CHAPTER 14

The Shape and Theology of the Office

Drawing to a close, we must ask what we may have learnt from the overview of the early and medieval offices. More importantly we may perhaps be able to say whether there may or may not be a single theology of daily prayer that can help us with the problems perceived in the offices of the present-day.

The Ritual Shape of Daily Prayer

One of the peculiarities of liturgical books is the way in which they differ in their arrangements of the daily offices. The pre-1912 Roman Breviary opened with the title, 'The Psalter disposed for the week with the ordinary of the Office of the Time'.[1] After the introductory prayers that preceded all the offices came the order of Matins and of Lauds for Sunday, without seasonal or festal propers. Now followed Prime, Terce, Sext and None, and then the order of Matins and Lauds for each day of the week in turn. After Saturday Lauds was found Sunday Vespers, Vespers for each weekday and daily Compline. The page that followed the order of Compline began the temporal with the *Magnificat* antiphon for the 1st Vespers of the First Sunday of Advent.[2] In other words the order in ordinary offices reckoned the day from Matins to Compline, while both seasonal and festal propers, and the common orders for saints, began at Vespers.

We find a strikingly similar thing when we examine the liturgical books of the other most widespread liturgical tradition, that of Byzantine Orthodoxy. The tenth-century Typikon of the Great Church starts the cycle of the months with Vespers on the eve of 1 September,[3] and a modern *Menaion* also starts the feasts of August with Vespers on the eve of Procession of the Cross.[4] On the other hand the standard *Great Horologion*[5] begins with the order of the Midnight Office, the *orthros* or Matins, the Hours and Inter-Hours with the

[1] 'Psalterium dispositum per Hebdomada cum Ordinario Officii de Tempore', *Breviarium Romanum, pars Autumnalis*, op. cit., 1.

[2] Ibid., 169.

[3] Mateos, *Le Typicon*, op. cit., p. 2.

[4] Μηναιον Αυγουστον (Athens: Φως, 1970), p. 8.

[5] Ωρολογιον το Μεγα (Athens: της Αποστολικης Διακονιας. 1993), p. 3.

Typika,[6] then Vespers, Great and Little Compline. In both traditions one set of liturgical ordos reckons the day from midnight to midnight and the other from evening to evening. This little-remarked discrepancy is found in other liturgical traditions as well. Since a very large number of the oldest surviving liturgical books (as opposed to books of the Bible, such as the Psalter) are compilations of festal or seasonal material, the reckoning of the day from Vespers may argue for antiquity. After all, it is likely that the fixed parts of the offices were originally supplied from simple Psalters or even from memory.

It is doubtful whether any conclusive proof that one reckoning is more ancient than the other will ever be obtained. However, we will suggest that both the evidence of the ancient documents and the theology of the offices we have tried to tease out in all that has gone before make it easier and clearer in what follows to continue to reckon the liturgical day from evening to evening.

Throughout this work we have concentrated on the offices of Vespers and Matins, including in the latter the service often known in the West as Vigils or Nocturns. It is widely agreed by scholars that we have clear indication of services at the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours of the day from a very early stage. However for reasons of clarity some further reflection on Day Hours will follow our conclusions about the evening and morning offices. As the euchological and hymnic material inevitably varies greatly from rite to rite, we shall concentrate most of our concluding remarks on the shape of the services and their use of scripture.

The Overall Shape of the Evening Office

We propose that there is a more or less common shape of the evening office that can be described schematically as follows:

Introductory material, often concluding the day
Current psalmody (when present, always in the first part)
The 'Core' of the evening office – lights and incense
(Readings not usually present)
Intercession, Prayer in preparation for the night, other prayers
Originally processional appendices (Not always present)

We could say that this structure concludes the day, perhaps allows space for meditative praying of the Psalter, celebrates the evening light and offers prayer and praise in thanksgiving, signified by the use of incense. There may then be a vigil reading, but in most cases prayer is offered both for the church and the

[6] This service is related to or replaces the Liturgy and is not discussed here.

world, and for protection through the coming night, that we may come to the new day. The service may conclude with devotional appendices that might, for example, provide a remembrance of baptism. In other words, the day ends and Christ the light of the world guides his people, washed in the waters of baptism, into the night from which they will arise the next morning.

The ways in which the offices begin are themselves interesting. Byzantine offices always start by blessing God, either simply in the presumed Palestinian form 'Blessed is our God, always, now and ever . . . ', or with the more elaborate Trinitarian form 'Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit . . . ' which in Constantinople began the services of the cathedral office as well as the Divine Liturgy, and which still commences Vespers when combined with either the ordinary or Presanctified Liturgies. East Syrian Vespers begins by ascribing glory to God in the Highest, and a kiss of peace,[7] in Milan and in the Old Spanish rite the service begins with the priestly greeting, 'The Lord be with you'. The traditions that retained a blessing or salutation continued to give witness to the public and ecclesial nature of the services.

All West Syrian offices begin by invoking the triune name. The Roman and Benedictine offices begin with the verses of psalm 69, 'O God make haste to help me', the Armenian Vespers with verses from psalm 54, Coptic offices with the Lord's Prayer. The Coptic and Roman traditions have been heavily influenced by monastic practices, and it may be that those rites that begin with psalm verses and other similar prayers may here show their close connection with the lay-led services of early monasticism.

