

TRADITIONS, LITURGICAL, IN THE EAST

The distinction within the ecumenical church between the churches of the East and the churches of the West is rooted in patterns of evangelization and evolution in the first six centuries of the Christian Era. As Christianity spread beyond Jerusalem to the whole Mediterranean world, four regions, in addition to Jerusalem, became major centers of Christian life: North Africa (Carthage), Rome, Antioch and Alexandria, each developing its own distinctive forms of faith and prayer.

These initial centers had varying fates. Jerusalem was destroyed in a.d. 70. The church of North Africa, where Latin Christianity was born and developed [Tertullian (d. ca. a.d. 240), Cyprian (d. a.d. 258)], was destroyed by the Moors in the 7th century, but not before exerting a major influence on the church of Rome. This latter (Rome) evolved in three stages: a primitive apostolic stage (Clement of Rome (fl. ca. a.d. 80); a developed Greek stage (Hippolytus of Rome (d. a.d. 235), and, in the fourth century, Latin Rome (usually taken to be the Roman tradition) which adopted as its own, and further evolved, the Latin Christianity of North Africa. The church of Alexandria developed for a time as the major intellectual center [Clement (d. a.d. 215), Origen (d. a.d. 253/254), Athanasius (d. a.d. 373) and Cyril (d. a.d. 444)] until the Council of Chalcedon (a.d. 451), which Alexandria rejected. Alexandria is also known for its monastic movement, which likewise had an effect on its evolving liturgical forms. The Antiochene influence was felt throughout Asia Minor with the churches of Cappadocia [Basil of Caesarea (d. a.d. 379), Gregory of Nazianz (d. a.d. 389) and Gregory of Nyssa (d. a.d. 394)] helping further to shape both theological and liturgical evolution. Finally, from the late 4th century onward, the new imperial capital at Constantinople began to emerge as yet another major Christian center, under whose influence the later Byzantine church, still Antiochene in root, would develop its own distinctive liturgical forms.

The term liturgical tradition, as it is employed here, refers to these five centers (Jerusalem, Rome, Carthage, Antioch and Alexandria), the forms of faith and prayer characteristic of each, and the forward evolution of these forms in the many churches that constitute the one church of Jesus Christ. Though there are countless instances of mutual influence, one tradition on another, it can generally be said that the Latin tradition (Carthage and, especially, Latin Rome) is the root tradition of the churches of the West, while the Syriac and Greek traditions (Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria) form the root traditions of the churches of the East.

Because of the early disappearance of the Jerusalem church, the churches to be considered here as liturgical traditions of the East are derived from either Antioch or Alexandria. The Jerusalem tradition was absorbed into certain strains of Antioch Christianity and no longer exists as an independent living liturgical tradition. Antioch gave rise to an East Syrian strain manifest in the Nestorian and Chaldean churches of Iran and Iraq and in the Malabar church in India, and a West Syrian strain which appears in several layers of evolution. In its most primitive form it shows itself in the Syrian (monophysite and Catholic) and Maronite churches of the Middle East, and in the Orthodox and Malankara churches of India. In more complex and developed form it appears in the Byzantine churches and also in the Armenian church, which has been significantly influenced by other traditions (e.g., Cappadocia and Rome) as well. The two primary manifestations of the Alexandrian tradition are the Coptic church in Egypt and, though again with a variety of secondary influences (esp. West Syrian), the national church of Ethiopia.

The primary focus here will be on these traditions as they exist in living churches today. Since sacraments in the East are treated elsewhere, the focus is further restricted to the eucharistic liturgy. The aim is to examine each of these ritual forms and uncover the distinctive theology and spirituality which they contain.

All of the churches follow the standard ritual pattern where proclamation of the word precedes and leads into the sacramental offering. It is the general Eastern custom to prepare the bread and wine for offering at the beginning of the liturgy, and it is a common understanding in the East that these gifts somehow already represent Christ even before the consecratory anaphora or eucharistic prayer. In many of the churches the ancient custom of conducting the first part of the liturgy from the bema (raised platform for the celebration of the word) and away from the altar is being restored. Except in cases where Western influence imposed otherwise, these churches generally use leavened bread and distribute the eucharistic wine by intinction, by spoon, or directly from the chalice. Some of the liturgies, notably the Byzantine and the Armenian, and to some extent the Coptic, are space dependent; others less so, or not at all.

EAST SYRIAN CHURCHES: NESTORIAN, CHALDEAN AND MALABAR

The Churches

Antioch was the original center of Syrian Christianity, with a second center developing by the end of the 2nd century in Edessa. Edessa itself became divided by early christological disputes between Monophysites (one person, one nature in Christ) and Nestorians (two persons, two natures in Christ), and soon political pressure drove the Nestorians further east into the Persian Empire.

The Nestorian church was centered at Nisibis and organized as a distinct church in the 4th century by the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Because it developed outside of the Roman Empire, it did so with a large measure of independence from what it called “the churches of the West” (i.e., everything to the west of itself). The Nestorian church preserves a very primitive layer of liturgical evolution.

These East Syrian Christians adhered to the decrees of Nicea, but not to those of Ephesus or Chalcedon, and eventually they adopted Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. a.d. 428), who was condemned by the Chalcedonian churches, as their champion theologian. From the 4th to the 7th centuries they engaged in great missionary activity throughout the East. The rise of Islam, however, put a stop to their missionary expansion, cut the mission territories (see Malabar church below) off from the mother church, and left the Nestorian church but a remnant community living peaceably, if under severe restrictions, among the Moslems. Since the 16th century some have been united to the church of Rome, these being the Catholic Chaldeans, while others remain non-Chalcedonian Nestorians.

The Malabar church, also called St. Thomas Christians because they claim Thomas the apostle as their link to the apostolic church, came under the missionary influence of the Persian Nestorians until they were cut off from them by the advance of Islam. The St. Thomas Christians were re-discovered in the 16th century by Portuguese missionaries who tried unsuccessfully to impose the Latin liturgy upon them. These missionaries did succeed, however, in heavily Latinizing the Malabar liturgy, a deed which has only recently been undone. Liturgical revisions begun in 1962 have restored the Malabar eucharist to its Syro-Chaldean form, and translated it from Syriac into modern Malayalam.

The liturgy of the Nestorian, Chaldean and Malabar churches is essentially the same. The primary anaphora (eucharistic prayer) is that of Sts. Addai and Mari, which is unique in that no words of institution are to be found in it. These words are inserted in the text by the Catholic Chaldeans and Malabarese. Two other prayers are also found in the tradition, one attributed to Nestorius and one to Theodore of Mopsuestia, though these are used only occasionally by the Nestorians and Chaldeans, and not at all by the Malabar church. These prayers do contain the institution narrative in its proper place, which makes its absence from the Addai-Mari text, in spite of great efforts to prove otherwise, most probably a simple absence rather than a reasoned omission.

