

Types of Prayer

1. Introduction

By the third century CE Christian prayer had developed certain characteristics. A Christian presbyter in Carthage, Tertullian (145 – 220 CE) refers to some of the characteristics for Christian prayer and gives his outline of the requirements. Although we get his interpretation of the necessary standards for prayer in early Christianity at that time there is no reason to doubt that he was describing the characteristics that had actually developed as other Church Fathers, e.g. Polycarp, Cyprian and Hippolytus also describe similar characteristics.

2. Tertullian

Tertullian was educated in Rome and was a prolific writer on Latin Christianity. His treatise ‘On Prayer’ was written c. 200 CE.⁹⁶ In the first half of Tertullian’s treatise he expounds on the perfection of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, stating that the ‘Lord Christ’s...method of praying’:

...has embraced not only the special duties of prayer, be it veneration of God or petition for man, but almost every discourse of the Lord, every record of *His* Discipline; so that, in fact, in the Prayer is comprised an epitome of the whole Gospel’. (Ch. 1.)⁹⁷

Tertullian sees in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘an epitome of the whole Gospel.’ After describing the Lord’s Prayer Tertullian then gives an outline on how to pray. Tertullian takes the economy of the phrases of the Lord’s Prayer as an example to indicate that one should not use too many words for one’s prayer, as we are to trust that God knows our needs when he says, ‘that we think not that the Lord must be approached with a train of words, who, we are certain, takes unsolicited foresight for His own.’ (Ch. 1) Tertullian then states that after people pray the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ they can petition the Lord for their needs as he (the Lord) said separately, after delivering his rule of prayer, ‘Ask, and ye shall receive’. Tertullian stresses that one must pray ‘with remembrance of *the Master’s* precepts’. (Ch. 10) which Tertullian then clarifies in the second half of his Treatise ‘On Prayer’. When these precepts are compared with characteristics of prayer from other religions one finds similarities and differences.

3. Greek Prayers.

Greek Religion was based on myths, and worship was expressed in state and personal rites and sacrifices. ‘The prayers with which the Greeks communicated with their gods could be either [spoken] loud or whispered, written on leaden tablets or pieces of papyrus, cut into stone or scratched on temple walls. Public prayers were sometimes sung [hymns] at festivals either by a

⁹⁶ Tertullian, ‘On Prayer (trans. Rev. S. Thelwall)’, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to a.d. 325*, eds. Alexander Roberts. & James Donaldson, Vol. 3, Hendrickson Publishers Inc, Massachusetts, 1995, pp. 681-91.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 681)

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whole community or by a chorus of performers'.⁹⁸ Most Greek prayers were extempore and were usually linked with libation and sacrifice.⁹⁹ The earliest Greek religious worship consisted mainly of sacrifice and prayer; the sacrifice was to propitiate the god and 'the purpose of prayer was to strike a bargain with the divinity'.¹⁰⁰

How were Greek prayers constructed?

Stambaugh and Balch in their study of *The Social World of the First Christians* state that Greek prayers:

usually began with an invocation, a reminder of past benefits or an allusion to the god's great power to confer benefits, and then moved on to the statement of the request, nearly always accompanied by a promise to do something for the god in return.¹⁰¹

An early example *c.* 750 BCE of Greek prayer is found in Homer's *The Iliad* when the priest Chryses was petitioning Apollo for the return of his daughter. She had been given to Agamemnon as booty after the Greeks had plundered Thebes in the latter part of the Trojan War. Chryses is said to have 'prayed and prayed again' to Apollo:

O hear me, master of the silver bow, protector of Tenedos and the holy towns, Apollo, Sminthian, (invocation and allusion to the god's power as protector) if to your liking ever in any grove I roofed a shrine or burnt thigh-bones in fat upon your altar - bullock or goat flesh - (reminder of petitioner's loyalty) let my wish come true: your arrows on the Danaans for my tears! (request). (IL. 1, 36-40.)¹⁰²

This prayer has 'veneration of [the] god' and 'petition for man', the special duties of prayer as Tertullian had pointed out. Chryses is a priest and he reminds Apollo of his previous loyalty. The use of the short invocation 'O hear me' or similar is used in Greek prayer throughout literature to call to and to gain the attention of the deity. These characteristics of prayer as the Greeks communicated with their gods are seen in the earliest epics and set the standard for Greek prayer. Greek prayer forms could consist of verse in epic style as above, or in drama. They could also be sung praises such as the hymn below by Aristophanes (*c.* 447 – 385 BCE), which illustrates popular prayer and the Greeks' interaction with the gods. Aristophanes' attitude to the gods appears disrespectful in many of his plays, however the following hymn to Athena in his play *The Knights*, written 424 BCE is most probably 'an adaptation of popular hymn-writing',¹⁰³

Pallas our Protectress, guardian, (invocation)
Of the holiest land on earth,
Home of power and home of valour,

⁹⁸ Bremer, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁹⁹ Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, pp. 73-5.

¹⁰⁰ Stambaugh & Balch, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰² Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Robert Fitzgerald, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984 (1974), p. 2.

¹⁰³ John Ferguson & Kitty Chisholm, (eds.), *Political and Social Life in the Great Age of Athens*, The Open University Press, London, 1978, p. 180.

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Home of poets of true worth:

Come thou hither with our ally, (call to the goddess to be present)

In the chorus and the field,

Victory, who ever with us,

Fights our foes and makes them yield. (allusion to the goddess' great power)

Come Athena, now if ever!

Let us now thy glory see!

Now, O Maid and Queen, we pray thee,

Give thy Chorus victory. (request)

*The Knights 581-94*¹⁰⁴

4. Roman Prayers

Religions of today usually have a variety of prayer forms to suit different occasions but in Roman religion prayer forms were usually unvarying. Part of the action in ritual and worship in ancient Roman religion was prayer. In Roman religion prayers were offered in particular forms of words and these forms had been handed down from antiquity, jealously guarded by the priests (*pontifices*). The rituals of the old religion featured sacrifice, prayer, vow, and divination: usually a combination of two or more of these features. 'Roman prayers were almost always spoken aloud and in a public context'.¹⁰⁵ In the first century CE, Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* 28.2(3) 10, writes, 'it apparently does no good to offer sacrifice or to consult the gods with due ceremony unless you also speak the words of prayer'.¹⁰⁶

How were Roman prayers constructed?

The traditional structure of Roman prayer is defined by one modern author as a process in which:

The deity is first addressed by name, then defined more closely in a relative clause; there is a statement of the claims which the supplicant can make on the benevolence of the deity, and finally there comes the request.¹⁰⁷

Livy gives us an example of ancient Roman religious practices in his augur's prayer included in *The Early History of Rome*. The augur is asking for signs, *auspicium*, to proclaim Numa as king:

Father Jupiter, if it is Heaven's will that this man, Numa Pompilius, whose head I touch, should reign in the city of Rome, make clear to us sure signs within those limits I have determined. (1.18)¹⁰⁸

The augur addresses the deity by name; the word 'Father' illustrates the sense of familiarity (benevolent father) in the relationship of the augur with the god. He also implies that Jupiter's will is the will of heaven, by addressing him as the head of the gods, and then states the request. The practice of reading certain signs 'augury' to seek to know the god's will prior to any

¹⁰⁴ Aristophanes, *The Knights/Peace/The Birds/The Assembly Women/Wealth*, trans. by Alan H. Sommerstein, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1978, p.58.

¹⁰⁵ Larry J. Alderink & Luther H. Martin, 'Prayer in Greco-Roman Religions', pp. 123-127 in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Mark Kiley et al, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 125.

¹⁰⁶ Shelton, op. cit., p. 373.

¹⁰⁷ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 287.

¹⁰⁸ Livy, op. cit., 1. 18. p. 53.

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occasion remained constant from ancient time to the early Christian times. The Roman traditional structure of prayer was similar to the Greek, however, the Romans were more legalistic in the details of the prayer. The prayers had to be said correctly or they were deemed not to work. Pliny the Elder (23 - 79 CE), points out that prayers are said by civil officials such as 'our highest magistrates' who:

make appeals to the gods with specific and set prayers. And in order that no word be omitted or spoken out of turn, one attendant reads the prayer from a book, another is assigned to check it closely, a third is appointed to enforce silence. (Pliny *Natural History* 28.2(3), 11.)¹⁰⁹

Many of the 'specific and set' prayers had been passed down by the priests throughout Republican times and maintained their special formulas even though the reason they remained so specific was forgotten. The habit of using the same ancient formulas is attested to by a chant used by the Arval Brethren, which possibly dated back to the sixth century BCE.¹¹⁰ Jo-Anne Shelton included the chant (from an inscription dated 218 CE) as an example of Roman conservatism in *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*. The Arval Brethren were priests 'concerned with the worship of deities who protected crops',¹¹¹ the prayer is one of petition and the inscription describes the procession and chant:

Then the priests closed the doors, girt up their robes, picked up their hymn books, divided into three choirs, and moved in three step rhythm, chanting these words:

Help us Lares!
Help us Lares!
Help us Lares!
Marmor, let not plague or ruin attack the multitude,
Marmor, let not plague or ruin attack the multitude,
Marmor, let not plague or ruin attack the multitude,
Be filled, fierce Mars. Leap the threshold. Halt, wild one.
Be filled, fierce Mars. Leap the threshold. Halt, wild one.
Be filled, fierce Mars. Leap the threshold. Halt, wild one.
By turns call on all the gods of Sowing.
By turns call on all the gods of Sowing.
By turns call on all the gods of Sowing.
Help us, Marmor!
Help us, Marmor!
Help us, Marmor!
Triumph!
Triumph!
Triumph!

After the three-step procession had finished, a signal was given and public slaves came in and collected the hymn books. (*CIL* 6.2104 (*ILS* 5039))¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Shelton, op. cit., p. 373.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 374.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 373.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 374.

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The Arval Brethren were a college of priests connected to the worship of the gods of crop protection. Their chant is repetitious and formulaic and the priests perform a three step dance as they call on the ancient gods associated with agriculture, specifically Mars. The aim of this tradition was to maintain a right relationship with the gods to bring about success in all undertakings. These were tried and true methods, there was no need to change them so the prayer forms in Roman religion, at least the most important features, changed little from ancient Roman times to early Imperial times.