Almost all traditions have preparatory prayers, which may be said silently before the formal beginning as in most Western traditions,[8] or aloud after the opening blessing or psalm verses, as in contemporary Byzantine offices. These are all much later developments as are penitential rites that are usually found at the First Hour and Compline, and which may come at the end or at the beginning of the service.[9] Many ancient vesperal offices are intended to be services of confession and forgiveness in themselves.[10]

An opening psalm such as psalms 85 or 103 of the Armenian / Byzantine traditions may serve to draw the day to a close. By contrast the Roman, Benedictine and Coptic monastic rites, together with the East Syrian rite, begin the Psalter in course almost immediately after the opening verses. West Syrian

[7] Maclean, op. cit., p. 1.

[8] The Lord's Prayer is a common component of these prayers.

[9] E.g., In the old Roman (*Pars Verna*, 167) and Monastic (I, 176) Breviaries, the confession and absolution are at the beginning of the service, in the Sarum Use (Sarum Brev. Psalterium, 239) they come towards the end, as does the rite of forgiveness in Byzantine Great Compline (Great Horologion, 181).

[10] See Winkler, 'L'aspect pénitential dans les Offices du soir en Orient et en Occident', op. cit.

Vespers draws the day to a close in prayer that mentions rest from the labours of the day and release from worldly thoughts.[11] Prayer at this point is not uncommon. For example, the Byzantine Great Litany has moved to this point. The Old Spanish and Milanese Vespers began with a light ritual, but the Old Spanish rite lacks current psalmody, and such psalmody at Vespers may not be original to Milanese tradition. Ethiopian *wazema* appears to be the only traditional rite that commences with a hymn, though it also has supplication at this point.

Rites that lack current psalmody proceed directly to the unchanging core: the West Syrian, Old Spanish, Ethiopian and Armenian services. Current psalmody dominated the first part of the Roman and Benedictine rites of Vespers, also the cathedral rite of Constantinople and East Syrian *ramsha*. Although now often abbreviated, the current Psalter is also found here in the contemporary Byzantine office of Palestinian origin. A form of semi-current psalmody made up much of the Coptic monastic Vespers.

A major difference between the rites is the way in which the Psalter is discharged. The cathedral rite of Constantinople chanted the psalms with simple responses, whilst the monastic custom of one voice reading *recto tono* was adopted from Palestine into the contemporary rite. East Syrian practice was to read the psalms without responses on weekdays and supply such responses on Sundays and feasts.[12] Early Western monastic practice appears to have been a mixture of meditative reading by one voice together with the responsorial method.[13] By the high Middle Ages this had become choral chanting of the psalms by all in choir, usually side to side. This practice probably contributed to the idea common by the sixteenth century and still heard today, that the recitation of the psalms in course was the *raison d'être* of the Divine Office.

What we have called the core of the evening office is broadly characterized by select psalmody, especially the use of psalm 140, and ritual than might involve lights and / or incense. The Armenian group of psalms 139–41, prayer for the blessing of light, and the hymn *Phos hilaron*, is closely paralleled by the Palestinian / Byzantine group of psalms 140–1, 129 and 116 with poetic *stichera*, procession with lights and incense, and the same hymn. The West and East Syrians used the same group of psalms 140–1, 118.105–12 and 116. The former has an incense rite, the latter once had a procession with lights and incense to the Bema on which the core service was celebrated, and still has incensation introducing that core. The old Byzantine office had a procession into church with lights and incense at psalm 140, and the core continued with

[11] Griffiths, op. cit., p. 4.

[12] Maclean, op. cit., p. 2, n. 3.

[13] See *RB 1980*, op. cit., 402–3.

the 'Little Antiphons' at the Ambo. We have suggested that the Coptic raising of incense may have had a connection with psalm 140, which is one of the psalms that make up Ethiopian *wazema*.

Is this core so readily identifiable in Western rites? We have suggested that the Milanese complex of *lucernarium, antiphona in coro* and Responsory *in coro*, may be that core. This is a complete service which appears to be very similar to the Old Spanish order of *lucernarium*, antiphon and *alleluiaticum*. The Roman and Benedictine offices seemingly had a vestigial core that included a scriptural blessing, and the versicle and response from psalm 140, also the incensation that comes to be associated with the *Magnificat*. It may be that the growing emphasis on choral chanting of the current Psalter contributed to the withering of the core.

This core is vital to understanding the theology of the Vespers. The light was sometimes brought in from outside of the church, as in Milan. Sometimes it was simply shown to the people, as was presumably the case in Spain and the Constantinopolitan cathedral rite, and sometimes it has left vestiges in the candle or candles carried in procession in the contemporary Orthodox rite[14] and in older East Syrian practice. Original practice must have been to begin the light ceremony when it became dark enough for artificial lighting to be necessary, just as the modern Jewish synagogue service to begin the Sabbath starts at sunset on Friday, at whatever hour that might occur. In Spain and possibly ancient Milan, in Armenia, Ethiopia and Western Syria where the current Psalter was largely carried out at night / early morning, this light ritual seems to have come near the beginning of a relatively short service. Where the custom was to have psalmody in course before the *lucernarium*, in Byzantine Orthodoxy, East Syria and possibly in Rome, that psalmody could be seen as a form of 'gathering rite' whilst waiting for the sunset. In either case the light appears to have functioned in the same way as that lit at the beginning of the Western Easter Vigil, as a symbol of Christ the light who conquers the darkness of sin and death. This light may well have been left throughout the night as in the Temple light mentioned on pp. 9–10 above.

