

Church Fathers THEO621

Semester 2 2005

Assignment 2

Survey the development of liturgy in the period from the fourth to the sixth century referring to the works of representative writers.

2000 words

Due 17.10.2005

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

In accordance with Regulation 4.5 I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person or myself, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other unit, degree or diploma of a university or any other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

I have made and retained a copy of this original assignment.

Dr Geoffrey Madden

The period from the fourth to the sixth century was the time in which the Church was moulded by its change of status from that of an oppressed minority, through tolerance, to a position of power. The sociological impacts of that change were the major drivers in the process of elaboration and homogenisation that transformed local varied liturgies into recognisably universal forms. While the great theological controversies of the time can be seen reflected in aspects of liturgy, and the fear of heresy was a definite impetus to standardisation, it was the move to a larger stage, the influence of a lukewarm majority and the expansion of opportunities to travel freely that bequeathed what came to be our orthodox liturgical forms.

Travel in the first centuries of Christianity could be missionary journeys of Paul, the journey to martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch or the flight from persecution from within and without the Church, but it took the peace of Constantine to allow mass pilgrimages such as that to the holy city of Jerusalem.¹ The volume of this travel along the pilgrim routes allowed local liturgical innovations at the way stations and the hub, Jerusalem, to become disseminated to the home area of the pilgrim. From the second half of the fourth century onwards we see such innovations as Christmas on December twenty-fifth and baptism at Easter spreading from Rome and North Africa while baptismal formulae flood back from Syria and the use of Psalms and the observance of Lent disseminate from Egypt.² Prayers multiply simply because they are being appreciated and appropriated by these travellers:

The second half of the fourth century witnessed a veritable explosion in the development of texts of eucharistic prayers, as the apparently relatively simple patterns of earlier centuries were expanded with new features, many of which — like the Sanctus, the narrative of institution,

¹ Adalbert Hamman, *How to Read the Church Fathers* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 74.

² Paul Bradshaw, "The Homogenization of Christian Liturgy," *Studia Liturgica* 26 (1996), 4-5.

and epiklesis — were simply borrowed from the practice of other places and inserted into native structures.³

In the writings of Egeria about her travels to Jerusalem we have a record in microcosm of this process. She was in Jerusalem, probably from 381 to 384, and gave an account of the liturgy from the perspective of an enthusiastic foreigner.⁴ She noted what occurred at the Holy Sepulchre to tell her friends at home, “about the daily services they have in the holy places,”⁵ with the concern to show the novelty she was observing. This leaves the difficulty that we are unlikely to hear from her about aspects of life and liturgy that she accepted as commonplace.⁶

If she noticed the “rascality, adultery, theft, idolatry, poisoning, quarrelling [and] murdering,”⁷ that disturbed Gregory of Nyssa in Jerusalem, it did not register. Rather, she was swept up by the Holy Land and the ceremonies and went into great detail about the magnificence of Constantine’s Church⁸ and the minutiae of observance:

Note that the Fortieth day after Epiphany is observed here with special magnificence...All the presbyters preach first, then the bishop, and they interpret the passage from the Gospel about Joseph and Mary taking the lord to the Temple, and about Simeon and the prophetess Anna...Then comes the Easter season, and this is how it is kept. In our part of the world we observe forty days before Easter, but here they keep eight weeks... [and] forty-one fast days.⁹

Pilgrims such as Egeria brought back the liturgical traditions they encountered, no doubt with the enthusiasm of their “mountain top” experience, and their influence contributed to the incorporation of such features into their

³ Bradshaw, “Homogenization,” 4.

⁴ Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 129.

⁵ J. Wilkinson (trans) *Egeria’s Travels* (Jerusalem: Ariel Publications, 1981), 123.

⁶ Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 129.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa in Thomas Carroll and Thomas Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 220.

⁸ Wilkinson, *Egeria*, 127.