Cato the Elder (234 – 149 BCE), in some of the prayers in his work *On Agriculture*, specifies the ritual and the words of prayers to be said in various agricultural pursuits. The following ritual, consisting of prayers and sacrifice, is an affirmation of the primitive belief in the presence of gods or goddesses in the woods and groves. This ritual has the precautionary invocation statement to the unknown deity or deities that was common in prayers of the early agrarian society and had been handed down (religiously). The acceptance that the grove of trees was a sacred place and belonged to some god or goddess attests to Cato's respect for the land and his desire for benign processes of nature. The prayer illustrates the vulnerability the Romans felt to natural processes and their assumption that they could influence them:

When thinning a grove of trees, it is essential to observe the following Roman ritual. Sacrifice a pig as a propitiatory offering and repeat the following prayer: 'Whether you are a god or goddess to whom this grove is sacred, as it is proper to sacrifice to you a pig as a propitiatory offering for the disturbance of this sacred place, and therefore for these reasons whether I, or someone I have appointed performs the sacrifice, provided that it be performed correctly, for this reason, in sacrificing the pig, I pray in good faith that you will be benevolent and well disposed to me, my home, my family and my children. For these reasons therefore be honoured by the sacrifice of this pig as a propitiatory offering'.

If you wish to plow the cleared land in the grove, offer a second propitiatory sacrifice in the same manner but add these words: 'for the sake of doing this work'. (*On Agriculture* 139.140)¹¹³

A Harvest Ritual (see Appendix A, p. 110) is also defined by Cato the Elder and combines sacrifice and prayer to specific named gods, Ceres, the goddess of the harvest (grain production and plant fertility), Janus, the god of beginnings, and Jupiter and Juno, the king and the queen of the gods.¹¹⁴ It was important to name the god whose sphere of influence was associated with the action one proposed, to ensure communication with the correct god. Invoking the king and the queen of the gods for their continued blessing was also an added precaution. Cato repeats his petition after each naming of each of the gods and his or her respective offering. The sacrifice consists of offerings of cakes, wine, incense and a pig. The ritual is a clear example of the

¹¹³ Shelton, op. cit., pp. 364-5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 367.

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prescribed procedures of sacrifice, purification and prayer that were deemed necessary to ensure the cooperation of the gods in one's undertakings.

Towards the end of the Republic, although ancient Roman religious observances were being neglected and rationalisation based on Greek philosophy was becoming more popular, subscribing to the State cult was politically expedient. As symbolic father of Rome, Augustus offered a prayer at the Secular Games in 17 BCE, in the legalistic fashion. The formalised prayer shows the particular attention that the Romans paid to the wording of their prayer as Augustus prays for the welfare of the state, the Roman people and his own family. He repeats 'the Roman people, the Quirites' five times. His public prayer of dedication at the Games stresses that Rome's greatness has only come about because of the gods' favour and he petitions the gods for their continued favour and protection:

O Fates . . . I beseech and pray you, just as you have increased the Empire and the majesty of the Roman people, the Quirites, in war and peace, so may the Latins ever be obedient; grant everlasting safety, victory and health to the Roman people, the Quirites; protect the Roman people, the Quirites, and keep safe and sound the state of the Roman people, the Quirites; be favourable and propitious to the Roman people, the Quirites, the Board of Fifteen, to me, to my house and my household; and deign to accept this sacrifice of nine ewes and nine female goats, perfect for sacrificing. For all these causes be increased by the sacrifice . . . ¹¹⁵

The ritual required him to be exact in his wording in order to offer a perfect sacrifice, according to custom, so that the gods would look favourably upon all Rome. In the polytheistic religions the naming of the deity was sometimes difficult so a generic format was usually adapted to suit the occasion. Augustus uses 'O Fates' in order that he will not miss out on any god. Prayers for the reigning emperor exemplified by the following inscription attest to the dedication and loyalty engendered by the emperor cult. The inscription, dated 80 CE, was a prayer of petition to Jupiter for the protection of and in loyalty to the Emperor Titus:

Jupiter Optimus Maximus, if the emperor Titus Caesar Vespasianus Augustus, pontifex maximus, holder of the tribunician power, father of his country, and Caesar Domitian, son of the deified Vespasian of whom we deem that we are speaking, should live and their house be safe on the next X January that comes to pass for the Roman people, the Quirites, and for the state of the Roman people, the Quirites, and you preserve that day and them safe from dangers (if there are or shall be any before that day) and if you have granted a felicitous issue in the manner that we deem that we are speaking of and you have pre-served them in that present condition or better - and may you so do these things - then we vow that you shall have, in the name of the College of the Arval Brethren, two gilded oxen, . . . ¹¹⁶

This legalistic inscription was a vow that the Arval Brethren would sacrifice to the god Jupiter Optimus Maximus if the emperor and his family were preserved from danger. Colleges of

¹¹⁵ R.M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods*, The Hogarth Press, London, 1988 (1969), pp. 31-2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

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priests, such as the Arval Brethren, were responsible for public worship of specific deities and performed rituals on different public occasions and celebrations.

Other inscriptions, celebrating worship of a popular god in early Christian times, were written to Asclepius, the Greek god of health and medicine who had been very popular in Rome since 5BC. The Romans had adopted him and his cult was widespread over the Roman Empire because he was said to bring about miraculous healing. Priests of the cult had a record of some of these healings inscribed on *stelae* outside Asclepius' temple at Epidaurus, which were copied from thank offerings or related to them by grateful suppliants.¹¹⁷ The testimonies report how the suppliants performed the rites (probably prayers of petition) and slept either in the temple or at home and after having a dream of some aspect of the god, woke up healed.

5. Mystery Religion Prayers

The mystery religions came from both east and west and were similar in some of their rituals. Prayers were said to the gods or at least the gods were called to come to the ceremony, which was usually secret. Ritual dances, music and chants brought the participant to a state of hysteria or trance. A sacred meal was sometimes consumed and the ritual could include a drama recounting the gods' history and the special favours given by the god to humankind. Due to the commitment of the initiates not much is known about the nature of the secret ceremonies and only conjecture from ancient sources is available. A prayer to Isis, in a popular second century CE novel, *Metamorphoses*, by the Latin writer Apuleius, does give an example of a format of petitionary prayer in his time although it is based on the Roman format. The main character, Lucius, has been changed into an ass and in his prayer he appeals to the goddess Isis to change him back into human form.

Prayer to Isis. (see Appendix A, p. 110.) *Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Bk XI, Ch. 2.

The characteristics of the type of prayer including 'veneration of God' (the goddess in this case) and 'petition for man' resembles Christian prayer as written about by Tertullian. The prayer style is similar to traditional Roman style in so far as he first calls on the deity, 'O queen of heaven', he then names a number of goddesses who have been subsumed together as Isis listing certain characteristics of each goddess. 'Whether you are bountiful Ceres, primal mother of all crops...or heavenly Venus...or Phoebus' sister...or dreaded Proserpina...' He then justifies the namings by stating 'by whatever name, with whatever rite, in whatever image it is meet to invoke you' then follows the request.¹¹⁸ Apuleius also describes some of a ritual associated with Isis (around second century CE) as the patron of sailors, such as the blessing of the fleet in which, after a procession to the seashore and back to the temple, the scribe summoned the priests:

¹¹⁷ Dillon, op. cit., p. 169.

¹¹⁸ Arthur J. Hanson, (ed.), *Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Harvard University Press, London, 1989, pp. 293-5.

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as if calling them to an assembly. Then from a lofty platform he read aloud from a book verbatim, first pronouncing prayers for the posterity of the great Emperor, the senate, the knights, and the entire Roman people, for the sailors and ships under the rule of our worldwide empire. Then he proclaimed, in the Greek language and with Greek ritual, the opening of the navigation season. (*Apuleius' Metamorphosis* Bk. XI, Ch. 17)¹¹⁹

The prayers were read out 'verbatim' with prayers for the emperor and Rome as was traditional. The actual ritual or blessing was 'proclaimed in the Greek language' because the worship of Isis had come to Rome from Egypt through Greece and 'the nucleus of her [Isis] communities was provided by immigrants from the Greek East'.¹²⁰

6. Jewish Prayers

In Judaism 'prayers of praise and exaltation were most esteemed, then expressions of thanksgiving; the individual petition or supplication was lowest in rank'.¹²¹ The literary sources for prayer forms in Judaism are the Jewish Scriptures primarily the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Prophets. Prayers are numerous throughout the Old Testament. There are many examples of Judaic prayer forms from early Christian times in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Odes of Solomon and the Psalms of Solomon. The Psalms of Solomon are 'eighteen hymns (or psalms) composed and presumably recited by Jews around the turn of the Common Era'.¹²² Prayer forms in Judaism during early Christian times had developed from the prayers of the major protagonists in the Jewish scriptures to the public proclamations or blessings declared by the priests and scribes on behalf of the community. Before the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE Temple worship consisted of prayers, taken from the Psalms, along with sacrifice. These Psalms plus the Eighteen Benedictions, or *Amida*, and the *Sh'ma*, which were all taken from Jewish scripture, made up the major part of public worship in both the Temple and the synagogue.

How were some Jewish prayers constructed?

The *Sh'ma* is the great commandment taken from Deut 6:4-9. In the first century, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora the *Sh'ma* formed part of the devotion of the Jews daily ritual in the Temple and the synagogue.¹²³ It was made up of a prayer of creed, which espoused the beliefs of the Jews in the one God:

Hear, Israel:
The Lord is our God,
The Lord is one.

Then followed a blessing and praise:

¹¹⁹ Hanson, op. cit., pp. 325-7.

¹²⁰ Liebeschuetz, op. cit., p. 222.

¹²¹ Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge: The Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in the Synagogue and Church during the First Millennium*, Dobson Books Ltd, London, 1959, p. 4.

¹²² Charlesworth, 'Jewish Hymns, Odes, and Prayers (ca. 167 B.C.E.-135 C.E.)', p. 416.

¹²³ Paul F. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, p. 1.

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Blessed be his name
Whose glorious kingdom
Is for ever and ever.

The body of the prayer contained the main commandment to love God and to teach the commandment to their children and be conscious of it at all times; in fact, to carry reminders of their God and the commandments on their person, in their house and on their doorposts:

And you shall love
The Lord your God
With all your heart
And with all your soul
And with all your might.
And these words
Which I command you this day
Shall be upon your heart.
And you shall teach them diligently
To your children,
And shall talk of them
When you sit in your house,
And when you walk on the way,
And when you lie down,
And when you rise up.
And you shall bind them
For a sign on your hand,
And they shall be for frontlets
Between your eyes,
And you shall write them
On the doorposts of your house
And on your gates.¹²⁴ (Martin 1968 p. 109 Psalm translation from the Jewish
Publication Society Version of the Hebrew Bible.)

The Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries (small leather boxes containing written texts) to remind them to keep the law was a means of following the above commandments.

The *Amida* was made up of blessings, *beraka*, which were ‘an acknowledgement, in a spirit of praise, of an act or gift of God’¹²⁵, and they were compulsory prayers for every Jew in the service of the synagogue at the time of Jesus.¹²⁶ The blessings consisted of:

- a) the opening blessing, always the stereotyped formula, ‘Blessed be the Lord’, using the passive participle of the verb *barak*;
- b) further appellatives of God, although this element is sometimes omitted;
- c) a relative clause, using the third person singular of an active verb in the perfect tense and expressing the particular grounds for the blessing.¹²⁷

there could then follow the recalling of the benevolence of God on a prior occasion and then a petition followed by a concluding statement of God’s majesty and finally an ‘Amen’ to be followed by a response of the congregation in repeating the ‘Amen’.¹²⁸ With the compulsory

¹²⁴ Bernard Martin, *Prayer in Judaism*, Basic Books, New York, London, 1968, p. 109, (Psalm translation from the Jewish Publication Society Version of the Hebrew Bible.)

¹²⁵ Werner, op. cit., p. 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

¹²⁷ Bradshaw, op. cit., p. 12.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

Amida there was also the opportunity for one 'to insert private and spontaneous prayers or petitions in certain places'.¹²⁹

7. New Testament Prayers

What was the style of prayer in the New Testament? As daily prayer was normal for the Jews, the early Christians would most probably have continued this practice.¹³⁰ Prayer of the early Christians was based on Jewish tradition as:

The first Christians offered up the same prayers that all pious Jews did, visited the Temple for worship, . . . attended the synagogue, kept the Sabbath and observed the festivals.¹³¹

Thus the prayer forms in New Testament Christianity developed from the Jewish background of the community and the teachings of Jesus Christ. These ranged from private extempore prayers to the public proclamations or blessings illustrated in the Gospels and in the letters written to the growing community. Many prayers were taken from the Psalms and the Jewish traditional Benedictions were used.

How were Christian Prayers constructed?

The literary sources for prayer forms that I used are some of the canonical documents: the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul, Deutero-Paul, Pseudo-Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude and Revelations. The types of prayers were mainly (a) petition, (b) praise and blessings, (c) prayers of thanksgiving, (d) doxology and (e) hymns. There were also special gatherings of the community in the home for the blessing and 'breaking of the bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42b).

(a) Prayers of Petition

As Tertullian had declared the special duties of prayer were 'Veneration of God' and 'Petition for Man'. Of the many examples of the types of prayer used in the New Testament the prayers of petition were the most mentioned. Jesus encouraged petitionary prayer. In what is commonly called the 'Lord's Prayer' he gave an example of the format for petition to God when he encouraged his disciples to:

Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (Mt. 6:9-13)

The format of the first three sentences is similar to the format that one finds in the beginning of the Jewish prayer, the *Kaddish*:

¹²⁹ Werner, op. cit., p. 5.

¹³⁰ Bradshaw, op. cit., pp. 25-6.

¹³¹ W. O. E. Osterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*, Oxford University Press, London, 1965 (1925), p. 97.

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Magnified and sanctified be His great name in the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during your life and during your days ... ¹³²

As with Greek and Roman prayer structure the Lord's Prayer includes calling on the deity, then praise and acknowledgment of the power of God followed by submission to his will and finally the requests. The addressing of God as Father is formal, however, the use of 'our' denotes a familiarity in the requests for daily needs. Jesus also petitions the Father in Jn. 17:1-26, on the evening of the Passover feast, where 'he looked up to heaven' and prayed personally for his apostles to his Father. Later he petitions the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane:

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' (Mt. 26:39)

and at Golgotha after he is crucified:

Then Jesus said, 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' (Lk. 23:34)

Then Jesus crying in a loud voice, said, 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this he breathed his last. ((Ps 31:5) Lk. 23:46)

Luke reports that Jesus was 'crying in a loud voice' when he prayed his last prayer on the cross. Was the prayer loud to bear witness to his precept to forgive one's enemies or because of the effort of praying while suffering? Stephen had also prayed with a loud voice when he was dying. (Acts 7:59-60)

Paul continually petitions God for spiritual blessings in his writings such as for the Ephesians:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him. (Eph 1:17)

Paul's prayers throughout his letters were usually for someone else. He includes instructions about others praying insisting that they persevere in prayer and supplication and also that they pray for him to preach boldly:

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak. (Eph 6:18-20)

Paul also prays in petition for the Philippians:

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight. (Phil 1:9-11)

¹³² Werner, op. cit., p. 6.

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Paul appeals for prayers so that he may be delivered from imprisonment in order to continue to spread the gospel:

I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. The God of peace be with all of you. Amen. (Rom 15:30-33)

(b) Prayers of Praise and Blessing

Prayers of praise were part of the Jewish liturgy, and as well as public prayers of praise in the temple and synagogue, spontaneous private episodes are reported in the Gospels. The words of the Magnificat or Mary's Song of Praise, (Lk. 1:46-55) (see Appendix A) are:

uttered (or, not improbably, chanted) by the Blessed Virgin, when she visited her cousin Elizabeth under the circumstances narrated by St. Luke in the first chapter of his Gospel...[and declare] the fulfillment of the olden prophecy and prophesying anew until the end of time...[and the] promises made to Abraham and to the patriarchs.¹³³

Paul's first letter to Timothy includes this prayer of praise:

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim1:17)

The titles of 'King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God,' are a formal praise acknowledging the power of God followed by the blessing and Amen.

Prayers of blessing, *beraka*, were common in Jewish tradition. The Benedictus (Lk. 1.68) (see Appendix A) said publicly by Zechariah is a classic example of Jewish prayer in the New Testament with the opening formula 'Blessed be...' followed by the naming of his God then lengthy praise and prophesy. The Jewish custom of praying before any action such as the blessing of bread before meals became a common form of Christian prayer.

Other common blessing prayers were those used as part of letter-writing formats. Paul included blessing prayers in his greetings and introductions to some of his letters as was common in the Jewish tradition of letter writing, however the blessings were Christian for example in Eph. 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

The letter called 1 Peter also includes an opening blessing of:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Pet. 1:3)

¹³³ H.T. Henry, 'Magnificat' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IX, p. 534.

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The naming of the deity: Zechariah's 'God of Israel', Paul's 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' is formal in these prayers however Paul is also acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the son of God thus stating his Christian beliefs.

Paul used many blessing prayers as closures in his writings as well such as:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.
Amen. (Gal. 6:18)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Phil. 4:23)

A prayer of blessing as well as petition and doxology is used as the final benediction in the letter to the Hebrews:

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)

The book of Revelations written c. 95 CE by someone called John had hymns of praise that were for the encouragement of the Christian community in times of persecution. The following hymn of praise would have been useful in community prayer with the inclusion of the Hallelujah four times for enthusiastic response by the community:

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgements are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted earth with her fornication and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants. Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her for ever and ever. Amen hallelujah...Praise our God all you servants, and all who fear him small and great...Hallelujah! For the Lord our god the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure. (Rev. 19:1-2, 3,4,5,6-8)

Also a closing blessing at the end of the book calls on Jesus to come.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints.
Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)

the belief that Jesus would come back to earth soon to conquer the world was prevalent in the early years of Christianity:

These prayers of blessing and praise call upon the favour of the deity, and were influenced by Jewish tradition.

(c) Prayers of Thanksgiving

The prayers of thanksgiving in the New Testament usually included a first person thanksgiving; 'I thank you' such as:

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At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes Father, for such was your gracious will'. (Mt. 11:25-26)

Also Jesus thanks God in public when he raises Lazarus to life:

So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, 'Father I thank you for having heard me'. (Jn. 11:41)

Paul included prayers of thanksgiving in some of his letters such as his prayers for the Philippian community:

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1:3-5)

And his prayer of thanksgiving for Philemon:

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. (Philem. 1:4-6)

Paul also instructs Timothy about prayer of thanksgiving:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer. (1 Tim. 4:4-5)

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he states that he prays constantly in thanksgiving for Timothy and the work he is doing in the community:

I am grateful to God - whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did - when I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night. (2 Tim. 2:3)

Throughout his letters Paul prays for his readers as in the following examples:

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. (2 Thess. 3:5)(petition)

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:5-6) (Praise and petition)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13) (Blessing and petition)

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(d) Doxology

‘In general this word means a short verse praising God ... The custom of ending a rite or a hymn with such a formula comes from the Synagogue’.¹³⁴ Although there was only one instance of a doxology in the canonical Gospels at the end of the Lord’s Prayer,¹³⁵ which was probably a later addition, St Paul frequently used them in his letters such as:

To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Gal. 1:5)

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:21)

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36)

To the only wise God, through, Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen. (Rom. 16:27) (To God through the Son.)

Another example can be found in the second letter of Peter as part of the final blessing:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)

(e) Hymns

Paul also uses a creedal hymn in his instructions to Timothy about the mystery of Christian religion:

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16)

Then in the second letter in another form of early hymn he declares the faithfulness of God to those who remain faithful:

The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself. (2 Tim. 2:11-13)

8. Church Fathers.

The early Church Fathers sent letters of encouragement to other Christian communities encouraging prayer and fidelity to Christ’s teaching as it had been passed on to them. There were many exhortations for prayer of petition in these writings. These types of prayer, however, developed a more formal framework as the church developed.

Clement

One of the earliest extant post-New Testament writing was a letter from the ‘Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth’. The letter had probably been written because of the report of some conflict in the church at Corinth. This letter was presumably written by Clement who was

¹³⁴ Adrian Fortescue, ‘Doxology’ in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, p. 150.

¹³⁵ Werner, op. cit., p. 298.