An exception to the above which cannot simply be explained away is Egeria's account of the light ceremony taking place at four in the afternoon, the light being brought from the sepulchre and, one would presume, well before sunset. The order was the lighting of the lamps, psalmody, the entrance of the bishop, more psalmody and prayer. This pattern does not appear to be replicated by what we know of later Palestinian practice, nor do we see it reflected elsewhere, unless our proposals about the ancient Milanese office are

[14] It was ancient Russian practice for the candle bearers to push open the holy doors of the iconostasis with their candlesticks (Uspensky, *Evening Worship*, op. cit., p. 98), thus light might be seen to open the doors to the altar that can represent Christ's tomb.

completely wrong. Perhaps the pattern simply changed to combine the light ritual with the entrance of the bishop, which would form a blueprint for the present rite.

The Roman and Benedictine traditions appear to have had a core of *capitulum*, (Responsory), Hymn, Versicle and *Magnificat* with festal incensation. Any light ceremony has disappeared and incense is associated with the canticle and represents the prayers of the saints. Although the hymn was a later addition to this core in the Roman rite, it is interesting that it was added here and not at the beginning of the office as in the modern rite.

The other ritual act of the core was that of incensation, a rite that seems to have survived even when the light ritual had disappeared or shrunk to insignificance. Obviously taking inspiration from the words of psalm 140, the evening sacrifice of incense has usually involved the incensing the altar as a symbolic offering of prayer and praise in the evening sacrifice, but also the incensing of the people as a rite of cleansing and forgiveness of sins.[15] Even on weekdays in the contemporary Byzantine Vespers when there is no entrance, the censing still takes place, and the prayer of the entrance with its reference to the evening sacrifice is always prayed. The West Syrian rites give great importance to the purificatory aspect, which in the East Syrian was probably also originally associated with the procession to the Bema. Incense as an evening sacrifice for forgiveness of sins is central to the Coptic rite of Evening Incense.[16] Armenian usage seems to be connected with the prayer section of the core.[17]

As already stated, the Western use of incense at Vespers seems to have become associated with the prayers of the saints, although Amalarius commented on the ritual in conjunction with the versicle from psalm 140. There is no ancient evidence for a standing censer placed on or near the altar. The censer with chains traditional to East and West, and even the hand-held *katzion* of Greek use, witness to a traditional Christian view of incensation as an action rather than as an object of contemplation. This raises some interesting questions that are too complex to enter into here.

It should not be forgotten that this proposed central core of Vespers must also include the intercessions and other prayers. In the old Roman and Benedictine rites this element immediately followed the *Magnificat* with its incensation, and was later reduced to the collect of the day (preceded by the Lord's Prayer in the Benedictine rite) except when the so-called *Preces Feriales* were used. The core of the Constantinople Vespers taken in the nave included a

[15] See especially, Winkler, 'Über die Kathedralvesper', op. cit.

[16] E.g., *Coptic Liturgies and Hymns* (Hayward, CA: Jonathan Center, 1995), pp. 12–13.

[17] In St Sarkis, London (November 2001), incensing took place during the singing of the Trisagion.

whole range of litanies and prayers, and this shape has survived at the Sunday and Festal Great Vespers of the present rite. *Phos hilaron* and the acclamatory *prokeimenon* are followed by two litanies with the ancient prayer 'Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this night without sin'. In the East Syrian *Ramsha* the same lengthy set of intercessions that are also used at the Eucharist and baptisms follow hard upon the evening psalms and variable material of the core. Moreover this is often the only point at which a minister, the deacon, is vested. We have seen that the Armenians also have litanic prayer at this point, and the West Syrian tradition has the variable, poetic form of intercession, the *b'outho*. Intercessory prayer is very much part of the Coptic raising of incense, and the Old Spanish tradition shows relics of an intercessory section which includes the Lord's Prayer.

We have emphasized several times the lack of readings from most orders of Vespers. Where they exist they are often, as in the modern Byzantine rite, a first part of the vigil observance of a feast, distinct from the evening service proper. In the same rite in Lent, they appear to be a displaced catechumenal instruction. The adding of a Gospel reading to the West Syrian festal Vespers and to a recent celebration of the Armenian vespers seems to be the result of later influences. The Old Spanish and even the Romanized Milanese rite prior to Vatican II had no readings at all, just like the East Syrian and the Constantinople sung office on most days. We have also suggested that the short chapters of the Roman and Benedictine offices are not vestigial readings that may now be lengthened into full ones, but have entirely different ritual origins. Ancient evening rituals were not vehicles for reading scripture but scripture-based celebrations of the saving death of Christ. Systematic reading of scripture had its place, but not there. The only strictly edificatory scriptural material in ancient Vespers appears to have been the reading of the Psalter in course.

