Introduction

What I have said thus far has been, in intention at least, an objective interpretation of the history and present shape of the Liturgy of the Hours in the traditions of Eastern and Western Christianity. What follows in this final section is more experiential, the fruit of reflection on my own experience chanting the Liturgy of the Hours day by day, solemnly and in common, according to the Russian usage of the Byzantine Rite. That experience, however, has been measured against years of studying the Divine Office in the tradition of the Church, both Eastern and Western, across its entire history. So it is a personal reflection—but not, I trust, an arbitrarily subjective one.

21

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Surprisingly, in spite of its importance in the liturgical life of the Church, especially in religious and clerical life, there has been relatively little written of late on the theology or spirituality of the Divine Office.[1] But since the appearance in 1945 of Dom Gregory Dix's classic *The Shape of the Liturgy*[2] it has been customary to fit the office under the heading of "sanctification of time," as a "liturgy of time" distinct from the "eschatological" Eucharist. Furthermore, Dix sees the office as something new, part of the fourth-century revolution in the spirit of worship.

Here is Dix's argument.[3] In the pre-Nicene Church, faith and worship informed the whole inner life of the believer, but because secular life was pagan, liturgy and daily life were distinct and even opposed. Worship was countercultural, world-renouncing, exclusive, not all-inclusive as it was to become later in monasticism.

The monastic movement swept the fourth-century world, bringing in its train a new emphasis on personal edification in Christian worship. This

[1]There is one work on the theology of the recently reformed Roman *Liturgia horarum*: D. de Reynal, *Théologie de la Liturgie des heures* (Beauchesne religions, Paris: Beauchesne, 1978).

[2]Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*.

[3]*Ibid.* 323–332. References to quotations from these pages will be indicated in the text

element, though present from the beginning, "had hitherto found only restricted expression in christian corporate worship and none at all in the eucharistic rite" (323). Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* presents a regime of prayer "recognizably semi-monastic in character," which "represents the purely *personal* aspect of devotion, and stands quite apart . . . from the corporate worship of the *ecclesia*" (324). There were of course "private meetings," agape suppers for instance, for edification, but these were not corporate assemblies. ". . . The corporate worship of the pre-Nicene christians in its official and organised forms, the synaxis and the eucharist was overwhelmingly a 'world-renouncing' cultus, which deliberately and rigidly rejected the whole idea of sanctifying and expressing towards God the life of human society in general . . ." (326).

Such is the scenario drawn by Dix, all of which was to change in the fourth century when the pre-Nicene system of *private* prayer, developed by the monks into a large part of their *public* worship, leads to the introduction of services of praise into the public worship of secular churches. The older worship stressed the corporate action of the Church. The new offices, though done in common, are intended chiefly to express and evoke the devotion of the individual worshiper.

So for Dix the cathedral office is "a direct result of the monastic-ascetic movement" (328). The monks gave the Church the office and with it the idea that the whole of life was consummated in worship, instead of seeing worship as "the contradiction of daily life, like the pre-Nicene church" (332).

Another novelty is that these services, unlike the Eucharist, were open to all. True, catechumens and others were also dismissed at the office, before the final Prayers of the Faithful, "but the element of prayer in the secular office was never a large one, and the bulk of the office . . . was always open to all" (331).

I trust that the historical sources already adduced suffice to show how totally wrong Dix is in almost every aspect of this interpretation. The prayer we saw, for example, in the *Apostolic Tradition* is not "semi-monastic" but in direct continuity with a tradition of daily Christian private prayer that goes back to the beginnings of the Church. All later development is simply an expansion and formalizing of this earlier tradition. What happened in the fourth century was but one more step in the process. The monks prayed at the same hours as in the earlier system. If they were cenobites they did this in common because *koinobion* means common life: they did *everything* together. And when the secular churches came above ground they developed some of the private prayer times into public services because "to assemble" was what it meant to be "church."

It is enough to read again the early Fathers on the cathedral hours to see how unfounded is Dix's notion that the cathedral offices were more expressions of individual piety than a corporate action of the Church. The *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 59, one of our earliest witnesses to the cathedral office, is quite explicit on just this point:

> When you teach, bishop, command and exhort the people to frequent the church regularly, morning and evening every day, and not to forsake it at all, but to assemble continually, and not diminish the Church by absenting themselves and making the Body of Christ lack a member. For it is not only said for the benefit of the priests, but let each of the laity hear what was said by the Lord as spoken to himself: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matt 12:30). Do not scatter yourselves by not gathering together, you who are members of Christ. . . . Do not be neglectful of yourselves nor rob the savior of his members nor divide his body nor scatter his members, nor prefer the needs of this life to the Word of God, but assemble each day morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's houses, in the morning saying Ps 62, and in the evening Ps 140.
>
> But especially on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day of the resurrection of the Lord, meet even more diligently, sending up praise to God. . . . Otherwise how will one defend himself before God, one who does not assemble on that day . . . on which is accomplished the reading of the prophets and the proclamation of the gospel and the offering of the sacrifice and the gift of the holy food?

The conclusion alone, which refers indiscriminately to the daily office and Sunday Eucharist, is proof enough that there is no basis for distinguishing as Dix does between the Mass as a "corporate action of the Church" and fourth-century "offices of devotion."

In the first place, moves in the direction of non-Eucharistic morning and evening assemblies are seen well before the post-Nicene, Constantinian era. Furthermore, to look upon the pre-Nicene agape and other non-Eucharistic Christian assemblies as "private" is to introduce anachronistic categories and distinctions that find no support whatever in the sources of this early period. The same can be said for the notion that the new offices were "inclusive" whereas the Eucharist was "exclusive." Catechumens and others were dismissed from fourth-century cathedral offices in exactly the same way and for exactly the same reason and at exactly the same point in the prayers as they were at the Liturgy of the Word. And both had the same number of "prayers," which were not at all inconsiderable, as we saw in the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, 35–39 (cf. 6–9), where

they seem almost endless.[4] Such dismissals had nothing to do with whether a service was Eucharistic or not, but with who could or could not participate in certain acts of the priestly people of God. As for the novel *spirit* of these services, being directed at edification, there is no difference whatever between this and the spirit of Christian life and worship in the New Testament itself, as we shall see.

But since Dix, a whole theology of the hours as a "sanctification of time" distinct from the "eschatalogical" Eucharist on the Lord's Day has developed. The inevitable conclusion is that Eucharist should ideally be celebrated only on Sundays—as if the cathedral hours of morning praise and evensong were not also an integral part of the celebration of the Lord's Day!

Earlier theories took the opposite tack, considering the Eucharist the "summit of the Divine Office," as if the daily celebration of the Eucharist had some intimate connection with the daily hours of prayer, like a jewel in its setting.[5]

I must frankly confess I see no warrant for any of this in the sources, which from the beginning are reasonably clear on the meaning of Christian life and liturgy, and, within that context, on the meaning of the Liturgy of the Hours. For the hours take their meaning not from the Eucharist, nor from Christian daily life as opposed to an otherworldly eschatological expectation, nor from the natural cycle of morning and evening, nor from personal devotion and edification as distinct from the work of the community. Rather, they take their meaning from that which alone gives meaning to all of these things: the paschal mystery of salvation in Christ Jesus. This is the basis of any theology of Christian worship that takes, as it surely must, the New Testament as its starting point.

Worship in the New Testament

A fundamental principle of New Testament theology is that all salvation history is recapitulated and "personalized" in Jesus.[6] Nothing is clearer than the fact that everything in sacred history—event, object, sacred place, theophany, cult—has quite simply been assumed into the person of the Incarnate Christ. He is God's eternal Word (John 1:1, 14); his new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 8:19ff.; Rev 21—22) and the new Adam (1 Cor 15:45; Rom 5:14); the new Pasch and its lamb (1 Cor 5:7; John 1:29, 36; 19:36; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5ff.); the new covenant (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Heb 8—13), the new circumcision (Col 2:11–12), and the heavenly manna (John 6:30–58; Rev 2:17); God's temple (John 2:19–27), the new sacrifice, and its priest (Eph 5:2; Heb 2:17—3:2; 4:14—10:14); the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest (Col 2:16–17, Matt 11:28—12:8; Heb 3:7—4:11) and the Messianic Age that was to come (Luke 4:16–21; Acts 2:14–36). Neither the list nor the references are exhaustive. He is quite simply "all in all" (Col 3:11), "the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). All that went before is fulfilled in him: "For the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities" (Heb 10:1); and that includes cultic realities: "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col 2:16–17).

This is seminal for any theology of Christian worship. The Old Testament temple and altar with their rituals and sacrifices are replaced not by a new set of rituals and shrines, but by the self-giving of a person, the very Son of God. Henceforth, true worship pleasing to the Father is none other than the saving life, death and resurrection of Christ. And our worship is this same sacrificial existence in us. Paul tells us, "Just as surely as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:49; cf. Phil 2:7–11; 3:20-21; Eph 4:22–24), the Risen Christ, "image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), who conforms us to his image through the gift of his Spirit (2 Cor 3:15; Rom 8:11ff., 29). For St. Paul, "to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21), and to be saved is to be conformed to Christ by dying to self and rising to new life in him (2 Cor 4:10ff.; 13:4; Rom 6:3ff.; Col 2:12–13, 20; 3:1–3; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:1ff.; Phil 2:5ff.; 3:10–11, 18–21) who, as the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), is the definitive form of redeemed human nature (1 Cor 15:21–22; Rom 5:12–21; Col 3:9–11; Eph 4:22–24). Until this pattern is so repeated in each of us that Christ is indeed "all in all" (Col 3:11), we shall not yet have "filled up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). For we know "the power of his resurrection" only if we "share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil 3:10).

Far from being a fourth-century innovation, edification and personal sanctification and the intimate relation of liturgy to everyday life are the essence of the New Testament message concerning the new cult.

[4] See ch. 3 at note 30.

