

Worship pioneer Robert Webber dies: Influence spanned the spectrum of Christian traditions

News in the [May 29, 2007](#) issue

Robert Webber, one of the most influential figures in Christian worship during the past half century, died April 27 of pancreatic cancer in his home in Sawyer, Michigan. He was 73.

The author of more than 40 books on worship, Webber taught at Wheaton College in Illinois from 1968 to 2000, retiring as professor emeritus. That same year he took an endowed chair in ministry at Northern Baptist Seminary in Lombard, Illinois.

Webber was best known in recent years for his emphasis on “ancient-future worship”—an effort to infuse contemporary and emergent worship with the liturgical practices of the premodern church.

In the 1985 book *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, Webber described his own gradual shift from his fundamentalist roots to the Anglican tradition. In 1998 he founded the Institute for Worship Studies (now bearing his name), hosted by Grace Episcopal Church of Orange Park, Florida.

Although he is widely known in evangelical circles, Webber’s experience and influence spanned the spectrum of Christian traditions. More than 30,000 people have attended his worship workshops. “I recall . . . where the line of pastors waiting to hear Dr. Webber curled around the block” before an American Baptist biennial meeting, said David C. Laubach, an official with the denomination.

Born in the Congo to Baptist missionary parents, Webber received his bachelor’s degree from ultraconservative Bob Jones University in 1956. He earned a divinity degree from Reformed Episcopal Seminary in 1959 and a doctoral degree in theology from Concordia Theological Seminary. Among his books are *Worship Old and New*, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, *Ancient-Future Faith* and *The*

Younger Evangelicals.

“Without any doubt Robert Webber has impacted the theology and practice of Christian worship, especially among evangelicals,” said Roger Olsen, theology professor at Baylor’s Truett Theological Seminary. -*ABP*