⁹ Wilkinson, *Egeria*, 128.

home liturgies. Augustine noted the suffering of the local bishop under such pressure:

If someone on pilgrimage in another country where the people of God are more numerous and given to attending services and more devout, sees for instance that the eucharist is offered twice on Thursday in the last week of lent, both in the morning and the evening; and on returning home where the custom is to offer it only in the evening — if he then makes a fuss that this is wrong...that is a childish way to behave. We should not imitate it ourselves, though we may put up with it from others; but we should correct it among our flock.¹⁰

Egeria for her part has duly noted this Cyrilline practice of an extra service on that Thursday.¹¹ If the dating of her travels is correct, the Bishop of Jerusalem that she saw preaching was in fact Cyril of Jerusalem. As the bishop at the meeting place of the pilgrims, his liturgical forms were often those that flowed back along the pilgrim paths. The desire of pilgrims to trace the last week of Jesus' life in Jerusalem became Cyril's liturgy of the Holy Week and this was then influential on such practice throughout the Church.¹² He is also credited with elaborating liturgy by introducing special psalms and hymns for feast days, a fact not lost on Egeria.¹³

Cyril noted that he had candidates for baptism that were not exactly burning with zeal, who have only come because it is now to their benefit to become Christian, perhaps to impress their master or to woo a woman.¹⁴ That Christianity had become acceptable had some consequences that did not assist the Church. Merely belonging to an illegal organization whose very membership included martyrdom as a possible outcome, weeded out the lukewarm, and living on the edge as an oppressed Christian supplied enough awe for any life. Without this danger there was anxiety that the candidates might find the rites of baptism rather

¹⁰ Augustine Ep. liv. 5 in Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), 441.

¹¹ Wilkinson, *Egeria*, 134-5.

¹² Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 200.

¹³ Dix, *Shape of the Liturgy*, 334.

¹⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechal Lectures*, Prologue 4,5 in J. Comby *How to Read Church History Vol 1* (London: SCM press, 1985), 77.

pedestrian when compared to the riches in initiation to the mystery cults. Ambrose suggested the candidate might ask himself, “Is this all?”¹⁵ when approaching the font and be somewhat disappointed.¹⁶ Facing the open competition from other philosophical schools and cults fed the need to increase the awe in the liturgy above the simple rites of the early Church.¹⁷ This process succeeded rather too magnificently, to the point where most Christians were too terrified to fully participate in the mass.¹⁸

Becoming a part of broader society allowed pagan influence upon the rites of the Church to proceed without embarrassment. The kiss, the dismissal, the altar, the torchbearers and assistants to the bishop all derived from pagan antecedents.¹⁹ Pagan feasts had their popularity cannibalised by the co-opting of their dates, the greatest example being the birthday of Sol Invictus being taken over for Christmas.²⁰

These services were now held in large basilicas financed by imperial patronage that could accommodate the growing crowds. The grandness of the surroundings was yet another influence towards elaboration of the liturgy²¹ and the architecture, based on Roman models designed for state ceremonies, ensured that participation in the mass was replaced by watching the celebrant.²² Prayers became more formalised to suit the circumstances found in a Cathedral²³ and this

¹⁵ Ambrose *The Sacraments* Book 1 Chapter 3 in R. Deferrari (trans) *Saint Ambrose – Theological and Dogmatic Works*, Series: Fathers of the Church, vol. 44 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1963), 272.

¹⁶ Georgia Frank, “‘Taste and See’: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century,” *Church History* 70 (2001), 619.

¹⁷ Bradshaw, “Homogenization,” 8.

¹⁸ Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 197.

¹⁹ Jungmann, *Early Liturgy* 128-133.

²⁰ Jungmann, *Early Liturgy*, 147.

²¹ Bronwen Neil, “Christianity and Contemporary Culture,” in Module 7, *The Literature of the Church to Gregory the Great* THEO621 (Brisbane: ACU, 2005)

²² Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1982), 250.

