

## THE LITURGY OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE CHRISTIAN LITURGY<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HIS question covers a wide, largely unexplored field. It will not be easy to draw parallels before we know what to choose as a type for comparison in the synagogal liturgy on the one hand, and in the wealth of Christian liturgies on the other. Jewish prayers comprise not only those which were codified and organized as such and may be termed liturgy proper, but also an abundance of another type of prayer which is not official, but where we may yet find traces of the early Jewish prayer. In the Christian liturgy the best witness will *not* be the Roman, but some of the Eastern rites, especially the Coptic and Syriac.

Again similarities with the synagogal prayer will be found more easily in the Divine Office than in the Mass. Although we know very little about the origins of the breviary and how it was constituted, one notices a convergence of private and monastic piety, as well as liturgical tradition, part of the latter going back to the Synagogue.

How far back can we go? The oldest Jewish prayer-book dates back to the 9th century A.D. Our knowledge of the Christian office, on the other hand, cannot be traced back further than the 8th century, and even at this time, there was between Church and Synagogue a long-standing relationship of mutual ignorance, if not of downright hostility.

Nevertheless if we turn to older sources, for instance, to the MISHNA<sup>2</sup> itself, (2nd and 3rd century), we shall be able to discuss the structure of the liturgy, the elements of the service and the celebration of the Eucharist.

### I. *The Arrangement of the Liturgy*

We know from the Mishna that since the 1st century A.D. both the morning and evening service in the Synagogue had two essential parts. The first is the SHEMA, or solemn attestation of the faith of Israel in One God, the other the TEPHILLAH or prayer *par*

<sup>1</sup> Adapted and abridged from a talk given at Notre Dame de Sion, Paris, July 12th, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> The Mishna is part of the Talmud.

*excellence* formed by the eighteen benedictions. There were introductory prayers, besides, which included a commemoration of the sacrifice of Abraham, read from Genesis XVIII, followed by commentaries and very beautiful prayers. In place of the sacrifices in the Temple, which could no longer be performed, the faithful were requested to offer more spiritual sacrifices, 'agreeable to the Lord'. Some of these prayers were very beautiful, especially the one reminiscent of our Preface, ending with the solemn acclamation: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Eternal Zebaoth, all the earth is full of His Majesty'. It is worth notice that the Christian liturgy contains this same triple Sanctus. We say, however, 'Heaven and earth are full of his glory', meaning, as a commentator has brought out, that, since the coming of Christ, Heaven and earth have been reconciled in a common homage to God.

We give at this point a few extracts from the liturgy of the synagogue.<sup>3</sup>

*From the Morning Service: Preliminaries* (I Chronicles xxix. 10-13)  
 . . . 10. And David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the congregation: and David said, Blessed art thou, O Lord; the God of Israel our father, from everlasting to everlasting. 11. Thine, O Lord is the greatness, and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine, O Lord, is the kingdom, and the supremacy as head over all. 12. Riches and honour come of thee, and thou rulest over all; and in thine hand are might and power; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13. Now, therefore, our God we give thanks unto thee, and praise thy glorious Name.

(Nehemiah ix. 6)

6. Thou art the Lord, even thou alone; thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and all their host, the earth and all things that are thereon, the seas and all that is in them, and thou givest life to them all; and the host of heaven worship thee.

*Here follows the evocation of the whole mystery of Salvation:*

7. Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham: and foundest his heart faithful before thee:

<sup>3</sup> These extracts are from the authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations, edited by Dr J. H. Hertz. Shapiro Vallentine and Co., London, 1955.

And thou madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, even to give it unto his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous. 9. And thou sawest the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red Sea; 10. and shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land; for thou knewest that they dealt arrogantly against them; and didst make thee a name, as it is this day. 11. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their pursuers thou didst cast into the depths, as a stone into the mighty waters.

(Exodus xiv. 30-xv, 18)

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the great power which the Lord put forth against the Egyptians, and the people revered the Lord: and they believed in the Lord and in Moses his servant.

