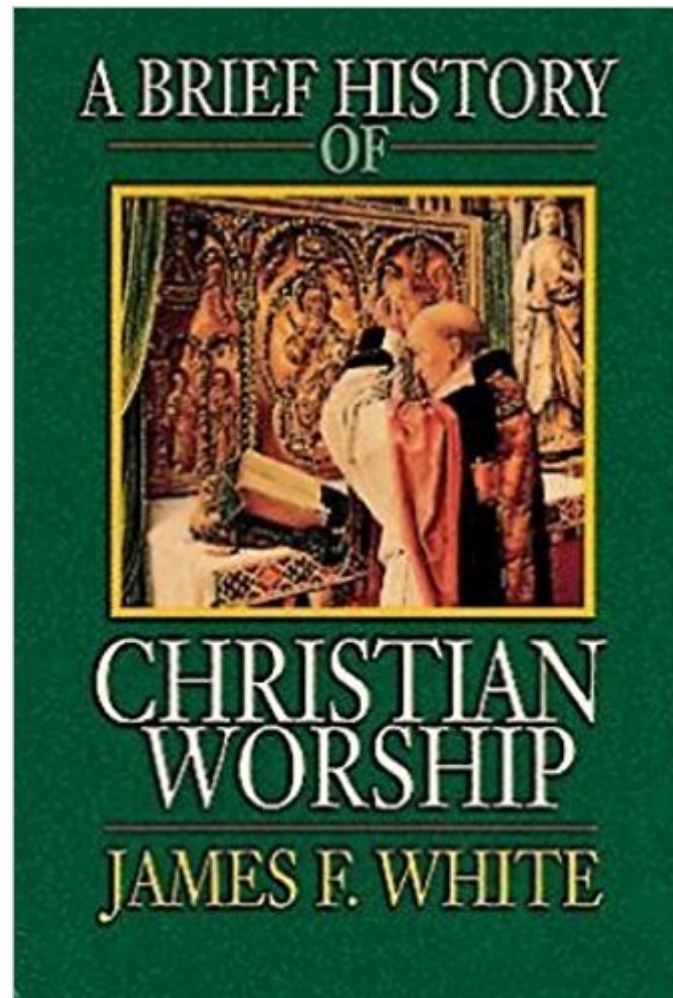


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# A Brief History Of Christian Worship



## Synopsis

Most histories of Christian worship are written as if nothing significant in liturgical history ever happened in North America, as if cultural diversities were insignificant in the development of worship, and as if most of what mattered were words the priest or minister addressed to God. This book is a revisionist work, attempting to give new direction to liturgical history by treating the experience of worship of the people in the pews as the primary liturgical document. It means liturgical history written facing the other way--that is, looking into the chancel rather than out of it. Relishing the liturgical diversity of recent centuries as firm evidence of Christianity's ability to adapt to a wide variety of peoples and places, Professor White shows that this tendency has been apparent in Christian worship since its inception in the New Testament churches. Instead of imposing one tradition's criteria on worship, he tries to give a balanced and comprehensive approach to the development of the dozen or more traditions surviving in the modern world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This history book breaks the molds of stereotype. The format is simple: 1) worship of the New Testament Era 2) worship of the early Christian centuries 3) worship of the middle ages 4) worship of the reformation period 5) worship of modern times, and 6) worship of the future. What causes me to give this book a 5-star rating is its honesty. Most books of this nature try to plug a certain perspective at the risk of almost becoming dishonest. This book simply lays it out. If you become uncomfortable learning that your style of worship is not as universal as you would like, or that your

theology hasn't always been central to Christian practice, so be it. I found myself challenged by the questions I began asking. This is the kind of book I like.

White does an excellent job tracking several spiritual themes through the various Christian epochs. He compares things as what was the process of becoming a Christian and other themes that most consider timeless, but instead shows the changing in what was considered normative from the early church, patristic period, medieval ages, enlightenment period and modern Christianity. I have read many many books on worship, and this one is definitely worth reading and White's analysis is honest, reasonable and very informative.

Dr. White does an amazing job with this book. It is not so simple that the average reader interested in Christian Worship would be bored, but not as complex as other books so that it is a tedious read. It is informative, and Dr. White maintains a truly objective perspective. He discusses Roman Catholic Worship, Protestant Worship, and (most importantly to me) discusses the origin of other sacraments such as Holy Orders, Baptism, etc. I cannot highly enough recommend this book.

The title of this book says it all. It's about the history of Christian worship and it's brief. The former is a positive. Unlike the authors of some books on the subject, James White does not have a theological axe to grind. He maintains a high level of objectivity as he describes the development of worship in the successive ages of church history and the various liturgical traditions. (The book is divided into chapters on the New Testament Era, the Early Christian Centuries, the Middle Ages, the Reformation Period, Modern Times, and the Future.) All this is beneficial for those desiring a brief overview of these various periods. The brevity is both a plus and a minus (although not enough to lower its five-star rating). For those who want nothing more than a quick overview of the worship traditions of two millennia, I highly recommend reading this book. For those already familiar with the major developments in worship, White's book will not provide any fresh insights. (But then again, those acquainted with the history of worship are unlikely to pick up a book with this title.) One thing that I found beneficial was his discussion of church architecture in the various ages. Although his comments were brief (no surprise) what he said caused me to reflect on what church architecture throughout the ages and in divergent traditions says about the attitude toward worship (and even toward God Himself) conveyed in the symbolism of the architecture (e.g., the basilica, the Gothic cathedral, the Puritan meeting house, the contemporary megachurch auditorium with its theater seating). For a more detailed discussion of the significance of architecture and religious symbols as

well as other topics related to worship, see *Spiritual Anorexia: How Contemporary Worship Is Starving the Church*.

Unlike the authors of some books on the subject of Christian worship, James White does not have a theological axe to grind. He maintains a high level of objectivity as he describes the development of worship in the successive ages of church history and the various liturgical traditions. As the title implies, the book is brief. This is both a plus and a minus. For those who want nothing more than a quick overview of the worship traditions of two millennia, this is an excellent book. It will probably not provide fresh insights for those already familiar with the major developments in the two centuries of Christian worship. Especially beneficial is his discussion of church architecture in the various ages. What he said caused me to reflect on what church architecture throughout the ages says about the attitude toward worship (and even toward God Himself) conveyed in the symbolism of the architecture (e.g., the basilica, the Gothic cathedral, the Puritan meeting house, the contemporary megachurch auditorium with its theater seating). This is an area sometimes overlooked by those who write about worship.

This book really does fill a void in the market. Most books on the history of Christian worship are excessively simple or excessively complex. Occasionally an educated lay person will ask me for a book that they can understand (without a divinity degree) but that goes beyond the simple "altar guild" books one might use as an absolute introduction. I am very pleased that Professor White is able to maintain the middle ground.

This is an outstanding book! It is extremely readable, and gives the reader a fantastic overview of the history of Christian worship. This should be required reading for every worship leader and student of worship.

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