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acknowledged to be the third bishop of Rome by Eusebius.¹³⁶ In Clement's Letter to the Corinthians c. 97 CE¹³⁷ he urged prayers of petition:

Let us pray, therefore, and implore of His mercy, that we may live blameless in love, free from all human partialities for one above another. (Ch. 50:2b-3a.)¹³⁸

They were to pray for forgiveness and to praise the Lord rather than to sacrifice:

The Lord, brethren, stands in need of nothing; and He desires nothing of any one, except that confession be made to Him. For, says the elect David, 'I will confess unto the Lord ; and that will please Him more than a young bullock that hath horns and hoofs. Let the poor see it, and be glad'. (Ch. 52:1-2.)¹³⁹

To praise the lord and always pray when in need and to:

Offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High. And call upon Me in the day of thy trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. For the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit. (Ch. 52:3-4.)¹⁴⁰

and

(Praise) May God, who seeth all things, and who is the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh - who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a peculiar people - grant (petition) to every soul that calleth upon His glorious and holy Name, faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity, and sobriety, to the well-pleasing of His Name, (doxology) through our High Priest and Protector, Jesus Christ, by whom be to Him glory, and majesty, and power, and honour, both now and for evermore. Amen. (Ch. 58:2.)¹⁴¹

Ignatius

Ignatius (c. 30 - 107 or 116 CE) was said by Eusebius to be the second bishop of Antioch.¹⁴² Possibly during a persecution of Christians in Antioch sometime in the reign of the emperor Trajan (98 - 117 CE) Ignatius had been sentenced to be taken to Rome 'to fight with wild beasts'.¹⁴³ On his way to Rome in c. 106 (or 116 CE) he wrote to other communities in Asia Minor and Rome exhorting them to prayer and Christian living. His concern for the communities and his dedication to prayer was evident in his letters. Ignatius requested prayers of petition for himself in his letter to the Trallians.¹⁴⁴

And do ye also pray for me, who have need of your love, along with the mercy of God, that I may be thought worthy to attain the lot for which I am now destined, and that I may not be found reprobate. (Ch. 12: 3.)¹⁴⁵

¹³⁶ Eusebius, Bk. 5:6, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G. A. Williamson, ed. Andrew Louth, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1989, p. 152.

¹³⁷ Clement, 'The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, Commonly Called Clement's First Letter' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 5-21.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴² Eusebius, Bk 3:22, *op. cit.*, p. 83

¹⁴³ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁴ Ignatius, 'To the Trallians' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 66-72.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

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and for his church in Syria:

Remember in your prayers the Church, which is in Syria, from which also I am not worthy to receive my appellation, being the last. (Ch. 13.)¹⁴⁶

When Ignatius wrote to the Romans¹⁴⁷ in anticipation of his martyrdom he told them that he had prayed to be able to see the community members in Rome:

Through prayer to God I have obtained the privilege of seeing your most worthy faces, and have even been granted more than I requested; for I hope as a prisoner in Christ Jesus to salute you, if indeed it be the will of God that I be thought worthy of attaining unto the end. (Ch. 1.)¹⁴⁸

He hoped that the Romans would not try and prevent his martyrdom:

Pray, then, do not seek to confer any greater favour upon me than that I be sacrificed to God while the altar is still prepared; that, being gathered together in love, ye may sing praise to the Father, through Christ Jesus, that God has deemed me, the bishop of Syria, worthy to be sent for from the east unto the west. (Ch. 2:2.)¹⁴⁹

and asked them to pray for him to have the strength to face his martyrdom:

Only request in my behalf both inward and outward strength, that I may not only speak, but [truly] will; and that I may not merely be called a Christian, but really be found to be one. (Ch. 3:2.)¹⁵⁰

Ignatius also asked the Romans to pray for him to be martyred by being thrown to the lions:

Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God]. (Ch. 4:2b.)¹⁵¹ - Pray ye for me, that I may attain [the object of my desire]. (Ch. 8:3.)¹⁵²

and as he did in most of his other letters he asked for prayer for the church at Antioch that he had left:

Remember in your prayers the Church in Syria, which now has God for its shepherd, instead of me. (Ch. 9:1.)¹⁵³

Ignatius requested prayers for himself and acknowledged the success of the prayers of the other communities for his church in Antioch in his letter to the Philadelphians,¹⁵⁴ when he wrote:

But your prayer to God shall make me perfect, that I may attain to that portion which through mercy has been allotted me, (Ch. 5:1.)¹⁵⁵

and,

¹⁴⁶ Ignatius, 'To the Trallians', p. 72.

¹⁴⁷ Ignatius, 'To the Romans' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 73-8.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁵⁴ Ignatius, 'To the Philadelphians' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 79-85.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

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Since, according to your prayers, and the compassion which ye feel in Christ Jesus, it is reported to me that the Church which is at Antioch in Syria possesses peace. (Ch. 10:1.)¹⁵⁶

In his letter to the Smyrnaeans ¹⁵⁷ he stated his concern for the Smyrnaeans to beware of heretics and exhorts them to pray for them.

only you must pray to God for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance, which, however, will be very difficult. (Ch. 4:1b.)¹⁵⁸

He acknowledges that their prayer for his church at Antioch has helped them, ‘Your prayer has reached to the Church, which is at Antioch in Syria. (Ch. 11:1.)¹⁵⁹

Ignatius had also written to Polycarp (65 – 100 -155 CE), the bishop of Smyrna,¹⁶⁰ as a father, exhorting him to pray, saying ‘Give thyself to prayer without ceasing’. (Ch. 1:3)¹⁶¹ The Letter of Ignatius to Polycarp also included the petition:

I pray for your happiness for ever in our God, Jesus Christ, by whom continue ye in the unity and under the protection of God, (Ch. 8:3.)¹⁶²

in the Epistle of Barnabas c. 100 CE, ¹⁶³ is a prayer of blessing and petition:

And may God, who ruleth over all the world, give to you wisdom, intelligence, understanding, knowledge of His judgments, with patience ... The Lord of glory and of all grace be with your spirit. Amen. (Ch. 21.)¹⁶⁴

Polycarp

The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians¹⁶⁵ included a petition and a blessing:

But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith and truth, and in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity; and may He bestow on you a lot and portion among His saints, and on us with you, and on all that are under heaven, who shall believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in His Father, who ‘raised Him from the dead’. (Ch. 12:2.)¹⁶⁶

Iranaeus

In his writings Iranaeus (120 – 202 CE) stressed the need to follow ‘what the Church believed and taught and to preserve that teaching from corruption’.¹⁶⁷ In his prayer ‘A prayer to God’ he prays for his readers to turn away from heresy:

¹⁵⁶ Ignatius, ‘To the Philadelphians’, p. 85.

¹⁵⁷ Ignatius, ‘To the Smyrnaeans’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 86-92.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁰ Ignatius, ‘To Polycarp’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 93-6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁶³ ‘Epistle of Barnabas’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 137-149.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁶⁵ Polycarp, ‘Letter of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 33-6.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁷ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

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I call upon thee, O Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob and Israel, thou who art the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in thy infinite mercy hast been pleased that we should know thee; thou hast made heaven and earth, thou art the sovereign Lord of all things, thou only art the true God, and there is none higher than thee.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, grant that all my readers may know thee, for thou only art God; confirm them in thee, turn them away from every heretical and impious doctrine which knows not God.¹⁶⁸

and he includes a petitionary 'Prayer for the conversion of heretics.'

For our part, we pray that they [the heretics] may not lie in the pit they have digged for themselves; that they may not depart from their Mother, that they may leave the Abyss, forsake the Void and flee the Ogdoad; that being converted to the Church of God they may be law-fully begotten, and that Christ may be formed in them. May they acknowledge the only true God and Lord of all things as the sole Creator and Fashioner of this world. That is the desire of our charity; offered to God, our love is of more avail than that with which they think they love themselves, and being sincere it will be effective, if only they respond to it. It is like a bitter medicine: it cuts away the dead flesh of he wound, it unmask their pride and boastfulness. Earnestly and untiringly, then, let us try to stretch out our hands to them. In our next book we intend to present the words of the Lord; may these convince them and draw them away from all error and blasphemy concerning their Creator, who alone is the true God and the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.¹⁶⁹

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria (153 - 217 CE) included a prayer at the conclusion of his treatise, 'The Instructor'¹⁷⁰ which is called the 'Prayer to the Paedagogus.' This was a prayer of petition and praise with the standard doxology:

Be gracious, O Instructor, to us Thy children, Father, Charioteer of Israel, Son and Father, both in One, O Lord. Grant to us who obey Thy precepts, that we may perfect the likeness of the image, and with all our power know Him who is the good God and not a harsh judge. And do Thou Thyself cause that all of us who have our conversation in Thy peace, who have been translated into Thy commonwealth, having sailed tranquilly over the billows of sin, may be wafted in calm by Thy Holy Spirit, by the ineffable wisdom, by night and day to the perfect day; and giving thanks may praise, and praising thank the Alone Father and Son, Son and Father, the Son, Instructor and Teacher, with the Holy Spirit, all in One, in whom is all, for whom all is One, for whom is eternity, whose members we all are, whose glory the aeons are; for the All-good, All-lovely, All-wise, All-just One. To whom be glory both now and for ever. Amen. (Bk.3, Ch. 12.)¹⁷¹

Cyprian

Cyprian (200 – 258 CE) was a pupil of Tertullian and his writings in the third century stressed the necessity for urgent and constant prayer. In his Epistle VII 'To the Clergy, Concerning

¹⁶⁸ Jacques Zeiller, *Christian Beginnings*, Burns & Oates, London, 1960, p. 92.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

¹⁷⁰ Clement of Alexandria, 'The Instructor' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. pp.209-296.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

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Prayer to God',¹⁷² written c. 250 CE during the Decian persecution, he told the clergy that Christians had a responsibility to constant prayer and petition:

Let us urgently pray and groan with continual petitions. For know, beloved brethren, that I was not long ago reproached with this also in a vision, that we were sleepy in our prayers, and did not pray with watchfulness; (Ch 5.)¹⁷³

He instructed that one must pray with 'watchfulness' as St Paul in Col. 4:2, had instructed:

Let us therefore strike off and break away from the bonds of sleep, and pray with urgency and watchfulness, as the Apostle Paul bids us, saying, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same.' (Ch 5.)¹⁷⁴

Cyprian stated that they have the example of the Lord and the apostles at prayer constantly:

For the apostles also ceased not to pray day and night; and the Lord also Himself, the teacher of our discipline, and the way of our example, frequently and watchfully prayed, as we read in the Gospel: 'He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.' And assuredly what He prayed for, He prayed for on our behalf, since He was not a sinner, but bore the sins of others. (Ch 5.)¹⁷⁵

He gave the example of Jesus praying for Peter:

'And the Lord said to Peter, Behold, Satan has desired to sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' But if for us and for our sins He both laboured and watched and prayed, how much more ought we to be instant in prayers; and, first of all, to pray and to entreat the Lord Himself, and then through Him, to make satisfaction to God the Father! We have an advocate and an intercessor for our sins, Jesus Christ. (Ch. 5.)¹⁷⁶

Prayers of Thanksgiving

The description of the Martyrdom of Polycarp in 'The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna'¹⁷⁷ included a prayer which he said before he was martyred. This prayer is regarded as possibly 'representative of the type of Eucharistic consecration prayer in use in Smyrna in the middle of the second century.'¹⁷⁸

O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body, through the incorruption [imparted] by the Holy Ghost. Among whom may I be accepted this day before Thee as a fat and acceptable sacrifice, according as Thou, the ever-truthful God, hast fore-ordained, hast revealed beforehand to me, and now hast fulfilled. Wherefore also I praise Thee for all things, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, along with the

¹⁷² Cyprian, 'Epistle VII "To the Clergy, Concerning Prayer to God"', *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, pp. 285-87.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁷ 'The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna', *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 39-44.

