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The Beginnings

The birth of the Christian Church was a hectic event. The Church of Pentecost was a message rather than an organization, springing green from its Jewish soil in a reckless, energetic outpouring of the Spirit. The Church's leaders and missionaries got on with what they burned to do, but had they stopped to consider, they might well have frozen in their tracks at the thought of the task before them. With an immense and ancient tradition behind us of communally recorded experience, we can hardly imagine what the difficulties must have been for the Church's pioneers in evolving structures, clarifying the truths to be held, and keeping together a popular movement spreading through the known world, in the absence of any adequate means of communication to coordinate the effort. There were no New Testament, no church buildings, no precedents to turn to in solving unexpected problems, no way of foreseeing misunderstandings, wrangles and dilemmas that would arise. This is the situation out of which Christian liturgy was born, very far from the serene, idealized picture we sometimes imagine.

In the effort to hold things together liturgy will have played a vital role. Converts needed simple, urgent formation in the faith if they were to put down roots in this still inchoate body, the Church, and it is perhaps in such a fervent and crash-programme atmosphere that we should see the origin of the discipline of praying at fixed points throughout the day. The initial gusto could eventually fizzle out. So we hear calls to persevere, to pray without ceasing, to conserve by frequent prayer the flame of faith. Christians are to strain forward like the athlete, lest they should slip back. As enthusiasm began to lose its head of steam, discipline stepped in for the husbanding of spiritual resources, and to provide structures for what enthusiasm could not indefinitely maintain.

The evolution of disciplines within the Church was related to a powerful sense of *belonging*. In a world where the individual was held to be of little account, Jesus' vision of the one Body, of the vine with its branches, must have come up to ordinary people like a Rolls-Royce car to a footsore tramp. Suddenly each person learned they were somebody, because made in the image of a God who numbers even the hairs of our head, and they learned that the Kingdom of

heaven itself was their inheritance. 'Once you were no people, but now you are God's people' (1 Pet. 2.10).

The New Testament (3) is steeped in this sense of belonging, and this permeated people's worship and prayer no less than their thoughts. Instances of prayer with others far outweigh those of people praying in solitude. Even alone in the wilderness the Lord will hardly have forgotten the people he came to save. In Gethsemane it was tragically important to him to know if the disciples were awake and praying with him. Peter on the housetop at Joppa prayed not as an 'individual' – even if he had understood that idea, he would have rejected it. Christ and his Body the Church will have coursed through all his prayers and determined his sense of himself as a person. Any parish priest today knows how much that is true. In his study of worship in the New Testament, D. G. Delling remarks that 'from the common worship there proceeds an energizing over the whole range of the life of the "individual" (who indeed is no longer an individual): he is . . . always joined with the brethren by the ties of the life of worship'.¹ In New Testament times the Church will have run in restless counterpoint through the prayers of the Christian individual.

Our information on how the first Christians prayed is very piecemeal. We can deduce with moderate certainty that there was an early break with the synagogue, by AD 90 at the latest in Palestine. People met instead for regular meals, at which on the Lord's Day at least the Eucharist was celebrated. As they evolved their own ways of worship they were inevitably conditioned by what they were used to. Jesus gave them an example in the Last Supper, but also in various pieces of guidance on how to pray, and in the habits of common prayer he built up with the disciples. He was not one to go into the finer points of detail, however, and seems to have left his followers to find their own way in matters of practical organization. They, either Jewish or Gentile in upbringing, brought all their cultural-religious baggage to bear in finding their way.

We can find many Jewish elements in the forms of worship which eventually arose, but it is difficult to say how far these are a direct inheritance from the synagogue (1). Until the end of the first century Jewish belief and practice varied so much from place to place, and group to group in any one place, that talk of inheritance from 'the synagogue' as some homogeneous entity is not really possible.² Obviously, some continuity was inevitable, the mere retention of the Old Testament being of colossal importance before anything else, and liturgical continuity is clearly to be seen in the eucharist. But the practices of daily prayer which gradually developed show no cast-iron evidence for continuity with any practices in the first-century synagogue. We are not at all certain that Jewish public services took place daily on any scale outside the Temple, and if they did, the Christians seem to have given them up rather than take them over, for we have no reference to daily public worship in the Church before the fourth century. Even the Psalter was only gradually discovered, and

in the early period we only have evidence of its use at table – for ordinary and religious meals.

It is likely that the Christians' daily prayers followed fairly stereotyped patterns, though evidence on 'private' prayer is thin in most periods of history, and it is impossible to say with any certainty what form these daily prayers of the early Church would have taken. They were offered mainly in the home, or by individuals wherever they happened to be. Later evidence implies that in the home there was a rich prayer-life in which, where possible, all the family shared.³ Mealtimes were surrounded by prayer. Thanksgiving (*berakah*) was given over the food, and psalms and hymns were sung before and after the meal. All our references to psalms in the first century are connected with mealtimes. Clement of Alexandria describes people singing psalms to each other at table,⁴ a practice earlier alluded to in Ephesians 5.19 and Colossians 3.16.

The hours of prayer reported in Acts are problematic (3). At most they could reflect only local practice at the time of writing, but these random references to prayer at the third, sixth and ninth hours are not enough in themselves to establish that Luke was used to daily services or private prayer at these hours. Indeed, it is by no means certain that there were universally recognized, publicly marked divisions of the day under the Romans,⁵ and the incidence of these hours of prayer occurs so early and so widely in Christian history that it is very tempting to read them that little bit further back to apostolic times, something for which available evidence gives little justification. They could just as easily have grown up later as devotional practices to mark the stages of the passion, and to imitate the apparent practice of the apostles in Acts – in the early centuries terce, sext and none in particular were regularly associated with both.

It may seem unhelpful to be so cautious, but with a subject as enigmatic as Christian daily prayer we must have the poverty of the evidence clear in our minds before resorting to conjecture. The history of liturgy is often muddled by anachronistic tendencies to read back into the past developments which only arose later. While it may possibly be true that the hours of prayer go back to apostolic times and the synagogue, we should be clear in our minds about the fact that very little can be said on this subject with certainty. Not until the second century does evidence begin to appear of a pattern of daily prayer-times. From then on we receive fairly consistent references to prayer in the morning, at the third, sixth and ninth hours, in the evening, in the middle of the night, and at cockcrow (4 onwards). (The final two hours of prayer need some clarification. It was an acceptable and widespread custom for people to get up in the middle of the night to pray for a while and then return to bed. Distinct from this was a practice of rising some time before the light in order to greet the dawning day with prayer, as the Lord did in Mark 1.35. The proportion of direct and oblique references in the New Testament to prayer in the hours of darkness is large (3), and this preoccupation with the night was to

endure until the monks came to specialize in it in the fourth century. Then it declined among the laity, who resented later attempts to revive it.) People would have prayed vocally, standing with their hands raised. Origen and Tertullian tell us in addition that there were 'prescribed prayers' (7, 8) but we have no information on the content of such prayers until much later. All of these times of prayer were usually, as far as we can see, private or domestic. They were obviously observed by many, especially bishops, clergy and devout people, but it is impossible to say how far ordinary people kept them.

It seems obvious to seek a connection between these early Christian hours of prayer and the fixed prayer-times observed by devout Muslims. While it is difficult to find positive evidence of an inheritance by Islam of prayer-disciplines known to Christians, the idea of saying prayers at certain hours of the day was a part of the common background of Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad had contact with both Jews and Christians in Arabia, and similarities in prayer customs with some Middle Eastern Christian groups are remarkable enough to suggest a link. The influence may well have come from monasticism, for there are traditions which mention contact between Muhammad and a Christian hermit. Research on this subject could well throw light on the Christian side of the story.⁶

The public cult

Morning and evening prayer were the principal prayer-times, and at some stage they were transformed into public services. Eusebius of Caesarea (?260-340) is the first to mention this (11), and from the advent of Constantine and the peace of the Church this public daily office became a universal norm. Christianity suddenly found itself donning the shoes of the old gods, and mass conversions brought in people of varying commitment, more likely to be sanctified by attractive and imaginative services than by a private discipline which no longer had the strong back-up of the small, committed sect. So the daily prayer-times went public, which is not to say that some people did not still observe some of them at home, for we know that they did. These new public services did not attempt to keep to the old private scheme of six or seven hours of prayer. They homed in on those natural turning-points of the day, the morning and evening. The 'morning and evening hymns', as the services were known, rapidly became an institution everywhere in East and West, popular services attended daily by people in large numbers. Staged in the large new churches being erected in the towns and cities, these services made all the use they could of music, ceremony, visual effect and audience-participation. They were strictly hierarchical, each order from bishop downwards having its allotted part. There were no books, so the content had to be simple, most of it being fixed and invariable, the people joining in through the use of simple refrains,

both in the psalmody (known, confusingly, as 'hymns') which made up the body of the service, and the litany which concluded it.