²³ Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 191.

formalisation was accelerated by the need to write down liturgies that were now lasting hours.²⁴

The monastic movement also was instrumental in the elaboration of Church activities by the incorporation of spiritual practices peculiar to their charism into more general liturgy. The much-travelled Cassian provides instruction to religious in the provenance of the services he has encountered:

It should be ...mentioned that in other countries as well there is a daily service undertaken by the brethren. For throughout the whole of Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Cappadocia and all the East the brethren succeed one another in turn every week for the performance of certain duties...when all the brethren come together to chant the Psalms... those whose turn is over wash the feet of all in turn.²⁵

The use of psalmody was a component of monastic prayer²⁶ that found its way into the liturgy of the Church and found later expression in the chant associated with Gregory the Great.

While these changes have little to do with matters of belief as such, aspects of liturgy do become influenced by developments in theology. The idea of consecration for example became a matter of controversy between Latin and Greek but began subject to local variety and peculiarity.²⁷ While varying understandings of the Eucharist had devolved to understandings centred around the Church as the body of Christ and a sign of its unity, the thought that the priest actually did something that changed the elements as an act of consecration is seen in the Western Church first in the writings of Ambrose.²⁸

²⁴ Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 252.

²⁵ Cassian, *Institutes* Book 4, in A. Roberts et al (trans) *Sulpicius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian – vol XI Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 224-225.

²⁶ Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 189.

²⁷ C.W. Dugmore, "Sacrament and Sacrifice in the Early Fathers," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1951), 24.

²⁸ Dugmore, "Sacrament," 26.

Thou sayest perhaps, “My bread is of the usual kind.” But that bread is bread before the words of the sacraments; when consecration has been added, from bread it becomes the flesh of Christ.²⁹

Ambrose detailed the actions of the priest that constitute this act commencing with:

Make for us...this oblation, ratified, reasonable, acceptable, seeing that it is the figure of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,³⁰

which was preserved as:

Bless and approve our offering; make it acceptable to you, an offering in spirit and in truth. Let it become for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ,³¹

in the Roman Canon, albeit without the latter’s more literal emphasis. He completed his exposition of consecration with an institution and memorial prayer that is even more easily recognisable in our Eucharistic Prayer I.

While influenced by eastern thought, Ambrose does not include the invocation to the Holy Spirit that had been in previous rites and persists in Orthodox liturgy as a central event in the consecration.³² The influence of the debates in the Church on the Holy Spirit³³ and its prioritising in the East, illuminates the note by Cyril of its presence in his liturgy:

We call upon the compassionate God to send out his Holy Spirit on the gifts that are set out; that he may make the bread the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ.³⁴

A prayer of this nature, the Epiklesis, appeared in the memorial prayer after the form, “we offer to you this reasonable and unbloody sacrifice,” and is

²⁹ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* Book 4 Chapter 4 in T Thompson (trans) *Translations of Christian Literature Series III Liturgical Texts: St Ambrose* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), 109.

³⁰ Ambrose, *On the Sacraments* Book 4 Chapter 5, 113.

³¹ *Sunday Missal* (Sydney: E.J.Dwyer, 1986), 423.

³² R.D. Richardson, “Eastern and Western Liturgies: The Primitive Basis of their Later Differences,” *Harvard Theological Review* 42 (1949), 125.

³³ Bradshaw, “Homogenization,” 7.

³⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem in H. Bettenson, *The Later Church Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 46.

considered an essential part of the act of consecration in Orthodox liturgy.³⁵ The Epiklesis with its suggestion that the Holy Spirit performs the consecration could not remain a part of the Roman canon once the consecration was wholly attributed to the words of institution in the West.³⁶ The Invocation of the Holy Spirit reappears in the current Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV, removed to a position before the Institution of the Lord's Supper but not considered essential to consecration.