The text cited to examine the East Syrian liturgical tradition as it lives today is the revised text of the Syro-Malabar church (see, *Celebration of the Eucharist according to the Syro-Malabar Rite*, Bangalore: Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1973). Differences between this and the Chaldean liturgy are noted. The major differences between the Chaldean and Nestorian liturgies are the saints who are called upon in the prayers and, of course, the insertion of the institution narrative in the Addai-Mari text.

The Liturgy

(a) Introductory Rites. The introductory rites of the liturgy are remnants of a monastic office. They consist of an abbreviated doxology (“Glory to God in the highest and to all on earth, peace and hope forever”), the Lord’s Prayer, a variable psalm and a prayer of incense, which concludes with the lakhoumara, a 4th century prayer of praise to Christ the Lord. The gifts are prepared in the Chaldean rite simply, and before the liturgy begins; in the Malabar rite the offerings are prepared during the preanaphora, after the celebrants have come to the altar. In an earlier version of both rites, the gifts were prepared more formally between the lakhoumara and the trisagion.

(b) Liturgy of the Word. The liturgy of the word begins with the trisagion (“Holy God, holy strong one, holy and immortal, have mercy on us”) and consists of two (Malabar) or four (Chaldean) readings. A homily, prayer of the faithful (Malabar), and creed conclude this part of the liturgy. An earlier version of both rites concluded with an imposition of hands and blessing of the people, and probably the dismissal of catechumens as well.

(c) Pre-anaphora. The pre-anaphora includes the “access to the altar” by the celebrant(s), transfer of the gifts (if prepared elsewhere) or their presentation and preparation.

(d) Anaphora. The anaphora or Qurbana of the Apostles (Addai and Mari) follows. The anaphora includes more than the eucharistic prayer alone. It begins with a prayer of gratitude on the part of the ministers (“... through the multitude of your mercies, you have made us worthy to be ministers of the sacred mysteries of the body and blood of your Christ ...”), the greeting of peace, the unveiling of the gifts (the veil is folded and placed around the gifts to represent the sepulchre of Christ), and the incensing of the gifts. After the customary dialogue, the eucharistic prayer gives thanks to God for creation, leads into the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and continues in thanksgiving for the incarnation and redemption. At this point the narrative of institution is inserted.

There follows the prayer of remembrance (anamnesis), prayers of intercession (it is characteristic of the East-Syrian tradition to locate the intercessions here), the invocation of the Spirit (epiclesis) and the concluding doxology.

(e) Post-anaphora. At the conclusion of the anaphora, priest and people proclaim faith in the living and life-giving bread of heaven. The bread is broken and signed with the precious blood. The people are invited to “approach the mysteries of the precious body and blood of our savior” with an invitation as well to “turn away from our faults.” A litany prayer for forgiveness and the Lord’s prayer (a second time) lead into the distribution of communion to all. This is followed by a brief thanksgiving prayer, blessing and dismissal.

Theology and Spirit

The over-all tone of the Syro-Chaldean liturgy is one of glory and praise to God. This doxological note is set at the very beginning with the “Glory to God” and the Lord’s Prayer. It continues in the prayer that concludes the psalm (“For all the helps and graces you have given us, for which we cannot thank you enough, we will praise and glorify you unceasingly in your triumphant church forever”) and in the lakhoumara (“You, Jesus Christ, we glorify; you are the one who raises our bodies and you are the savior of our souls”). After the trisagion, and before the first reading, the presiding priest prays “that love and hope may grow in us, that we may find salvation, and praise you forever.” Before the gospel: “O Christ, Light of the world and Life of all, glory forever to the eternal Mercy that sent you to us.” In coming to the altar, the priests pray: “We give you thanks, our Father, Lord of heaven and earth, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for though we are sinners, you have made us worthy by your grace to offer you these holy, glorious, life-giving and divine mysteries” A prayer of praise introduces the greeting of peace (“We offer you praise and honor, worship and thanksgiving now and always and forever”), and again the fraction rite (“Glory be to your name, O Lord Jesus Christ, and worship to your Majesty forever”). Finally, the concluding prayers and blessing continue this theme to the end: “It is our duty, O Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to offer always to your most Blessed Trinity praise and honor, worship and perpetual thanksgiving” and “Let us sing the praises of Christ who has nourished us with his body and blood.”

The liturgy is heavily christocentric. While many of the prayers are addressed to the triune God or simply to the Father, many more are addressed directly to Christ himself. Even within the anaphora, a prayer most often addressed exclusively to the Father, the section on redemption is addressed to Christ.

The East Syrian liturgy is a remembrance that looks forward to the eschaton rather than to the past (the Lord’s Supper) or present (this eucharistic offering or the heavenly mysteries as they are now being enacted). This is captured most forcefully in the epiclesis of the Addai-Mari anaphora: “let your Holy Spirit come and rest upon this oblation of your servants; may he bless it and sanctify it that it may be unto the pardon of our offenses and forgiveness of our sins, and for the hope of resurrection and for the new life with the just in the kingdom of heaven.”

Finally, the East Syrian liturgy exhibits a theological note derived from Theodore of Mopsuestia who considered the bread and wine, once placed upon the altar and before the invocation of the Spirit, to represent Christ in the tomb, with the epiclesis itself signifying the resurrection. Once the gifts are prepared, the veil is folded around them “as a sepulchre” and is not removed until after the epiclesis.

The Addai-Mari anaphora has several distinctive marks. In addition to being in part addressed to Christ, the intercessions are placed between the anamnesis and epiclesis, and therefore form part of the offering itself. The anamnesis is untypical in that, while it does commemorate the “passion, death, burial and resurrection” (no mention is made in the anamnesis of the future coming of Christ), it does not lead into the offering of the gifts, but only to the more general offering of “praise and honor, worship and thanksgiving.” Finally, the institution narrative, where it is inserted by the Catholic Chaldeans and Malabarese, is in fact a somewhat awkward fit; most probably the original text served as a perfectly adequate eucharistic prayer without it. If so, it bears witness to a primitive strain of eucharistic understanding that was lost to other liturgical traditions.

WEST SYRIAN CHURCHES: SYRIAN, MARONITE, SYRO-INDIAN

The Churches

The churches which follow the primitive West Syrian tradition are the primary heirs to the tradition of Jerusalem. Though these churches employ many anaphoral texts, the oldest and most treasured among them is that attributed to St. James, “the brother of the Lord.” The three churches, Syrian, Maronite and Syro-Indian, need to be identified separately.