Ever since Anton Baumstark's coining of the term, the public office which arose at this time has been referred to as a 'cathedral office' to distinguish it from the daily offices of the monks. This presents problems in so far as the public office of the Church was not long confined to cathedrals. The word 'office', while failing to reflect the air of celebration of these services, is useful in indicating a public service which is liturgical and part of an ordered daily round; the problem is, rather, in finding an appropriate adjective. The services are 'public', 'ecclesial', 'community', 'congregational', 'parish', 'secular'; but perhaps they are above all worship for the people, and in two senses: (a) the worship of the assembled people of God, the *ecclesia*, and (b) worship for ordinary people, the *plebs*. A term which seems to suggest itself therefore is 'people's office'. None of the eligible terms is entirely satisfactory, but on balance this appears to be most adequate, and I shall use it from now on.

The people's office has to be distinguished from the monastic office which arose out of it (not vice versa). While the subject of this book is the people's office, it is impossible to understand it without giving some attention to its monastic counterpart: for the story which unfolds is one of a dialectic between the two, each quickly coming to be indebted to the other. At this point, therefore, we need to look briefly at the distinguishing characteristics of the people's office and the monastic office.

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Monasticism

The monastic ideal finds its roots in the primal experience of the Christian Church, and the close-knit, committed life of communities of believers in the apostolic era. In any period Christian congregations have had some members who are more committed than the majority, and from very early on there were those who wished to live a life of particular asceticism and commitment, even to the extent of renouncing marriage and family ties. Such people came to be known by various names, one of the most common being the devout or *devoti*.⁷ Things later thought to be typical of monasticism were part of normal life in local Christian communities. Only subsequently did those who led a more rigorous life, consecrated entirely to the Church, begin to separate off from the congregation. By the third or the fourth century such *devoti* had begun to evolve strong liturgical characteristics of their own, especially in Syria, and were beginning to live in community rather than as individuals, while they continued to worship in the local church.

Into this current came a strong injection from the side, arising from the eccentric flight of hermits to the desert in the third and fourth centuries, especially in Egypt. This considerably sharpened the whole picture, raising the business of commitment to a more dramatic and aggressively challenging plane. The enduring legacy of the Egyptian hermits was twofold. They left behind them a tradition of ripe wisdom with a sharp cutting edge, to remain a fundamental source of inspiration in the future history of the religious life. In the second place they brought a new and surprising approach to prayer and worship. The Egyptian hermits had no daily office, but centred their whole waking life on perpetual recitation of the Psalter. As far as we know, this had had no place in Christian worship until then.

When the hermits came to be organized in centralized communities under Pachomius (c. 290–346), their times of common prayer developed from this tradition, taking no account of the secular hours of prayer. Their ‘services’ were in essence simply communal meditation on the Psalter, read through, as the hermits were accustomed, in numerical order. There were only two of them, in the morning and the evening (36, 37). The day was given over to work, the monks continuing on their own the recitation of the Psalter as they worked.

These services were daily in Pachomius’ monasteries, but in lower Egypt they normally seem to have taken place on Saturdays and Sundays. Otherwise they were prayed individually in the monks’ cells.

It seems fair to say on the basis of this that two types of monastic office were to be found in these early years: the daily services of the *devoti* centring on the services of the local church, and the rigorous ascetic labours of the Egyptians, perpetually running off the whole Psalter in their desert exile. This Egyptian type of monasticism was to spread to Europe, finding particularly sympathetic soil among the British and Irish Celts, but in the end fading out with no direct heirs outside Egypt itself (42). The *devoti* were to be the model for the future, heavily impregnated, however, with the ideals, and in part the practices, of the Egyptian monks, for as these *devoti* began to distance themselves from their ‘parish’ base they came to discover some of the virtues of the Egyptian way of prayer. It was in this type of monasticism that a hybrid daily office thus developed, a mixture of people’s and monastic prayer which was to set the parameters for monastic worship in the future.

It will probably help at this point to list the distinguishing characteristics of the two poles of prayer, people’s and monastic. First, however, it needs to be said that it is misleading to talk of a ‘monastic office’ as if it were some independent species. All we can speak of are trends to which the epithet ‘monastic’ can reasonably be applied. These trends cannot simply be assumed in monastic worship, and we must be careful to distinguish in any case between Egyptian monasticism and the other types which evolved in Palestine and elsewhere. Indeed, the question of whether the Egyptian gatherings can be called ‘offices’ as such is an open one. Adalbert de Vogüé contends that they cannot, but were merely opportunities for performing together the continuous psalmody which the Egyptians would be reciting continuously throughout the day anyway.⁸ Bearing these qualifications in mind, the table overleaf lists some typical preferences in the two strands.

The bases on which these distinctions can be made will emerge as we proceed, but it will be helpful to elucidate one or two of them here:

1, *Principal services*: the ‘lesser hours’ were in origin a discipline for all Christians (in theory), as we have seen. They failed, however, to become general public services until the early Middle Ages, when the people’s office came under monastic influence; and they never succeeded in becoming popular public worship. They soon became essential to monastic prayer, however – even, with the passage of time, in Egypt.

4, 5, 6, *Ceremonies, music and clerical order*: early monks were very suspicious of the use of music and ceremonies. In the fifth century Abba Pambo admonished a monk who had been beguiled by church music he had heard in Alexandria: ‘What kind of contrition does the monk have when he . . . raises his voice like the oxen?’ Another abbot was moved to point out that ‘singing . . . and melodious tones may be appropriate for secular priests and others, as a

	<i>Early people's office</i>	<i>Early monastic office</i>
1	Principal services: 'morning and evening hymns'; resurrection vigil on Sunday mornings	Principal services: seven or more daily, including during the hours of darkness, aiming at 'prayer without ceasing'
2	Small number of fixed psalms	Whole Psalter in numerical order
3	No readings (except at special vigils, and gospel at resurrection vigil)	Systematic Bible-reading in night office
4	Ceremonies, processions, incense, vestments, etc	Minimum external observance
5	Much music and hearty singing	Music very restrained (or even absent altogether)
6	Hierarchical ordering of liturgy	No special place given to ecclesiastical orders, except that the abbot presides
7	Important place given to intercession	Often no intercession
8	Conscious of celebrating the prayer of the Church	Praying in the tradition, as part of that particular community's way of life

means of attracting people to the church, but monks live far from the noise of the world, and such things are not good for them . . . let all melodious singing be far from the monk who desires to be saved'.⁹ This reticence towards music has remained in the monastic strands of the Byzantine services, and is especially evident there in the lesser hours, which are recited by a single reader. In the West the elaborate musical system which developed is difficult to categorize, as the plainchant can trace its origins via the *devoti* and their 'parish' links to the music of the ancient secular Church. This chant eventually came to be seen in itself as an ascetical exercise.¹⁰

The only offices in monastic tradition which can normally make use of ceremonies and the clerical order are the morning and evening offices when they are solemn. This is because, like the Eucharist, their essential form has always been the same in both monastic and people's worship. They are pivotal and ecclesial in character, part of the parish round which was simply continued by the *devoti*. The question of ceremonies is complicated because the more monasticism has become involved with 'the world' the more it has naturally gravitated towards splendid ceremonies, or at least has become more interested in the seemly performance of liturgy. There are plenty of positive and negative examples of this from history, but that should not be allowed to obscure the fact that any single-minded following of the monastic way will naturally tend towards simplicity.¹¹

These two different approaches to daily prayer, secular and monastic, were quite clearly defined in the early period, and stand for fundamental differences of emphasis which have always continued to be valid. But each side borrowed from the other to such an extent in subsequent centuries, often to the detriment

of the original understandings, that today we are faced with the problem of teasing out these strands from each other, as if trying to separate two bushes whose branches have become intertangled. For in looking at the forms of daily office which eventually established themselves in the various traditions we shall usually find ourselves faced with a mongrel.

Western Europe

The various monastic currents made their way to Western Europe in the fourth century, and the early story there is therefore one of great variety. John Cassian brought Egyptian monasticism to Marseilles about 415. Perhaps by a different route it also strongly informed the monastic rules of the Celtic Church in the British Isles (42), as it did to some extent all the earliest Western rules, which are mostly of a dour and disciplinarian spirit, making for heavy work in church (and out of it). Bishop Caesarius of Arles wrote one which envisaged nine or more services every twenty-four hours, and on Fridays his monks had to cope with at least thirty-seven readings and ninety-eight psalms (44).

The *devoti*-type of life from Palestine and Cappadocia on the other hand found a strong base in Rome. The forms of office used by the quasi-monastic communities at the Rome churches were by the sixth century close to the form they were to retain for 1500 years, and from them we inherit the office of the Roman or 'Western' liturgy (32). The undoubted crux of the monastic story in the West is the Rule of St Benedict, written about 540 (46). Benedict signalled the wane of the old monasticism, and the arrival of a new development, a balanced and humane rule which it was possible for anyone to follow. The form of daily office prescribed in the Rule became the basis of all Western monastic prayer in the succeeding centuries, as the old variety was gradually swept away. It is most probable that Benedict took the office of the old Roman communities as his model, though he was also heavily indebted to the *Rule of the Master* (45), of which his Rule is partly an ingenious adaptation.