[5] On this see J. Dubois, "Office des heures et messe dans la tradition monastique," LMD 135 (1978) 62ff.; de Vogüé, *La Règle de s. Benôit* VII, 240ff. (English trans. in CS 54, 159 ff.); Taft, "The Frequency of the Eucharist," 17–18.

[6] In the following pages I resume some material from my article "The Liturgical Year: Studies, Prospects, Reflections," *Worship* 55 (1981) 14ff.

Indeed, for St. Paul liturgy *is* Christian life. Never once does he use cultic nomenclature (liturgy, sacrifice, priest, offering) for anything but a life of self-giving, lived after the pattern of Christ.[7] When he does speak of what we call liturgy, as in 1 Cor 10—14, Eph 4, or Gal 3:27–28, he makes it clear that its purpose is to build up the Body of Christ into that new temple and liturgy and priesthood, in which sanctuary and offerer and offered are one. For it is in the liturgy of the Church, in the ministry of word and sacrament, that the biblical pattern of recapitulation of all in Christ is returned to the collectivity, and applied to the community of faith that will live in him.

To borrow a term from the biblical scholars, the liturgy is the ongoing *Sitz im Leben* of Christ's saving pattern in every age, and what we do in the liturgy is exactly what the New Testament itself did with Christ: it applied him and what he was and is to the present. For the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospels is the historical setting not of the original event, but of its telling during the early years of the primitive Church. Do not both New Testament and liturgy tell us this holy history again and again as a perpetual anamnesis? Note that this is not kerygma, as it is often mistakenly called. Kerygma is the preaching of the Good News in order to awaken the response of faith in the new message. But the kerygma written down and proclaimed in the liturgical assembly to recall us to our commitment to the Good News already heard and accepted in faith, even though "we know them and are established in the truth" (2 Pet 1:12), is anamnesis, and that is what we do in liturgy. We make anamnesis, memorial, of this dynamic saving power in our lives, to make it penetrate ever more into the depths of our being, for the building up of the Body of Christ.

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have communion with us; and our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1–4).

It seems to me, then, that the eschatalogical expectation vs. sanctification of life dichotomy arose long before the fourth century, *pace* Dix, and was solved by the Apostolic Church. But it was not solved by abandoning New Testament eschatology, which sees Christ as inaugurating

[7]See for example Rom 10:9; 12:1; 15:16; Phil 2:17; 4:18; 2 Tim 4:6; also Heb 13:11-16.

the age of salvation. What was abandoned was the mistaken belief that this implied an imminent parousia. But that does not modify the main point of Christian eschatology, that the endtime is not in the future but *now*. And it is operative now, though not exclusively, through the anamnesis in word and sacrament of the dynamic present reality of Emmanuel, "God-with-us," through the power of his Spirit in every age.

In the Gospels the transition to this new age of salvation history is portrayed in the accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.[8] They introduce us to a new mode of his presence, a presence that is real and experienced, yet quite different from the former presence before his passover. When he appears he is not recognized immediately (Luke 24:16, 37; John 2:14, 7, 12). There is a strange aura about him; the disciples are uncertain, afraid; Jesus must reassure them (Luke 24:36ff.). At Emmaus they recognize him only in the breaking of the bread—and then he vanishes (Luke 24:16, 30-31, 35). Like his presence among us now, his presence to the disciples is accessible only through faith.

What these post-resurrection accounts seem to be telling us is that Jesus is with us, but not as he was before.[9] He is with us and not with us, real presence and real absence. He is the one whom "heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:21), but who also said "I am with you always, until the close of the age" (Matt 28:20). It is simply this reality that we live in the liturgy, believing from Matt 18:20 that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them," yet celebrating the Lord's Supper to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26) in the spirit of the early Christians, with their liturgical cry of hope: "Marana-tha! Amen. Come Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

So the Jesus of the Apostolic Church is not the historical Jesus of the past, but the Heavenly Priest interceding for us constantly before the throne of the Father (Rom 8:34; Heb 9:11–28), and actively directing the life of his Church (Rev 1:17—3:22 and *passim*).[10] The vision of the People who produced these documents was not directed backwards, to the "good old days" when Jesus was with them on earth. We see such nostalgia only after Jesus' death, before the resurrection appearances give birth to Christian faith.

The Church did keep a record of the historical events, but they were reinterpreted in the light of the resurrection, and were meant to assist Chris-

[8]D. N. Stanley, *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1967) 278ff.

[9]*Ibid.* 280ff.

[10]*Ibid.* 284–285.

tians to grasp the significance of Jesus in their lives.[11] That this was the chief interest of the New Testament Church, the contemporary, active, Risen Christ present in the Church through his Spirit, can be seen in the earliest writings, the epistles of St. Paul, which say next to nothing about the historical details of Jesus' life.

It is this consciousness of Jesus as the Lord not of the past but of contemporary history that is the aim of all Christian spirituality and liturgical anamnesis. Christian vision is rooted in the gradually acquired realization of the Apostolic Church that the parousia was not imminent, and that the eschatological, definitive victory won by Christ must be repeated in each one of us, until the end of time. And since Christ is both model and source of this struggle, the New Testament presents both his victory and his cult of the Father as ours: just as we have died and risen with him (Rom 6:3–11; 2 Cor 4:10ff.; Gal 2:20; Col 2:12–13, 20; 3:1–3; Eph 2:5-6), so, too, it is we who have become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22-24), a new circumcision (Phil 3:3), a new temple (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19–22), a new sacrifice (Eph 5:2), and a new priesthood (1 Pet 2:5–9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). This is why we meditate on the pattern of his life, proclaim it, preach it, celebrate it: to make it ever more deeply our own. This is why the Apostolic Church left us a book and a rite, word and sacrament, so that what Christ did and was, we may do and be, in him. For this reason, sacred history is never finished: it continues in us.

The Newness of Christian Ritual

I think it fair to say that this New Testament vision of cult is something startlingly, radically new. Of course human beings have always gathered to express themselves in ritual, so when Christians do so they are not inventing something new.[12] What *is* new is the *vision* they are expressing.

Ritual itself is simply a set of conventions, an organized pattern of signs and gestures which members of a community use to interpret and enact for themselves, and to express and transmit to others, their relation to reality.[13] It is a way of saying what we as a group are, in the full sense

[11] *Ibid.* 285.

[12] I resume here some material from my article, "*Thanksgiving for the Light*—Toward a Theology of Vespers," *Diakonia* 13 (1978) 27–50.

[13] I follow here some of the ideas of V. Turner, "Ritual, Tribal, Catholic," *Worship* 50 (1976) 504–526.

of that *are*, with our past that made us what we are, our present in which we live what we are, and the future we hope to be. Ritual, then, is ideology and experience in action, the celebration or interpretation-through-action of our human experience and how we view it.

Human societies have used ritual especially to express their religious outlook, their universal system for relating to the ultimate questions of life. A religion is different from a personal philosophy of life in that it is a *shared* perspective, a common outlook on reality. As such it depends on *history*, on the group's collective remembrance of things past, of events that have been transformed in the collective memory of the community into key symbolic episodes determinative of the community's being and self-understanding.

This is the basis of ritual behavior. For it is through the interpretation of its past that a community relates to the present and copes with the future. In the process of ritual representation, past constitutive events are made present in ritual time, in order to communicate their force to new generations of the social group, providing thus a community of identity throughout history.

In primitive, natural religious systems the past was seen as cyclic, as an ever-repeating pattern of natural seasons. Rituals were celebrations of this cycle of autumn, winter, spring, harvest—of natural death and rebirth. But even at this primitive stage men and women came to see these natural rhythms as symbols of higher realities, of death and resurrection, of the perdurance of human existence beyond natural death.

So even natural religious ritual is not just an interpretation of experience, but implies a reaching for the beyond, for an ultimate meaning in the cycle of life that seemed to be an ever-recurring circle closed by death. The discovery of history was a breakthrough in this process: life was seen to have a pattern that extended beyond the closed cycles of nature, of life and death. Time acquired a new meaning, and human ritual was transformed from a way of interpreting *nature* into a way of interpreting *history*.

Thus, events in the past came to acquire a universal symbolic value in the mind of the community; in fact, these events were so fundamental that they actually created and constituted the community's very identity. By celebrating these events ritually, the community made them present again, and mediated to its members their formative power. Of course these were usually events of salvation, of escape from calamity and death, and it was but one further step for them to become transformed in the collective memory of the group into symbols of God's care and eternal salvation.

This is what happened with Israel. What makes Israelite liturgy differ-

ent from other rituals is revelation. The Jews did not have to *imagine* that their escape from Egypt was a sign of God's saving Providence: he *told* them so. When they celebrated this Exodus ritually in the Passover meal, they knew they were celebrating more than the universalization of a past event in the historical imagination of their poets and prophets. The covenant with God which they reaffirmed ritually was a permanent and hence ever present reality because God had said so.

Here we encounter a basic difference between Judeo-Christian worship and other cults. Biblical worship is not an attempt to contact the divine, to mediate to us the power of God's intervention in past saving events. It is the other way around. It is a worship of the already saved We do not reach for God to appease him; he has bent down to us.

With Christian liturgy we take another step in our understanding of ritual. As in the Old Testament, we, too, celebrate a saving event. For us, too, the meaning of this event has been revealed. But that is where the parallel ends. For Old Testament ritual looked forward to a promised fulfillment; it was not only an actualization of the covenant, but the pledge of a yet unrealized messianic future. In Christianity, what all other rituals strain to achieve has, we believe, already been fufilled once and for all by Christ. Reconciliation with the Father has been accomplished eternally in the mystery of his Son (2 Cor 5:18–19; Rom 5:10–11). The gap is bridged forever through God's initiative.

So Christian worship is not how we seek to contact God; it is a celebration of how God has touched us, has united us to himself and is ever present to us and dwelling in us. It is not a reaching out for a distant reality but a joyful celebration of a salvation that is just as real and active in the ritual celebration as it was in the historical event. It is ritual perfected by divine realism; ritual in which the symbolic action is not a memorial of the past, but a participation in the eternally present salvific Pasch of Christ.