In the wake of the Council of Chalcedon, the West Syrian church of Antioch was divided between those who accepted the council’s decrees and those who tended toward Monophysitism. The former, considered not only orthodox Catholics but also loyal subjects of the emperor, came to be called Melchites (also, Melkites; Heb. melek, king, monarch, emperor); the latter, organized by the monk Jacob Baradai, came to be called Jacobites. In the centuries that followed, the Melchites came “more and more under the ecclesiastical domination of Constantinople, and by the end of the 13th century they had abandoned their own liturgies to the Monophysites and adopted that of imperial Byzantium” (see, *The Christian Churches of the East*, Vol. 1, Donald Attwater, p. 55). The Syrian church was in effect the Syro-Jacobite church. In the 17th century, some of these sought union with Rome, and since that time there have been Syrian Catholics as well as Syrian Jacobites. It is questionable just how strongly monophysite these Jacobites are; the preferred term for them is non-Chalcedonian Syrians.

The Syro-Jacobite tradition came to the Malabar region of India as a result of resistance to the Portuguese missionaries who, as noted above, tried first to Latinize the St. Thomas Christians, but succeeded only in Latinizing their East Syrian liturgy. Some who resisted sought support from the West Syrian Jacobites, and these West Syrian Orthodox Christians continue to flourish today. In 1934, some of these sought union with Rome, thus forming the Syro-Malankara Catholic church.

The history of the Maronites is transmitted more by legend than by established fact. Legend has it that a 5th century monk, Maron, founded a monastery in Syria and supported the positions taken at Chalcedon. Threat of persecution drove these “Catholic” monks to the mountains of Lebanon where, in the 7th century, under their first patriarch John Maron, the monastery of Maron became the Maronite church. Legend further has it that these Maronites were from their beginning loyal to the see of Rome and in communion with it. Available facts paint a much less precise picture, and suggest a probable Jacobite origin to this corporate entity that emerged only in the 8th century as a distinct Maronite church (Moosa).

Over the centuries, the Maronite liturgy was heavily Latinized. In a post-Vatican II revision, it has been restored to its primitive West Syrian form. The text cited to examine the West Syrian liturgical tradition as it lives today is this revised Maronite text (see, *The Maronite Liturgical Year*, Diocese of St. Maron, USA, 1982).

The Liturgy

(a) Introductory rites. The liturgy begins with a hymn sung during the entrance of the ministers and the preparation of the gifts. This latter is done simply at a side table. The introductory rites and service of the word are conducted at the bema. The opening doxology and prayer are followed by a general greeting of peace (“Peace be with the church and her children”), which is followed in turn by a seasonal psalm. The rites conclude with the Hoosoyo, a penitential prayer of incense, which is unique to the West Syrian tradition. It consists of a proemium or introduction, which invites the assembly to “praise, glorify and honor the Lord,” the sedro, which is a rich, seasonal instruction as well as a prayer, a psalm to be sung or recited by the assembly, and the etro, or conclusion, asking the Lord to “be pleased with our service of incense.”

(b) Liturgy of the Word. The service of the Word begins with the trisagion, chanted in Aramaic, and the mazmooro, a psalm chanted by the assembly and priest. One or two readings precede the gospel, which is introduced by the characteristic “Let us be attentive to the gospel of life and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded by” A brief seasonal response of the assembly, the korozooto, the homily and the creed conclude the service of the word.

(c) Pre-anaphora. The service of the Mysteries begins with the pre-anaphora, which consists of the prayer of access to the altar (“I have entered your house, O God, and I have worshipped in your temple. O King of glory forgive all my sins”), the transfer of the offerings to the altar, the prayer of offering, and an incensation of offerings, altar, cross and assembly.

(d) Anaphora. As in the East Syrian liturgy, the anaphora includes more than the eucharistic prayer itself. Strictly speaking, the term refers to the whole second part of the liturgy, right through its concluding prayer and blessing. It begins with the rite of peace, in which the “peace” is sent from the altar (which represents Christ) to the whole congregation. The eucharistic prayer follows the typical West Syrian structure: dialogue; thanksgiving narrative which includes the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and the narrative of institution; anamnesis; epiclesis; intercessions and final doxology. Even where the liturgy as a whole is celebrated in a local vernacular, it is customary, at least among the Maronites, to chant the institution words in Aramaic: not only the “words of Jesus” but the language of Jesus as well.

The bread is broken and signed with the precious blood. The Lord’s prayer follows. A brief penitential rite (priest touching the consecrated offerings with one hand, extending the other over the congregation and praying for forgiveness) leads into the invitation to communion (“Holy things for the holy, with perfection, purity and sanctity”). Communion is distributed by intinction.

(e) Concluding prayers. The conclusion of the rite is simple: a prayer of thanksgiving and final blessing. The last prayer is a “farewell” to the altar: “Remain in peace, O altar of God, and I hope to return to you in peace”

Theology and Spirit

The dominant theme running through the West Syrian liturgy is that of anticipation. The eucharist is celebrated in expectation of the Lord’s second coming. While the liturgical texts are generous in singing the glory of the Lord, it is a glory that is yearned for rather than already present in its fullness. The eucharist is at one and the same time *rabouno*, a pledge of the glory to come, and *zouodo*, a viaticum which transforms us into citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

The typical prayer ending is both forward-looking and optimistic. Three examples: (a) “Then we will praise you, your only Son, and your living Holy Spirit, now and forever” (rite of peace, Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles); (b) “Make us worthy to live by your Spirit, leading a pure life, and we shall praise you, now and forever” (epiclesis, Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles); (c) “We will glorify your Father who sent you for our salvation and your Holy Spirit, now and forever” (rite of incense, First Sunday of Epiphany). This ending reveals a subtle nuance, namely, a sense of confident hope in the future that is anticipated.

The anamnesis in the eucharistic prayers is also typically a prayer that “looks forward.” Even where the note of “offering” is included as well, it remains secondary to the expectation and anticipation. This prayer combines both the pledge of glory to come and the purification that transformation into God’s kingdom requires. “We remember, O Lover of all, your plan of salvation, and we ask you to have compassion on your faithful. Save us, your inheritance, when you shall come again to reward justly everyone according to his or her deeds” (Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles).

The Hoosoyo, the offering of incense for purification, always begins, in some form or other, “May we be worthy to praise, confess, and glorify the Lord who ...,” where a seasonal reference follows the word “who.” It is a prayer for purification, but it is not a self-conscious prayer that focuses on the sinfulness of those who pray. The emphasis is rather on the deeds of God recounted in narrative form and on the confidence with which we approach, even while the sense of unworthiness is strongly stated. Again, the conclusion anticipates the requested action of God which allows us (will allow us) to give God praise and glory.