The effect of Benedict's Rule was not immediate, but as it gained ground it brought with it a subtle revolution in monastic living. Sunday mass had rarely been celebrated in religious houses up until then. The community attended the nearest convenient church. It now became more common for priests to be monks, and the monastery to become a self-sufficient family, independent of the outside world. All these characteristics were entrenched and magnified in that decisive rewriting of the Rule which was undertaken at Charlemagne's behest by another monk, Benedict of Aniane (c. 750–821).

The history of the Western monastic office in a sense starts and ends with St Benedict, even though developments over the following centuries make a complicated story. The shape of the Western monastic office was now fixed for good and all, the Rule remaining the fundamental point of reference for all monastic orders which arose after it.

Retracing our steps from Benedict to the fourth century once more, we can now pick up the story of the people's office where we left it. There is one place whose liturgy stands out from all others at this period – the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Not only did it play a very important role in the development of liturgy; it is outstanding too because of the unusually detailed information we have on its services, thanks to that precise and formidable nun, the lady Egeria, who presents us for the first time with a vivid picture of the people's office in full operation.

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Jerusalem

Somewhere on the Atlantic coast of southern France or northern Spain was a community of devout ladies (nuns?) which in the fourth century had the enterprise to send a sister to report on worship in the Holy Land. This was quite the thing to do at the time; many pilgrims travelled to Palestine from all over Christendom, taking back with them reports on the worship there for the benefit of communities at home. Jerusalem had great influence in this period, and there were many attempts to introduce elements of its liturgy into local rites in East and West. This borrowing played an important part in the development of the Eastern rites, and anyone familiar with Eastern worship will quickly recognize some of the things described in the report sent back by this Western nun.

Her name, it is now thought, was Egeria (16, 22). She tells us that at the church of the Holy Sepulchre there were five daily offices: a service from cockcrow until dawn (a monastic vigil), a dawn service which followed without a break (people's morning office), and services at noon, three p.m. and evening. On Sundays there were fewer but longer services and at festivals and special times there were considerable variations.

Four groups of people were associated with the basilica: the bishop and his clergy; the monks and nuns; the local laity; the pilgrims. The *Anastasis* was therefore no ordinary church, and its worship falls into no simple category. But it does give us a picture of what popular worship could be like.

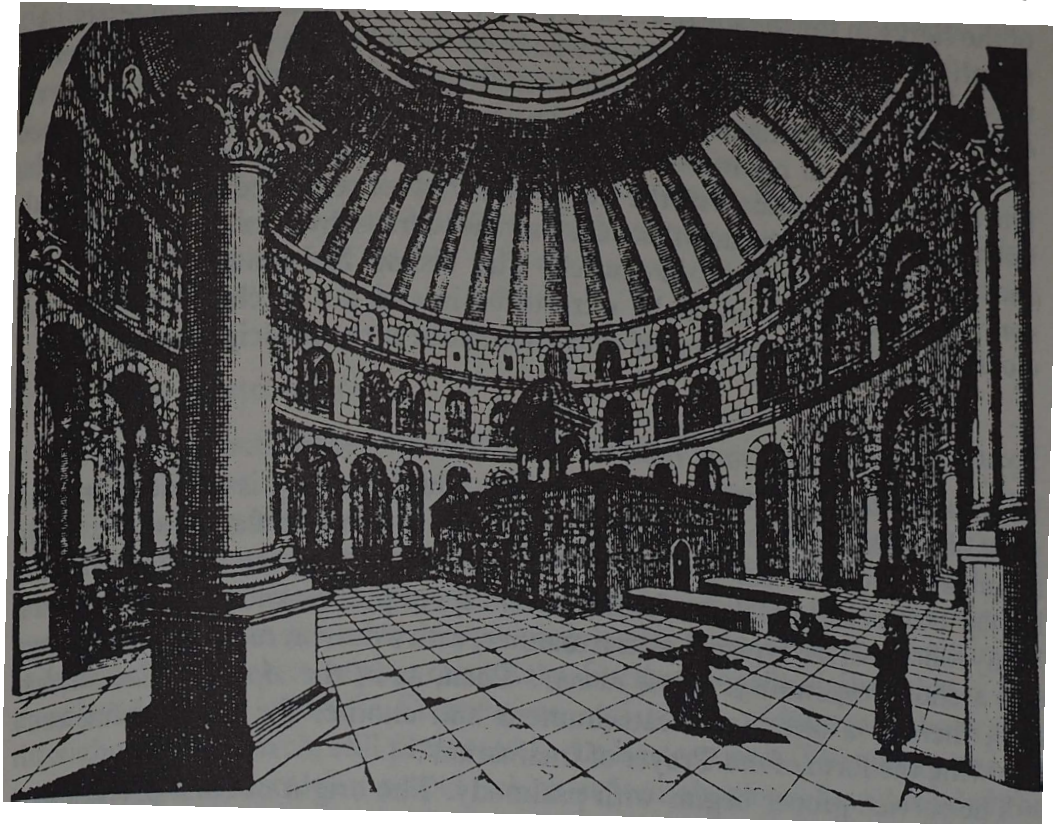
Morning office

The weekday service at cockcrow was monastic, with few laity present. 'From that time till dawn hymns are recited and psalms with their refrains, and antiphons too; and after each hymn there is a prayer, for two or three presbyters, and deacons also, are present by rota each day with the monastics (*monazontes*) to say the prayers after each hymn and antiphon.'¹² Prayers can only be said by a priest if the bishop is not present. No one else may recite prayers of any sort (maybe because the prayers were improvised, and the speaker needed to know what he was doing). A principal function of the deacon

was to announce the biddings in the prayers, a function he still has in certain litanies in Orthodox worship. As soon as it begins to get light the morning office begins. 'They begin to recite the morning hymns. Then the bishop comes with his clergy and immediately enters the cave, and from inside the screen he first recites the prayer for all, and he himself commemorates any names he wishes; then he blesses the catechumens, recites another prayer and blesses the faithful. After this, the bishop comes outside the screen, and all come to his hand, and he blesses them one by one as he comes out, and so the dismissal takes place when it is already light.'¹³

Several details in this account are curious. First, Egeria gives no information on what she means by 'hymns' and 'the morning hymns'. The word 'hymn' is frequently used in contemporary accounts to refer to psalms, and the phrase 'morning hymns' has a double use, indicating both the morning office as a whole and the fixed psalms and canticles which formed its nucleus. Egeria's matter-of-fact mention of the morning hymns implies that they are identical with what she is used to in Gaul, and it seems very likely that they included some or all of the following: Psalms 51, 63, 148–150, the Benedicite and Gloria in Excelsis.¹⁴ The fact that Egeria never sees fit to give details of the material used in services is typical of all early authors, and may imply a general uniformity of practice, but seems more readily to be explained by a simple lack of interest in liturgical detail. All contemporary writers are uniformly exasperating, including the greatest among the fourth- and fifth-century Fathers. Egeria evidently does not think her community would be interested in learning about psalm-cycles and lectionaries. Such detail is not of major importance in the matter of daily prayer!

Another curious fact is the entry of the bishop and his clergy after the service is well under way. Here we have a concept of liturgy offered to God as something in its own right. Neither clergy nor people are there first and foremost to pray their private prayers, but to play their particular part in the whole offering. In the bishop's entrance there is perhaps a hint of the theatrical, but it heightens the solemnity of the offering which the people in their entirety are making to God. Africa often provides interesting parallels which throw light on early church history. In the Anglican Church in Africa Sunday worship often begins with mattins, led by the churchwardens or catechists. After it has finished, the congregation fills the time waiting for the arrival of the priest by hearing a sermon or singing hymns. It can never be certain when the priest will arrive, so the gathered faithful are used to carrying on for half the morning until he should show up. In a society with plenty of time, things can work quite happily like this. There are parallel practices in churches of various traditions. Among Roman Catholic Red Indians there has been a custom of the chief leading a service of a catechetical sort while the priest's arrival is awaited. In the Presbyterian Church of Scotland there was the so-called 'reader's service' which preceded the main service of the day. In Orthodox Russia the entrance



The rotunda of the church of the Holy Sepulchre as it appears in a seventeenth-century engraving. It was here that the offices were celebrated in the fourth century. By the time of this engraving the *Anastasis*, as it was called, had undergone many vicissitudes and transformations. It was all destroyed in a disastrous fire in the nineteenth century and rebuilt to a different design.

