

The Status of the Liturgy in the Christian East and Liturgical Differentiations¹

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The history of the ancient liturgy would be incomplete if we did not look at the Christian East at the end of antiquity. In the East, the liturgy was developed in a different way than in the West. The center of the development of the liturgy was Constantinople (*Byzantion*), which became the capital of the empire. After the permanent division of the Empire in 395, it became the capital of the Eastern Empire for more than one thousand years until 1453, when the Turks conquered the city. During this period, *Byzantion* was the seat of government and a centre of flourishing culture that combined Hellenistic and oriental features. The music of the Byzantine Church influenced the West until the Great Schism, which resulted in the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054.

The liturgy of the Byzantine Church in antiquity was influenced by tradition. In the history of liturgy of Byzantion, there are some gaps in the sources. We do not have sources relating to the liturgy in the sixth and seventh centuries, at the end of Christian antiquity. This is probably the result of the influence of Islam and Iconoclasm in the major part of the Empire. The period in the liturgy in the Christian East at the end of antiquity can be described as the period of Byzantine synthesis where several traditions were combined. The simplicity of the original structure of the ancient Christian liturgy is recognizable, but we can see some influence of the cultural environment of the emperor's city and court. This fact was emphasized by the presence of the emperor and by the liturgy that was celebrated by the patriarch of Constantinople at the court of the emperor. Thus the liturgy was majestic, solemn, and beautiful. Mosaics decorating the church, incense, big candlesticks,

1 Research for the study was realized thanks to the Literary Fund of Slovakia and the Fund for Support of Science of the Faculty of Arts and Letters of the Catholic University in Ruzomberok.

procession, bows, and beautiful vestments – all these things belonged to the liturgy in this area. The second form of synthesis can be seen in the language that was used in the Byzantine liturgy. The Greek language was not the sole legitimate liturgical language in the East. Thus the churches in Antiochia, Alexandria and other areas that wanted to be faithful to the emperor and patriarch followed the liturgy of Constantinople, but the texts of the liturgy were translated into national languages.² We can say that in the East there came into being a rite that connected many nations and it made possible for them to adapt to this liturgical rite through their own language.³ Another feature of the Byzantine synthesis of the eastern liturgy is the fact of unification of cathedral and monastic orders in the liturgy. Both orders had their roots in the past, but the first one was older and related to the early Christian period. The Byzantine liturgy was based in the participation of all and everybody participated in the liturgy according to the particular place. We can see this in the Byzantine liturgy, specifically in short responses of the faithful to the psalms or responsorium. These responses were easy to remember and easy to learn. They were simple strophic hymns with easy meters and psalms, which could be sung by everyone. Over the years, the liturgy was adapted to the time period. The Church became the institution that was accepted by the state in Byzance and it could develop freely and the liturgy became more solemn. A kind of synthesis related to the previous one was the connection of liturgy with the cities of Jerusalem and Constantinople. These historical cities were made more beautiful thanks to the gifts of the emperors, and they could accept more multitudes of pilgrims. The Emperors Constantine and Justinian invested huge amounts of money to basilicas, while the emperor Herakleios came in solemn procession to Jerusalem in order to return the relics of the Holy Cross. These relics were stolen by the Persians. The city of Jerusalem was very attractive. Syrian monks who lived at the outskirts of the city in the monastery of St. Saba wrote poetic texts for the liturgy and later these texts were inserted into the liturgy of the emperor's city.

On the other hand, Constantinople became unique due to the presence of the emperor and it became an important city because it protected the Holy Land and Jerusalem. It was obvious that all the basilicas of Jerusalem kept the liturgical customs of the emperor's city. In antiquity, there was a partnership

2 We can see something similar in the liturgy of Slavic languages in the Balkans.

3 Cf. A.-J. Wegmann, *Liturgie in der Geschichte des Christentums*, Regensburg 1994, pp. 243–252.

between Constantinople and Jerusalem, and liturgical customs were exchanged between these two cities.

Under the influence of cultural and social conditions, various liturgical families were created during Christian antiquity according to the place where the liturgy developed. In general, the liturgy was divided into that of the East and that of the West. As we can see in the previous historical characteristics, the liturgy in the East developed differently than the liturgy in the West. Therefore, we can see more differentiation and variety of liturgical rites but the essence of the liturgy is preserved. The following structure points to the main division of the Eastern liturgical groups and rites:

Eastern rites				
Antiochian group			Alexandrian group	
East-Syrian type: • Syrian orthodox rite • Chaldean rite • Malabar rite	West-Syrian type: • Syrian-Antiochian rite • Maronite rite • Armenian rite	Byzantine type: • Byzantine rite	• Ethiopian rite	• Coptic rite

In general, we can divide the liturgical rites in the Christian East into two groups: Antiochian and Alexandrian.