*Here the great canticle of the Exodus is sung:*

I will sing unto the Lord for he hath been highly exalted: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. 2. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; this is my God and I will glorify him; my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his Name. 4. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: and his chosen captains are sunk in the Red Sea. 5. The floods cover them: they went down into the depths like a stone. 6. Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in Power, thy right hand, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy. 7. And in the greatness of thy majesty thou overthrowest them that rise up against thee: thou sendest forth thy wrath, it consumeth them as stubble. 8. And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were piled up, the streams stood upright as an heap; the floods were congealed in the heart of the sea. 9. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: my desire shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them; thou didst blow with the wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. 11. Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, revered in praises, doing marvels? 12. Thou stretchest out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. 13. Thou in thy loving kindness leadest the people whom thou hast redeemed; thou guidest them in

thy strength to thy holy habitation. 14. The peoples have heard it; they tremble: pangs have taken hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. 15. Then were the dukes of Edom confounded; the mighty men of Moab, trembling taketh hold of them: all the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away. 16. Terror and dread fall upon them: by the greatness of thine arm they are as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over that thou hast acquired. 17. Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. 18. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. THE LORD SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER.

(Psalm 22, 29)

For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is ruler over the nations.

(Obadiah I, 21)

And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

(Zachariah, 14, 9)

AND THE LORD SHALL BE KING OVER ALL THE EARTH: IN THAT DAY SHALL THE LORD BE ONE AND HIS NAME ONE. AS it is said in the Law:

HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD IS OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

*Then comes a long series of formulae culminating in the TRISAGION*

The name of the Divine King, the great, mighty and dreaded One, holy is he; and they all take upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven one from the other, and give leave one unto the other to declare the holiness of their Creator: in tranquil joy of spirit, with pure speech and holy melody they all respond in unison, and exclaim with awe:

(Isaiah 6, 3)

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE LORD OF HOSTS: THE WHOLE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS GLORY.

In spite of these parallels, there will be found more differences than similarities between the arrangement of the two services. The first Christians were invited to pray three times a day, when they would recite the Our Father, a simpler form of prayer than the long benedictions of the Synagogue. Later the first composers of monastic rules organized a lengthier worship. Although they used the psalms, they did so quite independently of Jewish custom. One might say that they were inspired rather by their

private Scripture-reading, which every pious Jew was supposed to do, and which, as we have mentioned before, was not in the codified liturgy. Thus it is apparent that the *arrangement* of our liturgy being largely derived from private rather than public Jewish prayer, has very little outward resemblance to the Jewish liturgy (i.e. public prayer).

## II. *Elements borrowed from the Jewish liturgy*

There is more to be said about what the Church borrowed from the Synagogue, whether she inserted it in her liturgy without any modification, or whether she assimilated it so as to bring out its full meaning in relation to the New Revelation.

1. The first element is, of course, *Scripture* itself. From the beginning the Word of God was read in Christian assemblies and in this the Church is the heir of the Synagogue. The more conservative Oriental Churches, the Coptic and Syriac, still give first place to readings from the Torah or Pentateuch. Next comes a passage from the prophets, then three texts from the New Testament: (a) Acts or Catholic Epistles, (b) St Paul, (c) the Gospel. The Roman liturgy relegated the Old Testament readings to the Vigil or Night Office and reduced the texts from the New Testament to two only (our present Epistle and Gospel). There is one exception in the Roman rite, the liturgies for the Emberweeks. These were composed at a time when there was a renewed interest in the usages and even in the precepts of the Old Law. There was also, at this time, a tendency to make use of the wealth of the Old Law liturgy. Of the four Emberweeks throughout the year, that of September furnishes us with the closest resemblance to its Old Law ancestor. (The Emberweeks of June and December are more 'New Law', since the former refers back to Pentecost and the latter looks ahead to Christmas. The Spring Emberweek liturgy was a later addition.) In our September Emberweek we use the beautiful liturgy of the first month of the Jewish year (when they celebrated the day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles). The Oriental Church shows a quite independent parallelism in its September liturgy, for the feasts of the Dedication of the Holy Sepulchre and the Finding of the Holy Cross.