As with the East Syrian liturgy, the West Syrian eucharist is strongly christocentric. Christ is addressed in prayer. After the institution narrative in the eucharistic prayers, Christ is first prayed to (“We commemorate your death, O Lord. We confess your resurrection. We await your coming”) and then asked in turn to pray with the church to the Father (“Your people beseech you, and through you and with you, the Father, saying ...”—the prayer returns to direct address of the Father). The greeting of peace is given to all present from the altar which represents Christ. At the prayer of forgiveness before communion the priest places one hand on the consecrated bread and wine while praying blessing on the assembly: “Bestow your blessings upon your people who love you and await your mercy” (Anaphora of St. James); “O Lord, with the strength of your powerful right hand, come now to bless your servants who bow before you” (Anaphora of St. John the Evangelist).

The liturgy moves comfortably between the awesome language of mystery and the harsh realities of everyday life. This is nicely illustrated in the peace prayer of the Anaphora of St. James: “O Lover of all people, through your redemption, free us from personal bias and hypocrisy, that we may greet each other in peace. Then, united in a unique bond of love and harmony by our Lord Jesus Christ we will glorify and praise you and your living Spirit, now and forever.”

The West Syrian liturgy captures the full scope of eschatological prayer. It is optimistic, prayed in hope against the horizon of a victory already achieved. Yet it is realistic, prayed in the face of ample evidence that the victory has not yet unfolded in its fullness in human life and human history. Finally, though it is indeed forward-looking in anticipation and yearning, it is nonetheless a prayer that recognizes the importance of the present. The eschaton is even now unfolding in the lives of those who pray. The announcement of the victory at one and the same time (a) proclaims a victory achieved, (b) unveils the historical incompleteness of that achievement, and (c) purifies those who yearn for the victory proclaimed.

THE BYZANTINE CHURCHES

The Churches

The family of churches that follow the Byzantine rite is comprised of three groups: those directly linked to the see of Constantinople, those historically evangelized from the church of Constantinople, particularly Russia and the slavic countries, and the contemporary national churches (e.g., Orthodox Church in America, with links to the church of Moscow) which likewise claim the title Orthodox. Catholic Byzantine churches (in union with Rome) include Melkites (see above), Ukrainians, Russian Catholics and Ruthenians. Apart from very slight differences, both Orthodox and Catholics follow essentially the same liturgical rites. For the eucharist three ritual forms are used: most commonly, that attributed to St. John Chrysostom; occasionally, that attributed to St. Basil of Caesarea (Cappadocia), and on some days during Lent a liturgy of the presanctified attributed to Gregory the Great. The liturgical texts cited here are from *The Byzantine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (New York: Fordham University Russian Center, 1955).

The Liturgy

The Byzantine liturgy is a complex ritual form that evolved in several stages from the 6th to the 14th centuries. Structurally it has the form of two interwoven liturgies, that which is prayed in the sanctuary (Holy of Holies) by the bishop and priest concelebrants, with the assistance of the deacon, and that conducted by deacon with assembly in front of the icon screen. A third layer of prayers consists of private prayers of the priest who prays in support of the action of the deacon and the assembly. The icon screen, and indeed the iconic display throughout the church, are integral to the liturgical act. They provide a visual focus for contemplative prayer which itself is aided by the abundant mantra-style litanies which form the heart of the deacon-assembly liturgical act. There are some churches where a deacon is not regularly employed, though this obscures the structure and flow of the liturgy itself. The liturgy is an evolution of the West Syrian Antiochene tradition.

(a) **Introductory Rites.** Two elaborate rites introduce the Byzantine liturgy: the *proskomidia* (preparation of gifts) and a collection of litanies, hymns and prayers that are remnants of a liturgical office. The *proskomidia* is conducted by the priest and his assistants at a small table in the sanctuary; the three litanies are introduced and concluded by the priest and led by the deacon with the assembly or the choir providing the antiphons and hymns.

The primary focus of the proskomidia is the round loaf of leavened bread bearing the letters ic xc ni ka (“Jesus Christ conquers”). The center square is cut and placed on the paten to represent Christ. From the rest, particles are cut and arranged in rows to honor Mary, the angels, the apostles and the saints, and to commemorate the living and the dead. A particle is added for the priest himself. This whole represents the church: Christ, the Lamb, at the center gathering the church in heaven and the church on earth into one. The gifts are covered (the bread covered with the asterisk or “star of Bethlehem”), offered, and revered with incense. The sanctuary, the icon screen, the church and the assembly are honored with incense as well.

The second introductory rite begins the public prayer. It is introduced by the priest (“Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever and ever”) and consists of a long litany, with a prayer and antiphon, and two shorter litanies, also with prayer and antiphon. The hymn of the incarnation (“O only-begotten Son and Word of God ...”) is sung after the second antiphon.

(b) The Liturgy of the Word. The liturgy of the Word once began with the entrance of the bishop. This is now the Little Entrance, with the gospel book representing Christ carried in solemn procession (“O come, let us worship and bow down to Christ. Save us, O Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You. Alleluia”). Two seasonal hymns, the troparion and kontakion, and the trisagion precede the scripture readings. After the epistle and gospel, the prayer of intercession (the insistent litany) and prayer for, and dismissal of, the catechumens bring the liturgy of the word to a close.

(c) Pre-anaphora. The pre-anaphora begins with a prayer of access to the altar (“We thank You, O Lord, Almighty God, for having allowed us to stand here now before Your holy altar ...”). This leads into the litany prayer of the faithful and the transfer of the gifts. Known as “the Great Entrance,” the transfer of the gifts is made in solemn procession while the choir sings the Cherubic Hymn (“Let us who here mystically represent the Cherubim in singing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, now lay aside every earthly care so that we may welcome the King of the universe who comes escorted by invisible armies of angels”). The hymn is stopped halfway through so that the commemorations of the day may be announced. The gifts are placed on the altar and incensed, the priest prays the offering while the deacon and assembly sing the litany of offering.

(d) Anaphora. The greeting of peace and the creed precede the eucharistic prayer proper. This latter, though more elaborate, follows the standard West Syrian structure: narrative of thanksgiving, including the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and narrative of institution; anamnesis (“Remembering ... we offer”); epiclesis for consecration (“... and make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ, and that which is in this chalice the precious Blood of Your Christ, having changed them by the Holy Spirit”); the commemorations and the final doxology.