Antiochian Group

Antioch was an important centre of the Eastern Church in antiquity.⁴ In the fourth century, an independent liturgy was developed there. The theological School of Antioch influenced the interpretation of texts used in the liturgy of this type.⁵ A characteristic feature of the Antiochian group was that the anaphora contained one epiclesis that followed the anamnesis. The liturgies of this group contained a lot of anaphoras and the common petitions of the believers in the anaphora itself. The Antiochian liturgical family uses four readings, and in the fourth century they developed in the following way. The first of them was taken from Torah, the second reading from the Prophets, the third reading from the epistles, and the fourth reading came from the Gospels. They are quite lengthy. We can distinguish three types of liturgy within this group:

4 Antiochia was a Greek-Roman centre in the western Syria. In antiquity, it was the capital of the eastern world and it had a huge influence in the same way as Jerusalem.

5 It referred to literal translation of the Biblical texts and their oral interpretation in Targums in the Jewish tradition.

The East Syrian Type

This type of liturgy is very old and it reminds us of Christians who were closely related to Judaism and accepted the Semitic way of life. Of all rites, the East Syrian liturgy is rooted in the Jewish liturgy to the greatest extent. This rite preserved the scheme of the early Christian prayers with the participation of believers. In this type of liturgym the believers were presented with the Christian teachings of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who were generally considered to be followers of Nestorius. Therefore, this type of liturgy is called Nestorian. Throughout history, there were religious divisions, and the Nestorians were not willing to obey Constantinople. When they rejected the teachings of the council of Chalcedon, this tradition became Monophysitist. The sacraments in this type of liturgy are called mysteries. The existence of this type of liturgy is found in Persia⁶ and Mesopotamia. The liturgical language was mostly Syrian, and sometimes Arabic. In the liturgy, four readings are used, two of which are taken from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and one from the Gospels. The liturgy emphasizes contrition and conversion as the way to prepare for the coming of the Son of man. Three liturgical rites developed within the East-Syrian type of liturgy: the Syrian Orthodox rite (which uses three anaphoras; the Anaphora of Adai and Mari do not have words of consecration), the Chaldean rite (Nestorians settled at Cyprus and later united with the Catholic Church), and the Malabar rite, known as the Christians of Thomas⁷ (Nestorian who went from Cyprus to the East, for example to India; later they were united with the Catholic Church).⁸

The West Syrian Type

The West Syrian liturgy was used by Christian who lived in Jerusalem and in Palestine. Originally they were Monophysitists.⁹ They have some seventy anaphoras in total, but in general they use just twelve. Three rites developed within the Syrian Antiochian rite. Edessa was the place of origin and centre of this rite.¹⁰ The language is Syrian or Greek. The rite is rich in poetry. This is attested by the poetic homilies of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob Saruga. In the sixth century, Jacob Bar Addai caused a schism, and his followers are called

6 The Syrian Church in the East was the part of Persian Empire and thus was influenced by Islam.

7 Their Christian origin comes from St. Thomas the apostle.

8 Later, they began to mix with the Latin Western rite as well.

9 Some of them were completely united with the Catholic Church.

10 Edessa was a border city of the Roman Empire.

Jacobites.¹¹ In the sixth century, some of them joined the emperor Justinian and his opinions and those are called Melchites.¹² Another rite is the Maronite rite, which originated in the monastery of St. Maron in Lebanon, where 530 monks were martyred in 517. The memory of them was so strong that people in the surrounding villages began to keep their rite that the martyrs used in the monastery.¹³ They use the anaphora of St. Peter Sharar and the liturgy is of a mostly monastic and missionary character. The third West Syrian rite is the Armenian rite, which developed in Byzance. Some adapted features created an original and independent liturgical tradition. They use the liturgy of St. Athanasius, unleavened bread, and curtains instead of iconostas. Their liturgical calendar contains several fixed days.¹⁴ The Armenian liturgy has three readings: one is taken from the Old Testament and two are from the New Testament.