Finally we have seen that most rites of Vespers seem to have concluded, at some time in their history, with devotional appendices of a once processional nature. The Roman Breviary commemorations often included processions in the Middle Ages, and revival has been encouraged of those that survived at Milan, which are similar to Old Spanish forms. The modern Byzantine Vespers has relics of such processions, which actually take place when a festal *litia* is appointed.[18] The East Syrian forms are no longer processional and the Armenian ones may be very reduced. Nothing of this kind seems to have survived in the West Syrian or Coptic rites. As later rites, these appendices often vary very considerably, but some recall visits to the baptistery, to a place

[18] This is a penitential procession that is part of the vigil of a feast (every Saturday in some books and Russian Old Ritualist practice) – the rubrics expect there to be simplified vesture and the holy doors of the altar remain closed.

of the cross, or to the martyrs. In all cases one may see these processions as further reinforcing the ideas celebrated in the core of Vespers, that entering upon the night in the light of Christ is also accepting for oneself a commitment to die to sin and rise to new life in Christ.

The Psalms of Vespers

Although psalm 140 is frequently cited as the most common psalm anciently used at Vespers, it is not the only one. There are relatively few psalms obviously appropriate to Vespers and so the same ones regularly appear in different places, quite possibly without any direct influence of one centre upon another. We have already said something about psalms 85 and 103 in their role as introducing the office by concluding the day. Psalm 140 on its own in the Byzantine cathedral rite, and possibly elsewhere, partially employed in Spanish *lucernaria* and Roman versicles, and grouped with two or three other psalms is certainly very widespread. The groups in which it occurs make a three-psalm unit, psalm 116 in Byzantine, West and East Syrian use being almost certainly to serve as a doxology. As we have discussed above, these psalms often dwell on themes of protection against enemies. The Ethiopian *wazema* has psalm 140 preceded by psalms 23 and 92 which sing of God's grandeur and probably reflect the festal nature of this particular service in which the psalms are each accompanied by other poetic and euchological material.

Psalm 140 and those associated with it do not exhaust the psalms we find at Vespers. We have noted the frequent employment of the gradual psalms (119–33), the themes of which can be said to move from prayer at going up to the heavenly Jerusalem to praying through the night in the holy house. At certain times of the year (in winter and in Lent) these psalms are the 'current' psalmody at weekday Byzantine Vespers, while they also characterized much of Monday to Thursday in the old Roman rite, and the psalmody of Coptic monastic Vespers. There is no exact fit here and we cannot make too much of this, except to note that these psalms certainly did strike some people as suitable evening psalms.

A thoroughgoing current psalmody is less common in ancient rites of Vespers than one might think. It is only found in contemporary Orthodox practice in the summer months, though it was once common in the old Constantinople cathedral office. The East Syrian *marmitha* was, as we have seen, a semi-continuous reading that appears to show signs of selectivity, as well as being seemingly unconnected with the overnight recitation of the Psalter at *lelya*. The old Roman and Benedictine systems were selective in that psalms 109–50 were always used in the evening (always excepting those used in other offices), to the extent that festal psalms for Vespers were also drawn from this

part of the Psalter.[19] As has been said above, the major part of the recitation of the Psalter in course appears to have been more characteristic of the nocturnal part of Matins than of Vespers.

The use of a canticle, usually *Magnificat*, at Vespers is not found in the East,[20] and was not as universally used in the West as popularly supposed. The Old Spanish vespers had no canticle, Milan probably did not have one originally, and there is evidence to suggest that it may not have been part of the original Roman tradition. The *Magnificat* is regarded as the evening canticle *par excellence* by Western Christians, Catholic, Anglican and Protestant, whereas it is the morning canticle *par exellence* for modern Orthodox!

The Shape and Psalmody of Matins

It is relatively easy to demonstrate a common shape of Matins in traditional rites, though at the cost of great simplification:

Pre-dawn Vigil	Introductory material
	Current psalmody
	(Readings – not everywhere)
Dawn to Sunrise	Psalm 50 (not everywhere)
	Canticles and / or Morning Psalms
Morning Praise	Psalms 149–50
	Morning Hymn / Doxology / Canticle
	Intercession and Prayer
	Concluding material (incl. appendices)

We have not included in this the cathedral vigil, which in the contemporary Orthodox and East Syrian rites is placed more or less between the pre-dawn and dawn sections, and after the canticles in the Armenian Matins. This plan could apply to the Old Spanish office as well, but that was a cathedral vigil with Morning Prayer that may have been intended to be preceded by monastic pre-dawn psalmody.

The sheer amount of material involved in this, the longest of the ancient offices in their full development, means that while the above scheme is very over-simplified, it yet reflects something of a common progression of prayer and praise from darkness into light. Vespers may have developed around a

[19] See e.g., Louis Van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 203–4.

[20] Contemporary Byzantine use of *Nunc Dimittis* as part of what we have identified as the processional / devotional appendix, and the fact that it is normally read rather than sung, would argue a later development.

central core, often approached quite slowly, and then rather more quickly drew to a devotional and ceremonial close. Matins, on the other hand, appears to move from darkness into increasing light, and finally reaches its ritual climax in the sunrise praise of and prayer to the risen Christ. For example, the contemporary Byzantine rite on feasts climaxes in the Praise psalms and Great Doxology. The service is then concluded with two litanies and the dismissal rite, or in Greek parochial use leads directly into the eucharistic liturgy.