¹⁷⁸ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

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everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom, to Thee, and
the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen. (Ch. 14.)¹⁷⁹

Prayers of Praise

Also in the letter of the Church of Smyrna to the Church of Philomelium about the martyrdom of Polycarp was a standard prayer of praise and doxology clearly modelled on Paul's writings:

To Him who is able to bring us all by His grace and goodness into his everlasting kingdom, through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, to Him be glory, and honour, and power, and majesty, for ever. Amen. (Ch. 22.)¹⁸⁰

Prayers of Blessing

Prayers of blessing were common in community gatherings and in letters to other communities. The first Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians included prayers of blessing and ended with instructions for Christian living and a doxology:

Blessed are we, beloved, if we keep the commandments of God in the harmony of love; that so through love our sins may be forgiven us. For it is written, 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not impute to him, and in whose mouth there is no guile.' This blessedness cometh upon those who have been chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Ch. 50:5-7.)¹⁸¹

Also at the end of Clement's First Epistle to the Corinthians and Ignatius' letters to the Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans and Ephesians were the standard blessing and doxology.

Clement:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and with all everywhere that are the called of God through Him, by whom be to Him glory, honour, power, majesty, and eternal dominion, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen. (Ch. 59.)¹⁸²

Ignatius:

May the Lord Jesus Christ honour them, in whom they hope, in flesh, and soul, and faith, and love, and concord! Fare ye well in Christ Jesus, our common hope. Blessing. (Phil. Ch. 11:2b.)¹⁸³

Grace, mercy, peace, and patience, be with you for evermore! (Smyr. Ch. 12:2b.)¹⁸⁴

Fare ye well in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, our common hope, and in the Holy Ghost. Fare ye well. Amen. Grace [be with you]. (Eph. Ch. 21.)¹⁸⁵

9. Concluding Summary

The basic reason for prayer was to communicate with one's god, and the types of ancient Greek and Roman prayer were influenced by this need. The Judaic types of prayer incorporated praise,

¹⁷⁹ 'The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna', p. 42.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁸¹ Clement, 'The Letter of the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, Commonly Called Clement's First Letter', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 18-19.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁸³ Ignatius, 'To the Philadelphians', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 85.

¹⁸⁴ Ignatius, 'To the Smyrnaeans', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 92.

¹⁸⁵ Ignatius, 'To the Ephesians', in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 58.

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blessings and petition, which in turn influenced Christian prayer. The earliest Christian prayer types were mainly prayers of petition.

When Tertullian outlines prayer practices in the Christianity of the third century CE he refers to Jesus' method of praying in the Lord's Prayer and uses the Lord's Prayer as an example for Christian prayer. He points out that the Lord's Prayer was the perfect prayer as it contains 'veneration of God' and 'petition for man'.

Just as petition was the main prayer for early Christianity so it was the predominant prayer form in a majority of the religions in the Graeco-Roman world. Greek prayers were usually extempore and linked with libation and sacrifice. Frequently the prayers were made up of an invocation followed by praise followed by the request and then sometimes a promise to do something in return. Roman prayers were almost always spoken aloud and in a public context. Most Roman prayers were accompanied by sacrifice. Similarly to Greek prayer, Roman prayer was made up of an invocation, followed by praise or a definition of the god and a statement of the god's or goddess' benevolence followed by the a petition. The format had to be in the right words, and consequently there developed an almost legalistic usage of words. Prayer in mystery religions usually accompanied certain ritual actions and a ritual meal with ritual words.

Jewish prayers were taken from the psalms such as *Sh'ma*, and a collection of blessings called the *Amida*. It is clear that the prayers in the New Testament were based on Jewish prayers, but extempore prayers of petition were most favoured. The formal prayers of Christianity developed a similar format to those of the Greeks and Romans, in which there was an invocation of God, then praise, followed by the petition. The prayers of Jesus reported in the gospels were, of course, all to his Father and Paul's prayers in his writings were prayed to the Father through Jesus. Prayers of praise and thanksgiving were also evident in the gospels and Paul uses many prayers of blessings in his letters. Paul included doxologies in the closing of his letters and at the ends of various prayers. These doxologies were similar to those from Jewish prayer but were adapted to suit Christian prayer. The letters of the early Church Fathers were similar to Paul's letters in that they encouraged the communities to persevere in prayer and contained examples of prayers of petition most often.

Attitude and Posture for Prayer

1. Introduction

What was the attitude and posture required for prayer in the other religions and earlier Christianity? The state of mind was usually what brought some to prayer, such as prayers composed as a result of happiness, anger or distress. The approach to prayer would be governed by how the petitioner viewed himself and his god or gods - was it familiar or subservient? Examples of both can be found in all religions. Most Greek and Roman prayers were offered with dignity and reverence for the gods. In prayer forms in Greek and Roman religion it was not necessary to have made peace with one's brother as often the prayer was for the gods to help the suppliant to overcome some enemy or competitor. In early Jewish prayer often the plea to God was for help and protection from their enemies and offered in fear of their enemies and in hope for God's help.

2. Tertullian

In his 'Treatise on Prayer' Tertullian described the attitude required and correct posture for different occasions of Christian prayer.

a) Attitude for prayer according to Tertullian

- (i) Tertullian points out that before prayers one should have made peace with one's brother in:
that we go not up unto God's altar before we compose whatever of discord or offence we have contracted with our brethren'. (Ch. 11)
- (ii) One is to have a calm mind:
'Nor merely from anger, but altogether from *all* perturbation of mind, ought the exercise of prayer to be free, uttered from a spirit such as the Spirit unto whom it is sent.' (Ch. 12)
- (iii) Pray with modesty and humility:
But we more commend our prayers to God when we pray with modesty and humility, with not even our hands too loftily elevated, but elevated temperately and becomingly; and not even our countenance over-boldly uplifted. (Ch. 17)
- (iv) Pray with a subdued voice:
The sounds of our voice, likewise, should be subdued; else, if we are to be heard for our noise, how large windpipes should we need! But God is the hearer not of the voice, but of the heart, just as He is its inspector. (Ch. 17)

Tertullian refers to the Priestess' oracle at Delphi when Herodotus (Hdt Bk.1:47) stated that she knew what the petitioners wanted to know before being asked:

The demon of the Pythian oracle says:
"And I do understand the mute, and plainly hear the speechless one." (Ch. 17)

b) Posture required for prayer according to Tertullian

Tertullian also outlines the posture that would have been common at his time. One has:

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(i) Hands upraised and spread out:

We, however, not only raise, but even expand them; and, taking our model from the Lord's passion [on the cross] even in prayer we confess [or give praise] to Christ. (Ch. 14)

(ii) A variety of positions according to occasion:

Prayer is subject to diversity of observance, through the act of some few who abstain from kneeling on the Sabbath; ... this dissension is particularly on its trial before the churches, (Ch. 23)

The *Orans* see fig 1. was a picture of a female figure with extended arms in the common posture of prayer in antiquity for many religions. The *Orans* predated Christianity and had been used as funerary art in pagan religions.¹⁸⁶

Tertullian describes:

(iii) Standing as a posture of exultation:

We, however (just as we have received), only on the day of the Lord's Resurrection ought to guard not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude; deferring even our businesses lest we give any place to the devil. Similarly, too, in the period of Pentecost; which period we distinguish by the same solemnity of exultation (Ch. 23)

(iv) Prostration as a posture of adoration:

But who would hesitate *every* day to prostrate himself before God, at least in the first prayer with which we enter on the daylight? (Ch. 23)



Fig. 1.

(v) Kneeling as a posture of humility:

At fasts, moreover, and Stations, no prayer should be made without kneeling, and the remaining customary marks of humility; for (then) we are not only *praying*, but *deprecating*, and making satisfaction to God our Lord. (Ch. 23)

(vi) Tertullian had referred earlier to:

the custom which some have of sitting when prayer is ended, I perceive no reason, except that which children give. For what if that Hermas, whose writing is generally inscribed with the title *The Shepherd*, had, after finishing his prayer, not sat down on his bed, but done some other thing; should we maintain that also as a matter for observance? Of course not. Why, even as it is the sentence, "When I had prayed, and had sat down on my bed," is simply put with a view to the order of the narration, not as a model of discipline. (Ch. 16)

Herms' stated in his 'Vision Fifth' that he sat after praying, 'After I had been praying at home, and had sat down on my couch.'¹⁸⁷ It appears that some Christians had taken the example of Hermas, from his popular writings called the *Shepherd of Hermas* c. 160CE, as a guide to Christian practice.

¹⁸⁶ Stevenson, J. 1978, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered monuments of early Christianity*, Thames and Hudson, London.

¹⁸⁷ Hermas. 1995, 'Vision Fifth (trans. by the Rev. F. Crombie)', in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, p. 18.

3. Greek.

The attitude in Greek prayer was varied according to how the petitioner viewed the gods and himself. Prayers developed from ritual and were usually a part of the ritual with sacrifice in the act of communication and appeasement of the gods. Plato's 'Pan Prayer' from his play *Phaedrus*, c. 400 BCE is a friendly, extempore personal petition to the gods of a grove specifically, Pan, and illustrates Plato's acknowledgment of the presumed beneficial nature of the gods:

Socrates: 'Dear Pan and ye other gods who inhabit here, grant that I may become fair within, and that my external circumstances may be such as to further my inward health. May I esteem the wise man rich, and allow me no more wealth than a man of moderation can bear and manage. Is there anything else that we should ask for Phaedrus? To me my prayer is sufficient.'