Christian liturgy, therefore, publicly feasts the mystery of our salvation already accomplished in Christ, thanking and glorifying God for it so that it might be intensified in us and communicated to others for the building up of the Church, to the perpetual glory of God's Holy Name.

Liturgy: A Work of the Church

So liturgy is an activity of the Church. It is one of the ways the Church responds in praise, surrender, thanksgiving, to the call of God's revealing, saving word and deed. This eternal doxology is a response to something, and it is important to note that this divine action itself is not extrinsic to the liturgy but an integral part of it. Liturgy is not just our response; it is also the eternally repeated call. It is both God's unending saving activity and our prayerful response to it in faith and commitment throughout the ages.

Liturgy, then, is much more than an individual expression of faith and devotion, and infinitely more than a subjective expression of "where we're at," or "where we're coming from," as contemporary American slang puts it. It is first and foremost an activity of God in Christ. Christ saves through the ages in the activity of the body of which he is the head. He does this in the word that calls us to conversion to him and union with him, and to reconciliation with one another in him. He creates and nourishes and heals and restores this life in the water and oil and food of sacrament, and joins his prayer to ours to glorify the Father for those gifts. And all this is liturgy.

Liturgy then is the common work of Christ and his Church. This is its glory. It is also what makes possible the extraordinary claims the Church has made about the nature of Christian worship. Our prayers are worthless, but in the liturgy Christ himself prays in us. For the liturgy is the efficacious sign of Christ's saving presence in his Church. His saving offering is eternally active and present before the throne of the Father. By our celebration of the divine mysteries, we are drawn into the saving action of Christ and our personal self-offering is transformed into an act of the Body of Christ through the worship of the body with its head. What men and women have vainly striven for throughout history in natural ritual—contact with the divine—is transformed from image to reality in Christ.

Of course, Christ, through the Spirit, does all these things apart from the liturgy, too—all this calling and healing and nourishing and saving and praying in us and with us. Then what is so special about the liturgy? Certainly not its efficaciousness, for God is always efficacious in all he does. The obstacles come from us. What is special about the liturgy is that it is a *visible* activity of the *whole* Church. Indeed, in a certain sense Church is Church only in liturgy, for a gathering in its fullest sense is a gathering only when it is gathered! Liturgy therefore is different from private prayer and other means and vehicles of grace and salvation in that it is a "symbol," a symbolic movement both expressing what we are and calling us to be it more fully. It is a celebration of the fact that we have been saved in Christ, and in the very celebration that same saving mystery of Christ is offered to us again in anamnesis for our unendingly renewed acceptance, and as everlasting motive for our song of joyful thanks and praise:

"He who is mighty has done great things for me—holy is his name!" (Luke 1:49).

We do all this together because we *are* a "together," and not just individuals. Christian salvation is by its very nature "Church," a "gathering," a one Body of Christ, and if we do not express this, then we are not what we proclaim to be. Redemption in the New Testament is a coming together, a solidarity in the face of the evil of this world. It necessarily leads to community because only in common can new human values be effectively released and implemented. Christ came not just to save individuals, but to change the course of history by creating the leaven of a new group, a new People of God, paradigm of what all peoples must one day be. In the Acts of the Apostles the life of this group is sustained in *gatherings*, and its basic dynamic is toward unity: that they may be one in Jesus, that they may love one another as Jesus has loved them and as the Father loves Jesus, is the will and prayer of Jesus in the Last Discourse in John's Gospel (15:9ff., 17:20ff.). This is the remedy for hate and divisiveness and enmity, the products of egoism that is the root of all evil.

Unless seen in this broader context of the whole of life, what the community does in its synaxes does not make much sense, for liturgy is not an end in itself. It is only the means and expression of a life together in Christ. It is that which is primary: a common life of mutual support and generosity, of putting self second so that others can be first. Prayer in common is one of the means to this unity, part of the group's cement, as well as its joyful celebration of the fact that inchoatively, if not perfectly, this unity exists already.

So it is towards *life* that worship is always directed. We see this in 1 Cor 11–14 and Matt 5:23–24. We see it in the *Didache* 14:1–2: "And on the Lord's day of the Lord, after you have gathered, break bread and offer the Eucharist, . . . But let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled." A few years later, around 111–113 A.D., we see it in the garbled account of a Christian assembly in the letter of the pagan governor Pliny to the emperor Trajan, during the time of persecutions in the Roman Empire. Pliny had interrogated Christians concerning their private gatherings, which had brought them under suspicion after Trajan's edict forbidding *hetaeriae* or secret meetings. Pliny obviously did not comprehend the information he had received from them. But he did understand that these Christian assemblies involved commitment to a covenant with stringent ethical implications:

> They insisted, however, that their whole fault or error consisted in the fact that they were accustomed to gather before daylight on a fixed day to sing a hymn to Christ as God and to bind themselves mutually, by means of a religious vow, not to any crime, but rather not to commit any theft or robbery or adultery, nor to go back on their word, nor to refuse to return a loan when it is demanded back. (Plinius Minor, *Ep.* 10, 96:7).

We see it in the questions asked the *baptizandi* in Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20:

> And when those who are to receive baptism are chosen, let their life be examined: did they live good lives when they were catechumens? Did they visit the sick? Have they done every kind of good work? And when those who sponsored them bear witness to each: "He has," let them hear the gospel.

In short, the touchstone of our liturgy is whether or not it is being lived out in our lives. Is the symbolic moment symbolizing what we really are? Is our shared celebration of life a sign that we truly live in this way?

In taking this perspective we are doing precisely what we saw the New Testament do with the mystery that is Christ: we recall it, make anamnesis of it, as a medium for encountering this mystery anew, so that we might see it as it is, the model and source of what we must be. But its purpose is not merely didactic. Its blazing light serves not only to illumine our deficiencies. It also burns away our darkness and draws us into its divine light.

Liturgy then has precisely the same dynamic as the New Testament, and also contains my response to it. To appropriate an expression of Mark Searle, just as the Bible is the saving Word of God in the words of human beings, so the liturgy is the saving deeds of God in the actions of men and women. And both have the same end: that we might respond to the call, and live it. Indeed, in a sense liturgy is more inclusive than the Scriptures, for it comprises both the saving Word *and* the saving actions of God, and our response to both. But just as the Word and deeds of God are seen here in sacramental form, but are present to us at every moment, symbolized but not exhausted in the ritual movement, so, too, my ritual response is but the symbolic movement of what must be the response of my every moment, with God's help.

For liturgy is a present encounter. Salvation is now. The death and resurrection of Jesus are past events only in their historicity, that is, with respect to us. But they are eternally present in God, who has entered our history but is not entrapped in it, and they have brought the presence of God among us to fulfillment in Jesus, and that enduring reality we encounter at every moment of our lives. The past memorialized is the efficacious saving event of salvation now, re-presented in symbol In the Risen

Lord, creation is at last seen as what it was meant to be, and Christ is Adam, that is, all humankind.

So the Jesus we recall is the fulfillment of all that went before. But this fulfillment of the past is directed at the future. For just as Christ has become everything and fulfilled all, so for us to be fulfilled, we must become him. And we can do this only by letting him conform us to himself, to his pattern, the model of the new creation. It is this remaking of us into a new humanity that is the true worship of the New Law. The old cult and priesthood have been replaced by the self-offering of the Son of God, and our worship is to repeat this same pattern in our own lives, a pattern we celebrate in symbol when we gather to remember what he was and what we are to be.

To express this spiritual identity, St. Paul uses several compound verbs that begin with the preposition *syn* (with): I suffer with Christ, am crucified with Christ, die with Christ, am buried with Christ, am raised and live with Christ, am carried off to heaven and sit at the right hand of the Father with Christ (Rom 6:3–11; Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:7ff.; Col 2:20; Eph 2:5–6).[14] This is one of Paul's ways of underscoring the necessity of personal participation in redemption. We must "put on Christ" (Gal 13:27), and assimilate him, somehow experience with God's grace the principal events by which Christ has saved us and repeat them in the pattern of my own life. For by undergoing them he has transformed the basic human experiences into a new creation. How do we experience these events? In him, by so entering into the mystery of his life so that each can affirm with Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

This is what Christian life, our true liturgy, is all about. Our common worship is a living metaphor of this same saving reality, not only representing and re-presenting it to us constantly in symbol to evoke our response in faith and deed, but actively effecting it in us through the work of the Holy Spirit, in order to build up the Body of Christ into a new temple and liturgy and priesthood in which offerer and offered are one.

This is what I mean when I say that all liturgy is anamnesis. It is not just a psychological reminiscence, not just a remembering, but an active and self-fulfilling prophecy in which by the power of God we become what we celebrate, while at the same time thanking and glorifying him for that great gift.

2 Pet 1:12–16 says:

> Therefore I intend always to *remind* you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it is right . . . to arouse you by way of *reminder*. . . . And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to *recall* these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.

[14]Stanley, *A Modern Scriptural Approach* 210–211.

Liturgy also reminds us of the powerful deeds of God in Christ. And being reminded we remember, and remembering we celebrate, and celebrating we become what we do. The dancer dancing is the dance.

Liturgy and Spirituality

Christian life, according to the several New Testament metaphors for it, is a process of conversion into Christ.[15] He is the *Ursakrament* which we have seen the New Testament present as the personalization of all that went before, and the recapitulation and completion and model and foretaste of all that will ever be. As such, he is not just the mystery of the Father's love for us, "the image of the unseen God" (Col 1:15); he is also the revelation of what we are to be (1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). His life is the story of entering sinful humanity and returning it to the Father through the cross, a return that was accepted and crowned in Christ's deliverance and exaltation (Phil 2:5ff.). And this same story, as we have seen, is also presented as the story of everyone, the archetype of our experience of returning to God through a life of death to self, lived after the pattern Christ showed us: "He died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15).