The Byzantine Rite

The Byzantine type of the eastern liturgy and the Byzantine rite were and are the most frequently used form of the liturgy in the Christian East and at the same time they are the most widespread rite among the eastern liturgies. This rite was typical for Constantinople, and it later quickly spread into the whole patriarchate and Greek areas in southern Italy. Later, some areas of patriarchates in Alexandria and Antiochia accepted this rite. Four anaphoras are known: St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory, and St. James. The Byzantine rite differs from the Roman rite in its form, majesty, solemnity, and origin in the court ceremony of the Byzantine emperor. In the texts of the liturgy, the history of salvation from the incarnation up through the second coming of Christ is presented in an impressive way. This rite is visible in the textual structure of anaphoras within the eastern liturgical tradition. This rite has much reverence for icons and images. The historical development of iconostas proves this fact.

11 In the seventeenth century, they became reunited with the Catholic Church.

12 This is translated as “royal” and today they are inclined to the Byzantine rite.

13 In the ninth century, it became an independent liturgical rite and accepted a lot of Latin features, but it has few followers.

14 They use two types of fasting: *rigorous* – forty days before Easter, from Monday to Friday they eat just bread and salt and *mild* – every Wednesday and Friday except for Easter season when they do not drink alcohol.

The Alexandrian Group

For the Alexandrian liturgical group of rites,¹⁵ the following structure of the anaphora is typical: first there is the epiclesis, or anamnesis, and then the second epiclesis. The anaphora begins with the common petitions of believers. Two liturgical rites developed within the Alexandrian group: Coptic and Ethiopian.

The Coptic Rite

This rite originates in the intellectually important center of Alexandria in Egypt and differs from the Byzantine rite in its substance and structure. It is called Coptic rite and comes from apostle Mark. In 180 AD, the Copts had organized their diocese in Alexandria and a famous school where Origen studied. On the basis of Alexandrian theology, the Copts were Monophysitist Church in antiquity. This is proved by their isolated position, which was the result of the strong influence of Islam and distrust of Constantinople. The Copts use Arabic as their liturgical language.¹⁶ The following anaphoras are used in the liturgy: St. Mark, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen. Before the Sanctus prayer, the faithful are called to turn towards the East. All the liturgical solemnities are quite long and are of a contemplative character. The Coptic liturgy does not know many variations. Holy Communion in the Coptic rite is given under both kinds.

The Ethiopian Rite

In Ethiopia, Christianity has been very strong since antiquity. Later, the Ethiopians left the Copts and developed their own rite. The Ethiopian rite is similar to the Coptic one, but it has more anaphoras, two of which are Marian. The liturgical language is *geez*; Syrian and Jewish features dominate in the liturgy. Many hymns are used in the Ethiopian rite, and the Ethiopians are known for their very strong Marian devotion.

¹⁵ Alexandria was the metropolis of Egypt.

¹⁶ Today, some Copts are in communion with the Catholic Church, while others are not.

Ancient Eastern Christian Anaphoras

To facilitate the scientific understanding of these liturgical rites from the viewpoint of history of liturgy in the Christian antiquity, the context of direct liturgical texts is useful. These texts were preserved in the Christian East. I will mention some of them, which are important from an historical viewpoint. They can illustrate anaphoras of the above-mentioned types or liturgy and rites. The East Syrian texts of anaphoras are similar to those with Jewish roots. A unique one is the *Syrian anaphora*, named after the founders of the Church in Edessa, the apostles Addai and Mari. It belongs to the pre-Nicene period. This anaphora has three parts, just like the Jewish prayer after a meal. The prayers of this anaphora are structured to *Kushapa* (prayer recited silently and kneeling) and *G'handa* (a prayer recited aloud; the first and last parts are repeated). An interesting feature of this prayer is that the text of *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* does not contain the word on the institution of the Eucharist; thus consecration words of other anaphoras are missing. The consecration takes place in the moment of consecration epiclesis.¹⁷ Another Syrian-Palestinian anaphora is the Maronite *Anaphora of St. Peter*. It is described as the third one and is named after its beginning *Sharar*. This anaphora originates from the second century along with the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* because they have similar patterns, although in the anaphora of St. Peter the words of transubstantiation and anamnesis follow the thanksgiving. The articulation of the believers is evident in the words of the dialogue: *Dignum, iustum et salutare est; Ad te, Deus Abraham, Isaac et Israel, rex gloriosae et sancte in aeternum; Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus, abhinc et usque in aeternum.*¹⁸

Alexandrian Anaphoras

Among the Alexandrian anaphoras, the *Anaphora of Cyril of Alexandria* deserves mention. It was used in the Coptic liturgy. It contains the initial dialogue with responses: *Et cum spiritu tuo, Habemus ad Dominum, Dignum et iustum est.*¹⁹ A noteworthy feature of this anaphora is the ten acclamations of amen during the report on the institution and the acclamation credimus,

17 The Congregation for the doctrine of faith confirmed the validity of consecration in this anaphora. Syrian-Chaldean church uses slightly extended form of this prayer.