The preparation for communion consists of: a litany of supplication, the Lord's Prayer, a blessing of the assembly, the presentation of the eucharist to the people ("Holy things for the Holy"), and a prayer of personal faith ("I believe, Lord, and profess that You are in truth the Christ ..."). Communion is distributed with a spoon or, in some churches where wafers are used, by intinction.

(e) Concluding Prayers. The liturgy concludes with a thanksgiving, dismissal and blessing. There are additional prayers as well, and frequently the eucharist is immediately followed by one of the liturgical hours or other prayers. The liturgy thus concludes slowly and in stages.

Theology and Spirit

The theology and spirit of the Byzantine liturgy is as complex as its ritual form. Indeed the two evolved together, with perhaps a greater influence on each other than in any other liturgical tradition. It does have a single, strong theme: the presence of Christ. This presence, however, has many forms and many manifestations. It is at one and the same time the presence of Christ in the liturgical action and the presence of the liturgical assembly with Christ to the heavenly liturgy which is eternally enacted. The liturgical forms reveal this presence; so too does the iconic design of the liturgical space in which the liturgy unfolds.

Some sense of the evolution of this liturgy is required to understand its complex theology and spirit. Hans-Joachim Schulz (*The Byzantine Liturgy*) traces its successive stages from the time of John Chrysostom (a.d. 344–407) and Theodore of Mopsuestia to its 14th-century codification.

Chrysostom spoke of the liturgy as mystery, whereby heavenly realities are made manifest in human form. Theodore focused on the individual rites as imaging different aspects of the saving work of Christ (e.g., gifts on altar representing Christ in the tomb; epiclesis as the resurrection). Special attention was given to Christ as "high priest," understood less in terms of "interceding" and more as "seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."

This theological (mystagogical) reading of the liturgical actions took a turn to the spiritual in Dionysius the Areopagite (6th cent.), who "became the model for later Byzantine explicators" (Schulz, p. 25). Liturgical forms do indeed mediate salvation, but they do so by unveiling a spiritual process which unfolds in a higher sphere. It is the reverse of Theodore's stress on the actual liturgical forms making "present" Christ's saving work.

Under Maximus the Confessor (d. a.d. 662) the church structure itself became “liturgical.” With the Hagia Sophia set as norm, the church building was envisioned as an image of the cosmos: two spheres, the earthly (the nave) and the heavenly (the sanctuary), not separated by, but bridged by the iconostasis. After the iconoclast controversy (8th cent.), and the vindication of reverence to icons (Nicea ii, a.d. 787), decoration of the icon screen and the church itself became part of the liturgical act. Schulz says of this middle Byzantine development: “In this decorative use of images the Byzantine church structure shows itself to be what it had to be according to Dionysius’ vision of the world and what Maximus actually saw it as being: a copy of the cosmos that comprises heaven and earth, a cosmos ordered to Christ and filled with a cosmic liturgy. By reason of the images that adorn it the church itself henceforth becomes a liturgy, as it were, because it depicts the liturgico-sacramental presence of Christ, the angels, and the saints, and by depicting it shares in bringing it about. The iconography of the church also shows it to be the place in which the mysteries of the life of Christ are made present” (p. 51).

The Byzantine liturgy exhibits this dual focus. The life-of-Jesus symbolism gives shape to the *proskomidia* which is interpreted as the birth, infancy and hidden life of Christ. It shows itself as the gifts are placed on the altar (“The venerable Joseph took down from the cross Your immaculate Body, and wrapping it in a clean shroud with sweet spices, he carefully laid it in a new grave”) and at the *epiclesis* (“O Lord, who sent Your most Holy Spirit upon Your Apostles at the third hour, do not, O gracious One, take him away from us, but renew us who pray to You”). The heavenly liturgy symbolism is expressed in the Great Entrance, with its Cherubic hymn, and the prayer at the Little Entrance (“O holy God, who rests among the saints, whose praises are sung by the Seraphim with the hymn of the Trisagion, who are glorified by the Cherubim and adored by all the powers of heaven ...”). Both are integral to the iconic design of the liturgical space where, on the one hand, the *Christos Pantokrator*, set majestically in the dome, looks down over all, and, on the other hand, the biblical events of Jesus’ life are set out in rich, visual display.

In several places, the Byzantine liturgy reveals itself as a public statement of Christian doctrine. The Hymn of the Incarnation (“O only-begotten Son and Word of God, though You are immortal, You condescended for our salvation to take flesh from the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary”) was introduced in the 6th century as a proclamation of orthodox faith against the Nestorians (see above). The wording of the *epiclesis* (“... having changed them by Your Holy Spirit”) is a clear affirmation of the role of the Spirit as consecrator of the bread and wine, in contrast to the Western belief that it is Jesus’ own words, rather than the *epiclesis*, that effect the consecration.

The liturgy conducted, mostly in silent prayer, by the bishop and priest concelebrants in the sanctuary is, by and large, the West Syrian liturgy as described above. This liturgy is hidden from the assembly in silence, and occasionally by a drawn veil. The priest and his actions are part of the visual, iconic display. The deacon is the primary link between these actions and the assembly, assisting the priest, announcing what is taking place, and leading the assembly in an appropriate litany prayer (e.g., during the offering: “For the precious gifts that are offered, let us pray to the Lord”; after the eucharistic prayer: “For the precious gifts that are offered and consecrated, let us pray to the Lord”). The experience of the assembly is not shaped by the intrinsic meaning of the various liturgical actions, but rather, as an aesthetico-religious contemplative experience, by the sensual environment composed of music, iconography, incense, and the various bodily movements (bows, signing oneself with the cross, kissing of icons, etc.) that are assigned to them. By entering into the assembly, they enter into a cosmos ruled by God and filled with mystery, and are transported to that realm where the heavenly liturgy is eternally unfolding.

THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

The Church

The church of Armenia was evangelized from Edessa, and later by missionaries from Cappadocia. Its early liturgy was thus both Syrian and Greek. Its evolution as the Armenian church, with its own distinctive liturgy, is due to Gregory the Illuminator, a late 3rd/early 4th century aristocrat who was converted to Christianity in Caesarea (Cappadocia), and who returned to Armenia to convert the king (Trdat II) who had been, up to then, persecuting the Christians. As a result, Christianity became the state religion in a.d. 301, and Gregory became the leader (Catholicos) of the Armenian Church.

Gregory is not acclaimed as the “apostle of Armenia.” The legends which recount the origin of Christianity in Armenia attribute this to Jude Thaddaeus and Bartholomew. The Armenians thus claim apostolic roots. Gregory’s accomplishment was the conversion of the whole country and the establishment of the Armenian church.