St Basil the Great defended the Holy Spirit against relegation to a subordinate position and would have viewed such excisions as highly suspicious. His zeal to defend the Son and the Spirit against Arian tendencies can be seen in his treatment of a doxology that formed part of the daily office and became in the Roman Church the *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*.³⁷ The use of the form, "Glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit," was accepted by Basil opponents who objected to his use of a form containing "with the Holy Spirit." Basil noted that:

Each contributes their own meaning to true religion. The preposition "in" states the truth rather relatively to ourselves; while the "with" proclaims the fellowship of the Spirit of God.³⁸

Basil couldn't allow the possibly subordinationist slant of the earlier doxology to go unbalanced and defended what was obviously news to his opponents by recourse to unwritten traditions passed down from the apostles.³⁹

Observances did not necessarily correspond to fully worked through theological positions. Pentecost in the fourth century rivalled Easter with its own

³⁵ Adrian Fortescue, "Epiklesis," *Catholic Encyclopaedia*

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05502a.htm> accessed 1.10.2005

³⁶ Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 99.

³⁷ Peter Toon, *Doxology— Gloria Patri— and Trinity Season* The Prayer Book Society of the USA <http://www.episcopalian.org/pbs1928/Articles/Trinity2002.htm> accessed 13.10.2005

³⁸ St Basil the Great "De Spiritu Sancto, Chapter XXVII" in Philip Schaff (trans) *Basil: Letters and Select Works* Christian Classics Etherial Library

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208.vii.xxviii.html> accessed 13.10.2005

³⁹ Basil "De Spiritu Sancto, Chapter XXVII"

vigil and special celebration, suggesting a further influence of Eastern anxieties over a lesser role for the Spirit and its decline in importance over the centuries indicate that that battle had been fought and won. In his time, however, Augustine struggled to assimilate Easter and Pentecost:

Someone may ask me: ‘Why did the Lord give the Holy Spirit twice? ...If I should say that I know why the Lord gave the Holy Spirit twice I would be lying to you. I do not know why he did this.’⁴⁰

He could however use the Old Testament to make sense of the fifty-day tradition between Easter and Pentecost that Cassian merely ascribes to tradition⁴¹, by seeing it as the successor to the fifty days from the exodus to the receipt of God’s law.⁴²

While elaboration occurred as local rites, prayers and practices moved through the Christian world and a liturgy befitting triumphant Christendom was bequeathed to the future, it was a rite that had become uniform through a process of short lived changes⁴³ as these innovations were rapidly tested against the fear of heresy. Bradshaw notes that “any tendency to persist in what appeared to be idiosyncratic liturgical observances was likely to have been interpreted as a mark of heterodoxy.”⁴⁴ The theological battles that had formed the creeds thus indirectly impacted on liturgy as the modifications caused by the changing circumstances surrounding the Church, and brought to more general scrutiny outside their local genesis, are now tested by the furnace of orthodoxy and either refined or immolated.

⁴⁰ Augustine PL38.1197 in Carroll and Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 314.

⁴¹ John Cassian SC 64.94 in Carroll and Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers*, 311.

⁴² Augustine PL 40.340 in Carroll and Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers*, 311.

⁴³ Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 249.

⁴⁴ Bradshaw, “Homogenization,” 7.

By the sixth century the Roman canon was set as a liturgy that remained recognisable and without alternatives until the Second Vatican Council. Local variations had gone, as had local languages⁴⁵ with Latin holding sway in the West. Prayers had accumulated from the stocks of the various local churches and those that found favour became the standard. The liturgy was further influenced by borrowings from the Pagan ascendancy that the Church replaced, and the results of becoming a larger, wealthier but less fanatical outfit. Doctrinal influences can be detected in the growth of the liturgy, especially as the pending East-West schism illuminated liturgical divergence, but far less than had been so in the development of the creeds, with many of the issues more settled by the time the liturgy consolidates and acting now as the boundary markers of liturgy rather than a creative impetus.

⁴⁵ Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 252.

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