Some kind of invitatory rite is much more universal in Matins than at Vespers. Psalm 3 began the Benedictine rite, it also commonly occurred at this point is Spain, and was part of the introductory groups of three or six psalms found in the ancient and modern Byzantine rites and the Armenian and West Syrian rites as well. Even the Midnight psalmody in the Coptic cathedral rite begins with psalm 3. Milan began with the cockcrow hymn *Aeterne rerum* and the East Syrian rite with introductory prayers in the night and then immediately the current psalmody. Other psalms used at this point included psalm 62 (Byzantine, Armenian, Ethiopian) which Western rites tend to reserve to the beginning of the sunrise section, Lauds. The Roman tradition employed psalm 94 as an invitatory for the night office, in Benedictine use it was preceded by psalm 3.

This point of the service was traditionally seen as a time of prayer in the darkness, waiting in vigil for the light and acknowledging one's sinfulness and the need for God's saving grace. In fact the whole night part of the ancient offices seems to have been a vigil before dawn for which the recitation of the Psalter in course was particularly appropriate. The East Syrian, ancient West Syrian, Armenian and probably the Old Spanish monastic rites all regarded this time as the most suited to current psalmody. As we have seen, this is also largely true of the contemporary Byzantine rite at certain seasons, and pre-Carolingian Milan may have had current psalmody only when there was an overnight vigil praying the whole Psalter. We have also noted that psalms 1–108 (with the exceptions of those used as fixed psalms elsewhere) were substantially the base of Roman and Benedictine Matins / Nocturns. The Ethiopian morning service *Sebhata Nagh* in Lent appears to be the only time that that tradition has recitation of the whole Psalter. Although a morning office, the recitation would have to start before light.

In the ancient and early medieval world it would appear that only in the cathedral rite of Constantinople could the current psalmody ever be equal in length at both Matins and Vespers, and that only around the spring and autumn equinoxes! Only in the sixteenth century will we begin to find movements to equalize the morning and evening psalmody.

Most of the forms of Matins that have been examined in this book do more than simply recite the psalms before dawn. The simply structured East Syrian rite intersperses suitable vigil prayers, as did the Constantinople cathedral office. The Roman and Benedictine traditions interspersed biblical, patristic

and Hagiographic readings.[21] Many traditions used poetic chants to reinforce the vigil themes, such as the Sessional hymns of the Palestinian / Byzantine weekday *otoechos* with their insistence on penance. As far as we can tell from the evidence of the use of Tikrit, the West Syrian tradition, like the Armenian, interspersed canticles with the psalmody.

Although most Eastern rites of daily prayer do not have lengthy biblical readings at Matins, it should be remembered that, for example in the Sabaite *typikon* which is the basis of modern Byzantine practice, biblical or patristic reading was often inserted between Vespers and Matins when vigil was kept. There are also directions for readings between odes of the Canon. The difference between this practice and what one might call the later interpretation of the Western offices was that the Eastern custom continued to see current psalmody and reading as material to nurture one's prayer through lengthy nocturnal vigils. The more obviously ceremonial parts of the daily ritual at evening and morning were liturgical celebrations of the light of day as a symbol of the redemption wrought by Christ.

We have seen that there is a clear moment when the morning office takes over from the night, often marked by the penitential psalm 50. The modern Byzantine office has its cathedral vigil with resurrection gospel on Sunday inserted at the end of the nocturnal psalmody, then psalm 50 and the canon – we move from the night part of the office to the morning. Something similar was true of the old Roman office on weekdays, psalm 50 always began the morning psalms. The Benedictine office also began the morning part of the office, Lauds, with psalm 50 on weekdays. On Sundays, however, it concluded Matins with a series of canticles, a gospel reading by the Abbot and the hymn *Te Deum*. This structure is similar in some ways to the Byzantine cathedral vigil. The Armenian morning office inserts a vigil at a later point in the morning praises, perhaps similar to the inclusion on Sunday of the Constantinople resurrection gospel at the end of Matins. The East Syrian festal vigil has no Gospel and is simply inserted between the night and morning parts of the office, the latter starts straight away with the morning psalms. The Old Spanish office appears to be a daily cathedral vigil with morning praise and the same may also once have been true in Milan and elsewhere in the West.

We shall say little more about this vigil except that as a celebration of the resurrection in the night, preferably whilst still dark, it maintained the tradition that it was at such a time that Christ rose. Obviously Sundays as the weekly commemoration of the resurrection would attract such a festal insertion, but the very fact of prayer before the light on weekdays would show that some,

[21] Psalm prayers were known but do not seem to have become widespread, see Van Tongeren, op. cit., p. 206.

especially monastics, wished to watch and pray in the hope of resurrection every night.

The morning praises seem, from a very early stage, to have been organized around a canticle or canticles and the praise psalms, 149–50. We have suggested that the Ambrosian office demonstrates a very clear and primitive version of this: the Exodus 15 canticle and the *Benedicite* were followed by the praise psalms on Sunday, the weekday version having psalm 50 and the praise psalms alone. The Celtic rite of the Bangor Antiphonary is very similar in shape, and both are close to the early description from the account of the death of St Gall. The Old Spanish service had a variable canticle instead of only Exodus 15, but preceded by Psalm 50 as probably implied in the account of St Gall, and then the abbreviated *Benedicite*, a variable morning psalm and the praise psalms.