Under Gregory, the church was more aristocratic than popular; the people had no access to the liturgy which was in Syriac and in Greek—revisions came only in the 5th century. These involved the creation of an Armenian alphabet and the translation of both scripture and the liturgy into Armenian. The Armenian liturgy is certainly Antiochene in its roots, but, apparently for political reasons, the Armenian church sided with Alexandria after the Council of Chalcedon. Hence it only recognizes the first three councils. Today there are Armenian Catholics in union with Rome, and Armenians who remain an independent church. The preferred title for these latter is the Armenian Apostolic church.

The liturgy of the Armenian church, called “The Liturgy of our Blessed Father Saint Gregory the Illuminator, revised and augmented by the Holy Patriarchs and Doctors, Sahag, Mesrob, Kud and John Mandakuni,” is, as noted, rooted in the Antiochene tradition. Its evolution, however, reveals the influence of many sources: Coptic, Byzantine, and later (12th cent.) Latin. There is a sub-stratum of the Syrian liturgy of James, which may have come via the liturgy of Basil (in use in Cappadocia). It was later embellished with texts from the Chrysostom (Byzantine) and Latin liturgies. It is not therefore simply an evolution of the Syrian/Antiochene tradition. Nonetheless it remains Syrian at its deepest level. The texts cited here are from *The Armenian Liturgy* (tr. into English, Venice: Monastery of St. Lazarus, 1862).

The Liturgy

(a) Introductory Rites. The introductory rites consist of the vesting of the ministers in the sacristy, the entrance and absolution of the officiating priest, and the preparation of the gifts. The first two are carried out in rich ceremonial; the last is done without the elaborate ritual of the Byzantine *proskomidia*. When prepared and veiled, the gifts are honored with incense. Most significant in these rites is the focus on the priest.

(b) Liturgy of the Word. The liturgy of the Word originally began with the chanting of the trisagion. It was later embellished with texts from the Byzantine liturgy. It begins now with the blessing (“Blessed be the reign of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ...”), the Monogenes of the Byzantine liturgy (“O only-begotten Son and Word of God ...”), which may be replaced with a seasonal hymn, a blessing, and four prayers recited by the priest while the choir sings the psalm and hymn of the day. These four prayers are the three antiphon prayers from the Byzantine introductory rites and the prayer of the Byzantine Little Entrance.

The trisagion is then sung, while the priest prays the Byzantine prayer of the trisagion. This is followed by a litany, the epistle and gospel reading, the creed (to which is appended an anti-Arian anathema), another litany and blessing, and the dismissal of the catechumens.

(c) Pre-anaphora. The pre-anaphora begins with a proclamation (“The Body of our Lord, and the Blood of our Redeemer are about to be here present ...”). There follows the hagiology of the day (a seasonal catethesis), while the celebrant, if a bishop, removes the vestments of honor; or, if a priest, removes his cap. The gifts are transferred to the altar while the choir sings the Cherubic hymn and the priest prays the corresponding Byzantine prayer “humbled before the altar.” The gifts are incensed, the deacon exhorts the assembly (“With faith and holiness, let us pray before the holy altar of God, filled with profound dread ...”), and the priest prays the prayer of oblation.

(d) Anaphora. The anaphora proper begins with a benediction and peace greeting. The deacon kisses the altar and the arms (*sic*) of the priest, and then brings the greeting to the others. The eucharistic prayer, after the customary dialogue, again follows the classic West Syrian structure: thanksgiving narrative for creation and redemption, including the “Holy, holy,” and leading into the institution account, anamnesis, epiclesis, intercessions and doxology. This prayer is interspersed with other prayers, blessings, greetings and gestures (incense, signing with cross, etc.), and it includes seasonal commemorations as well.

(e) Post-anaphora. The Lord's Prayer and incensing of the people begins the communion or post-anaphora. This is followed by a prayer of penitence addressed to the Holy Spirit. The gifts are presented to the people in rather elaborate fashion: a trinitarian benediction oft repeated by deacon, choir and people. The priest then invites all to communion: "Let us partake holily of the holy, holy and precious Body and Blood of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, who, descended from Heaven, is distributed among us. He is life, the hope of the resurrection, the expiation and pardon of sins. Sing to the Lord our God" This last part is echoed by the deacon. Then, with curtain drawn, the priest prepares to take communion with a series of prayers and gestures, the longest prayer being that of John Chrysostom ("I give Thee thanks, I exalt Thee, I glorify Thee, O Lord my God, Thou hast rendered me worthy on this day to partake of Thy Divine and fearful Sacrament ...").

After communion of the faithful, the priest blesses all ("Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance ..."). The bishop, if presiding, puts on his episcopal robes. There are prayers of thanksgiving, a prayer for a blessing, the prologue of John read as the "last gospel," a prayer for peace, and the final blessing. As is customary among the Byzantines, the Armenians too distribute blessed bread as the people leave.

Theology and Spirit

The tone of the Armenian liturgy is that of a "temple" liturgy, and throughout the text it stresses the notion of sacrifice more than any other Eastern liturgy.

References to the temple are clear and abundant. The hymn sung during the vesting proclaims that "holiness becomes Thy dwelling, since Thou alone art enveloped in splendor." After the confession and absolution of the priest, he prays: "Within the precincts of this temple ... we adore with trembling." And again: "In the Tabernacle of holiness, and in the place of praise ... we adore with trembling." During the preparation of the offerings, the priest incenses and prays: "In the Lord's temple, open to our offerings and our vows, united as we are to accomplish in obedience and in prayer the mystery of this approaching and august sacrifice, let us together march in triumph round the tribune of the holy temple" And he is clearly a temple priest who prays: "Thou hast confided to us the Priesthood for this holy ministry and for Thine unbloody Sacrifice."

References to the sacrifice are likewise clear and abundant. A prayer during the vesting reads: "Full of fear and awe we approach Thee, to offer the Sacrifice due to Thine Omnipotence." The deacon proclaims just before the eucharistic prayer: "Christ, the Immaculate Lamb of God, offers Himself as victim." The intercessions of the same prayer are introduced by: "Grant by virtue of this Sacrifice ..."; and a thanksgiving prayer chanted by the deacon mentions sacrifice no less than four times.

The way the liturgy views the priest is consistent with both temple and sacrifice. In contrast to the Byzantine *proskomidia*, with its elaborate focus on the bread and wine as Christ, the Armenian introductory rites come to focus much more strongly on the priest. He confesses his sins (“I confess in the presence of God ... all the sins I have committed”) and receives absolution (“May the all-powerful God have mercy on you, and grant you the pardon of all your sins ...”) before going ahead with his service. Prayers of purification are numerous.