The structure in the middle is the sepulchre (Egeria refers to it as the 'cave').

of the clergy in the middle of vespers was a tradition on Sundays and feasts. 'All the priests of the city, as well as any who from the suburban periphery happened to be on hand, were obliged to participate. In order to be at the cathedral church on time for the singing of the vesperal psalms, the priests of the other churches in the city had to celebrate vespers in their own places a little earlier.'¹⁵ In fourth-century Jerusalem all the clergy would have been based on the cathedral, but the services were such that had they not served by rota they would have spent most of their time in church. The bishop had no one to share his contribution, and so, unless he were to be in and out of church around the clock, he had to content himself with attendance at the principal moments.¹⁶

Evening office

In vespers, the principal service of the day, the psalmody is divided into two parts. First, all the lamps are ceremonially lit from a flame in the Holy Sepulchre and then the Lucernare Psalms are sung. In the second part, the bishop arrives and sits down for the second set of psalms and canticles. Then a litany follows in the typical Eastern manner, with a deacon reciting the biddings and a choir responding: '*Kyrie eleison*'. Then, as in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (13), there is a blessing of catechumens and another for the faithful, each following the form of the 'Prayer of Inclination'.¹⁷

The service proper begins with psalmody. The origin of such preliminary psalmody, which is found in all the Eastern rites (except the Maronite, which dropped it) has never been fully established. It usually takes the form of groups of psalms, mostly in numerical order, each group having its own antiphon or popular refrain. It is part of a wider question which still waits to be clarified – the origin of psalmody *in course* in the people's offices of both East and West, generally presumed to be of monastic origin. Egeria gives no definite indications that her psalmody is of this sort, and indeed it is far from being a mere preliminary – it accompanies the lucernarium, the ceremonial lighting of the lamps.

The lamplighting ceremony was once an almost universal observance at vespers, and normally understood not, as some suppose, as a mini-Paschal Vigil, but simply as a thanksgiving for the light. The moment for lighting-up was an important turning-point of the day for pre-modern man, and something of the feel of it can still be experienced by the motorist on a long journey, a moment of truth which reveals how the day is passing. It was natural to associate prayers with it. In the *Apostolic Constitutions* (13), an early Christian document, such a ceremony preceded the agape, and this may in fact be the origin of the vesper ceremony in the people's office – as an agape rite. But there are also pagan precedents, not to mention too the ceremonial lighting of lamps in the Jerusalem temple at morning and evening (Exod. 30.7f.).¹⁸ It is out of this lucernarium tradition that the paschal candle arose, and not vice versa –

significantly, few early liturgical texts or commentaries associate the lucernarium itself with the resurrection. It was a thanksgiving for the light, and a celebration of Christ our light, performed at home as well as in church. The theme of resurrection was much more associated with the morning office, and particularly with the vigil which preceded it on Sundays.

The service at Jerusalem ends with a special devotion at the cross, which was in another place in the same building, on the reputed site of Golgotha. This additional devotion found its way into all manner of local liturgies, always in the people's office.¹⁹

Vigil of the resurrection

A vigil of the resurrection was held every Sunday morning at cockcrow; the first part of it was for the whole community, the second part monastic. The people apparently went back to bed while the monastics kept things going until dawn. The psalms seem to have been a basic popular devotion, and while the great crowd waited for the doors to open, clergy were on hand to organize the psalmody and, as far as we can see, people joined in as spontaneously as a crowd at Lourdes breaks into saying the rosary. Such a people's vigil as this is also mentioned in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and was a widespread observance throughout the Church, still preserved in the Eastern rites. The climax was the reading of the resurrection gospel (which at Jerusalem may have included the passion narrative).

There were important changes in the programme of services in special periods such as Lent and Holy Week, but what I have said above should give a good idea of how the daily office was approached. We do not know how far this was the creation of Bishop Cyril (c. 315–86) who, partly through a need to make the services more vivid for pilgrims, had embarked on revision a few years before. Egeria records more than once how impressed she is that psalms, prayers and readings were always appropriate to the time, place and theme of the service. Cyril's reform aimed at making maximum use of evocative and vivid worship, ceremonies and processions which engaged the emotions of a highly emotional clientele. The very different monastic services wove in counterpoint through the scheme, as shade to the light, and sober reflection behind the spectacle.

Much of what Egeria saw was akin to the worship she was used to in Gaul, or whatever Western region she came from. This unity of practice between East and West was to endure longer than is generally realized, even though the two halves of the Church early began to feel their separate identity.

Before we can begin to consider the Western liturgy, it is essential to have some idea of how daily worship developed in the East. First, what happened to

the liturgy of Palestine – did it produce any direct descendants? Further afield, yes, but on the territory of Palestine itself, destined to a turbulent history with many breaks in continuity, there was to be no simple handing-on of liturgical traditions.

Where, then, should we look? There is a whole range of rites which are historically of great importance in the East, the principal families being the Armenian, east and west Syrian, Maronite, Coptic, Ethiopian and, of course, the Byzantine. While the latter came to predominate, the others are equally important for the history of liturgy: they all owe a great debt to Jerusalem, and all of them preserve elements we can find in Egeria's account. We do not have space here to consider them all, but let us take the road north-east from Jerusalem to the home of a rite which was first described little more than two centuries after Egeria's visit, and has changed little in essentials since then

11

After Egeria

The Christians of eastern Syria have a remarkable history. Known variously as Chaldeans, Assyrians or Nestorians (though they hold no Nestorian views), their Church once extended from its Mesopotamian centre, beyond Persia, through Afghanistan, Turkestan, Mongolia and Tibet to China, where they enjoyed royal favour in the seventh and eighth centuries and remained important throughout the Middle Ages. Their greatest missionary success, however, was along the Malabar coast of South India, where the church has flourished right down to the present day. 'It is no exaggeration to contend', writes A. S. Atiya, 'that, in the early Middle Ages [this church] was the most widespread in the whole world.'²⁰ Many aspects of the liturgy and church life in general are so primitive that they take us back to the very early centuries of the Church, and in many ways back to Judaism. The *Apostolic Constitutions* were probably written in the vicinity in the fourth century, and we know that by the seventh century the liturgy had reached a stable state, its many Jewish features suggesting at least some preservation of first-century Christian practice.

The story of the east Syrian daily office is closely bound up with political events. Through the disaster of the Islamic conquest the Christians, reduced to poverty, were to endure centuries of maltreatment and deprivation. There was some small compensation for future generations, however, in that this meant the preservation of many very ancient churches, and a fixing of liturgy and the layout of churches in a primitive stage of their development. Innovation was a luxury not to be afforded in such hard circumstances, and established tradition was to be held on to at all costs. The greatest descent in the fortunes of the east Syrian Church seems to have come after the Middle Ages, perhaps beginning with the Mongol invasion in the fourteenth century. At some point between then and the nineteenth century a dramatic decline ensued, and while this affected the performance of services, it left their content unaffected. The internal arrangement of churches was drastically simplified, and reduced to a level of utter poverty and simplicity. Only in recent years has any improvement in the situation been possible.

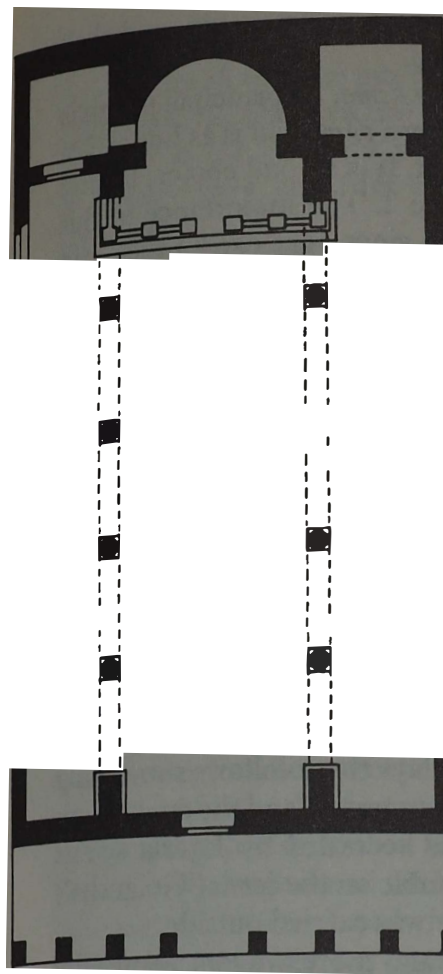
In order to understand this daily office we need to be aware of the peculiarities of the traditional east Syrian church building. The altar is screened off by a

solid wall, with a central doorway giving access. Across this a veil is drawn. In the midst of the nave used to be a large platform, the *bema*. This was semicircular in shape, like a reversed apse, with a central throne for the bishop and curved benches on either side for the clergy. In ordinary churches the bishop's throne was replaced by a stone stand on which the Gospels were enthroned. Also on the *bema* was a table known as Golgotha, on which were placed a cross and the gospel-book, and on either side of this were often two lecterns. The main part of the daily office was led from the *bema* while the men crowded round, the women having to occupy the back of the church. The *bema* is also known in the modern synagogue, and may be an inheritance from Jewish worship, although its precise origins remain a subject of controversy. Ancient examples have been found as far away as West Germany.²¹ In the early centuries of the Church there was a good deal of experimenting with chancel furniture, and the *bema* was one solution to the problem of where to put the clergy and singers, the square 'chancel' at San Clemente in Rome, the large ambo in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and the three-sided rectangle of western cathedral choirs all being obscurely related. By the nineteenth century at the latest the use of the *bema* had disappeared in the Syrian liturgy – the poverty-stricken people now crowded into small, dark, bare churches where furniture and ceremonial were reduced to a minimum, and the clergy, even bishops, to leading weekday services in ordinary laymen's clothes.

