

## *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*

Lawrence J. Johnson, ed. *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009. 4 vols.: 1,235 pp. \$339.80. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780814661277 (Set).

As noted in the introduction, modern revisions to the communal worship structures of the various Christian bodies were first preceded by scholarly study of the early Church's communal prayer. Those studying the history of worship, however, have few sources that gather the relevant resources together. Most researchers' contact with the sources is through scattered citations in various publications. Some sources have never been translated.

To meet this need, Johnson (former Executive Secretary of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, and author of *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*) gathers a rich selection of sources illustrating the growth of worship and common prayer, from its Jewish roots to the end of the sixth century. Material from the western and eastern branches of Christianity is provided. Among the collected resources are homilies, dogmatic and spiritual treatises, letters, monastic rules, church orders, prayer formulae, and canonical and synodical legislation. Subjects addressed include not only sacramental celebrations but other liturgical elements, such as the liturgical year, times of day for varieties of prayer, music and song, arrangement of church buildings, liturgical roles, decorum inside and outside church buildings, etc.

The source material is arranged in a broadly chronological order (since some documents have, at best, an approximate date) and, within the time frame, follows a general geographic progression from west to east. Thus, for example, in volume one, the main sections are divided among Jewish Texts; Subapostolic Texts: Second Century West, Second Century East; Third Century West; and Third Century East. The authors and works one would expect to find in a work like this are well represented, including excerpts from the *Kaddish*, the *Passover Haggadah*, the *Shema Yisrael*, and the *Shemoneh Esre* (the Eighteen Benedictions that are at the heart of Jewish Morning Prayer). One also can find *The Didache*, the *Odes of Solomon*, Justin Martyr's *Apology*, Tertullian *On Baptism* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (among many other works). Works that include information on worship but are not themselves focused on worship (for example, the *Rule of St. Benedict*, which includes instruction on celebrating the Divine Offices) are also provided. The length of each text varies from a few lines to several pages. The excerpt from Tertullian *Against Marcion*, for example, is only one sentence, while the excerpt from Augustine's work *On the Forgiveness and the Just Deserts [sic] of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants* runs seven pages. Since this is an anthology, it offers mostly selections from the works cited; few documents are provided in full.

Brief introductions precede each piece, but the level of detail is not as encyclopedic as one would hope for in such a work. The notes on the *Shemoneh Esre* state that Blessing 12 (*La-Meshumadim—Against the Apostates*) can be dated after the fall of the Temple in 70 CE, but do nothing to address the common assertion that it was directed against Christians expelled from the synagogue. The introduction to Augustine's *On Baptism: Against the Donatists* is a mere three sentences long, and does nothing to place Donatism in context nor explain why Donatists were interested in re-baptizing (the central focus of the excerpt).

The value of a chronological arrangement of the texts is not immediately clear. Given the complexity of subject matter, the arrangement does not help the reader to develop an understanding of the historical development of any aspect of worship nor the theology surrounding it. Readings on the use of the sign of the cross, for example, are scattered across all four volumes and do little to help the reader understand when the sign was used and what the early Christians understood its use to mean.

Furthermore, if a user is seeking to uncover the historic development of a particular topic (e.g., how the theology of Eucharistic presence developed, or the evolution of various communion rites), any individual text would be of little use. A better approach might have been a more topical arrangement (e.g., separate sections on Baptism, Eucharist, the Sign of the Cross, etc.), *then* with the works arranged chronologically within a given section. It might be argued that is what the index is for, particularly as certain topics occur in multiple places, across different time periods, and in conjunction with discussions on different subjects. For example, Baptism is often discussed in relation to forgiveness of sins (i.e., in relationship to Penance), but having an alphabetical arrangement by subject does not preclude the use of an index. Most modern encyclopedias are arranged alphabetically by subject, with an index to locate topics treated outside the major essays. Such an option could have been considered in this instance.

Each volume has its own index. Volume four has two indexes: one to its own contents, and a comprehensive index to all four volumes. (This is redundant; the comprehensive index alone would have been sufficient). The indexes use two methods of citation. A number in bold (e.g., **27-D**, which is an excerpt of Cyprian's exhortation *On Works and Almsgiving*) indicates a particular document. All other numbers refer to a particular volume and paragraph. Thus, for example, the Kiss of Peace during the Eucharistic Liturgy is discussed in "2:1614, 1774" (i.e., volume 2, paragraphs 1614 and 1774, both of which are sections of the *Apostolic Constitutions*). The different citation methods are not intuitive to the reader, forcing a turn back to the first page of the index for an explanation. A simpler approach should have been devised.

The set includes a CD-ROM, which can also be purchased separately. As with the printed set, it is clear that the CD is intended only for an individual user. The license clearly states that it may only be installed on an individual user's computer, and its contents may not be installed on a local network or local server. This may be just as well, as the disc includes only a PDF copy of the text. As such the usual PDF features are available (e.g., the Search function to view words and phrases across the four volumes, and a copy and paste function to quote sections in another document), but the disc does not include any unique features that would interest the scholarly reader. For example, there are no texts in the original languages, nor are there hot links to move from one section of the work to another. The latter lack of hot links is unfortunate, as the CD user has no easy way to get from the index to any individual paragraph cited. (Editor's note: The publisher has advertised an online version from initial publication, but as of this date cannot provide a date or price for the online availability.)

The quantity of texts and the variety of translations are impressive. Volume 3, for example, includes writings from Narsai of Nisibis, a prominent theologian of the Assyrian Church but one not known to many western Christians. The translations themselves come from a variety of sources. Where recent translations are available, these were used. So, for example, the Narsai texts are taken from *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, translated by R. H. Connolly (1916). Where recent translations were not available, the author provided his own. *The Letters of Leo I*, for example, were translated afresh from the texts included in *Patrologia Latina* 54. In some instances it is not clear why Johnson attempted a translation when many fine ones were available. The portions of *The City of God*,

for example, were translated by Johnson from *Corpus Christianorum* despite the existence of translations by Henry Bettenson, Gerald Walsh, etc.

Although a Catholic author writing for a Catholic press, Johnson allows the material to speak for itself, which makes it a useful resource for liturgical churches of various traditions. On the other hand, the overly brief introductions to the works and the lack of any context provided for the more difficult texts, as well as its complex bibliographic mechanics, suggest that it is not an appropriate resource for most reference collections. However, it could be used for assigned readings for an introductory history of worship class, and could also be a heavily used resource in library circulating collections. For upper-level undergraduates or beginning seminarians, *Worship in the Early Church* will provide a useful overview of the commonalities and differences in worship traditions within the Church, not only across time but also across space. For example, Cyprian's letter to Cecil is included, the author admonishing Cecil's church in Biltha (elsewhere in Africa) for using water instead of wine in celebrations of the Eucharist.

The work's principal value, however, may be devotional, as the reader experiences again the spirit with which the early Church approached worship. Thus we learn from John Chrysostom that the Paraclete has instituted the priesthood "by persuading men who are still in the flesh to imitate the service given by the angels" [2: 208-209]. And Caesarius of Arles' *Homily Given Before the Nativity of the Lord* may serve as the perfect antidote for the excesses of the Christmas season:

Although it is always proper to give alms, it is especially on the holy solemnities that we should do so more generously. More frequently summon the poor to the banquet, for it is not right that on a holy solemnity some of the Christian people—all of whom belong to the same Lord—should have much to eat while others suffer from the danger of hunger [4: 112].

To discover these early writings on worship is to discover a spirit that has been lost in our modern age. For Christians to appropriate that spirit would connect us much more strongly to the Early Church and to the teachings of Christ than any given liturgical practice.

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