In the New Testament, the very process of its composition reveals the growing realization of this fact: that our final passage to the Father through death and resurrection was to be preceded by a life of death to sin and new life in Christ. The whole point of the New Testament reflection on Christ's life is to make it speak to this new awareness: that the new age was to be not a quick end but a new, holy history. As Abbot Patrick Regan has said, the eschaton is not a time or a thing, it is a person, the new Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 5:20ff., 42ff.). And the new creation is a life lived in him (2 Cor 5:13–19)—or rather, his life in us (Gal 2:20).[16]

[15]See M. Searle, "The Journey of Conversion," *Worship* 54 (1980) 48–49, and his "Liturgy as Metaphor," *Worship* 55 (1981) 111ff.

[16]"Pneumatological and Eschatological Aspects of Liturgical Celebration," *Worship* 51 (1977) 347.

Liturgy, therefore, has the same purpose as the gospel: to present this new reality in "anamnesis" as a continual sign to us not of a past history, but of the present reality of our lives in him. "Behold *now* is the acceptable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). The liturgy of the Church presents us with a multi-dimensional celebration of this basic reality, but the reality is always the same. What we celebrate is the fact that Jesus lived, died, and rose for our salvation, and that we have died to sin and risen to new life in him, in expectation of the final fulfillment. Baptism celebrates the initiation of this gift in us. Eucharist nourishes it, and celebrates it as a community of life now, and as a sign that the final days have already begun, when we shall eat and drink at God's table in the kingdom.

This common celebration of our salvation in Christ is the most perfect expression and realization of the spirituality of the Church. There are many "schools" of spirituality, but they are legitimate only insofar as they are rooted in the worship of the Church. The purpose of the spiritual life is to "put on Christ," so that, as St. Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). And this life is created, fed and renewed in the liturgy. Baptized into the mystery of his death and resurrection, we rise in him, having "put on Christ." Henceforth he dwells in us, prays in us, proclaims to us the word of his new covenant, seals it with his sacrifice, feeds us with his body and blood, draws us to penance and conversion, glorifies the Father in us. In proclamation and preaching he explains to us his mystery; in rite and song he celebrates it with us; in sacramental grace he gives us the strength to live it.

The mystery that is Christ is the center of Christian life and it is this mystery and nothing else that the Church renews in the liturgy so that we might be drawn into it. When we leave the assembly to return to our other tasks, we have only to assimilate what we have experienced and realize the mystery in our lives: in a word, to become other Christs. For the purpose of the liturgy is to generate in our lives what the Church realizes for us in its public worship. The spiritual life is just another word for a personal relationship with God, and the liturgy is nothing less than the common expression of the Church's personal relationship with God.

In such a liturgical spirituality the Church's public worship and the spiritual life of the individual are one. All the supposed tension in spirituality between public and private, objective and subjective, liturgical and personal, is an illusion, a false dichotomy. For in her public worship it is precisely this work of spiritual formation that the Church carries on.

The Divine Office as Liturgy

So liturgy is simply a celebration of the Christian life—or the "spiritual life," if you will—and the same is true of the Liturgy of the Hours. It is no more, no less than a common celebration of what we are, or rather of what we have become and are ever becoming in Christ. And we do it in common because all Christian life is a shared life, a group life. Throughout history social groups have always gathered to express in rite and feast their common vision of what they are, because this is one of the ways of *being* it. A group that does nothing as a group is not a group.

But if what we are as a group is the Body of Christ, and if the eternally present Christ is an everlasting hymn of praise and glory before the throne of the Father, it is our vocation to enter into this salvific event; to live that Christ-life of priestly praise and glory. And so the Church as his Mystical Body, associates herself with the eternal priestly prayer of her head. In so doing, she truly participates in the salvific praise of Christ, according to the theology of the Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 83–85:

> Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise. For He continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. This she does not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine Office. . . . It is truly the voice of the bride addressing her bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His body, addresses to the Father. Hence all who perform this service are not only fulfilling a duty of the Church, but also are sharing in the greatest honor accorded to Christ's spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church, their Mother.[17]

The Spirit of the Cathedral Office

Traditionally, morning praise and evensong with Eucharist have been the principal ways in which the Church exercises this *leitourgia*. Per se there is no special mystical significance about morning and evening as times

[17]W. M. Abbott (trans.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966) 163–164.

of prayer. They are the beginning and end of the day, and so it was perfectly natural to select them as the "symbolic moments" in which we express what ought to be the quality of the whole day. As seen in chapter 3, the cathedral offices by the beginning of the fifth century had fleshed out the bare bones of psalmody and prayer with rites and symbols that revealed the morning and evening hours as sacraments of the mystery of Christ. In this sense the early cathedral office can be called a "sanctification of time" in that time is "sacramentalized" into a symbol of the time that transcends time.

In the liturgical mystery, time becomes transformed into event, an epiphany of the kingdom of God. All of creation is a cosmic sacrament of our saving God, and the Church's use of such symbolism in the office is but a step in the restoration of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). For the Christian everything, including the morning and evening, the day and the night, the sun and its setting, can be a means of communication with God: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 18:1).

"God is Light" (1 John 1:15)

The basic natural symbol from which this ritual elaboration springs is, of course, light, a theme that can be traced back to the Old Testament and beyond, to the prominent use of sun imagery in the paganism of the Mediterranean world.

> Behind the imagery of the light and the sun in the religions of the Near East was the attempt to find meaning and hope for human life in the daily victory of light over darkness: the dawn was the harbinger of divine rescue and of eternal salvation. Indeed, the power of the light to bring hope is much older and deeper than mere human history. In responding as they did to the power of light, the religions of the Near East gave liturgical expression to the yearnings and the stirrings of the protoplasm, the nameless need in the very stuff of life to be sustained by light.[18]

In spite of the power of the imagery of sun and light in Hellenistic Judaism (Philo), it does not seem to have especially affected the ritual of Jewish morning and evening prayer. The Yotzer benediction of the Shema recited at these hours in the synagogue does refer to light and darkness in the context of creation, but its symbolic application does not seem to have been ritualized: "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe,

[18]J. Pelikan, *The Light of the World. A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962) 13.

who form the light and create the darkness, who make peace and create all things (Is 45:7), who illumine the earth and those that dwell on it with mercy, and from your goodness renew daily the work of creation. . . ."[19]

Christians at any rate were quick to apply this symbolism to Christ: it is a constant New Testament theme, especially in the Johannine literature:

> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world (John 1:4–9).
>
> I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12; cf. 9:5).
>
> He who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness (John 12:45-46; cf. 12:35-36).

In Christ, this illumination has already been accomplished:

> . . . (give) thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints of light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:12–13; cf. 1 Thess 5:5; Heb 6:4; 10:32).

Eph 5 and 1 John stress that this illumination has a moral and communitarian dimension:

> . . . God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).
>
> Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the light is already shining. He who says he is in the light and hates his brother abides in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:8-11).

[19]See W. O. E. Oesterly, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1965) 48. Of course Jewish tradition offers parallels in the ritual of the Hannukah lights, and the ritual lighting of the Sabbath lights Friday evening and of the Havdalah lamp at the completion of the Sabbath. But I know of no parallel in the *daily* domestic or synagogue rituals of the Jews in the first Christian centuries.

But perhaps the most pregnantly beautiful passage for our purposes is the description in the Apocalypse of the light of the Lamb in the City of God, the New Jerusalem. The visionary is describing the Heavenly City:

> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there . . . (Rev 21:22-26).

The passage is a deliberate fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (60:1-3, 11, 19-20) in the prophet's vision of the same heavenly abode:

> Arise, shine; for your light has come
> and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
> For behold, darkness shall cover the earth .
> but the Lord will arise upon you,
> and his glory will be seen upon you.
> And the nations shall come to your light,
> and kings to the brightness of your rising.
> Your gates shall be open continually;
> day and night they shall not be shut. . . .
> The sun shall be no more your light by day,
> nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night;
> but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
> and your God will be your glory.
> Your sun shall no more go down,
> nor your moon withdraw itself;
> for the Lord will be your everlasting light,
> and your days of mourning shall be ended.

It was not long before this symbolism passed into the poetry and hymnody of Christian worship. A venerable hymn is cited in part in Eph 5:14. Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), *Protrepticus* 9, 84:2, gives the full text:

> Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
> and Christ shall give you light,
> the sun of the resurrection,
> begotten before the morning star (Ps 109),
> who gives life by his own very rays.

This light Christ gives is salvation, and it is received in baptism. Heb 6:4-6, in a passage strikingly reminiscent of the three stages of initiation, speaks of "those who have . . . been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come. . . ." And in the early Church, baptism was called "*phôtismos*" or "*phôtisma*," illumination; those to be baptised were "*illuminandi, phôtizomenoi.*"

It is not surprising, then, that Christians prayed facing East, as we saw in chapter 2, seeing in the rising sun a symbol of the Risen Christ, light of the world. For Malachi 4:2 prophecied, "the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings," and Zechariah proclaimed that in Jesus "the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79). Nor is it remarkable that in the evening office, celebrated at the setting of the sun and the onset of darkness, the hour of lamplighting, Christians were drawn to see the evening lamp as a symbol of Christ the light of the world, the lamp of the Heavenly City where there is no darkness or night but only day, and to render thanks to God for it.