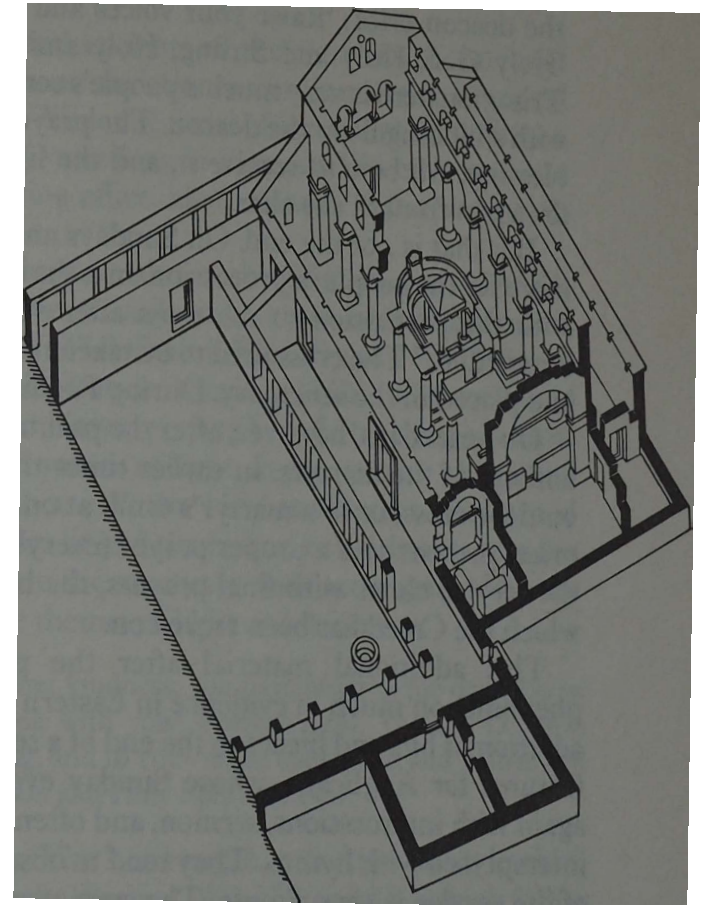
I shall base the following account on the daily office as it was performed in the heyday of the east Syrian liturgy, before the period of decline and before the attempts at revival in the present century. There is evidence that some of the lesser hours may have had an important place in the past, and various forms of monastic-type night prayer are also described in liturgical books, but standing proud of everything else is a classic people's office scheme of daily morning and evening prayer, with a resurrection vigil at weekends and festivals.

Vespers

The evening service is a very primitive form of vespers to which has been added preliminary 'monastic' psalmody (17). The opening kiss of peace is not mentioned in the service-books, but is practised by tradition, and we can assume it originally took place during the arrival of the people before the service began, as it does today in English country parishes, where people feel it is important to greet each other before the service starts, and again at the end, when they may make a point of shaking hands with the priest. In Coptic monasteries, too, the monks greet each other with the Peace before each service and more formally at the end. After this comes the psalmody. It is performed in numerical order, *in course*, and is therefore probably of monastic origin. After this psalmody, vespers proper begins, with lighting of lamps and the offering of incense. A flame was brought from the altar (in Egeria's Jerusalem, from the



Kharab-Shems, northern Syria.



Behyo, northern Syria

The *bema* of Syrian churches, a kind of reversed apse in the middle of the nave, varied in design from a simple horseshoe to a grandiose structure with high walls and a canopied table ('Golgotha') in the midst.²²

Sepulchre), and with it a lamp standing before the sanctuary was lit, and then all the lamps in the church, and incense was offered.

The main part of the office was celebrated at the *bema*. Its principal psalm is Psalm 141, which is found too in all the other Eastern rites, and is as important to Eastern vespers as the Magnificat is in the West. It is an odd choice, having earned its position purely on the strength of verse 2. The importance of this psalm, however, in the Church's evening worship since very early times, can hardly be overestimated – for half of the Church over the best part of two millennia it has typified what the Church means by its daily vespers.

That concludes the 'evening hymns'. Now come the prayers, in the form of three litanies. The first one asks for comparatively little, and is gloriously doxological.²³ The second has simply 'Amen' after each petition, but even this is sometimes omitted. The refrain is not essential to a litany. Some early forms simply have silence after each petition. Having led the prayers before the altar the deacon cries: 'Raise your voices and glorify the living God', and all sing, 'Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us'. The Trisagion here is very much a people's song, for in no other rite is it introduced with a bidding from the deacon. The prayer of inclination²⁴ is in origin the final blessing. All bow to receive it, and the lights are extinguished and the veil is drawn in front of the altar.

But that is not the end. On Sundays and feast-days there follows something more for the people: a procession. In it the cross is honoured, and the connection with the procession to the cross after vespers as recorded by Egeria seems irresistible.²⁵ The cross used to be taken from the table on the *bema* ('Golgotha') and placed in the sanctuary. During Paschaltide it was carried outside.

On ferial days, however, after the psalm-verses and more prayers, comes the anthem of the martyrs. In earlier times there was here too a procession to an outdoor cross, or to a martyr's tomb at one side of the sanctuary. After it each priest present says a proper prayer (everybody is 'given something to do') and the service closes with final prayers, the blessing and the peace, to the end of which the Creed has been tacked on.

This additional material after the prayer of inclination illustrates a phenomenon much in evidence in Eastern liturgy, and no less in the West, the addition of bits and pieces to the end of a service. It certainly has many familiar features for Anglicans, whose Sunday evensong, after the Grace, carries on again with intercessions, sermon, and often a procession of clergy and choir, all interspersed with hymns. They tend to obscure the fact that the essential shape of the service is very simple. The service could be described as psalmody plus intercessions, and we shall see later that there is cause to suggest that this is in fact the essential basic framework of any form of the morning and evening offices.²⁶

Resurrection vigil

Before considering the morning office it is necessary to mention the vigil which takes place on Sundays and feast-days. The service begins while it is still dark. The veil is opened as the psalmody begins. This used to be led from the *bema* in former times, and after a procession the variable psalms were led from the sanctuary.

In most liturgical traditions where it is found, such a festal vigil reaches a climax in the reading of the resurrection gospel, but here we have the one exception which proves the rule, as for some reason the gospel reading has disappeared (except on Good Friday!). All stand for the litany, and then the morning office begins.

Morning office

Here is something very remarkable and ancient: all the elements of the ferial office are completely fixed – there is no variation according to the liturgical year or even to the cycle of the week. While the festal office is slightly different, there are even here only exceptional variations in the text. We have in fact a very ancient and pure people's morning office, identical with that described in seventh-century documents.

Astonishingly, the first seven psalms are also in the Sabbath service of the synagogue as it is described to us by the oldest Jewish prayer-book in existence, which comes from the ninth century²⁷ (17e). Psalms 93, 100 and 148–150 were also said at Sunday Lauds in the old Roman breviary (33b). The service is called the dawn service (synagogue: 'dawn prayers'), and the theme is *light*. Psalm 100 has the refrain: 'Lord and source of light, to you we give glory', and is followed by a prayer on the same theme. Psalm 113 has a similar refrain, and at this point on Sundays the lamps are lit and the bishop or celebrant, who has been seated in the sanctuary, comes to the sanctuary door accompanied by the clergy and proclaims a collect on the themes of light and darkness:

O Lord, the creator of light in your loving kindness, you have ordered the darkness in your wisdom, and you illumine creation with your glorious light. To you, O Lord, belongs continual praise without ceasing, and to your name confession and worship in heaven and earth, Lord of all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ever.

He then solemnly intones Psalm 93: 'The Lord reigns, robed in majesty', which is linked with the resurrection of Christ. Psalms 148–150 and 117 which follow used to be sung from the *bema*, to which the clergy went in procession.

The various elements of this first part of the morning office are remarkable for the beauty and joy of their meditation on the theme of light. During the subsequent censing the veil before the altar is opened, and on ferial days all sing Psalm 51 – a strange damper at this point in such joyful proceedings.²⁸

The rest of the service is as for evening prayer, except that there is no litany and no procession to the martyr's tomb. It is very rare to find an ancient people's office ending without intercession and petition, though Egeria reported that, in Jerusalem, rather than a full-blown litany there was merely 'prayer for all' at the morning office.

A liturgical tap-root

The east Syrian daily office is in the mainstream of the Church's daily prayer, taking us back to those early centuries when people gathered day by day for the 'morning and evening hymns'. Juan Mateos, the Jesuit oriental scholar, goes so far as to say that 'the Chaldean and Armenian rites have preserved the purest structures of the divine office'.²⁹ This rite's primitive nature is demonstrated by the surprising fact that there is no Scripture-reading in any of the offices. In the Eastern rites as a whole, if readings do appear in the office they are late local developments. The only exception is the resurrection gospel at the festal vigil, and even that is missing here.