(2) *The Psalmody*. The Church inherited the psalms from the Synagogue and gives them a very important place. However, as

has been already shown, the way the Church has arranged these has little to do with the old Synagogue arrangement.

(3) *The Amen*. This the Church has taken over directly from the Synagogue. Many of us do not say it as solemnly as we should. It is a Hebrew word, meaning: True. In the Synagogue the word is still used as containing, in itself, a whole profession of faith. For this reason it was introduced into the Christian Liturgy, enriched now by the solemn affirmation of our Lord who said: 'I am the Amen, the Truth' (Apoc. III, 14).

(4) *Miscellaneous Elements*. Besides those elements which the Church has borrowed directly from the Synagogue, there is an element as well of certain prayers and formulae, some of which the Jews learnt at home. These have also contributed to Christian prayers.

We said, at the beginning, that the two fundamental elements of the synagogal liturgy were the *SHEMA* or profession of faith in the Oneness of God and the *TEPHILLAH*, the prayer *par excellence* of the 18 benedictions. The *Shema* itself is not used, as such, in our liturgy, but with the surrounding psalms, it did become an element of the Eucharistic prayers, namely the *ANAPHORAE*.<sup>1</sup> In the Syriac rite, particularly, we can see the resemblance of the Anaphora to the Jewish prayer ending in the triple Sanctus. The Synagogue makes of this an acclamation of the Divine Name, of the Majesty and the Oneness of God, while the Church proclaims it in honour of the Unity in Trinity. The *Tephillah* has no exact parallel in the Christian liturgy, but it is curious to note that the substance of the old formulae (which developed into the 18 benedictions) was brought out by Jesus himself in the 'Our Father'. The rapprochement has been made several times and the seven demands of the Our Father put in two columns with the essential of the eighteen blessings for comparison. Thus the first Christians recited the Our Father, and the monks later used it as a conclusion to their office.

In the Christian Eucharistic Liturgy the Anaphora<sup>2</sup> also recalls the *Tephillah*, as it introduces the Lord's Prayer in all the Christian

1 Anaphora means 'offering'. In the Roman Liturgy it is one long prayer beginning at the dialogue of the Preface and going with interruptions (for the mementos) up to the doxology preceding the Pater Noster.

2 We have just seen that it is an heir to the *Shema*, except that it substitutes the sacramental Presence of the Word of God, incarnate in the Person of Christ, for the mysterious presence of God (the *Shekinah*) transmitted to Israel.

liturgies. In some Eastern rites, the AMEN is solemnly sung after each demand of the Pater Noster. In the Roman liturgy, however, it is only said (or sung) at the conclusion. In all these cases it is the Christian transposition of a great prayer of Israel which concludes our liturgy.

### III. *The Jewish Sources of the Eucharist*

A few months ago, a French television programme gave as an introduction to our Sunday liturgy a short telecast of the Jewish KIDDUSH.<sup>1</sup> Some Jewish friends of the organiser had consented to the taking and televising of this rite in their family. Many Catholics were deeply moved on seeing this ritual and said they now could far better understand the deep human sense of the Eucharist which our hieratic celebration tends sometimes to put in the background. This was an opportunity to introduce them to a better knowledge of the Eucharistic rite in its primitive shape: 'The first Mass at the Last Supper'. Once more we have an instance of extra synagogal prayers. The Kiddush of the Sabbath, as well as the more solemn Kiddush of the Pasch, is the remnant of a rite which was fully developed by the beginning of the Christian era, when groups of pious Jews used to meet on the eve of the Sabbath to celebrate a community meal. These rites were kept by the first Christians, especially the blessing of the cup, which is in three parts:

(a) The benediction of the Name of God, which has evolved into our Preface. As far back as the 3rd century this blessing was concluded by the Trisagion or triple 'Sanctus' which is taken from the synagogal liturgy, as has been said above.