The mutual similarity of the Western non-Roman shapes is striking, and we may also propose a very considerable similarity between them and the Roman and Benedictine Lauds. In these latter offices the *Benedicite* was the Sunday canticle, followed by the praise psalms. On weekdays there was a canticle for each day of the week, Exodus 15 being appointed for Thursday. In both cases there was a series of morning psalms preceding the canticle, of which the first on weekdays was always psalm 50 (92 on Sundays). The first morning psalm in the Roman rite was proper to the day, the next two, psalms 62 and 66, were to be used daily. The Benedictine form varied this but retained the same fundamental shape, which we can see was more or less the same throughout late antique, early medieval Western Europe.

When we turn to the Eastern morning liturgies we find first that the proposed reconstruction of the Coptic *Psalmodia* of the night has Exodus 15 and *Benedicite* (separated by psalm 135), and the praise psalms after intervening poetic and intercessory material. The Ethiopian *sebhata nagh* has more canticles, but with psalms 62, 91 and 5 (all appropriate morning psalms) preceding those canticles, which normally include *Benedicite*, and finally bringing in the praise psalms, this office also reflects the same shape. The modern Byzantine office has replaced the canticle on most occasions with poetry, but the suggestion has been made that three Sunday canticles was once normal, and they could have been Exodus 15, *Benedicite* and the *Magnificat* and *Benedictus* together. These then being followed by the praises. The Constantinople cathedral rite marked the shift from the pre-dawn vigil to the morning office by a procession of entry from narthex to nave with incensation, at the canticle *Benedicite*. The ensuing core of the service at the Ambo was the praise psalms, this time preceded by psalm 50. In the contemporary rite a relic of this may be in the fact that the daily Matins incensation is begun during the eighth ode which replaces *Benedicite*.

The Armenian morning office also has *Benedicite* followed by New Testament canticles and psalm 50, and then the praises. The West Syrian

rites seem to have a duplicated morning office, but the normal order of this ritual core includes psalm 50, canticle (often *Benedicite*) and praises. The East Syrian *sapra* alone has a series of morning psalms, including 99, 90 and 92 immediately followed by the praise psalms. The *Benedicite* comes a little later on Sundays, psalm 50 replacing it on weekdays. The Chaldean use of *Benedicite* here may supply for the lack of the Great Doxology that immediately follows the praises in both cathedral and contemporary Byzantine tradition, and also the Armenian. The Great Doxology, 'Glory to God in the Highest', is found in the form of the *turuhat* of the Coptic *psalmodia* which follows an incense rite introduced by the praises. The Ethiopians seem not to use this ancient Christian hymn, while the West Syrian rites use it before the morning praise.[22] Western use of this hymn was usually limited to the Eucharist except in Milan where the Great Doxology, or *Laus Angelorum Magna*, followed the praises and the *psalmus directus* until the sixteenth century.

The continuation of the cosmic praise after psalms 148–50 seems in the Roman and Benedictine traditions to have been represented by the Lucan canticle *Benedictus*, a most appropriate choice for the morning. There is a real ritual cohesion in this whole outburst of praise in the old Roman rite of Sundays, beginning with the *Benedicite*, continuing through psalms 148–50 and the *Benedictus*, to the doxological capitulum: 'Blessing, and glory and wisdom ... to our God for ever and ever'.[23] The morning hymn, versicle and the *Benedictus* then further extended this praise of God the creator of all things.[24] In Constantinople, *Benedictus* appears to have once come immediately before the Great Doxology, but in the contemporary office it finishes the canon and immediately precedes the praises.

We have so far said little of ceremonial enactment of the morning service of praise. As a progress towards the light, the morning offices needed no light ritual. However incense and processions often characterized this part of the rite. We have already noted the existence of incensation and procession in the Byzantine tradition, and the cathedral rite on Sundays had a further movement to the altar for the resurrection gospel reading. Milan, and perhaps old Spain, may have associated incensation with the praise psalms; it is possible that a Roman and Benedictine tradition of incensation at the *Benedictus* derived from this.[25] The raising of incense may also have been seen as an entirely suitable introduction to the intercessory and concluding prayers, which bring most of

[22] See e.g., Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 20–1.

[23] Revelation 7.12.

[24] One of the hymns used was *Aeterne rerum conditor*, see *Brev. Rom.*, op. cit., 24.

[25] It was rare to have a solemn Lauds except at Christmas, see Adrian Fortescue, *Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* (London: Burns & Oates, 1918), pp. 236–7.

these rites to a close. Their structure is much the same as at Vespers and we will say nothing more about them here.

The Psalms of Matins

Before concluding these reflections on Matins, a few words should be said about the psalms and canticles employed. The praise psalms, 148–50, seem to have most usually been used as an unbroken and unchanging group of three, except for the addition in some places, for example, Milan, of psalm 116, almost certainly as a primitive doxology. There are indications that the last *six* psalms of the Psalter may once have been used and not just these three. Other psalms appear to have been chosen for their morning themes, and certainly there are more to choose from than there are evening psalms. Any psalm with a theme of the reign of God is an appropriate psalm for a morning service envisaged as a celebration of the new day, itself an earnest of the eternal day; psalms 92, 96 and 99 are frequently found. Psalm 5's statement that in the morning we offer prayer is sufficient to justify its frequent occurrence, for example in the rites of Tikrit, Spain, Rome and the Benedictines.