Phaedrus: Offer it for me too, Socrates; friends should share everything.¹⁸⁸

The salutation of 'Dear Pan' as to an old friend and the inclusion of other gods who may be present shows the Greeks' belief that the gods were present in their world and available to help humankind. The fact that he was saying the prayer in a grove attests to the Greeks belief that the gods were everywhere. However it was of major importance not to overlook any god who may be in the area. Greek prayers were prayed to many gods or one specific god and played an important role in Greek culture and the Greeks' need to acknowledge a power outside the human sphere.

Posture in Greek prayer

Walter Burkert says about the posture of prayer for the Greeks, 'To invoke the heavenly gods, both hands are raised to the sky with upturned palms; to call on the gods of the sea, the arms are extended out to the sea; the hands are also stretched towards the cult image'.¹⁸⁹ Throughout *The Iliad* Homer describes examples of Greek prayer posture. One example typical of Greek prayer posture is when the high priest Chryses' daughter is returned (cf Ch. 4, p.35 for the prayer) and 'open-armed to heaven Chryses prayed'. (IL. 1, 460.)¹⁹⁰ Chryses was 'open-armed' indicating outstretched arms. Another episode in *The Iliad* states that:

The soldiers held their hands to heaven, Trojans and Achaeans, in this prayer: 'Father Zeus, almighty over Ida, may he who brought this trouble on both sides perish! Let him waste away in the undergloom! As for ourselves let us be loyal friends in peace!' (IL. 3, 315)¹⁹¹

Other illustrations of the posture of Greek prayer can be found in the temple architecture, sculpture and reliefs of the classical age. Worshippers can be seen in the attitude of prayer 'standing and with the right hand (sometimes both hands) raised'¹⁹² as in Greek iconographical

¹⁸⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*, trans. Walter Hamilton, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 103.

¹⁸⁹ Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁰ Homer, *The Iliad*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁹² F. T. Van-Straten, 'Gifts for the Gods', pp. 65-151 in *Faith, Hope and Worship*, ed. H. S. Versnel, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1981, p. 82.

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material. ‘Sometimes the suppliants (particularly women) would kneel to pray as is illustrated in some votive sculpture from the fourth century’.¹⁹³

4. Roman Attitude and Posture

Virgil (70 - 19 BCE), Livy (59 BCE – 17 CE) and Horace (65 BCE – 8 CE), all writing just prior to Christian times, illustrate that religious practices were once part of a Roman’s everyday life. The private prayers that Virgil put into the mouths of his characters in the *Aeneid*, although not examples of formulaic prayer, take the form of praise, petition, devotion, vows and service. Throughout the *Aeneid* the gods are petitioned for help and guidance. These examples indicate attitudes and mannerisms of prayer forms that were most probably common in Virgil’s own day. The prayer of Anchises is a good example of reverence, attitude, posture and devotion when he asked for a sign from the gods to let him know if they were with him and whether he should flee from Troy with Aeneas:

Anchises raised his eyes to the stars in joy and stretching his palms towards the sky said, ‘Jupiter Almighty, if any prayer can change your will, look down on us this once. We make one prayer only, and if our righteousness has earned some favour, give us now your presage, and confirm this sign.’ (*The Aeneid* 2, 680.)¹⁹⁴

The deity is first addressed by name, ‘Jupiter Almighty’, then a request for benevolence followed by claims of devotion and finally the request. Anchises prayed with ‘his eyes (raised) to the stars’, palms stretched upward, in the attitude of prayer, as was the common posture for Roman prayer. Similar to Greek prayer posture, the arms were usually ‘outstretched towards the domain associated with the deity, that is, towards the sky, the sea, or the underworld’.¹⁹⁵

Aeneas prays in a more personal manner to the gods for guidance when he makes a heartfelt petition to Apollo on the island of Delos for help to find a homeland. He says:

Reverently I entered the temple built of ancient stones and prayed. ‘Apollo, grant us a home of our own. ... Who is to be our guide? Where do you bid us go, where settle our home? Be to us a father-god; tell us your will and speak direct to our hearts.’ (*The Aeneid* 3, 85-90.)¹⁹⁶

Another prayer of Aeneas, which testifies to the reliance that the ancient Romans had on the gods, is when he in his despair, prays to Jupiter to save his fleet from destruction by fire. This example illustrates Aeneas’ manner of approach:

Then Aeneas the True rent the garment off his shoulders, stretched forth the palms of his hands, and called on the gods for aid: ‘Jupiter Almighty, if you do not yet look on every Trojan with hatred, and if your loving-kindness, shown of old, can still take note of humanity’s suffering, permit our fleet, even now, to escape the flames, O Father, and wrest Troy’s slender hope from death. Else, if I deserve, cast the

¹⁹³ Van-Straten, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁹⁴ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. W. F. Jackson Knight, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1958 (1956), p. 71.

¹⁹⁵ Larry J. Alderink & Luther H. Martin, ‘Prayer in Greco-Roman Religions’, pp. 123-127 in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Mark Kiley et al, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 125.

¹⁹⁶ Virgil, op. cit., p. 77.

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remnant left of us down to death by your own angry bolt; overwhelm me, by your
own hand, here'. (*The Aeneid* 5, 690-700.)¹⁹⁷

Aeneas, as well as adopting the usual posture for prayer when he 'stretched forth the palms of his hands' also tore the garment off his shoulders, possibly taking off his cloak or tearing at his garment in an act of desperation and humility.

By the first century CE there were many different religions and cults flourishing in the Roman Empire as the result of Roman expansion and the policy of allowing conquered countries to retain their own customs. The State religion, together with mystery religions from the east and cults of the hero gods, the imperial cult and emperor worship, following Julius Caesar's death,¹⁹⁸ existed side by side. The emperor cult was a cult of loyalty to the dead emperors and devotion to the reigning one, which developed in Augustus' time. The citizens of Rome considered 'the state religion', which was the ancient Roman religion, the so-called 'faith of our fathers' still to be theirs.¹⁹⁹ This Roman religion had been revived for the sake of the state; its rituals were still carried out by elected priests who were state officials. It was the responsibility of these officials to ensure that the gods were propitiated. The state religion was political and public, the Roman custom for public prayer was more dependent on the correct word usage rather than what was in the heart. Roman religion was a corporate religion and it was the state's relationship with the gods that was important not the individual's belief as compared to Judaism and Christianity in which the correct inner disposition of the person praying was of major importance for prayer. Participation in Roman state religion did not conflict with a Roman citizen's membership of an approved mystery religion or some other cult. As long as one took part in the public ceremony that fulfilled one's duty to the Emperor, and thus to the state, one could be involved in whatever other cult satisfied one's spiritual needs.

5. Mystery Religions: Attitude and Posture

The posture and attitude for Mystery religions varied according to the mystery. The tearing of clothes is seen in some rituals in Mystery religions. One common attitude was of reverence and fear towards the deity such as in the cult of Magna Mater and the Dionysian rituals. The participants would become intoxicated as in the Dionysian rituals or be swept up in hysteria through the rituals as in cult of Magna Mater. Strict observance of the rituals as in the Eleusinian and Mithraic Mysteries reflected the serious spiritual attitude of the participants.

6. Jewish Attitude and Posture

In many of the prayers in the Old Testament the Jews' plea to their God is for him to intercede or to mediate and they cry out to him or beseech him. The Jews' approach to their God was

¹⁹⁷ Virgil, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁹⁸ Frederick C. Grant, *Ancient Roman Religion*, p. xxiii.

¹⁹⁹ Shelton, op. cit., p. 360.

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sometimes as a child to its father, or at other times as to a judge and they often prayed out of fear and duty. The posture of entreaty in Jewish prayer was clearly illustrated in certain psalms in the Old Testament such as:

... So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
(Ps. 63:4.)

... O Lord, God of my salvation, when at night, I cry out in your presence, ...
I spread out my hands to you. (Ps. 88:1,9b.)

... O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the
Lord, our Maker. (Ps. 95:6.)

... Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord. (Ps. 134:2.)

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; ...
I stretch out my hands to you; (Ps. 143:1,6.)

The posture of prayer ranged from standing, to genuflection, to kneeling and to prostration. In Old Testament prayer, standing with hands outstretched to God or towards the temple, was a common posture. Solomon stands with arms outstretched on a platform when dedicating the great temple. 'Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven.' (2 Chr. 6:13.) 'Although the Jews ordinarily stood at public prayer, in the post-exilic period they began the custom of kneeling during private prayer'.²⁰⁰ In the Psalm 'O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker' Ps 95:6 indicates the expression of 'humble submission' needed in prayer.²⁰¹ Prayer in the synagogues would be said or chanted standing just as in the Temple. The *Amida* was a prayer said standing with genuflection at specific passages.²⁰²

7. New Testament

One of the characteristics of early Christian prayer was confidence in a loving God and 'the certainty of being heard'.²⁰³ Jesus had said to his apostles to have confidence in prayer for, 'I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything I will do it.' (Lk. 14:13-14.) In many of his letters Paul exhorts the communities to have faith in prayer, as in his letter to the Philippians in which he writes 'do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' (Phil. 4:6.)

For prayer to be acceptable it was important to have the right disposition. Jesus points out that one needs to have faith as well as love when praying:

²⁰⁰ Louis F Hartman & Alexander A Di Lella, 'Daniel', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary - 2nd Edition*, p. 415.

²⁰¹ John J Castelot & Aelred Cody, 'Religious Institutions of Israel', pp1252-1283 in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary - 2nd Edition*, p 1273.

²⁰² Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁰³ Greeven., *op. cit.*, p. 803.

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Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." (Mk. 11:22-25.)

One must not only have faith but also forgiveness if anyone has offended you. Mark was referring to the Jewish custom of standing to pray when he reports that Jesus had said, 'whenever you stand praying'. Humility is also a required disposition as shown in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income. But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' (Lk. 18:10-13.)

The thanksgiving prayer of the Pharisee standing proudly and proclaiming his own value and thinking that he was not like other people was shown as not as pleasing to God as the prayer of the tax collector. The Pharisee had fulfilled the Jewish law as far as religious observances when he says, 'I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income' and obviously he was a good practitioner of his religion but his interior disposition was one of pride in his achievements and not of his need of God. The tax collector's petition to God shows the correct disposition needed for prayer, that of humility. His prayer was of few words and expressed his inner disposition and need of God.

Paul gave many instructions concerning the disposition needed for prayer such as, 'I desire then that in every place that men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or argument,' 1 Tim. 2:8. The writer of Hebrews makes a closing request for prayers so that he would have the right disposition, 'pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things.' (Heb. 13:18.) James, a disciple of Jesus and leader after Peter of the Christian community in Jerusalem, exhorts the community to pray with faith. He says that the prayer of the righteous will be answered:

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. (Jas. 5:13-18.)