We find in this rite considerable use of poetry and liturgical compositions, which have the advantage of concentrating the attention more directly on the central Christian mysteries than is possible in the West, where the office is very much Old Testament-dominated. The east Syrian offices are particularly impressive for the quality of much of this material. There is, too, abundant use of collects and short prayers, often preparing for the next item in the service or summing up other aspects of its content.³⁰ A striking characteristic of the east Syrian Church is the apparent inheritance from Israel. The scattered remnants of Jewish practice found in all oriental rites are here found in abundance. Clergy, for instance, are addressed as Rabbi, the table of the cross before the royal door is the Shekinah, Maundy Thursday is Pascha (i.e. Passover, not Easter), and so the list could go on, almost without end. It is difficult to know how enduring was the connection with Judaism, and to what extent one might have affected the other. Discussing a similar phenomenon in the Armenian Church, P. Sigal writes:

Armenian Christianity contains interesting remainders of Christian Jewish liturgy and ritual that passed through the Adoptionist Church which, under the name of 'Pauliani' from Paul of Samosata, was excommunicated at Nicaea. The Church's theological mainstay, *The Key of the Truth*, translated by Conybeare in 1898, repeats Ebionite doctrine, and is another of the many items that lead to the inference that there were many avenues through which Judaism penetrated even second- and third-century Christianity.³¹

The Jewish connection is clearly complicated, and we should beware of trying to see in it a direct inheritance from the first-century synagogue, or the primitive Church.

In the east Syrian daily office the level of the people's participation is impressive, and so are the tenacity with which they have continued to attend daily, the imaginative use of space, movement, music, light and smell when circumstances have favoured it, and the general air of exuberant celebration. This contrasts strongly with our Western understanding of the daily office as quiet, muted meditation on Scripture.

Though certainly not without its problems, east Syrian Christianity is very much alive today in the Middle East and India, and in its Western diaspora. There has been some revival in the use of the *bema*, and the tradition continues to flourish among the laity of daily attendance at mattins and vespers. The very strength of this tradition has probably helped to ensure their survival in what has at times been a very hostile world.

At the end of the nineteenth century two Englishmen, A. J. MacLean and W. H. Browne, published moving accounts of east Syrian church life, in their book *The Catholicos of the East*. There they describe the daily people's worship, putting some flesh on the bare bones we have been analysing:

Every morning and evening before sunrise and sunset, all Syrians who are alive to their religious duties assemble at the church for their daily prayers. They certainly put our apathetic and respectable Westerners to shame in this respect . . . We proceed to describe the evening service . . . On entering the church the people often kiss the cross on the doorpost; and then proceed to the quasi-altar in the nave, or in the summer chapel, as the case may be, where the cross is lying, and devoutly kiss it, crossing themselves and bowing. The bishop, or senior priest present, first advances, crosses himself, and kisses the cross, saying, 'Glory be to God in the highest (thrice), and on earth peace and a good hope to men, at all times and for ever'. He then stands on the north side of the nave near the cross, and all the people advance in order, kiss the cross and then the priest's hand, and pass down in line, touching the hands of those who have already kissed the cross, and raising their own hands to their lips . . .

As the services are all in the classical Syriac, they cannot be generally followed, except at well-known points, by the laity, especially by the old men and women. But all who can read the old books now press forward to the books, of which there are seldom more than two, and often only one, and stand round them. It is a matter of indifference whether the letters are upside down or sideways on, or what we should call right side up; they can be read with almost equal facility in any case. Thus ten or a dozen men may read from one book of large type, some peeping over the shoulders of others . . . the singers divide themselves into two choirs . . . As the churches are nearly always dark, rude tapers of beeswax are held in the hand over the books. As these grow dim every few minutes, they are snuffed by the hand, and the greasy condition of the manuscripts testifies to the zeal of the holder to sing rather than to his care to prevent the wax falling.

Certainly the Syrians have a thorough notion of congregational worship. All their services are sung; but all who can read join in at the top of their voice, whether they are musical or not; often not to the same tune, and generally not in the same key as their neighbours . . . But all is very hearty and earnest, and one would not exchange the

Syrian evensong for a most beautiful musical rendering in many of our cathedrals. The Syrians would consider a read service as unworthy of the time and place ... [The anthems after the *Shurayas*] are divided into paragraphs; each choir sings one to its proper tune, and the other choir takes up the next to the same tune, and so on to the end. They are sung rather slowly, and take up much more time than a corresponding amount of the psalms. Each paragraph is prefaced by a clause from the Psalter which gives it its keynote. These anthems are a special feature of all east Syrian services, and give an opportunity to all who can read of joining heartily in the worship.³²

This worship still lives up to the name 'morning and evening hymns', and the way it fosters the corporate spirit in a minority group is perhaps relevant to some of the difficulties of being a Christian in today's world. This at any rate is a phenomenon we shall find again in the history of daily prayer.

The daily offices of the east Syrian Church provide us with a good example of people's daily worship as it was conceived in the period immediately following the peace of the Church in the fourth century. It may be difficult for Westerners to grasp the significance of the Eastern rites, foreign as they are to our experience, and, we might be tempted to feel, irrelevant to our needs, yet nothing could be further from the truth. The Church is one, and all its parts have much to learn from each other which is of vital importance. There are centuries of mutual ignorance to overcome, and anyone who claims to believe in the catholicity of the Church will have to come to terms with the fact that East and West have been ignorant of each other for far too long. Any attempt to understand the divine office without knowledge of the Eastern rites is a sheer impossibility.

I make no apologies, therefore, for staying with the East for the time being before moving on to consider the history of daily prayer in the West.

12

Crowd Scenes

The history of the Byzantine people's office has traced two distinct paths. One resulted in the Byzantine office which we know today; the other was a people's office of a quite different character, which has now disappeared.

The old 'chanted office'

In its earliest form this now-defunct office probably derived from Antioch some time between the fourth and sixth centuries, and from then on continued to evolve and expand. It was this which remained in use in the church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople until the disastrous Latin sack of the city in 1204. When the Greeks eventually returned to power fifty-seven years later, they did not restore it, but put in its place the very different St Sabas office. The old rite continued in use in Thessalonica, however, until the fifteenth century, stubbornly defended by its bishop Symeon against considerable opposition from his clergy, who obliged him here and there to simplify it. With the Turkish conquest of the city in 1430 it was finally swept away, never to be seen again. (In Russia too it disappeared in the fifteenth century as a result of the Tatar invasion.)³³ Our information on it is now mainly limited to a few documents, the earliest of which come from the ninth or the tenth century, an account from a Russian monk, Antony of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople hardly a moment too soon in 1200, and the writings of Bishop Symeon himself.

In essence this old rite was a straightforward people's office consisting of mattins and vespers. Symeon called it the *akolouthia asmatikē*, the 'chanted office', and this musical emphasis shows its popular rather than monastic roots. It was the office of all the secular churches of the empire, as well as the Orthodox churches of southern Italy, Sicily and Russia, all of whom had their own local forms of it. The daily office introduced into Kiev in the tenth century seems to have followed it very closely.

The most surprising feature for us in this office is the movement it involved for all concerned. First, psalmody in the narthex, then the dramatic opening of the doors and the entry of the clergy and people singing; the central part of the service was then held in the midst of the church at the ambo, which looked

something like a bandstand and was big enough to contain a choir. Then for the last part of the service all were on the move again to the sanctuary, before which the final prayers were offered and the blessing was given. It was imaginative worship for the people. The visual effect of a service was said to have been spectacular, involving in cathedrals large numbers of singers and robed clergy, and for the participants it was a vivid daily pilgrimage from outer darkness to the gates of paradise.

Mattins

The morning office (18) began with introductory psalmody, which was all performed in the narthex, the doors to the church being shut. It normally consisted of eight selections from the Psalter, of equal length, known, as was common in the East, as antiphons, each antiphon having its own refrain. When the seventh antiphon had ended, the doors were opened, the lamps were lit, and all poured into the church singing the Benedicite, the clergy through the central doors, the laity through the side ones. We have already had one traditional morning Psalm, number 63. Now when all are at the ambo in the nave the others are sung. Psalm 51, as usual, comes at the beginning, and then Psalms 148–150, and the canticles.

After the Trisagion everyone had to be on the move once again, towards the sanctuary, where the final part of the service was held standing before the altar.

