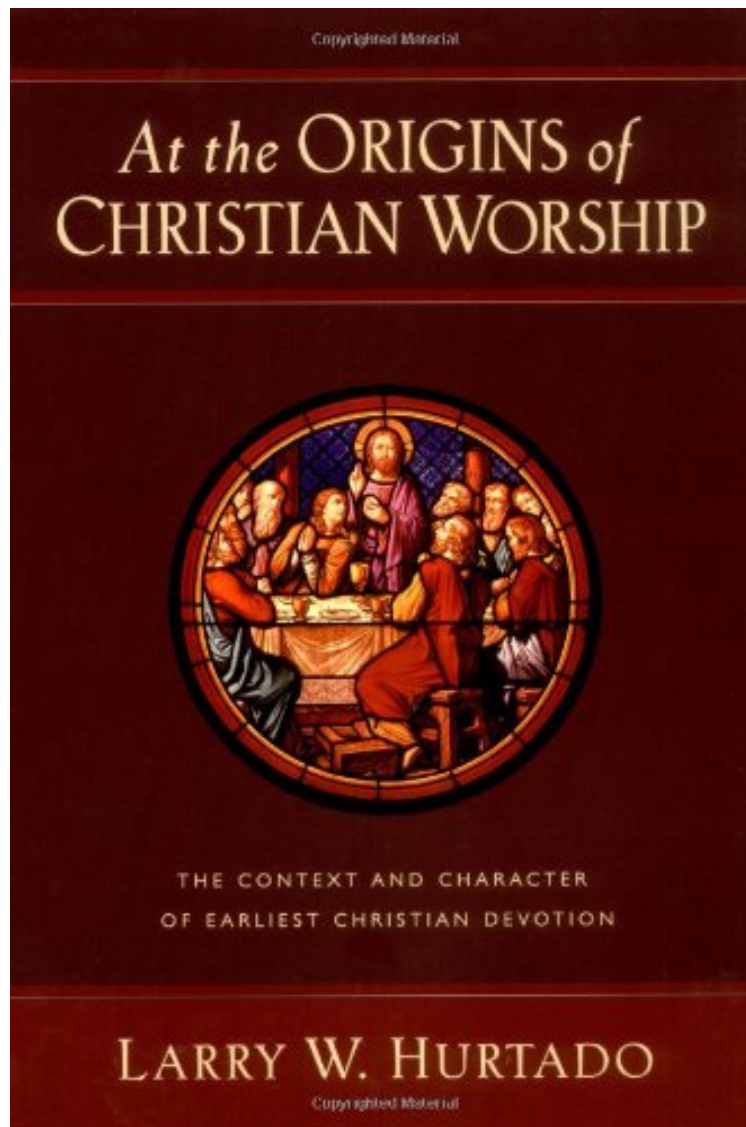


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At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion

Larry W. Hurtado

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Larry W. Hurtado : At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion:

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5 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Hurtado Gets Personal
By Michael D. Gantt
Larry Hurtado's three great contributions (at least in terms of books) to an accurate historical understanding of when Jesus first came to be treated as godlike (which was, practically speaking, in the earlier part of 30-50 C.E.) are *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (2005), *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (2003), and *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (1988, 1998). Those books are all longer than this one, and more academic than this one. In this book, Hurtado lets down his hair and speaks a little more personally, especially about modern Christian worship in the fourth and final chapter. He never ceases to give footnotes throughout the book, and he never ceases to speak in his cautious circumspect manner - but he does use exclamation points more often, and his personal views do finally make the page. As if to punctuate the point, he dedicated the other books I mentioned to his scholarly colleagues while he dedicated this one to his wife. The first chapter is an interesting and helpful portrait of just how religious Roman-era "pagan" cities were. The second chapter juxtaposes a portrait of the earliest Christian gatherings and how they were similar to, and yet very different from, the many other religious gatherings of that time. In the third chapter Hurtado focuses on the six specific ways Jesus was incorporated into Jewish monotheistic synagogue rituals. Thus the first three chapters are "typical Hurtado" - that is, history ("just the facts, m'am"). The final chapter is Hurtado's take on how this history should inform modern-day worship by Christians. If you're like me and think worship is a matter of lifestyle and not liturgy, you won't be every interested in the last chapter. I was very glad to read it, however, for one important reason. In it, Hurtado professes his belief that God is a trinity. This is noteworthy because in his other books he is very clear that there is no evidence that the authors of the Bible were consciously Trinitarians. In fact, if anything, he says the New Testament writers were "binitarian." (By the way, he has even altered that terminology, stating on his blog last year that he now proposes the term "dyadic," as he is wanting to use a term that carries the least "baggage.") Thus Hurtado writes his first three chapters of the book in his usual role of historian, but this last chapter he writes as a theologian. Yet in so writing that last chapter, he proves what an intellectually honest historian he is. And so the fourth and final chapter made me appreciate all the other work of this able historian all the more. I strongly recommend him to you, though his other books I mentioned are more worthy of your attention than this one simply because they are meatier. As for theologians, the only one we really need is Jesus.

This volume makes a valuable contribution to the debate about the origins and development of Christianity. Larry Hurtado argues that understanding the nature of Christianity in the first century requires taking full account of the first Christians' devotional practices because worship was the context in which christological titles and other expressions of faith were given their specific meaning--a fact that has largely been ignored. Hurtado focuses on two distinguishing characteristics of earliest Christian worship: its exclusivity (rejecting the worship of other deities) and its "binitarian" shape (the veneration of Christ alongside God the Father). Setting early Christianity within the religious environment of the Roman era, Hurtado describes the features of Christianity that attracted followers and led them to renounce other religions. He then turns his attention to a more detailed discussion of the place of Christ in the monotheistic worship of the earliest Christians, showing that Christ figured in their public and corporate devotional life at a surprisingly early stage. The book concludes with some reflections for Christian worship today based on the historical features of early Christian devotional practices. Clear, illuminating, and relevant to the modern church, this volume will be of interest to scholars, pastors, students, and general readers seeking insight into the origins of Christian faith and practice.

Theology (UK)"A concise and useful introduction to the subject of roots of Christian worship."
"Worship Leader"
"This book proves to be pointed and helpful in coming to a greater understanding and appreciation of the origins of Christian worship. I recommend it especially to those wanting to better understand worship's roots."
"Toronto Journal of Theology"
"In a manner that is both innovative and challenging, Hurtado seeks to locate early Christian theology within the context of early Christian worship (rather than the other way around), comparing Christian practices described in the New Testament with alternative religious expressions from the contemporary Mediterranean world. . . As a rich introduction to Christian worship in its social context, Hurtado's praxis-oriented approach bears much fruit, including its ability to suggest so many promising avenues for further research and debate."
"Anglican Theological"
"This brief, scholarly, and readable book considers -- as its subtitle accurately puts it -- the context and character of early Christian devotion. Larry Hurtado, a leading scholar of evangelical background, seeks to describe the setting in which the earliest Christian worship arose and certain of its features, and then to reflect on issues for contemporary Christian worship."