As many scholars have pointed out, early offices seem to have either employed psalms appropriate to the time of day, or simply read the whole Psalter in course. Egeria is an early witness, especially in her description of Holy Week, to the selection of both psalms and other scriptural readings to suit particular celebrations. Seasonal psalmody is found in various places, and is often in the form of verses selected from psalms rather than whole psalms, for example the Byzantine *prokeimenon*, many of the Roman and Benedictine Responsories, the Old Spanish *antiphonae*, and the East Syrian *shuraye*. Most rites signified seasons and feasts by adding poetic material to the fixed psalmody or using scriptural verses as antiphons, which were originally responses, with a largely fixed psalmody. Festal psalms in the Roman rite were always drawn from those used normally at that time of day.

Canticles could, of course, be drawn from a wide variety of other Old Testament texts, as the Old Spanish tradition certainly proved. However, most rites confined themselves to a relatively small number of such texts; the nine odes of the Byzantine canon containing some of those most often used. We have already mentioned *Cantate* from Exodus 15 and *Benedicite* from Daniel 3, other frequently found examples were the canticle from the last chapter of Deuteronomy and the Isaiah 26.9 canticle, 'My soul yearns for thee in the night'. Much more has been said of these in the foregoing chapters, we may summarize by noting that they can mostly be connected with typical Paschal vigil themes. If the canticles were first connected with the Paschal vigil readings that lead into them (which is the case with *Cantate* and *Benedicite* in the contemporary Byzantine vigil, and with the former in the contemporary Roman vigil) then it seems that all were chosen for their appropriately resurrection themes. Only the Old Spanish tradition, until modern times, seems to have exploited texts suited to other festal or sanctoral themes.

Even the Old Spanish tradition made use of only three New Testament canticles, *Magnificat, Benedictus* and *Nunc Dimittis*, and that only sparingly and always in the morning. These canticles seem to have their original setting in the morning office, as fulfilment of the promises made in the Old Testament canticles. The numerous other New Testament texts, thought by modern New Testament scholars to be early Christian songs, and thus widely used in modern offices, have no discernible history as liturgical canticles.

Vespers and Matins, and Prayer at Other Times of the Day

We have largely concentrated on the offices at the beginning and end of the day, or the end and beginning of the night. What might be the place in the overall scheme for a series of Day Hours, or for prayer late at night? The East Syrian rite is famous for having no surviving Day Hours or Compline, except some possible relics in Lent. The West Syrian Day Hours have lost their psalmody, though *soutoro* (Compline) retains psalms 90 and 120, and been reduced to additions to the main Hours of Vespers and Matins. The Ethiopian cathedral office only has a form of Day Hours on certain solemn days, and the monastic provisions are too varied and too recent to supply us with a clear, historical pattern. The Armenian Day Hours seem to exhibit signs of have been abbreviated, except for Compline which has no less than nine psalms.

The ritual traditions that retained an accessible and analysable series of Day Hours until modern times, are the contemporary Byzantine Orthodox, the Roman (in which we shall include the Roman-derived Milanese Hours), the Coptic, the Benedictine and the Old Spanish. The Byzantine Hours are made up of three psalms chosen for the time of day, always the same except when Royal Hours are celebrated. For example, psalm 5 at the First; psalm 50 at the Third (verses 12 and 13 are associated with prayer for the Spirit); psalm 90 at the Sixth (protection at noon) and psalm 85 at the Ninth. Most of the remaining material, except the short Troparion and *kontakion* of the day, is the same each day and every day. The Roman Breviary until 1912 supplied a similar, largely unchanging diet, mostly of psalm 118. The Benedictine office had already re-distributed the Psalter and as a consequence had slightly more variety and shorter offices. The Coptic and Old Spanish monastic Hours are also always the same each day, though in the former case, that is true of the evening and morning offices as well, and all the offices of this tradition have at least 12 psalms. Where Inter-Hours exist (Byzantine

Orthodoxy and ancient Spanish monasteries), they are as fixed, and even simpler.

It is not only the fixed nature of the psalmody in most of the above cases that is of interest, but the fact that hymns and prayers also tended to be largely unchanging. In Lent the Byzantine offices acquire readings from the current Psalter, and Isaiah at the Sixth Hour, but the Troparia and *kontakia* are the same each day and do not vary as they do at other times. This fixity is ancient and means that these short services can be read in a simple monotone in about ten to fifteen minutes, just as the short Benedictine Hours could be sung to chant in about ten minutes. It is likely that these services were originally committed to memory and prayed without ceremony, alone or in small groups, wherever a monk's work happened to take him. Their brevity seems to have contributed to the later tendency to group them together, so that they did not disrupt a busy day.[26]

The lack of variable material, the fixity, and the absence of ceremonial, may all suggest that the Day Hours (and Compline) originally belonged to structures of private devotion rather than to the ancient fully ecclesial rites of evening and night-morning. As many scholars have pointed out, the Fathers and many early church documents speak of prayer at the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours of the day and seemed to regard them as periods of private prayer, at least in the beginning. Since they developed liturgical forms they should be regarded as part of the historic Liturgy of the Hours together with Vespers and Matins. However, if these latter principal services emerged from the context of public daily worship in the fourth century, and were, as we have suggested, derivatives of the Paschal vigil that celebrated the Christian mystery of Redemption, then they must be our principal source for the theology of daily prayer.

