



# The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity (Alcuin Club Collections)

*Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson*

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The liturgical year is a relatively modern invention. The term itself only came into use in the late sixteenth century. In antiquity, Christians did not view the various festivals and fasts that they experienced as a unified whole. Instead, the different seasons formed a number of completely unrelated cycles and tended to overlap and conflict with one another. In early Christianity, the fundamental cycle was that of the seven-day week. Taken over from Judaism by the first Christians, this was centered on Sunday rather than the sabbath. As the early Church established its identity, the days of the week set aside for fasting came to be different from those customary among the Jews. There also existed an annual cycle related to Easter.

Drawing upon the latest research, the authors track the development of the Church's feasts, fasts, and seasons, including the sabbath and Sunday, Holy Week and Easter, Christmas and Epiphany, and the feasts of the Virgin Mary, the martyrs, and other saints.

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*Maxwell E. Johnson is professor of liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, USA, and a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. His numerous publications are on the origins and development of early Christian liturgy as well as on current ecumenical theological questions, especially among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans. He is the author and/or editor of over fifteen books and seventy essays and articles in books and journals. He is also a member of the North American Academy of Liturgy, Societas Liturgica, and the Society of Oriental Liturgy.*

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