In addition, the texts of the liturgy put a strong accent on the majesty of God. They are more than generous in speaking of God as profound, incomprehensible, boundless, infinite, inscrutable, etc., and thus worthy of glory, power, worship, honor, praise.

Finally, note should be made of the place of the Holy Spirit in the Armenian liturgy. While it is common in both East and West to address the Spirit in the mode of invocation (*epiclesis*, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*), the Armenian text addresses the Spirit in other forms of prayer as well. To give but one example, the blessing after the Lord’s prayer: “O Holy Spirit! Thou who art the source of life and of mercy, have pity on this people who, kneeling, adores Thy Divinity ...,” with its adjoining doxology: “Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, as to Thee, O Holy Spirit, and to the Almighty Father, belong glory”

THE ALEXANDRIAN CHURCHES: COPTIC AND ETHIOPIAN

The Churches

Legend has it that Christianity spread to Egypt at the hands of St. Mark, and to Ethiopia via the eunuch of Candace (Acts 8:26–40). The legends concerning Mark attribute to him the complete shaping of the church in Alexandria: he was bishop and first patriarch, ordained deacons, presbyters and other bishops, and in general was responsible for establishing the church order that was in fact a much later development (see, Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*). With regard to Egypt it is more likely that, because of the commerce between Jerusalem and Alexandria, the path of Christianity’s spread was much less precise. As for Ethiopia, it is not until the 4th century, under Frumentius and Aedesius of Tyre, that any authentic evangelization is recorded (see, Attwater, *The Christian Churches of the East*, Vol. 1, p. 138), with more serious evangelization coming still later at the hands of Monophysite monks from Syria.

In the 6th century, however, the Coptic church was given missionary responsibility for Ethiopia, and the church there came under the jurisdiction of the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria, a dependency that has begun to dissolve only in the 20th century. As a result of this dependency, and although the Ethiopian church had other influences as well, and indeed does have its own particular liturgical “flavor,” the two can be taken to constitute a single liturgical tradition. This tradition is Alexandrian in its theological outlook, dominantly Monophysite in its Christology, and in many ways it is the polar opposite of the traditions rooted in Antioch.

The Coptic liturgy is austere, and quite evidently the product of monastic origins. Among the Ethiopians the liturgy is far more colorful, with dance, elaborate costume and a far more vibrant musical setting. Textually, however, the two liturgies are similar. The Coptic text cited here is from *The Coptic Morning Service for the Lord’s Day* (trans. John Patrick Crichton Stuart, London: Cope and Fenwick, 1908); the Ethiopian text, which has been modified and somewhat simplified, is taken from *The Ordinary and the Anaphora of the Apostles* (ed. T. Baraki, Washington, dc, 1984).

The Liturgy—Coptic

The Coptic liturgy employs three anaphoras: that of St. Basil, used on all occasions save four; that of St. Gregory, used at midnight at Christmas, Epiphany and Easter, and addressed directly to Christ; and the oldest Egyptian prayer, attributed to St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. a.d. 444) (also called the anaphora of St. Mark), used on the Friday before Palm Sunday. In the sanctuary of Coptic churches one finds three altars to allow multiple celebrations of the eucharist (Coptic custom allows only one eucharist on an altar per day). The Sunday liturgy is frequently preceded by the morning prayer of incense, parts of which are prefixed to the eucharist when the full morning prayer is omitted.

(a) Introductory Rites. The introductory rites consist of the morning office (whole or in part, as noted above), the preparation of the altar and the preparation of the offerings. The preparation of the altar consists of two prayers, both of which are prayers for the priest in his ministry. The preparation of the offerings is quite elaborate, involving the selection of the bread and wine for the eucharist, multiple blessings of the triune God, frequent processions around the altar, blessing the four corners of the earth with the hand cross, a prayer of thanksgiving, which leads into a prayer of oblation (an anaphora style prayer) addressed to Christ who is asked to “cause Thy face to shine upon this bread and upon this cup, which we have set upon this Thine holy table, bless them, sanctify them, hallow and change them, that this bread may become indeed Thine own holy Body and the mingled wine and water which is in this cup may become indeed Thine own Honourable Blood, that they may be unto us all help and healing and health for our souls, and our bodies, and our spirits.”

There follows a prayer of absolution (addressed to Christ) in which Christ is asked to “bless us, purify us, absolve us, and absolve all Thy people.” Incense is prepared (“The censer of gold is the Virgin; her sweet cloud is our Saviour; she hath borne him; he saved us; may he forgive our sins”) and offered. The altar is revered, with multiple processions around it, the priest stopping to kiss the four corners of the altar during each, and the “first anaphora” concludes with petitions and doxology (“Through whom (Christ) are due unto Thee (Father), with himself, and the Holy Ghost, the Life-giver, who is of one substance with Thee, glory, and honor, and power, and worship, now and ever, and to the ages of all ages. Amen”). This doxology concludes the introductory rites as well.

(b) Liturgy of the Word. There is in fact no clear transition to the liturgy of the word. After the doxology, the priest incenses the altar three times, each time with an appropriate prayer (1. “We adore Thee, O Christ, and Thy good Father, and the Holy Ghost”; 2. “Before the angels will I sing praise unto Thee, and will worship toward Thine holy temple”; 3. “As for me, I will enter into Thine house, in the multitude of Thy mercies, and will worship toward Thine holy temple”). The picture of Mary is likewise incensed (“Hail to thee, Mary, the fair dove, which hath borne for us God the Word ...”); so too are the other images. The service of readings then begins.

The Coptic liturgy employs three readings before the gospel itself: from the letters of Paul, from the catholic epistles, and from the Acts of the Apostles. Attached to each is a lengthy prayer. Between these readings and the gospel there are a series of petitions, accompanied by additional reverences to (processions around) the altar, an offering of incense on behalf of the people and the trisagion. After the gospel, which is greeted in a solemn and elaborate procession, the priest prays the gospel prayer (“... may we be made worthy to hear Thine holy gospels, and may we keep Thy precepts and commandments ...”). Catechumens may have been dismissed at this point.

(c) Pre-anaphora. A prayer is prayed privately by the priest as he approaches the altar (Prayer of the Veil). The priest then introduces the intercessions which are each led by the deacon (response of the people: “Lord, have mercy”) and augmented by the priest. The ministers, the people and the altar are incensed and all proclaim the Nicene Creed.

(d) Anaphora. As in the other Eastern liturgies we have seen, the greeting of peace precedes the eucharistic prayer. The eucharistic prayer of Basil is West Syrian in its structure: thanksgiving narrative, which includes the “Holy, holy” and the Supper narrative, anamnesis, epiclesis, intercessions and doxology. The institution narrative is interspersed with frequent acclamations of the people (“Amen”), as is the epiclesis (“Amen” and “I believe”). The intercessions, which include a reading of the diptychs of the dead, are quite lengthy.

