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*Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*

Kim Bowes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

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Some historians have characterized the fourth century CE as the eclipse of a strongly hierarchical and imperial church over an “illegal” or persecuted Christianity, a position Kim Bowes characterizes as “Christianization” (9–10). Proponents of this theory contend that Roman personal religion, public ritual, ritual officiants, and worship spaces transitioned wholesale to similar Christian roles with little re-signification (10). Christianization often ignores the “private”, or individual, familial, and communal contributions to early institutional Christianity (10–11). Instead of casting the “public” and “private” as independent variables, Bowes proposes a continuously variable “dialectic” for fourth and fifth century Christianity (12–13, 16). Her dialectic defines the “private” as a subjective dependent of the “public” (12). For Bowes, “private” early institutional Christianity cannot exist as an autonomous concept independent of public history and debates (12–13).

Urban and rural private Christianity begin with Roman ritual antecedents. Bowes’s first chapter explores public Roman civic ceremony and private benefaction. The imperial Roman civic cult demonstrated both state power and patrician nepotism through the hereditary nature of civic ritual office (23). The public ritual of *consecratio* created *res sacra*, the non-transferable property of the gods (24–25). Through *consecratio*, patrician civic priests gleaned the gods’ favor through public benevolence (24). Benevolence couched as civil ritual increased patrician social capital (22–23). The private counterpart of *consecratio*, or *dedicatio*, created ritually “profane” items which could be owned and sold between persons (25). Wealthy families’ *dedicatio* included shrines to ancestors and household gods, as well as the construction of grand mausolea, temples, and tombs (32–37). *Dedicatio* further enhanced not only a patrician family’s stature, but also strengthened the internal hierarchy of the Roman household from *paterfamilias* to slaves (32–37).

Bowes’s second chapter account of urban Christianity in Rome and Constantinople traces echoes of *consecratio* and *dedicatio* through pre-Constantinian voluntary associations and post-Constantinian titular churches. From the early second century, early Christian communities looked first to prosperous members of the local community for financial assistance (49). The expansion of private benevolence into the *tituli* system of late fourth-century Rome resembles aspects of the private benefaction of *dedicatio* with the ritual obligations and aggrandizement associated with *consecratio*. A *titulus* referred not to the church building itself but to a private

benefactor's dedication (66–67). Bishops managed the titular church finances on behalf of the benefactors (69), but also courted benefactors for their own charitable projects (70–71). The late fourth century Roman diocesan rite of *fermentum*, or the sharing of eucharist consecrated by the Roman bishop with the titular churches (71), attempted to quell competition between wealthy titular benefactors and bishops for ecclesial control (69, 70–71).

Fourth and fifth century Constantinople also witnessed more private worship space construction than hierarchical construction projects (106–107). The aristocratic derivation of the names of Constantinopolitan neighborhoods suggests that wealthy families defined neighborhoods through domestic private worship spaces (109). Constantine constructed a personal shrine for a fragment of the cross in his Great Palace, (110–111) and wealthy ascetic women sponsored and built monasteries for their own use (113). Private interests eventually deposed fourth-century Constantinopolitan bishops Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom. Nazianzen fell prey to competing benefactors, while the wealthy deported Chrysostom back to Cappadocia rather than submit to Chrysostom's demand for greater hierarchical oversight of private churches (117–120). Constantine's reconstructions of the Hagia Irene and Hagia Akaios churches, as well as the founding of a new church outside the city walls, Hagios Mokios, represented the closest approximation of a Christian imperial simulacrum of *dedicatio* in Constantinople (106–107). Still, only two fourth-century bishops oversaw the construction of modest churches (107). The dawn of the fourth-century witnessed the birth of Constantinople, but not the rise of a strong episcopacy.

The third chapter carries the reader into the countryside of the western Roman Empire and North Africa. Bowes's research again counters the Christianization hypothesis that bishops and landholders formed an elite hierarchy which converted the countryside (126). Rather, rural estates, landholders, and "seigniorial dependency structures" created nascent Christian communities quite different than urban Christianity (127). A spate of villa construction in the late third century speaks of the prosperity of the age (128–129) but not necessarily of Christian worship-space (129). The proximity of a church to a villa, (129) or even excavated small worship spaces inside villas (*sacraria*) do not necessarily point to exclusive Christian use given the frequent absence of altar remnants or other Christian liturgical furnishings (131–132). Excavations at Luddingstone in Britain and Villa Fortunatus in Roman Hispania show series of worship-spaces decorated with the chi-rho and other Christian symbols (131–135). By contrast, the rural mausoleum at La Cocosa in Hispania displays geographical characteristics of Christian worship-spaces, such as "eastern orientation", but with few other explicit Christian signs (137–138). Regardless of the archaeological and liturgical ambiguities posed by excavation findings, Bowes contends that rural landholders of fourth and early fifth-century



of the western Roman frontier, and not bishops, chose clergy to officiate at rituals which required their presence (157–158).

The western European experience contrasts with North Africa's landholders, whose semi-autonomous churches served as loci for tenant control (161). The relative lack of large villas in this region, combined with a socially fractious topography of farms, fortified villages, and even towns (162), enabled bishops such as Antonius of Fussala, once protege of Augustine, to not only manipulate the wealth of landholders but also aggrandize ecclesiastical influence through the mismanagement of local churches (166–168).

Both the fourth and the final chapter glance behind the basilica and villa towards Christian homes and individual Christian practices. Bowes shifts her focus towards the content of private prayer and ritual along the backdrop of alleged "heretical" private practices in the post-Nicene church. She contends that homes represented arenas for doctrinal negotiations in early institutional Christianity (195). Bowes also elaborates on the very important role of women in the post-Constantinian church only at the very end of her book. Her coda underscores her criticism of a masculinized Christianization undertaken by emperors and episcopates. For Bowes, women's asceticism and domestic ritual sculpted both doctrine and liturgy. While some Christians, such as the fourth-century exegete Jerome, viewed the home as a woman's protection from the profane world and a bulwark against temptation, (203) women's home devotions and eucharists often attracted the attention of hierarchs who viewed house worship as alternate venues for clerics opposed to their theologies (190).

The power of women to direct domestic piety and worship subverts the notion that men, and especially bishops, predominantly shaped the course of Christian institutionalization in the Roman Empire (4). Bowes's last chapter not only expands upon her understanding of Christian dialectic, but also inverts a prevailing androcentric view of Christian development. Her study invites us to consider both men and women as great protagonists in the rise of early eastern and western Roman Christianity.

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***The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith***

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This volume seeks to introduce the fundamental aspects of the Anabaptist tradition to the person of faith in Great Britain and Ireland who wishes to reinvigorate his