As we saw in numerous texts cited in previous chapters, this "sacramentalizing" of sunrise and sunset, with its evening lamp, is by no means a fourth-century novelty. Already in the last decade of the first century, Clement of Rome (1 Clem. 24:1-3) relates the natural succession of light and darkness to the resurrection of the just at the parousia, and around 250 Cyprian's treatise *On the Lord's Prayer* 35-36 first applies the resurrection theme to early Christian prayer times:

> . . . One must also pray in the morning, that the resurrection of the Lord may be celebrated by morning prayer. . . . Likewise at sunset and the passing of the day it is necessary to pray. For since Christ is the true sun and the true day, when we pray and ask, as the sun and the day of the world recede, that the light may come upon us again, we pray for the coming of Christ, which provides us with the grace of eternal light. For in the psalms the Holy Spirit declares that Christ is called the day . . . "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us exult and rejoice in it" (Ps 117:24). Likewise the prophet Malachy testifies that he is called the sun, when he says: "But unto you that fear the name of the Lord the sun of justice shall arise, and in his wings there is healing" (Mal 3:20).

From what follows it is evident that Cyprian looked on these times as signs of what every Christian "time" must be:

> But if in the Holy Scriptures Christ is the true sun and the true day, no hour is excepted in which God should be adored frequently and always, so that we who are in Christ, that is, in the true sun and day,

should be insistent throughout the whole day in our petitions, and should pray. And when by the laws of nature the return of night, recurring in its turn, follows, for those that pray there can be no harm from the nocturnal darkness, because for the sons of light, even in the night there is day. For when is one without light who has light in the heart? Or when does one not have the sun and the day, for whom Christ is sun and day?

So let us who are always in Christ, that is in the light, not cease praying even at night. . . . Let us, beloved brethren, who are always in the light of the Lord . . . count the night as day. Let us believe that we walk always in the light. Let us not be hindered by the darkness which we have escaped, let there be no loss of prayers in the night hours. . . . Let us, who by God's indulgence are recreated spiritually and reborn, imitate what we are destined to be. Let us who in the kingdom are to have only day with no intervening night, be as vigilant at night as in the light [of day]. Let us who are to pray always and render thanks to God, not cease here also to pray and give thanks.

Morning Praise

These symbols have remained an integral part of the fabric of Christian daily prayer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a twentieth-century martyr whom no one could accuse of being cut off from modern culture and the agonies of contemporary history, speaks of common Christian morning prayer in terms with which the Cyprians and the Clements, the Basils and the Benedicts, would have been completely at ease:

> The Old Testament day begins at evening and ends with the going down of the sun. It is the time of expectation. The day of the New Testament Church begins with the break of day and ends with the dawning light of the next morning. It is the time of fulfillment, the resurrection of the Lord. At night, Christ was born, a light in darkness; noonday turned to night when Christ suffered and died on the Cross. But in the dawn of Easter morning Christ rose in victory from the grave. . . . Christ is the "Sun of righteousness," risen upon the expectant congregation (Mal 4:2), and they that love him shall "be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (Judg 5:31). The early morning belongs to the Church of the risen Christ. At the break of light it remembers the morning on which death and sin lay prostrate in defeat and new life and salvation were given to mankind.
>
> What do we today, who no longer have any fear or awe of night, know of the great joy that our forefathers and the early Christians felt every morning at the return of light? If we were to learn again something of the praise and adoration that is due the triune God at

> break of day, God the Father and Creator, who has preserved our life through dark night and wakened us to a new day, God the Son and Saviour, who conquered death and hell for us and dwells in our midst as Victor, God the Holy Spirit, who pours the bright gleam of God's Word into our hearts at the dawn of day, driving away all darkness and sin and teaching us to pray aright—then we would also begin to sense something of the joy that comes when night is past and brethren who dwell together in unity come together early in the morning for common praise of their God, common hearing of the Word, and common prayer. Morning does not belong to the individual, it belongs to the Church of the triune God, to the Christian family, to the brotherhood. . . .
>
> Common life under the Word begins with common worship at the beginning of the day. . . . The deep stillness of morning is broken first by the prayer and song of the fellowship. . . .
>
> For Christians, the beginning of the day should not be burdened and oppressed with besetting concerns for the day's work. At the threshold of the new day stands the Lord who made it. All the darkness and distraction of the dreams of night retreat before the clear light of Jesus Christ and his wakening Word. All unrest, all impurity, all care and anxiety flee before him. Therefore, at the beginning of the day let all distraction and empty talk be silenced and let the first thought and first word belong to him to whom our whole life belongs. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph 5:14).[20]

And so at the start of the day we do as Jesus did (Mark 1:35), we begin the day with prayer. In morning praise we renew our commitment to Christ by consecrating the day through thanks and praise. And the hour provides our symbols. The rising sun, one of the ongoing marvels of God's creation, a source of life and food, warmth and light, leads spontaneously to praise and thanks, and to prayer for protection throughout the day. And since we celebrate what we are, and our core reality is that we have been saved by the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, the rising sun calls to mind that true Sun of Justice in whose rising we receive the light of salvation. Another part of our celebration is the exercise of our priestly intercession for the whole world, for as Christ's body we share in his responsibilities, too.

As we saw in chapters 3–4, Basil (*Longer Rules* 37:3), Chrysostom (*Commentary on Ps 140; Baptismal Catecheses* VIII, 17), and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (VIII, 38–39) all make it clear that morning praise served

[20]D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954) 40–43. I am grateful to my colleague John Allyn Melloh for this reference.

to consecrate the day to the works of God, to thank him for benefits received, especially the benefit of redemption in the rising of his Son, to rekindle our desire for him as a remedy against sin during the beginning day, and to ask continued help. In *Conference* 21:26 Cassian has Abbot Theonas exhort the monks at length on the same themes:[21]

> But what shall I say of the first fruits which surely are given by all who serve Christ faithfully? For when people waking from sleep and arising with renewed activity after their rest, before they take in any impulse or thought in their heart, or admit any recollection or consideration of business, consecrate their first and earliest thoughts as divine offerings, what are they doing indeed but rendering the first fruits of their produce through the High Priest Jesus Christ for the enjoyment of this life and a figure of the daily resurrection? And also when roused from sleep in the same way they offer to God a sacrifice of joy and invoke him with the first motion of their tongue and celebrate his name and praise, and throwing open, as the first thing [they do], the door of their lips to sing hymns to him, they offer to God the offices of their mouth; and to him also in the same way they bring the earliest offerings of their hands and steps, when they rise from bed and stand in prayer and before they use the services of their limbs for their own purposes, take to themselves nothing of their services, but advance their steps for his glory, and set them in his praise, and so render the first fruits of all their movements by stretching forth the hands, bending the knees, and prostrating the whole body. For in no other way can we fulfill what we sing in the psalm: "I anticipated the dawning of the day and cried out," and "My eyes have anticipated the break of day, that I might meditate on your words," and "In the morning shall my prayer come before you" (Pss 118:147–148; 87:14), unless after our rest in sleep when, as we said above, we are restored as from darkness and death to this light, we have the courage not to begin by taking for our own use any of all the services both of mind and body. . . . And many even of those who live in the world observe this kind of devotion with the utmost care, as they rise before it is light, or very early, and do not engage at all in the ordinary and necessary business of this world before hastening to church and striving to consecrate in the sight of God the first fruits of all their actions and doings.

[21]Trans. adapted from NPNF series 2, vol. 11, 513–514. Note in this passage how the ancients looked on sleep as a sort of death. On this see H. Bacht, "Agrypnia. Die Motive des Schlafentzugs im frühen Monchtum," G. Pflug, B. Eckert, H. Friesenhahn (eds.), *Bibliothek-Buch-Geschichte*. Festschrift für K. Köster (Frankfurt/M: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977) 357–360.

In the evening, after the day's work is done, we turn once more to God in prayer. The passing of day reminds us of the darkness of Christ's passion and death, and of the passing nature of all earthly creation. But the gift of light reminds us again of Christ the light of the world. With vespers we close the day, much as compline does in the later urban monastic offices. And as in morning prayer, the service of evensong closes with intercessions for the needs of all humankind, and then in the collect and final blessing we thank God for the graces of the day, above all for the grace of the Risen Christ. We ask pardon for the sins of the day and request protection during the coming night, for we are exhorted, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil . . . let all bitterness and wrath and anger be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you"—and the motivation is clear: "for we are members of one another" (Eph 4:25–32).

In *Longer Rules* 37:4 Basil emphasizes thanksgiving and confession of the faults of the day as the purpose of the evening hour:

> And when the day is finished, thanksgiving should be offered for what has been given us during the day or for what we have done rightly, and confession made for what we have failed to do—an offence committed, be it voluntary or involuntary, or perhaps unnoticed, either in word or deed or in the very heart—propitiating God in our prayers for all our failings. For the examination of past actions is a great help against falling into similar faults again.

The collect that concludes evensong in the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, 37 expresses a like spirit:

> O God . . . who has made the day for the works of light and the night for the refreshment of our infirmity . . . mercifully accept now this, our evening thanksgiving. You who have brought us through the length of the day and to the beginning of the night, preserve us by your Christ. Grant us a peaceful evening and a night free from sin, and give us everlasting life by your Christ. . .

The second basic element of the rite of vespers in every tradition is thanksgiving for the light, in which the Church uses the lamplighting at sunset to remind us of the Johannine vision of the Lamb who is the eternal lamp of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the sun that never sets. We saw this already at the beginning of the second century in the domestic rite alluded to by Tertullian in his *Apology* 39:18 and described in the *Apostolic Tra-*

dition 25, with its thanksgiving prayer at the bringing in of the evening lamp:

> We give you thanks, Lord, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom you have shone upon us and revealed to us the inextinguishable light. So when we have completed the length of the day and have come to the beginning of the night, and have satisfied ourselves with the light of day which you created for our satisfying; and since now through your grace we do not lack the light of evening we praise and glorify you through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom be glory and power and honour to you with the holy Spirit, both now and always and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Chrysostom in Antioch does not mention a lucernarium, but he insists more than once on the theme of penance and reconciliation at evensong:

> . . . let each one go to his affairs with fear and trembling, and so pass the daytime as one who is obliged to return here in the evening to give the master an account of the entire day and ask pardon for failures. For it is impossible even if we are ten thousand times watchful to avoid being liable for all sorts of faults. . . . And that is why every evening we must ask the master's pardon for all these faults. . . . Then we must pass the time of night with sobriety and thus be ready to present oneself once again at the morning praise . . . (*Baptismal Catecheses* VIII, 17–18).[22]

Indeed, repentance is the reason why the Fathers chose Ps 140 for vespers, according to Chrysostom's *Commentary on Ps 140*, 1: "They ordered it to be said as a salutary medicine and forgiveness of sins, so that whatever has dirtied us throughout the whole length of the day . . . we get rid of it in the evening through this spiritual song. For it is indeed a medicine that destroys all those things."[23]

For Chrysostom, then, vespers is basically a penitential service and, we might add, an efficacious one, for the forgiveness humbly requested is, in fact, granted. In the Eastern traditions the oblation of incense that accompanies this vesperal psalm (inspired undoubtedly by verse 2: "Let my prayer rise like incense before you, the lifting up of my hands like the evening sacrifice.") has a penitential meaning referring to our self-offering of repentance rising with our prayers and uplifted hands.