18 A. Hänggi, I. Pahl, *Præx Eucharistica. Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, Editions universitaires Fribourg Suisse, Spicilegium Friburgense, n. 12, 2nd edition, Fribourg 1978, p. 410.

19 In its old Armenian form the rubrics say that it is recited by a priest facing the people.

which precedes them. After the consecration, the faithful say: *Mortem tuam annuntiamus Domine et resurrectionem tuam sanctam et ascensionem confitemur.*²⁰ After the acclamation *Miserere nostri, Deus Pater omnipotens*, the priest faces the faithful, a tradition dating back to antiquity.²¹ The relatively frequent participation of the believers is visible in the Alexandrian *Anaphora of Our Holy Fathers Apostles (Sanctorum patrum nostrorum apostolorum)*. It was preserved in *Mashafa qeddasé* in the Egyptian rite. After the initial dialogue, there is the blessing for the people and blessing of the liturgical ministers ended by acclamation *Habemus ad Dominum Deum nostrum*. Another *Benedictio super populum* follows at the beginning *Orationis benedictionis sancti Basilii*. The *Sanctus* ends with the atypical text *perfectae pleni sunt caeli et terra sanctitatae gloriae tuae.*²² The second canticle of this anaphora contains a major acclamation: *Memento nostri, Domine, in regno tuo; memento nostri, Domine, magister noster; memento nostri, Domine, in regno tuo, quemadmodum meministi latronis qui a dextris tuis erat, dum suspendebaris in ligno sanctae crucis*. The other text of this anaphora features the following acclamation: *Secundum misericordiam tuam, Deus, et non secundum iniquitates nostras.*²³ After the words of transubstantiation, there is the acclamation: *Credimus. Hoc verum esse, credimus*. Then the words of transubstantiation follow with the text *quod pro vobis frangitur in remissionem peccati*, and the faithful answer: *Amen, amen, amen. Credimus et confitemur; laudamus te, o Domine noster et Deus noster; hoc esse vere corpus tuum credimus*. A similar acclamation follows the transubstantiation of the wine. Anamnesis in the anaphora *Sanctorum patrum nostrorum apostolorum*, which begins with the following acclamation of the faithful: *Annuntiamus mortem tuam, o Domine, ac resurrectionem tuam sanctam; credimus ascensionem tuam ac secundum adventum tuum. Laudamus te, ac confitemur tibi; rogamus te et deprecamur te, o Domine noster et Deus noster.*²⁴ The epiclesis following the transubstantiation contains the acclamation of the people again: *Amen. O Domine, miserere nostri; Domine, parce nobis; Domine, ignosce nobis*. After the priest's prayer, the faithful say *amen* and then *sicut erat et est et erit a generatione in*

20 A. Hänggi, I. Pahl, *Prex Eucharistica. Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, op. cit., pp. 136–137.

21 *Ibidem*, p. 138.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 147.

23 *Ibidem*.

24 *Ibidem*, p. 148.

generationem in saeculum saeculi. Then the believers and the priest say: Da nobis uniri in tuo ipsius Spiritu Sancto, et nos sana per hanc oblationem, ut in te vivamus per omne saeculum et in saeculum saeculi. Benedictum nomen Domini et benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini; benedicaturque nomen gloriae eius. Fiat, fiat, benedictus sit. Emitte gratiam Spiritus Sancti super nos.²⁵ The end of anaphora²⁶ is said by the priest, and the celebrant's calls of Surgite ad orationem and Pax omnibus vobis are answered by the faithful, who say: Domine, miserere nostri and Cum spiritu tuo.

Antiochian Anaphoras

The Antiochian *Anaphora of St. Athanasius*, which was only used on Sundays, has a certain interesting feature. When the celebrant recites the anamnesis, the believers recite the similar formulation of anamnesis.²⁷ In the similar Byzantine or Greek *Anaphora of St. James*, there are several acclamations of amen. The acclamation after the transubstantiation is similar to the Latin rite. After the anamnesis, the faithful answer: Miserere nostri, Domine, Deus, Pater, omnipotens. The *Anaphora of Severius of Antioch* contains triple acclamations of the faithful saying Kyrie eleison after the epiclesis with the long prayer of people before receiving Holy Communion.²⁸ In the other Antiochian *Anaphora of Clement of Rome*, the initial dialogue of the celebrant and people is changed in the following way:²⁹

S: Caritas.