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James is referring to prayer of the community for each other. The use of oil as a healing agent was an ancient custom and the use of oil in anointing symbolized the presence of the healing power of the Lord.²⁰⁴ Prayers always accompanied the anointing. In the same letter we find the instruction to petition for wisdom with faith and never to doubt, as doubting will render their prayer ineffective:

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (Jas. 1:5-8.)

James also refers to the fact that people pray for the wrong reason, 'You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on pleasures' (Jas. 4:3.) James stresses the attitude for prayer in his quotation of a scriptural text 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'. The same sentiment is expressed by Luke in the 'Magnificat', Mary's song of praise (Lk. 1:46-55), where the canticle declares that the petitions of the proud are rejected and the prayers of the humble are accepted.

Fig. 2. 'Christians with their arms uplifted in prayer.'



Part of restored wall painting from Lullingstone Roman villa, Kent (c. 350 CE).²⁰⁵

The above picture illustrates that one prayer posture:

favoured by the early Christians, (was) standing with hands extended, as Christ on the Cross, according to Tertullian; or with hands raised towards heaven,

Another posture could be standing:

with bowed heads, ... prostration, kneeling, genuflection, and such gestures as striking the breast (were)... all outward signs of the reverence proper for prayer, whether in public or private.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Thomas W. Leahy, 'The Epistle of James' pp. 909-916 in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary - 2nd Edition*, p. 915.

²⁰⁵ M. A. Smith, op. cit., pp. 152-3.

²⁰⁶ John J. Wynne, 'Prayer', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XII, p. 348.

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Jesus is reported by Matthew to have thrown himself on the ground in a posture of entreaty when he prays in Gethsemane Mt. 26:39. Other Christian prayer postures are described in the following New Testament examples:

The narrator of Acts described the community as kneeling when the disciples of Tyre were farewelling Paul:

When our days there were ended, we left and proceeded on our journey; and all of them, with wives and children, escorted us outside the city. There we knelt down on the beach and prayed and said farewell to one another. (Acts 21:5-6a.)

Jesus and Peter are described as kneeling to pray: Jesus on the Mount of Olives, 'withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down and prayed' (Lk. 22:41b); 'Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.' (Acts 9:40.)

Paul describes postures for prayer, possibly kneeling or genuflection or with hands uplifted in prayer:

... every knee shall bow to me; every tongue shall give praise to God. (Rom. 14:11b.)

... I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone ... I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer ... (1 Tim. 2:1.)

8. Church Fathers

Clement in 'The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians' indicated the posture of entreaty which was common in most ancient Christian prayer when he congratulated the Corinthians on their 'considerable Christian piety' and stated that the community:

did, with true earnestness of mind and a godly confidence, stretch forth your hands to God Almighty, beseeching Him to be merciful unto you, if ye had been guilty of any involuntary transgression. (Ch. 2:3.)²⁰⁷

and that they should prostrate themselves in entreaty and submission to God's will:

Let us therefore, with all haste, put an end to this [state of things]; and let us fall down before the Lord, and beseech Him with tears, that He would mercifully be reconciled to us, and restore us to our former seemly and holy practice of brotherly love. (Ch. 48: 1b.)²⁰⁸

That kneeling was a normal attitude for some prayer is made clear by Eusebius who, in *The History of the Church From Christ to Constantine*, describes how Christians knelt down to pray in the time of Marcus Aurelius (emperor 161-180). It happened just before a battle and a severe storm developed which routed the enemy. Eusebius writes that the soldiers of the Melitine Legion, the so-called 'Thundering Legion', 'as they faced the enemy in their lines, knelt down on the ground,

²⁰⁷ Clement, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

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our normal attitude when praying, and turned to God in supplication' and 'rain [was] sent from heaven in answer to Christian prayer'.²⁰⁹

9. Concluding Summary

Tertullian describes the attitude and posture needed for Christian prayer in his time. The attitude should be one of reverence, freedom from all grudges, a calm mind, humility and a subdued voice. He stated that the posture of the one praying varied to suit the occasion, but standing was a posture of exultation, kneeling, of humility, and prostration of adoration. In Greek, Roman and Jewish prayers as in Christian the attitude should be reverent. Posture for Greek prayer was usually standing with hands raised towards whichever area the deity was perceived to be or towards the deity's cult image. The attitude for Roman prayer according to Virgil was reverence and devotion and generally formal. The posture of Roman prayer was similar to Greek prayer and usually standing. The approach in Jewish prayer was one of devotion and duty. Lifting up of hands while standing was recorded in the psalms as the favoured posture, however some prayers required genuflexion and the custom of kneeling for Jewish private prayer became accepted in the post-exilic period.

In the New Testament writings the attitude for prayer was one of confidence that one's prayer would be answered if one were to petition with faith and humility. One must also have forgiven others. Paul stressed the need to pray with a pure heart. James, as well, stated that prayer would not be answered if it were not the prayer of the righteous. James also says that one should pray for wisdom and never doubt that prayer made with faith would be answered, but one must be humble and not ask for the wrong things out of greed. Christian prayer posture described in the New Testament was mainly kneeling or standing with hands uplifted towards the heavens. The posture for prayer in the early church fathers' writings was also standing with hands raised towards the sky as illustrated in some images. For private prayer the posture of kneeling indicated humility. The disposition of humility, and virtue was important for Christian prayer.

All religions had the disposition at various times of submission to the will of the deity and the stretching forth their hands in entreaty, thanksgiving and worship. The postures could be anything from standing to kneeling to prostration at various times depending upon the need and the type of prayer being said.

²⁰⁹ Eusebius, op. cit., p. 151 & p. 423.

Places for Prayer

1. Introduction

From ancient times special places such as temples, synagogues and sanctuaries were set aside for specific liturgies, sacrifices, prayer and worship. For both the Greek and Roman places of prayer could be at home or at a festival, out in a field or grove in peacetime or on the battlefield during war. The Romans also prayed to their ancestral spirits and gods of the hearth and home with both public and private worship of the *Penates* as guardians of the state (public) and guardians of the home (private) and at the 'shrine of Vesta [as] the symbolic hearth of Rome'.²¹⁰ According to Everett Ferguson in 'A.D. 240 in Dura Europos, a Roman garrison on the Euphrates River' you would find:

a temple of Mithras, a temple of Palmyrene gods, a Jewish synagogue, a temple of Adonis, a sanctuary of Tyche, a Christian house church, a shrine to Zeus Kyrrios. Elsewhere in the city you would find temples to Gadde (a local Palmyrene deity), Zeus Theos, Zeus Megistos, Atargatis (a Syrian goddess), Artemis, and Jupiter Dolichenus (a Syrian Baal), as well as the military temple next to the garrison's headquarters.²¹¹

This variety of places for worship was typical throughout the Roman Empire. Prayers could be part of the worship at any of these diverse places.

2. Tertullian.

Tertullian states that prayer should be said at every place that is convenient:

But how "in every place," since we are prohibited (from praying) in public? In every place, he means, which opportunity or even necessity, may have rendered suitable: for that which was done by the apostles (who, in gaol, in the audience of the prisoners, "began praying and singing to God") is not considered to have been done contrary to the precept; nor yet that which was done by Paul, who in the ship, in presence of all, "made thanksgiving to God." (Ch. 24)

3. Temples

Pagan temples were believed to be the places where the gods or goddesses visited or dwelled and to whom priests or priestesses of the cult offered sacrifices.²¹² There were many temples dedicated to various gods and used by members of cults and religions in the Graeco-Roman Empire at the time of Early Christianity. The Greek temples usually housed a cult statue and a suppliant could pray to the image.²¹³ Following processions and during festivals the sacrifices and prayers usually took place outside the Greek temples in the open air.²¹⁴ In the first century

²¹⁰ Ogilvie, op. cit., p. 90 & p. 102.

²¹¹ Everett Ferguson, 'The Competition. (Rivals to Christianity in the ancient world)' in *Christianity Today, Inc* February: 1998, p. 34.

²¹² Peter Murray & Linda Murray, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 105.

²¹³ Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, p. 92.

²¹⁴ Ibid.,

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CE the chief Roman temple was the Capitolium dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. There were also temples to many other deities including Apollo, Venus, Mercury, Hercules and the goddess Roma in major Roman cities such as Pompeii and Ostia.²¹⁵ The Temple of Jerusalem (up to 70 CE) was the Jewish special place for sacrifice and prayer. Early in Jewish history the temple of Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians c. 586 BCE, and then was rebuilt in the time of Cyrus II king of Persia c. 515 BCE. This Temple at Jerusalem had become the traditional Jewish place for prayer and sacrifice. If Jews could not be at the Temple they would look in the direction of Jerusalem to pray. In the Old Testament Daniel, when in exile, is described as praying in an upper room, which had windows opening towards Jerusalem. (Dan 6:10.)

4. Synagogues

Synagogues initially were Jewish community meeting places used for worship, teaching and prayer but not for sacrifice, for Jews who couldn't get to the Temple; but after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE synagogues became the major Jewish community places of worship. Throughout the second Temple period c. 515 BCE –70 CE 'sacrificial ritual was on the wane and prayer and liturgy on the rise'.²¹⁶ The synagogues developed as places of assembly for study and prayer without sacrifice. On the Sabbath, the service in the Synagogue would feature prayers, scripture reading and teaching.²¹⁷ 'During the life of Jesus ... [the Temple and synagogues] coexisted, not without some rivalry'²¹⁸. 'According to legend, there existed no less than 394 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the Temple'.²¹⁹ After the destruction of the Temple the sacrificial aspect of worship ceased to exist.²²⁰ The synagogues became the centres for public prayer and worship. 'The term 'Synagogue' [also] refers to Church in early Christian sources ... Jas. 2:2 ... [mentions the] assembly (Greek: *Synagoge*)'.²²¹

5. Sanctuaries

Sanctuaries, sacred sites or shrines were places of worship where various gods were believed to live or visit and where they dispensed favours in answer to prayer. Sanctuaries could be in the open air such as on mountains or in groves or in temples or caves. Some sanctuaries had restricted access or rigid purification rules before the worshipper could enter.²²² Sanctuaries could also be places of safety for special devotees of the god or goddess. There had been sacred places for worship associated with Jewish history prior to the building of the Temple at Jerusalem such as Shechem, Mamre, Bethel, Shiloh, Mizpah and others. Some of these

²¹⁵ Bradley, op. cit., p. 590.