[22]Ed. Wenger (SC 50) 256–257.
[23]PG 55, 427.

The request for protection during the darkness of night has eschatological overtones. We know not the day nor the hour (Matt 24:36; 25:13); death comes like a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15); the bridegroom comes at night and we must be found waiting, lamps in hand (Matt 25:1–13). This is a standard theme of night prayer; so is the cosmic theme of those at vigil joining their voices to those of the angels and all creation in praise of God, as in the *Benedicite* of Daniel, while the world sleeps.

Canon 27 of the *Canons of Hippolytus* from Egypt around 336–340 expresses this eschatological theme, showing how it forms the bridge uniting evening and morning prayer, which, once again, like all liturgy, are simply moments expressive of the ceaseless hymn of praise that is Christian life:

> Let each one take care to pray with great vigilance in the middle of the night, for our fathers have said that at that hour all creation is assiduous in the service of praising God, all the angelic hosts and the souls of the just bless God. For the Lord testifies to this saying, "In the middle of the night there was a cry: Behold, the bridegroom has come, go out to meet him" (Matt 25:6). At cockcrow, again, is a time when there are prayers in the churches, for the Lord says, "Watch, for you do not know at what time the Master will come, in the evening, or in the middle of the night, or at cockcrow, or in the morning" (Mark 13:35), which means we must praise God at every hour. And when a man sleeps on his bed, he must pray to God in his heart.[24]

It should be clear from these texts that the earliest tradition of non-Eucharistic public prayer had nothing to do with theories of the "sanctification of time," with *kairos* and *chronos*, with a liturgy of "time" or "history" as distinct from the "eschatological" Eucharist. Rather, the morning office dedicates the new day to God, and the evening office at the close of day leads us to reflect on the hours just passed, with thanksgiving for the good they have brought and sorrow for the evil we have done.

Note the limpid simplicity of the early Church's liturgical theology reflected in the basic structure and spirit of morning praise and evensong. Like all prayer in both the Old and New Testaments, they are a glorification of God that wells up from the joyful proclamation of his saving deeds: "The almighty has done great things for me! Holy is his name!" (Luke 1:49). This is the core of biblical prayer: remembrance, praise, and thanksgiving—and these can then flow into petition for the continuance

[24]PO 31, 397.

of this saving care in our present time of need. Remembrance, anamnesis, is also at the heart of all ritual celebration, for celebrations are celebrations *of* something: through symbol and gesture and text we render present—proclaim—once again the reality we feast.

In the early liturgical tradition this reality is one unique event, the paschal mystery in its totality, the mystery of Christ and of our salvation in him. This is the meaning of baptism; it is the meaning of Eucharist· it is the meaning of the Office as well. The anamnesis of the Christ-event is the wellspring of all Christian prayer. This is still reflected in the proper of the Byzantine Office found in the daily cycle of the *Oktoechos:* the texts are all focused squarely on the paschal mystery of salvation. Here for example are some of the refrains of the Byzantine Office for Saturday vespers, tone 3:

> Everything has been enlightened by your Resurrection, O Lord, and Paradise has been opened again; all creation, extolling you, offers to you the perpetual hymn of praise.
>
> We bow down in worship before your precious Cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify your Resurrection: for it is by your wounds that we have been healed.
>
> We praise the Savior, incarnate of a Virgin: for he was crucified for us and rose on the third day, giving us the great mercy.
>
> The Christ, having descended among those who were in Hell, proclaimed, saying: "Take courage, I have conquered. I am the Resurrection and I shall lead you away, after having destroyed the gates of death."
>
> We, who unworthily stay in your pure house, intone the evening hymn, crying from the depths: "O Christ our God, who have enlightened the world with your Resurrection, free your people from your enemies, you who love humankind."
>
> O Christ, who through your Passion have darkened the sun, and with the light of your Resurrection have illumined the universe: accept our evening hymn of praise, O you who love humankind.
>
> Your life-giving Resurrection, O Lord, has illumined the whole world, and your own creation, which had been corrupted, has been called back. Therefore, freed from the curse of Adam, we cry: "O Lord almighty, glory to you."
>
> You underwent death, O Christ, so that you might free our race from death; and having risen from the dead on the third day, you raised with you those that acknowledge you as God, and you have illumined the world. O Lord, glory to you.[25]

[25]Trans. adapted from A. Nadson, *The Order of Vespers in the Byzantine Rite* 42–43.

It is incorrect, then, to view the Divine Office as primarily "historical" rather than "eschatological." Theologically the coming of Christ is one indivisible event, though it can intersect with human history at different points in time. The eschaton, the final fulfillment of history, has already occurred in Christ. The time of the kingdom, the beginning of the final days, is already begun. In *all* true Christian worship the basic emphasis must *always* be on this eschatological element; on salvation history yes, but as one indivisible, eternally present reality which is the Kingdom of God in its fulness in the Passover of Christ.

Hence the Liturgy of the Hours, like all Christian liturgy, is an eschatological proclamation of the salvation received in Christ, and a glorification and thanksgiving to God for that gift. In this original and primitive sense the Liturgy of the Hours—indeed, all liturgy—is beyond time. For the Christian there is really no sacred space, no sacred persons or times: all are redeemed in Christ, for whom only God is holy, and those to whom he has given his sanctification, his saints, i.e., his people.

The later development of the Christian calendar and its proper introduced into the offices historical commemorations of individual events in salvation history. But that must not be allowed to obscure the original purity of the meaning of primitive Christian morning and evening prayer, which was not an "historical commemoration" nor a "liturgy of time" as opposed to the "eschatological, beyond-time" service of the Eucharist. Both were and are a praise of the same God for the same reason: Christ.

Christians by faith had the supreme joy of knowing that they lived a new life in Christ, a life of love shared with all of the same faith. What could have been more normal then, than for those who were able to gather at daybreak to turn the first thoughts of the day to this mystery of their salvation and to praise and glorify God for it? And at the close of day they came together once again to ask forgiveness for the failings of the day and to praise God once more for his mighty deeds. In this way the natural rhythm of time was turned into a hymn of praise to God and a proclamation before the world of faith in his salvation in Christ.

The Office as a Celebration of Our Life in Christ

The Liturgy of the Hours, then, is a sanctification of life by turning to God at the beginning and end of each of its days to do what all liturgy always does—to celebrate and manifest in ritual moments what is and must be the constant stance of our every minute of the day: our unceas-

ing priestly offering, in Christ, of self, to the praise and glory of the Father in thanks for his saving gift in Christ.

For Christian ritual is distinguished not only by its eschatological fulfillment and its sacramental realism; it is also distinct in that it is but the external expression of what is present within us. Salvation is an interior reality implying a whole way of life. So true Christian ritual is the opposite of magical rituals, which concentrate on the working of *things*. Christian ritual is *personalistic*: the purpose of Eucharist is not to change bread and wine, but to change you and me. And so our liturgy must be an expression of the covenant in our hearts, a celebration of what we are. Otherwise it is an empty show.

Hence in the liturgy there is a constant dialectic between celebration and life. For if we do not live what we celebrate, our liturgy is a meaningless expression of what we are not. As we saw in the New Testament, especially in St. Paul, the true cult of the Christian is interior. It is the life of self-oblation in charity, a life, like Christ's, that is lived in loving service—in short, a life of self-giving. Paul tells the Corinthians that their Eucharist is in fact no Eucharist at all because the mystery of communion, that is, unity in Christ, which Eucharist expresses was not lived in their lives (1 Cor 11:17-34).

That mystery is a mystery of self-offering, a giving of self for others, in obedience to the will of the Father, who has shown us, in Christ, that this is the only life worthy of human persons. This is what St. Paul means in Rom 12:1: "I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, consecrated and fit for his acceptance; *this is your authentic worship.*"

In the present dispensation there is of course only one acceptable sacrifice, that of Christ. But his offering needs to be filled up. We must fill up what is wanting in the sacrifice of Christ (see Col 1:24). This does not mean that Christ's salvific work was defective. Rather, it remains incomplete until all men and women have freely entered into Christ's offering, making their lives, too, a Christian oblation. This offering is pleasing in the sight of God only because Christ has made us his body, so that our offering is joined to his and transformed by it.

We make this offering in every act of our Christian lives. We do it when our faith is expressed in charity, as in Heb 13:15–16: "Through Jesus . . . let us continually offer up to God the sacrifice of praise, that is the tribute of lips which acknowledge his name, and never forget to show kindness and to share what you have with others; *for such are the sacrifices which God approves.*" We also offer liturgy when we proclaim our faith. In Phil 2:17 Paul speaks of "that liturgical sacrifice which is your

faith." In Rom 1:9 he says "I worship God with my person, proclaiming the gospel of his Son," and in 15:16, "My priestly service is the announcing of the good news of God."