P: Cum spiritu tuo.³⁰

S: Sursum corda.

P: Habemus ad Dominum.

S: Gratias agamus Domino.

P: Dignum et iustum est.

25 Ibidem, p. 149.

26 The end of the text preserved from this anaphora.

27 A. Hänggi, I. Pahl, *Prex Eucharistica, Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, op. cit., p. 221.

28 Cf. ibidem, pp. 283–284.

29 Cf. ibidem, p. 298.

30 In the *Anaphora of Athanasius of Alexandria*, it is preceded by amen and after anamnesis it is mentioned that the choir sings the song of thanksgiving: In omnibus benedictus es, Domine, benedicimus tibi, glorificamus te... A similar engagement of the faithful in this anaphora is after the epiclesis, and intercessions are interrupted by convocations: Memento, Domine, et miserere (A. Hänggi, I. Pahl, *Prex Eucharistica. Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, op. cit., p. 322).

The same dialogue with the people that begins with word *caritas* is preserved in the *Anaphora of the Roman Pope Julius*. This anaphora comes from Antioch. We can see a similar structure in the *Eustach anaphora* from the Antiochian group:³¹

S: *Caritas Dei Patris.*

P: *Amen. Misericordiae Dei.*

S: *Sursum corda.*

P: *Habemus ad Dominum.*

S: *Gratias agamus Domino.*

P: *Dignum et iustum est.*

The *Anaphora of Holy Roman Church* contains a totally different structure. It was inspired by the Syrian *Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles* and is ascribed to the Maronite priest Andreo Skandar. It contains almost no acclamations of the faithful, except for the triple acclamation of the believers of *Kyrie eleison*.³² It counts on the assistance of one minister, the *altar boy*. The Antiochian *Anaphora of the Lord's brother James*³³ has texts only for the lector and separate texts only for the faithful.³⁴ The earlier version of the *Anaphora of St. James*,³⁵ which probably comes from the fifth Mystagogic catechesis of St. Cyril of Alexandria or his successor John at the end of the fourth century, belongs to the Antiochian liturgical type. After the part of the preface thanking for the visible and invisible creation, the epiclesis and intercession follow. Then there is prayer of the *Our Father* with the believers, Holy Communion, and thanksgiving. It is interesting to note that the epiclesis (along with the intercessions) are at the end of the anaphora in a similar way as the third part of the Jewish prayer after meal. The anaphora³⁶ belonging to the West Syrian liturgical group has a similar structure. It was explained by *Theodorus from Mopsuestia* in his catecheses for catechumens around 400 AD. After the sacrificial gifts are brought, there is the kiss of peace, the diptychs are read and then follows the part of the preface with *Sanctus*, thanksgiving for the

31 Cf. *ibidem*, p. 306. This anaphora contains eight amens.

32 Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 315–318.

33 It is an anaphora of Syrian origin.

34 A. Hänggi, I. Pahl, *Prex Eucharistica, Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, op. cit., pp. 342–346.

35 It has a similar form in the Armenian rite.

36 Cf. A. Rückner, *Baptismi et missae quem descripsit Theodorus ep. Mopsuestenus in sermonibus catecheticis*, Münster 1933.

work of salvation. Then there is the report on the institution, the epiclesis and intercession, the breaking of the bread, Holy Communion, and thanksgiving.

These types of liturgies and liturgical rites show us the richness that is present in the Christian East and West. They are the liturgical traditions of the Church, which preserves the continuity of the Christian liturgical tradition from the viewpoint of historical context in the environment where the Christian were living. Despite the glory of Constantinople, the eastern Churches have preserved their own type of liturgy and rite. It does not matter that they are in smaller number; they are nonetheless still preserved in the liturgy despite circumstances hostile to Christianity and the influence of Islam. Local traditions in the West were gradually vanishing and the Roman liturgy had to confront life in Gallia. The celebration of the liturgy in the West according to the Roman model in the city of Rome and in areas under the jurisdiction of Roman bishop swas preserved in the Latin, Western Church until the beginning of the eighth century. Then there came a very important breaking point when the focus of the cultural-political and Church life was moved from the Mediterranean area into the German and especially Frankish areas north of Alps. This led to the enormous spread of the influence of Roman liturgy but, on the other hand, the Roman liturgy was merged with non-Roman liturgical traditions. This was the period of Christian Middle Ages.

Abstract

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Keywords: Ancient liturgy; anaphora; Eastern rites.

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