(e) Post-anaphora. The prayer of fraction, which precedes the Lord's Prayer, includes acclamations of faith in the presence of Christ and acts of adoration. The Lord's prayer is followed by several prayers of remembrance and one of absolution (addressed to the Father). The gifts are presented ("The Holy to the Holy"), and after a further series of preparation prayers, including an additional proclamation of faith ("I believe, I believe, I believe and confess till the last breath that this is the life-giving Flesh which Thine only begotten Son, our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ took from our Lady, the Lady of us all, the holy Mother of God, the holy Mary ..."), communion is distributed. The liturgy concludes with a prayer, blessing and dismissal.

The Liturgy—Ethiopian

The Ethiopian tradition knows of at least 22 eucharistic prayers, unique among which is one addressed in part to the Virgin Mary. The most commonly used, however, is the anaphora "of the Apostles," which is in fact an Alexandrian derivation from the prayer of Hippolytus (3rd-cent. Rome), and a variant on the Coptic anaphora of St. Cyril. The liturgical language is Ge'ez, though it is usually celebrated in the contemporary vernacular, Amharic.

Noticeably absent from the Ethiopian liturgy, when compared with the Coptic, are the frequent processions around the altar with reverence (kissing) given to the altar's four corners.

(a) Introductory Rites. After the opening sign of the cross (remnant of the Coptic office of incense), the priest announces: "How wondrous this day and how marvelous this hour in which the Holy Spirit will come down from the high heaven and overshadow this offering and sanctify it." This same text is employed in the West Syrian liturgy as a diaconal announcement prior to the epiclesis.

Attention is then turned to the offerings, with the same lengthy ritual form we saw in the Coptic liturgy. The bread is blessed ("Christ, our true God, sign with your right hand + and bless this bread, + hallow it with Your power and strengthen it with your Spirit"). The offering is made (again, a West Syrian text), the chalice is blessed, and then the bread and wine both are given the trinitarian blessing. A doxology introduces a prayer of thanksgiving and another of absolution, and the first anaphora (addressed to Christ) is begun. Reminiscent of Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose theology is evident in both the East Syrian and West Syrian traditions, the prayer of the veil, as the celebrant covers the bread and wine, recalls: "What we have placed upon this blessed paten is in the likeness of the sepulchre in which you stayed three days and three nights" Long prayers of general intercession conclude the introductory rites.

(b) Liturgy of the Word. The liturgy of the word begins with an invitation to stand, a greeting of peace, and invitation to adore “the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God,” and the prayer to Mary, recited by all (“You are the golden censer, that bore the glowing charcoal ...”). The traditional four readings are reduced to two though the “reading prayers” have been retained. Between the epistle and the gospel praises of Mary and the trisagion are prayed and the blessing of the four “cardinal points” is given.

(c) Pre-anaphora. The rites before the eucharistic prayer include: a prayer of blessing and intercession, the creed, a prayer of purification (washing of hands), a doxology (“Glory to God in the heavens, and peace on earth to men of good will”), and kiss of peace.

(d) Anaphora. The anaphora of the apostles is essentially the Hippolytus text, with the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and other acclamations of the people included. There are, as in the original, no intercessions within the eucharistic prayer proper.

(e) Post-anaphora. A complex fraction rite follows the eucharistic prayer, and, together with a prayer of thanksgiving, introduces the Lord’s prayer. This is followed by a series of prayers (of blessing, for forgiveness, of remembrance—including the commemoration of the dead). When the gifts are presented to the people (“Holy things to the holy”), a prayer over penitents and a profession of faith in the eucharist is made (“I believe, I believe, I believe and profess ...”). Final prayers of preparation for communion follow.

After communion there are prayers of thanksgiving, an imposition of hands in blessing of the people, a final blessing and dismissal.

Theology and Spirit

The Alexandrian theological tradition stands in contrast to the Antiochene on several counts. Its emphasis on the majesty and otherness of God is stronger, its ability to deal with the fullness of the incarnation weaker. In trinitarian theology it tends towards subordinationism, of Son to Father, of Spirit to both. In Christology it tends to emphasize the divine over the human. In liturgical theology it tends to stress the spiritual meaning of the symbols and the eternal realm in which that meaning resides. The sanctuary screen in the Coptic churches separates heaven from earth rather than uniting the two and bridging the gap.

Probably the most notable piece in both the Coptic and Ethiopian liturgies is the attention given to the bread and wine in the introductory rites and the seemingly consecratory “first anaphora” to Christ. There is a parallel in the Coptic baptismal liturgy which may illuminate this prayer. Before the baptism, ordinary water is solemnly “consecrated” for the baptism; afterwards, with a prayer equally as solemn, it is “returned to ordinary use.” It is as though materials of the earth, in this case the bread and wine, require a preliminary “consecration” to render them fit for the subsequent consecratory action of God.

Equally of note, at least in the Coptic version of this liturgical tradition, is the attention paid to the altar. The altar is the altar of sacrifice which the priest approaches unworthily. Many of the processions around the altar, including kissing the altar's four corners, accompany prayers of intercession offered in worship to God. The altar is likewise a symbol of the one who is offered ("We adore Thee, O Christ, and Thy good Father, and the Holy Ghost. Behold, Thou hast come, Thou has saved us"—said while incensing the altar). Placing the gifts upon the altar places them as well on the altar above ("Receive them upon Thine holy reasonable Altar in heaven for a sweet savour of incense"—Said while incensing the gifts placed upon the altar).

Finally, the place of Mary is unique. She is called the "censer of gold" whose "sweet cloud is our saviour" (Coptic) and the "golden censer that bore the glowing charcoal whom the blessed One ... accepted from the Sanctuary" (Ethiopian). She is also the one who makes strong supplication for us before God.

Conclusion

The liturgical traditions of the East contain a vast richness of Christian faith and prayer, a richness that only can be hinted at in these brief descriptions and reflections. Their perceptions of God range from the distant Other to the One "made flesh" who "dwelt among us." Their perceptions of the people who worship range from those free to participate in the heavenly mysteries to those unworthy to approach, from those who rejoice in the victory of Christ to those who must wait for the day of its fullness, from those who stand tall before the majesty of God to those who bow low in humble and awe-filled adoration. Together they reveal the many faces of the Mystery, of God creator, of Christ redeemer, of Spirit sanctifier. Together they reveal the many ways in which God approaches us and summons us to approach God in return.

See also Eucharist, history of, in the East; Reform, liturgical, in Eastern churches; Sacraments in Eastern churches

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