This is why we are all priests: as Christians it is of the very essence of our lives to *offer*. And all we have to offer is ourselves, in witness to our faith, professing it before others and living it through love. 1 Pet 2:2 says: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people claimed by God for his own, to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Hence for the New Testament there is no separation between liturgy and life. Our Christian life *is* our liturgy. That is why the New Testament uses liturgical and priestly vocabulary for two things only: 1) for Christ and his offering; 2) for all of us and the offering of our lives. For the Christian, then, worship, sacrifice, liturgy, are a life of faith and fraternal love—i.e., surrender to God and service of others. And these two, faith and charity, are really one. For by faith we see the world as the place where God's love is active and given to each person in a unique way, and hence we see each one as lovable. To say "yes" to God and "no" to people is impossible for the Christian. "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20). Worship, then, is not a department of life; it is life itself.

All true Christian liturgy is a celebration of that reality. Thus the offices at the beginning and end of the day are but ritual moments symbolic of the whole of time. As such they are a proclamation of faith to the world and partake of our mission to witness to Christ and his salvation. They are also a praise and thanksgiving for this gift of salvation in Christ. Lastly, they are our priestly prayer, as God's priestly people, for our needs and those of the entire world.

The Spirit of the Monastic Office

The *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 59 cited at the beginning of this chapter exhorts the congregation to be present regularly at the offices of morning prayer and evensong as well as at the Sunday vigil and Eucharist. It states explicitly that this exhortation is directed not just to the clergy but to the laity as well.

This passage is important to counteract a common misconception, often expressed in modern documents on the office: the notion that certain categories and groups in the Church are "deputed" to pray the office in the Church's name. When presbyters and deacons are ordained today in

the Roman Rite they are asked to pray the hours for the Church. I think it important to understand such later notions within the context of the early tradition. One can and must pray *for* everyone, including the Church and her needs and intentions. But no one can pray *in place of* anyone else, like some living prayer wheel that spins on vicariously while the world goes about its business. Some can be called to assume freely the obligations of a life more totally dedicated to prayer in common, but not in the sense that they are "official pray-ers" for others who thereby can consider themselves freed from the evangelical command to pray. The burden of common prayer is incumbent on all.

Many post-Vatican II Latin Catholic clergy consider the canonical obligation to recite the breviary the result of a later, Tridentine legalism ill-suited to our "modern" mentality. The truth of the matter is somewhat different. The privatization of the office into a breviary-become-clerical-prayerbook is certainly not traditional, for traditionally the Liturgy of the Hours is something a *group celebrates*, not something an *individual reads*. The narrowing of this further into a grave canonical obligation was still a later development in the Latin Church, in a period when her life found expression in the multiplication of canonical legislation. But it is not at all untraditional that attendance in common at the main cathedral hours be considered obligatory. The novelty is to think that *only* the clergy is obliged. In the early Church it was just as much an obligation of the priest's wife or grandmother as of the priest himself. What is untraditional, therefore, is not the *obligation* of the office, but its *clericalization*. As with so much else in the history of the Church, what was once the property of the entire People of God has degenerated into a clerical residue, only reminiscent of what it was meant to be.

But what of the monastic hours? Does this not contradict what we have so often heard concerning the purpose of the obligation of choir? Surely the monastic orders are deputed to offer the official cult in the name of the whole Church?

According to Dom Adalbert de Vogüé, in chapter 8 of his classic commentary on the *Rule of St. Benedict* concerning the meaning of the Divine Office, no early monk at his prayers had any idea of "performing an act in the name of the Church."[26] This purely Latin notion is largely the result of urban monasticism in the West from the fifth–sixth centuries, when monastic communities served major city sanctuaries such as the great Roman basilicas, and were responsible for the cult. This eventually results in the Cluniac *"monachus propter chorum"* ideology, and

[26]*La Règle de s. Benôit* VII, 193ff. (English trans. CS 54, 139).

passed into the Benedictine revival literature of modern times, as in the following citation from Delatte's 1913 commentary on the Benedictine Rule:

> The proper and distinctive work of the Benedictine, his lot in life, his mission, is the liturgy. He makes his profession in order to be in the Church a society of divine praise, one who glorifies God according to the forms instituted by the Church, she who knows how to glorify the Lord. . . .[27]

But the earliest monks had no such "liturgical mystique," which owes more to the neo-Gothic religious revival of nineteenth-century romanticism than to the Fathers of the Church. The meaning of the word "monk" is an enemy of such distinctions. For the early monk, life was one continual prayer, with no compartmentalization of life into "liturgical" prayer and other kinds of prayer and work. The one rule was the absolute primacy of the spiritual in the everyday lives of these men. The monastic movement began in the second half of the third century with the "solitaries," but the original meaning of *monachos* is not living alone, but living without a wife. Its motivation is the need for a "unified" heart: "Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; *unite my heart* to fear your name. I give thanks to you . . . with my whole heart" (Ps 86:11–12).

According to 1 Cor 7:32, the married person is "divided" *(memeristai)* by family cares; the monk is dedicated to God's service "undividedly," with no other aim or task in life.[28] "Single-mindedness" is the characteristic of the monk, and the aim of this unilateral existence was the life with God, a life lived through unceasing prayer. So the monks prayed while they worked and worked while they prayed. Wherever they were, refectory, oratory, workshop, cell, the differences were only accidental. What they sought ultimately was what modern spiritual writers would call a *state of prayer*,[29] a degree of spiritual perfection known to the hesychast movement in the Byzantine East, in which one's every breath, one's very existence is a continuous prayer not subject to fragmentation into successive acts, nor to interruption by external activities.

Necessary activities such as eating forced the early monk to interrupt his *offices*, his psalmody, his prostrations; but he *never* interrupted his *prayer*! So the rule was not, as today, to fix a *minimum* number of hours for prayer, and give the rest of the time to other occupations, but to fix

[27]Cited *ibid.* 196 (English trans. CS 54, 134); cf. the similar opinions cited on p. 197.

[28]A. Guillaumont, "Perspectives actuelles sur les origines du monachisme," *id.*, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien* 218–223.

[29]See Hausherr, "Comment priaient les pères," 39ff.

a *maximum* amount of time to be grudgingly accorded to such physical necessities as sleep, and give the rest to prayer. God is all, and demands not part of our time but all of it. The *monachos* was the unilateral, the undistracted one, with a one-track mind, tuned in to God alone.

Indeed in a certain sense one can say that the early anchorites lived liturgy rather than celebrating it. Life seems to have replaced liturgy except for the weekend services which they had in common with all Christians. The rest of the time their whole life was a living prayer. Only later does the monastic office get detached from the rest of life and become an "obligation," a *pensum* to be got through whenever one can.

Later, too, is the notion of the monastic office as a "public cult." It is evident from the documents cited in chapter 4 that originally monastic psalmody was God's Word to us, as de Vogüé has pointed out.[30] The monks' psalms were not chants of praise in the mouth of the Church, as in cathedral prayer, but God's Word on which to meditate before turning to him with prayerful response. Only later is the monastic psalmody seen as the Church's prayer to God, our message to him, thus approaching the cathedral notion of morning praise and evensong. We see this shift already in the pre-Benedictine *Rule of the Master* 47. Of course the two ideas are not opposed, for God is indeed glorified in the liturgy by us—but only insofar as we are sanctified by his grace, for our glorification of him is his gift to us, not ours to him. But this shift of accent is worth noting, for we thus arrive at a cultic notion of monastic psalmody that is simply not found in monastic texts of the late fourth and early fifth century. The earliest monastic prayer expressed a spirituality different from that which animated cathedral hours. The whole of cenobitic life was a communion, and hence also a communion in prayer, but the early cenobites had no notion whatever of participating in an "official" prayer of the Church.

So there is originally a slightly different orientation in the two spiritualities of the Prayer of Hours. But they eventually come together in urban monasticism, so that today I think it is legitimate to say that the differences are more in style than in substance, more in the structure and aim of the offices than in their theologies. The vocation of all Christians, not just monks, is to be a living prayer, and long-standing tradition has also taught monks that their praise of God is part of the official *leitourgia* of the Church. By vocation they are privileged to give more frequent common symbolic expression to what, ideally, must be the rhythm of the whole of every Christian life: a prayerful, continuous communion with the living God and with one another in him.

[30] *La Règle de s. Benôit* VII, 209–221 (English trans. CS 54, 139–149).

This theology of the monastic office is expressed in the Preface of the post-Vatican II *Thesaurus liturgiae horarum monasticae* issued by the confederation of Benedictine congregations in 1976. The "Dei" of Opus Dei, as I. Hausherr has shown, is an objective as well as subjective genitive: a work of God in us before it is a work we do in response to his call.[31] Hence the monks' prayer is *contemplative praise*, for the monastic hours repeatedly commemorate the motive for our praise in God's great works, and the monk contemplates it and glorifies him for it: "The almighty has done great things for me—holy is his name!" in the words of Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:49) that we have already used to sum up the whole dynamic of liturgical anamnesis and thankful praise.

[31] "Opus Dei," *Monastic Studies* 11 (1975) 195ff.

22

THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS AS THE CHURCH'S SCHOOL OF PRAYER

The Divine Office is said to have a superior value over other forms of prayer because it is approved by the Church, and that is perfectly true. As the prayer of the Church it is the prayer of Christ himself, the full Christ, head and members, and this fact alone gives a transforming value to our prayer that it cannot have when done alone. For it is in our common prayer that the Church is most fully and visibly Church: ". . . at your meetings let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope in love, in the blameless joy that is Jesus Christ. . . . Come together all of you as to one temple of God and to one altar, to one Jesus Christ . . .," Ignatius of Antioch exhorts in his *Letter to the Magnesians* 6-7.

But that does not answer the question why the Church has blessed precisely *this* form of prayer as her daily prayer *par excellence.* Undoubtedly many reasons could be advanced to prove the excellence of the office, but three stand out in my mind: the Divine Office is biblical, objective, traditional prayer.