Baptism and the Sacramentality of the Daily Offices

Having noted the importance that many New Testament texts give to the idea of staying awake to pray at night, we should also note some of the many texts that have baptismal themes. If baptism is entry into resurrection life (2 Cor. 5.17), a walking in newness of life (Romans 6.4), and a participation by all in the gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.13), then that once-for-all baptism must

[26] The Trinity-St Sergius Podvorie in Moscow groups Ninth Hour, Vespers, Compline, Matins and First Hour in the evening, and Midnight, Third and Sixth Hours before Liturgy in the morning (July 1999). The Benedictines of Prinknash, near Gloucester, in the 1980s had Terce at 8.20, Sext combined with Mass before lunch, and None at 2 – in all cases leaving a lengthy morning and evening work period.

continue to have central importance to the Christian life. 'For as many of you as are baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (Gal. 3.27).

That continued importance of the themes of new birth on the one hand, and death and resurrection on the other,[27] seem to us to have powerfully influenced the Christian tradition of prayer. We read of the symbolism of night and day, death and resurrection in Clement of Rome, of the sun's daily baptism in Melito, and of the light and darkness symbolism in the accounts of baptism in the Acts of Judas Thomas. For Basil the Great, baptism is a passage from darkness to light, and for Ambrose morning light shines in the darkness. The evidence of baptismal and other vigils at night culminating in the morning celebration of the Eucharist, appear to be strong signs of the importance of daily common prayer, when it emerges fully, as a daily or at least weekly, renewal of baptism.

Among the Church Orders, *Apostolic Tradition* expects nocturnal baptism and seems to know of meal vigils, perhaps with the Hallel psalms supplying reminiscences of the Red Sea. The *Testamentum Domini* has strong echoes of baptismal imagery in is treatment of darkness and light. There is a strong connection of baptism and the dawn celebration of the resurrection. We are not just recalling baptism but seeing it as having opened up to us the kingdom which is to come.

The strong connection of the Paschal vigil canticles with Morning Prayer, and the common connection of the vigils themselves with baptism show how the same themes of enlightenment and entry into new life undergird the daily life of the community of the baptized. The Old Byzantine office, with its progressive entry into the church building, may be seen as a daily catechumenal procession. The often remarked similarity between the cores of Vespers and Matins and the first part of the eucharistic Liturgy are not accidental and seem to be a part of a continuing sanctification of the whole of the Christian's life. The similar structures of the Chaldean offices are reinforced by that tradition's use of the same set of intercessory litanies at Vespers, baptism and the Eucharist. These rites are all intimately related to one another. In the West Syrian tradition the idea of incense as a cleansing rite may be a recollection of baptism and the *sedro* at the lighting of the lamps quoted on p. 162, could be minimally altered to make it suitable for a baptismal rite.

The Roman and other Western daily offices are not so obviously similar to the liturgies of baptism. However the widespread use of processions to the baptistery, especially in ancient Rome and medieval and modern Milan, show a similar pastoral concern to continue and deepen the life of the baptized as they move ever closer towards the *eschaton*.

[27] The biblical themes identified by Maxwell Johnson in his *The Rites of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 31.

Concluding Reflection

The sixteenth-century theologian Dominicus Soto objected to the proposed reforms of the Franciscan Cardinal Quignones because the Divine Office was not just about learning psalms and studying scripture, but about praise of and prayer to God. From the late Middle Ages at least there have been two fundamental theologies of daily prayer or Divine Office. The first, more characteristic of earlier periods even in the monastic rites, emphasizes the contrasts of darkness and light, night and of day, to both enact and express the Christian mystery of Redemption, thus to inspire the faithful caught up in that enactment to praise and prayer as the sons and daughters of God.

The second theology is more characteristic of the Renaissance and the Reformation periods, powerfully influencing Roman Catholic attitudes to daily prayer as much as those of Anglicans and Protestants. This theology has dominated Western offices up until the present time. This may be seen as a theology of the divine office as inculcating of scripture so as to support a powerful and formative spirituality, most especially for the clergy. Having attempted to explicate the first theology in this book, the second will need more extended treatment, and we hope to return to that theme in a future volume.

Many efforts at reform are being undertaken today, but a really effective reform must return to first principles, and we have tried to enunciate what those principles might entail. To return to first principles will not mean that we try to reconstruct an ancient cathedral office, but that we try and learn from the ancient and medieval sources the principles and the theology that might allow for a fresh start. For those of us who use an un-revised, traditional rite, such as that of Byzantine Orthodoxy, the return to first principles must begin with recovery of the original meaning of these rites. Then they may be celebrated in a way that reflects their integral meaning, rather than formalistically going through inadequately abbreviated versions.

Daily prayer services need to be recognized as having been conceived and developed as public, ceremonial and participatory acts of the church gathered in prayer. Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) says: 'Orthodox theology regards the sacraments as sacred actions through which an encounter takes place between us and God.'[28] Throughout this book we have argued that the ancient and medieval rites of daily prayer were just such 'sacred actions'. To confine sacramentality too narrowly to the seven rites identified by the later scholastics, or even to the clearly biblical ordinances of the Reformation, is to risk marginalizing daily prayer. If, as we have suggested, the underlying rationale

[28] *The Mystery of Faith*, op. cit., p. 130.

that lies beneath the huge variety of rites of daily prayer is to recall us to and renew us in our baptismal entry into the coming kingdom of God, then they too are sacred actions in which there is indeed an encounter between us and God.