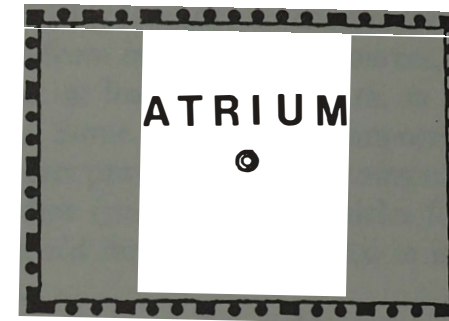
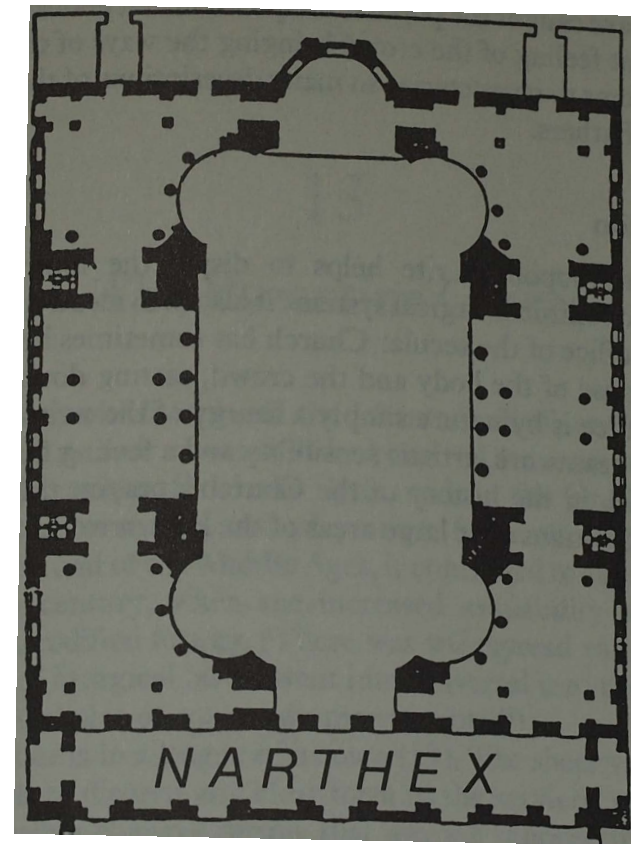
Vespers

The evening office is similar in form to mattins – introductory psalmody in the narthex followed by vespers proper in the nave, and ending at the sanctuary. There was no lucernarium, except on certain days,³⁵ despite abundant reference to light and the illumination of darkness – at Thessalonica ‘Hail, gladdening light’ (*Phōs hilaron*) was sung as participants moved from narthex to nave, where all the lamps had been lit. There was apparently no use of incense either in the earlier centuries. By the time of our earliest service-books, however, there is very elaborate use of the thurible.

(There was originally only one Psalm at vespers, Psalm 141 – as in Antioch in Chrysostom’s time. The primitive evening office in Syria was extremely simple: Psalm 141 followed by intercessions (13).³⁶ So it seems also to have been in Constantinople in the same period.³⁷)

In parish churches

At the present state of research, we know hardly anything about how this old office was celebrated in ordinary parishes, though one would like to think that its most distinctive traits, especially the movement from narthex to nave and



Plan of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in the time of Justinian.³⁴

sanctuary, will have caught the popular imagination and endeared it to ordinary people. It has that feeling of the crowd bringing the ways of the street into the church which seems to characterize so many descriptions of the public office in the times of the Fathers.

Music and action

The old Constantinopolitan rite helps to dispel the impression that the Byzantine is a monolithic liturgical system: it also provides a splendid example of how the daily office of the secular Church has sometimes been able to make very imaginative use of the body and the crowd, casting doubt on any claims that the divine office is by nature simply a liturgy of the written Word. These services required teamwork, artistic sensibility and a feeling for drama, and far from being a freak in the history of the Church's prayer, they animated the daily prayer of Christians over large areas of the known world for the best part of a millennium.

13

The Byzantine Office

The form of office which replaced the 'chanted office', and which is now in universal use, was no new creation. It had evolved over many centuries in the monasteries of Jerusalem, Sinai and Syria, and on the Greek mainland, in a steady ferment of borrowing and adaptation. Even after it had passed into general use by the end of the Middle Ages, it continued to develop until around the seventeenth century, when the increased availability of printing made possible a static, codified liturgy. (There was widespread variety until the first printed edition of liturgical books went into universal use: this had been based on a very limited choice of one or two manuscripts.³⁸)

This daily office is in a league of its own (19). The sheer volume of material makes it difficult to discern any clear form to the services, and the amount of variety and possible changes means that anyone innocently trying to follow them with a book will quickly flounder. Its creators over many generations have fused together material from many different sources, giving the impression of an attempt to preserve, at least in token form, as much relevant liturgical matter as they knew of. Some parts of it are impossible to perform fully (for example, the priest's secret prayers at the beginning of mattins); and some have shrunk to a mere shadow (such as brief versicles from once-entire psalms). Scattered fragments of old forms lie embedded in it, making it rather like a battered celestial body.

For the Westerner, Byzantine worship raises puzzling questions. In particular: how could anyone ever arrive at such a form of daily office? How was it allowed to replace the popular 'chanted office'? Political events certainly played their part, and the prestige and influence of monasticism, especially after the Turkish conquest, were partly responsible for the changes which came about. To judge from the problems Symeon of Thessalonica had with his clergy, the old office with all its ceremonies and drama was too demanding for them. A crucial role in the liturgical changeover, however, was played by the rise of hesychasm.

Before the fourteenth century two forms of daily office were in use in the Byzantine Church: the 'chanted office' in cathedrals and parish churches, and the office of the Studite monastery in monasteries (this had many 'people's

office' characteristics). Both of these were set to disappear with the introduction of this third form, the Palestinian office of St Sabas. Its use spread out from fourteenth-century Mount Athos, coinciding with the spread of hesychasm. In content it was not something entirely new. The old monastic office had also had deep roots in the Palestinian monastery of St Sabas. This second 'invasion' from Palestine represented not so much a new form of office as 'a return to the more austere sources of the monasteries of the countryside or the desert'.³⁹

Remnants of the older office are found in this St Sabas rite, as we shall see, all its contents having come together through a complicated setting of layer upon layer and through successive expansion or contraction of particular elements. We are speaking, in fact, not of three separate forms of office in the history of Byzantine worship, but of three currents within a tradition rooted in antiquity.

The subject is clearly vast and intractable, and all we need concern ourselves with here is to see how it can help us detect, in very simple terms, the survival and progress of the ancient people's office of the early Church.

The character of the services

The daily services are in theory the same in essentials whether used in monasteries, cathedrals or parish churches. There are no separate people's and monks' offices, but a single form which is a balanced combination of both, though weighted in favour of the monastic mentality. In practice, however, the services are adapted and shortened in parishes to make them more suitable.

There are fourteen services in all. Prime, terce, sext, none, and the four 'inter-hours' which are sometimes inserted between them in particularly fervent monasteries, consist essentially of psalms read through aloud by one reader at a lectern, followed by prayers. 'Typica' is in origin an ancient Palestinian office for daily communion from the reserved sacrament, from which the communion has since disappeared. The 'table office' is celebrated at table in association with either the midday or the evening meal. Compline ('little compline') is a shorter version of the 'grand compline' which is celebrated on the eve of certain feasts. This latter appears to combine elements of compline, a night vigil, and the morning office, a survival of another layer of Byzantine history, as is also the night office, which came late into the scheme, and fits in only with difficulty. The day's prayer, finally, is dominated by mattins and vespers, which have a character all their own, and are the only services used in parishes.

Vespers

The use of Psalm 104 at the beginning of monastic vespers is first mentioned in the eighth century (19). During it the priest reads seven prayers secretly. These prayers were certainly in the service-books by the eighth century and



A service in an Orthodox monastery. At the front is the iconostasis; in the alcove to the left a small group of monks sing round a lectern. A similar group sings in the opposite alcove (out of the picture). The monk at the lectern in the foreground may be reading the *kathismata* of the Psalter. Monks and laity freely mix – there is little of the neat precision of Western worship.⁴⁹

probably earlier, and there is good evidence to show that they were originally among the collects to the opening eight antiphons of 'chanted' vespers, each designed to follow a psalm or a group of psalms and relate to them.⁴⁰ The *kathisma* ('sitting') of weekdays is the 'monastic' preliminary psalmody which we have found in other rites. In parishes this is normally reduced or omitted altogether.

All of this material constitutes an introduction, and after it comes what is in origin people's vespers. It starts with a group of fixed psalms known as the 'Lucernarium Psalms', beginning with the evening Psalm 141. They are often reduced to a few verses. Then comes the lucernarium proper. The priest puts on his *felonion* (chasuble), all the lamps are lit, the incense is offered, and the choir sings 'Hail, gladdening light' (*Phōs hilaron*), which is regarded as the high point of the service. We have reached the people's office. On Sundays and feast-days the connection with primitive people's vespers is even more apparent, with the entrance procession led by candle-bearers from the deacon's door on the left, round to the royal doors. The deacon, while he censes, cries, 'Wisdom! Let us attend!', and then the choir sings the *Phōs hilaron*. (This, like the east Syrian Great Entrance, may derive from the entrance of the bishop in Egeria's Jerusalem.)

There is no Scripture-reading in the Byzantine office, except for certain great feasts, and every day during Lent, when there are readings at vespers from the Old Testament. Since early times Lent has been a period for communal study of the Scriptures, especially the Pentateuch. This study took place during the afternoon in Lent in fourth-century Jerusalem.⁴¹ In Constantinople and Antioch such instruction went on throughout Lent before vespers.⁴² The actual readings eventually made their way into the service they had preceded.