(b) The benediction or blessing of the Work of God for His People, God being the Liberator and Redeemer of Israel, especially from the slavery of Egypt. This part is preserved in its entirety in the Byzantine rite as well as in the Syriac and Copt. In the Roman Rite, the essential is preserved, viz., the narrative of the Institution of the Eucharist followed by the anamnesis<sup>2</sup> recalling the work of salvation.

(c) The third part of the benediction is the *Prayer for Israel*: that Israel, now scattered, may be reassembled from the four corners

<sup>1</sup> Kiddush is the Jewish family meal on the eve of the Sabbath.

<sup>2</sup> Anamnesis is the prayer 'Unde et memores' which comes directly after the elevation of the Chalice.



of the earth. This used to be the blessing for the land, Eretz Israel, as the blessing of the people cannot be separated from the blessing of the land. Our liturgy gives these a Christian significance. But some of the oldest liturgies, the Egyptian for instance, have a prayer for the reassembling of the People of God. They use the image of bread, uniting all the grains of corn harvested in many different lands, and the image there is a prayer that those who partake of a 'sacramental meal' may really become the People of God. We know that we do become the People of God by receiving the Spirit which forms the Body of Christ, so that we may be filled with the Spirit of God. In the oriental rite of Jerusalem in the 4th century, there is an invocation of the Holy Spirit over the Bread and Wine in order that these may become the Body and Blood of Christ. Both Churches, East and West, keep the same traditional prayer of Israel for the People and the Land.

And this is how the heritage of the Synagogue in its richest elements was taken up, assimilated and transposed by the Christian liturgy.

A short anecdote to conclude: Last year I was in Israel on Sunday, August 7th. It was the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, and we read that morning at Mass the passage of the Gospel where our Lord announces the destruction of the Temple. In the small room in the Kibbutz where we celebrated our liturgy, I explained to the 'Rovers' this episode and its meaning, adding that this year there was a very happy coincidence of the calendar so that this 1st Sunday in August, the 9th after Pentecost, was, day for day, the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. In the afternoon we passed the Petah Tikvah Synagogue where we saw a few old men and a handful of children. The 'Haver' of the Kibbutz told us that that day religious Jews celebrated the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. I replied that we had done the same that morning, when we read the passage from the Gospel in which Jesus foretold this destruction. 'What?' he exclaimed, 'Are you, Christians, interested in an anniversary so specifically Jewish?' — 'Of course', I said, 'we take an interest in it because both anniversaries of the destruction of the Temple are essential stages of the history of the People of God. They are two dates referring to the mystery of salvation.' — 'Oh', he said, 'of course, you'll always refer to this. In the history of Israel you always pretend to see things which are not of historical interest at all.'



It is, of course, a fact that events commemorated in our liturgy have a meaning beyond the purely historical interpretation. How few Christians know that this passage of the Gospel was selected for a Sunday which oscillates roughly between the end of July and the beginning of August, and that in the year 595 (in which the ancestor of our present Missal was composed by the Pope St Gregory) as well as in 1954, this 9th Sunday after Pentecost coincided with the first Sunday in August and therefore with the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple? This can only mean that such a choice was made purposely.

If we studied attentively first our Roman liturgy which is familiar to us, then other Christian liturgies, especially the Coptic and Syriac which remain much nearer to the Aramaean and Synagogal rites, we could, no doubt, discover more and more what a wealth of prayer we have in common with the Synagogue.



### THREE SHORT HOMILIES OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

TRANSLATED BY J. F. T. PRINCE

*Of being for nothing solicitous.*

Christ teacheth that we should work for ourselves and, going without much, become content with little. Thus for Himself, He cut down even of necessities, using no beast to bear Him, but walking such distances that He became weary with His journey. Wherefore, said He: 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' and of His days and nights, too, He spent most on the mountains and in the deserts. And of Him did David foretell: 'He shall drink of the brook in the way.' So then at the Well of Sychar doth John the Evangelist shew the Lord to be careless of food, treating the matter as of little import; and thus were the disciples taught, taking with them no provisions for the road. Different indeed from us, who rising from our beds are soon calling for provisions, and with earnestness, concerning ourselves with cooks and caterers. Before, then, we turn to the ordering of