1. Traditional

We can dispense quickly with the last quality, for we have already seen abundant proof of it. The Liturgy of the Hours is traditional—and

by that I do not mean "conservative" or "traditionalistic"—in that it has stood the test of time in every Church in Christendom that can with any historical seriousness lay claim to an ancient liturgical tradition. It is a form of prayer shared by Catholics Roman and Eastern, Orthodox Eastern and Oriental, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and others, in one form or another, from the early centuries right up until our own day. That is a very respectable track record, one that the Church could not ignore and remain true to its heritage.

II. Biblical

More important, even if the Divine Office evolved only gradually during the early Christian centuries, the pattern of this prayer goes back to the New Testament itself. When the early Christian community gathered for prayer, it remembered God's mighty deeds and glorified him for them. It prayed especially for the accomplishment of his holy will (Col 1:13–14; 4:2; Phil 1:3–11). It committed itself again to the covenant with God in Christ. It prayed "marana-tha," and "Thy kingdom come," for the fulfillment of the end of the ages. All these elements are still operative in the Liturgy of the Hours.

III. Objective

The final characteristic, objectivity, is really the result of the first two. The aim of Christian life is to enter ever more fully into the mystery of Jesus Christ, the New Adam, paradigm of the re-created humankind. As a memorial of this mystery, the Liturgy of the Hours is a true and efficacious encounter with the Father through Jesus in the Spirit, as long as our hearts remain open to respond in faith to this ecclesial sign of the unending divine call echoing through the ages in the rites of the Church.

Because of this objectivity, the office is the Church's own school of prayer, a novitiate in which she teaches her age-old ways of how to glorify God in Christ as Church, together as one body, in union with and after the example of her head. No other form of prayer is so rooted in the mysteries of salvation history as they are unfolded day by day in the Church's annual cycle. Through this constant diet of Sacred Scripture not only does God speak his Word to us, not only do we contemplate over and over again the central mysteries of salvation, but our own lives are gradually attuned to this rhythm, and we meditate again and again on this history of Israel, recapitulated in Jesus, that is also the saga of our

own spiritual odyssey. The march of Israel across the horizon of history is a metaphor for the spiritual pilgrimage of us all.

Furthermore, our own response to this prophetic word in our lives is also revealed. In the psalms we answer God in his very own prayers. This gives the Divine Office a concentration on the essential rather than the peripheral; it gives it a balance insofar as its rhythms are set by the Church and not by our own subjectivity. How much penance, how much festivity, how much contrition, how much praise, how much petition and how much thanks should our prayer contain? It is all right there in the age-old pedagogy of the Church's offices. How much devotion to the Mother of God, how much fasting, how much attention to the saints, how much to the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life? The Divine Office with its seasonal and festive propers has it all.

This gives a balanced and objective comprehensiveness to the Church's prayer that is a sure remedy for the one-sided excess and exaggerations of a subjective devotionalism that puts all its emphasis on only those aspects of the life of prayer that happen to have personal appeal to the individual at some given moment, often for less than ideal reasons. St. Gertrude prayed *"ut devotio ipsius concordet cum officiis ecclesiae,"* that her piety might be in agreement with the offices of the Church. That is the sure guide that one is on the right path. For an objective ecclesial piety is not all penitential, not all Eucharistic nor all Marian nor all devotion to the passion. It is not *just* christological nor *just* Trinitarian. It is a balanced synthesis of all of this.[1]

Hence prayer according to the common offices of the Church is an unending school of prayer that constantly pulls us out of whatever bourgeois sentimentalism and inverted egoism there may be in our "private" devotions, and draws us inexhorably into the objective spiritual values of a life lived according to the mystery that is Christ. What St. Benedict says in his "Prologue" to the *Rule* about the monastery as a school for the service of the Lord can be applied equally to the Liturgy of the Hours, for the "Prologue" is nothing but a meditation on verses of Sacred Scripture and psalmody heard in the offices day in and day out. Niceta (d. after 414), bishop of Remesiana (Bela Palanka in Yugoslavia), discussing the usefulness of vigils in his treatise *On the Vigils of the Servants of God* 8, expounds a similar doctrine:

[1]Of course it would be ecclesiolatry to pretend that the Church has always maintained this proper balance in her liturgical uses, for she, too, lives within history. But from what I know of private attempts, past and present, at liturgical reform I still prefer the inadequacies of Christ's Church to the fancies of individuals. The former have the advantage of being shared, and that is what liturgy is all about. And if the latter are right the Church will eventually come to see it.

> I must turn now to the next point, as I promised, and say a word about their usefulness—although this can be better learned by experience than expressed in words. It would seem that we must ourselves "taste," as the Scripture has it, "how sweet is the Lord" (Ps 33:9). Only one who has tasted, understands and feels how great a weight is taken from our heart, what sloth is shaken from our minds when we watch, what light floods the soul of one who watches and prays, what a grace and presence fills every member with joy. By watching, all fear is cast out and confidence is born, the flesh is weakened, vices waste away and charity is strengthened, folly disappears and prudence takes its place, the mind is sharpened, error is blunted, the Devil, instigator of our sins, is wounded by the sword of the Spirit. Is there anything we need more than we do such advantages, any profit greater than such gains, anything sweeter than this joy or more blessed than this happiness? I need only call to witness the Prophet who in the beginning of his psalms describes the happy man and indicates his supreme felicity in this verse: "If he meditates on the law of the Lord day and night" (Ps 1:2).[2]

In this way the hours provide us with a framework that molds and feeds and moderates our private prayer, and which our private prayer in turn makes more interior and personal and intense. Any aspect of human life, if it is to be fruitful, demands framework and consistency. Those who accomplish the most work are usually those that keep to a schedule, that lead a reasonably regular life. The same is true in the spiritual life. Those who pray at the same time every day are the ones who pray every day. Otherwise things of the spirit often get lost in the shuffle of our other more mundane but seemingly more pressing daily obligations.

Furthermore, the hours have a great consoling and strengthening power for anyone with a sense of human history, a sense of the solidarity of humankind down through the ages, a sense of that much neglected article of the creed, the communion of saints. When we rise in the morning and come together to sing the praises of God at the dawn of a new day, when we celebrate at the coming of darkness our faith in the true light of the world at evensong, when we keep vigil with the angels and the heavenly bodies of the firmament while the world sleeps, we are doing, in obedience to the command to pray always, what men and women have done since the time of Jesus. In every time, in every land and from every race: in the privacy of the home, in desert or cave, in peasant hut and hermit cell, in Gothic choir or country chapel, in concentration camp or jungle mission-station; at every hour around the clock someone raises his or her voice

[2]Niceta of Remesiana, *Writings* (The Fathers of the Church, New York: The Fathers of the Church Inc., 1949) 62.

in the prayer of the Church, to join with the heavenly and earthly choirs down through the ages in the glorification of almighty God. In our age of narcissistic individualism one often hears people say they "don't get anything out of going to Church." What one "gets out of it" is the inestimable privilege of glorifying almighty God

Of course to profit from the hours as a true spirituality, a school of prayer, one must be a person who prays and whose life is penetrated with the Scriptures. The Bible is a story of God's ceaseless calling, drawing, gathering, and of his people's constant waywardness. And the Fathers and monks of the early Church, in their meditation on this ever-repeated story, know that *they* were Abraham, *they* were Moses. *They* were called forth out of Egypt. *They* were given a covenant. They knew the wandering across the desert to the Promised Land was the pilgrimage of their life, too. The several levels of Israel, Christ, Church, us, are always there. And the themes of redemption, of exodus, of desert and faithful remnant and exile, of the Promised Land and the Holy City of Jerusalem, are all metaphors of the spiritual saga of our own lives.

The offices of the Church can be lived fully only by one whose life is permeated by such a *lectio divina* of the Bible. Contemporary biblical scholarship is rightly interested in the *Sitz im Leben* of what is recounted in the biblical text. But in the life of the Church there is also a *Sitz im Gottesdienst*, and in the spiritual life there is a *Sitz in meinem Leben.* As Jean Daniélou has said:

> The Christian faith has only one object, the mystery of Christ dead and risen. But this unique mystery subsists under different modes: it is prefigured in the Old Testament, it is accomplished historically in the earthly life of Christ, it is contained in mystery in the sacraments, it is lived mystically in souls, it is accomplished socially in the Church, it is consummated eschatologically in the heavenly kingdom. Thus the Christian has at his disposition several registers, a multidimensional symbolism, to express this unique reality. The whole of Christian culture consists in grasping the links that exist between Bible and liturgy, gospel and eschatology, mysticism and liturgy. The application of this method to Scripture is called exegesis; applied to liturgy it is called mystagogy. This consists in reading in the rites the mystery of Christ, and in contemplating beneath the symbols the invisible reality.[3]

St. Paul tells us, "Whatever was written in the past has been written for our instruction" (Rom 15:4). But it will not be for our instruction unless we constantly engage the biblical text in the personal dialogue of our

[3]My trans. from "Le symbolisme des rites baptismaux," *Dieu vivant* 1 (1945) 17.

private contemplation. For unless our psalmody is a response to such a *lectio divina*, a true *meditatio* in the original sense of slowly going over and over the revealed text to savor it in its depths in relation to ourselves, then of course the Divine Office will never reach its full meaning in our lives.

Just as the *lectio* penetrates our lives with a vision of human existence rooted in salvation history, the psalmody of the office is its cosmic and eschatological response. For it is in the office, above all, that we evoke that vision of a saved universe transformed into that hymn of cosmic praise before the throne of the Lamb read of in the final chapters of the New Testament (Rev 19—22):

> I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, " Halleluiah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just. . . . And from the throne came a voice crying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude . . . Halleluiah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready. . . ." And the angel said to me, " Writethis: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." . . .
>
> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them; and they shall be his people. . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." . . .
>
> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of nations. . . .
>
> Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

This is what our end is to be, and the Liturgy of the Hours, like other symbols of Christian life, provides us with the awesome privilege of anticipating it now.