The litany completes the ancient pattern by ending with petition and intercession. The Prayer of Inclination, as in the east Syrian office, was the final blessing, showing once again how the service has expanded (the actual prayer is not now said aloud).

Then outside this kernel come the *Aposticha* and *Nunc Dimittis*. The lamps are extinguished, the priest removes his *felonion*, and the rest of the service is conducted in the subdued monastic manner of the first part.

Mattins

The morning office is more complicated than vespers, a fusing of at least four services:

Office for the Emperor
Monastic night office

People's Sunday vigil
People's morning office

The opening doxology and two psalms are a relatively recent addition. An office for those in authority follows, probably originating in an office for the Emperor celebrated in monasteries of imperial foundation.

The next part of the service is in origin a monastic vigil, and opens, as does the same service in the Rule of St Benedict, with a versicle from Psalm 51, 'O Lord, open our lips . . .'.⁴³ The main elements in this vigil are the six invitatory psalms (*hexapsalmos*), and the variable blocks of psalmody (*kathismas*). The *hexapsalmos* as a whole is regarded as a solemn moment, during which all should stand, no one moving from their place. During the second three of these psalms the priest reads twelve secret prayers. Like the similar prayers in vespers, they are a relic of former psalm-collects, etc, and are found in the oldest Byzantine service-books known to us (ninth century).⁴⁴ The variable psalms (*kathismas*) are recited by one reader while all sit to listen, as Cassian's monks did in fourth-century Egypt. This psalmody is omitted in parishes – when parish churches choose to abbreviate a service, it is significant that monastic elements such as this psalmody tend to be the first to go. We can now see why grand compline and the night office do not fit easily into the total scheme. The Byzantine rite contains in fact three forms of night office, of which this one in mattins is the most naturally at home.

Now the atmosphere changes as the people's office takes over, in the form of a people's festal vigil: this is included in the service only on Sundays and feast-days. The lamps are lit, the royal doors are opened, and the church is censed, while the choir sing the *Polieley*, Psalms 135 and 136. The name, which means 'much mercy', refers to the refrain in Psalm 136. The high point of this people's vigil, following the classic pattern, is the reading of one of the eleven resurrection pericopes from the Gospels (at feasts on weekdays a proper Gospel is read). Then the resurrection is hymned.

Psalm 51 heralds the start of the morning office proper.⁴⁵ The *canon* which follows is an element of great importance, even though it has in fact grown like mistletoe out of an oak tree. Originally there was canticle-singing here,⁴⁶ but apart from the Magnificat the canticles have all disappeared (except in Lent); their antiphons have remained, however, and blossomed into a set of full-length poems. In very simple terms, their structure is as follows: a *troparion* is a stanza; three, four, five or more troparia make an *ode*; there are nine odes in a *canon*.

According to Symeon of Thessalonica the *Exapostilarion* ('sending-forth') is named thus because in it Christ is bidden to send forth his light. It introduces Psalms 148–150, which occur perhaps more than anything else in rites monastic and popular, right across the board, at this point in mattins.⁴⁷ The *Gloria in Excelsis* too is a traditional canticle for mattins.⁴⁸ As we will by now be coming

to expect, this people's mattins ends with a litany. The Prayer of Inclination remains to all intents and purposes the final blessing, and the service ends, as at vespers, with hymns and prayers.

Living prayer

Many problems in the interpretation of the Byzantine office remain to be studied and clarified. It is nevertheless possible to learn enough about it to find our bearings, and to gain some understanding of the particular way in which it has preserved ancient tradition. The most exciting thing about even such a simple investigation as this is the vivid picture it gives of how Christian worship lives and grows, ever innovating, always creative, yet retaining, like some huge tangled old bush, trunk and roots which go down to the vital origins. All it has been possible to do here is examine the skeleton of the Byzantine office. We have more to learn from the actual celebration of worship than can ever be gained from inventories of its contents, and it should be borne in mind that this very sketchy account, which has hardly looked at the theology and meaning of the services, is in no way adequate on its own to form an introduction to the Orthodox prayer of the Hours. Yet hopefully it serves our purpose here, which is to see how the characteristic features of the patristic people's office were preserved and developed in subsequent centuries.

Orthodox worship is so different from what Westerners are used to that some major differences ought to be mentioned.

The Western morning and evening offices have a simple structure, rising to a climax at the canticle and then gently subsiding again. Orthodox worship, however, simply flows on and on. It does have its climactic moments, but there is a dominating sense of a great swell rolling inexorably forward under its own momentum. Subjective, 'personal' religion is firmly put in its place. Anyone who attempted to squeeze the juice out of everything said and sung would soon give up exhausted. It all rolls on objectively, and if we abandon ourselves to it without over-concern about intellectual attention, it will still, like some great river, deposit its rich silt.

Very refreshing for the Westerner is the relaxed unselfconsciousness of clergy and people's behaviour in church, also reflected in the priest's wide liberty to adapt the service, and an unworried acceptance that in such a complicated undertaking some things will go wrong.

Orthodox laity are used to attending the daily office in monasteries and cathedrals, and they feel at home with it, although it may be truer to say that all Orthodox worship has much the same quality, appearance as one stream of worship, whether it be eucharist, daily office or other services of prayer, and people are used to staying for a while, whatever is going on, and can recognize the moments when they have their own part to play. The office is offered for its

own sake as a whole liturgical offering. The vestments, ceremonies and music, far from being optional extras, are necessities. There are parishes where the office is celebrated daily, but in others it takes place only on Saturdays, Sundays and feast-days. There is an accepted understanding that although it may sometimes be offered by few, it is always offered for all, in the indivisible oneness of Christ's Body.

II. The history of daily prayer

- 1 Delling (53) p. 181
- 2 See Bradshaw (5), chapters 1 and 2
- 3 See Fischer (55)
- 4 Clement, *Stromateis* 7.7
- 5 See Walker (61)
- 6 I am grateful to the Revd Dr Alan Amos for this information
- 7 See Luykx (71) pp. 67–81
- 8 Vogüé (76) pp. 128f.
- 9 Quoted in Uspensky (113) pp. 64f. See also Egender (119) vol. 1, p. 65
- 10 See Grosdidier (120) pp. 191–4
- 11 See Dekkers (66)
- 12 Egeria 24.1, as given in Bradshaw (5) p. 77
- 13 Egeria 24.2, as above, pp. 78ff.
- 14 See Bradshaw (5) p. 82
- 15 Uspensky (113) pp. 96ff.
- 16 See *ibid.*, p. 34
- 17 See page 150
- 18 For further details on its origins see Taft (23) p. 37
- 19 See pages 149ff.
- 20 Atiya (82) p. 240

- 21 On the *bema* see Bibliography. Relative structures have been found at Boppard on the and in Trier Cathedral
- 22 Illustrations from J. Lassus, *The Early Christian and Byzantine World* (1967), pp. 40–42
- 23 See page 172
- 24 See page 150
- 25 See page 149
- 26 See page 184
- 27 E. Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (1959), p. 150. See also W. O. E. Oesterley and G. H. Box, *A Short Survey of the Literature of Rabbinical and Mediaeval Judaism*, (1920), p. 149f.
- 28 See note accompanying 26 for parallels
- 29 Mateos (93) p. 27
- 30 Such collects are a characteristic of the daily office in the East, but also feature in the non-Roman rites of the West. See page 173
- 31 P. Sigal, 'Early Christianity and Rabbinic Liturgical Affinities', in *New Testament Studies* 30 (Jan. 1984), pp. 63–90
- 32 Maclean (90) pp. 212ff.
- 33 Uspensky (113) p. 73
- 34 Illustration from *DACL: Byzance*
- 35 Uspensky (113) p. 32
- 36 See Winkler (104) pp. 61f.; Bradshaw (5) p. 74; Taft (23) pp. 42–4, and in this book, page 184
- 37 It has been discovered that the modern Byzantine vespers of the Presanctified in Lent contains two services of vespers, each with a lucernarium, one of which is clearly in origin a people's office (see Janeras (122)). Was there a ceremony with light in the old Byzantine vespers which had been dropped by the time of our earliest documents?
- 38 See Egender (119) vol. 1, p. 53
- 39 Arranz (115) p. 85; (see also Arranz (116) 63–end; Egender (119) vol. 1, pp. 46ff.; Uspensky (113) p. 91)
- 40 Arranz (114) p. 118
- 41 See Winkler (104) p. 76, and Bradshaw (5) pp. 91f.
- 42 See Egender (119) vol. 1, p. 71
- 43 Mateos (129) pp. 22ff.
- 44 Arranz (115) pp. 409f.
- 45 The use of Psalm 51 in this position is very common. Cf. 14, 18, 19, 26, 30, 31, 32a, 33, 38, 39, 44, 45, 46
- 46 See page 157
- 47 Cf. 17, 18, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 38, 44, 45, 46
- 48 See page 158
- 49 Illustration by John Perret, from *Roumanian Pilgrimage*, by M. R. Loughborough (1939) p. 78