²¹⁶ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1994, p. 290.

²¹⁷ Daniel Harrington, 'The Gospel According to Mark', pp. 596-629 in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary - 2nd Edition*, p. 600.

²¹⁸ Werner, op. cit., p. 2.

²¹⁹ Bernard Martin, *Prayer in Judaism*, Basic Books, New York, London, 1968, p. 6.

²²⁰ Werner, loc. cit.

²²¹ Ibid., p.20.

²²² Dillon, op. cit., see his Ch. 6, pp. 149-182.

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sanctuaries had become contaminated with pagan practices and lost repute in Jewish worship. Eventually the Temple in Jerusalem became regarded as the centre of legitimate worship until the Romans destroyed it in 70 CE.²²³

6. Domestic Worship

Families and other groups such as members of the same trade gathering together for communal meals was a feature of many religions. Worshippers of pagan gods incorporated special food, banquets and rites in domestic situations of worship. In Roman homes family rites and celebrations were carried out in honour of the *Lares* and the *Penates*. The god of the hearth fire, Vesta, the family spirit of protection the *Lares* and the spirit of the cupboard or pantry, the *Penates*, were part of the household and were always included in private prayer and sacrifice.

Judaism had its Sabbath meal and home liturgies. There was a special 'home celebration on the eve of the Passover, called *Seder*.²²⁴ The Christians carried on this tradition in the form of the Eucharist. One illustration of a Christian gathering c. 200 CE can be found in the catacombs. See fig. 3 it possibly represents the Eucharist.



Fig. 3. The 'Breaking of Bread'. Wall-painting.

Late 2nd century. Rome, catacomb of Priscilla.²²⁵

7. House Churches.

In the New Testament the earliest Christians are described as praying in the Temple and in synagogues according to Jewish custom. They are described as praying together publicly in *The Acts*:

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. (Acts 2:46-47a.)

The early Christians also assembled for community prayer in their own houses²²⁶ such as:

the 'large upper room' (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12) where Christ's celebration of the Passover with his disciples at the Last Supper was the moment of the Institution of the Eucharist... and the 'upper room' (probably the same one) where the Apostles met after the Resurrection and "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer,..." (Acts 1: 13-14).

The Temple and the synagogues had been the traditional place for prayer for the early Christians however as the Jewish authorities became more antagonistic towards the new 'sect' the early

²²³ Castelot & Cody, op. cit., p. 1265.

²²⁴ Werner, op. cit., p. 11.

²²⁵ Andre Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p. 7.

²²⁶ Murray, op. cit., p. 105.

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Christians were forced to pray in their homes. Some of these eventually became 'house churches', and until about the middle of the second century there is no mention of specific buildings for churches. The select group that met in the upper room was the beginning of the Christian custom of using 'house churches' for the 'breaking of bread', which was the central act of prayer in the Christian church. Another report in *The Acts of the Apostles* has the Apostles 'all together in one place', (Acts 2: 1b.) where they were sitting together, probably at a meal, at the time of the Jewish Festival of Weeks (Pentecost) when the Holy Spirit is reported to have come to them. The writer of *The Acts* describes the early Christians as a community where, 'all who believed were together and had all things in common', Acts 2:44, they cared for each other and they worshipped in the temple as well as 'breaking bread' in their homes. According to Gregory Dix, at first their public worship in the Temple was their Jewish worship and the home worship was 'their specifically Christian worship'.²²⁷ However it was the also Jewish custom to pray before and after meals at home and also have special meals with special prayers weekly on the Sabbath and at special religious festivals.

When St Paul wrote to the communities outside Palestine, he referred to them as *ecclesia* 'churches', 'both in the sense of a community of the faithful, and houses where they met'.²²⁸ Ignatius of Antioch wrote to some of these communities at the beginning of the second century CE and also called them churches. He urged them to peace, harmony and unity and to meet in one place and have one service under one bishop. Ignatius' exhortations that all the members care for each other and meet together would imply the need for a large building for community prayer.

About 155 CE Justin Martyr wrote his 'First Apology' in which he described the weekly worship of Christians. The community spirit is similar to that described in *The Acts*, St Paul's letters and Ignatius' exhortations, as Justin explains that:

the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together...and on the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country.²²⁹

In Rome, as in other communities, the meetings were probably accommodated in the houses of the wealthier members.²³⁰ The early Christians prayed both in common and privately in their homes. The Romans were always in fear of political uprisings so public gatherings, unless they were of an approved association, had been restricted and controlled.

²²⁷ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dacre Press, Westminster, 1945, p. 16.

²²⁸ Murray, op. cit., p. 105.

²²⁹ Justin, 'First Apology of Justin', ch 67. pp. 163-187 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 185-6.

²³⁰ Dix, op. cit., p. 22.

8. Concluding Summary

There were set places for formal prayer but one could pray anywhere they felt the need. Temples, synagogues, shrines and sanctuaries had been used from antiquity. Prayer was said in or in front of temples in Greek, Roman and mystery cults. There were many Greek and Roman temples, but only one Jewish temple. Synagogues were originally Jewish although the term synagogue was used for places of early Christian prayer in some Christian sources. Sanctuaries were places of prayer and sacrifice for many religious cults and mystery religions, and there were early Jewish sanctuaries for worship.

In Greek religion the father of the household performed domestic worship. The Romans had their household *Lares* and *Penates*, and there was home worship in Judaism such the ritual meal on the eve of the Passover, called the *Seder*. The Christians developed the Eucharist from the *Seder*. The first Christian house church started with the upper room of the Lord's Supper. Paul referred to the places where the early Christians met as churches. As the Christian communities grew they used the larger houses of the wealthier members of the community as places of assembly.

Times for Prayer

1. Introduction

Most ancient religions had set times or seasons for community prayer but private prayer could be and was said at any time for the needs of the individual. Some hours of prayer were the same for most religions.

2. Tertullian

For Christian times of prayer Tertullian says that nothing at all has been prescribed, except clearly 'to pray at every time and every place.' (Ch. 23) He refers to the common hours of the third, the sixth and the ninth hour; these had been part of Jewish worship and temple sacrifice:

Touching the *time*, however, the extrinsic observance of certain hours will not be unprofitable - those common hours, I mean, which mark the intervals of the day-the third, the sixth, the ninth - which we may find in the Scriptures to have been more solemn than the rest. The first infusion of the Holy Spirit into the congregated disciples took place at "the third hour." Peter, on the day on which he experienced the vision of Universal Community, (exhibited) in that small vessel, had ascended into the more lofty parts *of the house*, for prayer's sake "at the sixth hour." The same (apostle) was going into the temple, with John, at the ninth *hour*," when he restored the paralytic to his health. (Ch 25)

Tertullian instructs one to pray at least three times a day and gives reasons why:

Albeit these *practices* stand simply without any *precept* for their observance, still it may be granted a good thing to establish some definite presumption, which may both add stringency to the admonition to, pray, and may, as it were by a law, tear us out from our businesses unto such a duty; so that - what we read to have been observed by Daniel also, in accordance (of course) with Israel's discipline - we pray at least not less than thrice in the day, debtors as we are to Three - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: of course, (Ch 25)

He includes the necessity of praying at dawn and dusk:

in addition to our regular prayers which are due, without any admonition, on the entrance of light and of night. (Ch. 25)

Tertullian also suggests that that one should pray before taking food or going to the bath:

But, withal, it becomes believers not to take food, and not to go to the bath, before interposing a prayer; for the refreshments and nourishments of the spirit are to be held prior to those of the flesh, and things heavenly prior to things earthly. (Ch. 25)

Also he recommends the custom of prayer before parting from one's brethren as a necessity for mutual peace:

You will not dismiss a brother who has entered your house without prayer...But again, when received yourself by brethren, you will not make earthly refreshments prior to heavenly, for your faith will forthwith be judged. Or else how will you-according to the precept - say, "Peace to this *house*," unless you exchange mutual peace with them who are *in* the house? (Ch. 26)

3. Greek Times of Prayer

An example of times of prayer in the Graeco-Roman world prior to 325 CE can be found in the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* a compilation of teachings attributed to the apostles which states in Ch LX that ‘the Gentiles every day when they arise from sleep run to their idols to worship them and before all their work and all their labours do first of all pray to them’.²³¹ From earlier literature we can see that this was the practice of those who believed in the Gods. Xenophon (c. 430 – 356 BCE) expressed conventional beliefs²³² when in his work *Oeconomics*, he has Socrates stress the need to pray to the gods before any undertaking,²³³ particularly, in this case, before ‘agricultural matters’:

Socrates: Yes, Critobulus, but I thought that you knew that the gods control farming matters no less than the matters of war. No doubt you have noticed that men who are engaged in war propitiate the gods before joining combat, and try to discover through sacrifices and omens what they should or should not do. Do you think it is any less essential to propitiate the gods for agricultural matters? Take my word for it, sensible men pay respect to the gods for the good of their fruits and crops and cattle and horses and sheep and indeed of all their possessions.
Critobulus: Well, Socrates, I think you're giving me good advice when you tell me to try to begin every activity with the help of the gods, because, as you say, they control the activities of peace no less than those of war. (*Oeconomics* V.19- VI. 1.)²³⁴

Thucydides in Bk. 6, Ch 32, of his *History*²³⁵ wrote about prayers being said prior to the ships sailing in the Sicilian expedition. It demonstrates the Greeks’ need to invoke the blessings of the gods before any major undertaking.²³⁶

When the ships were manned and everything had been taken aboard which they meant to take with them on the voyage, silence was commanded by the sound of the trumpet, and the customary prayers made before putting to sea were offered up, not by each ship separately, but by them all together following the words of a herald.(Thuc. 6, 32)

4. Roman Times of Prayer

As the state religion was an essential part of Roman society, state magistrates ‘colleges of priests’, who were civil magistrates, performed the state rites and prayers for protection of the community. These were carried out according to the civil calendar for festivals and rituals. The prayers would accompany the sacrifices that were performed on anniversaries, before civil affairs and games and any important event. At the many temples their respective priestesses or priests offered prayers to whichever god they served. Private prayers were also said at home to images

²³¹ ‘Constitutions of the Holy Apostles’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, p. 423.

²³² Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Xenophon, Oeconomics: A Social and Historical Commentary*, trans. Sarah B. Pomeroy, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 258.

²³³ Meijer, op. cit., p. 235.

²³⁴ Pomeroy, op. cit., p. 133.

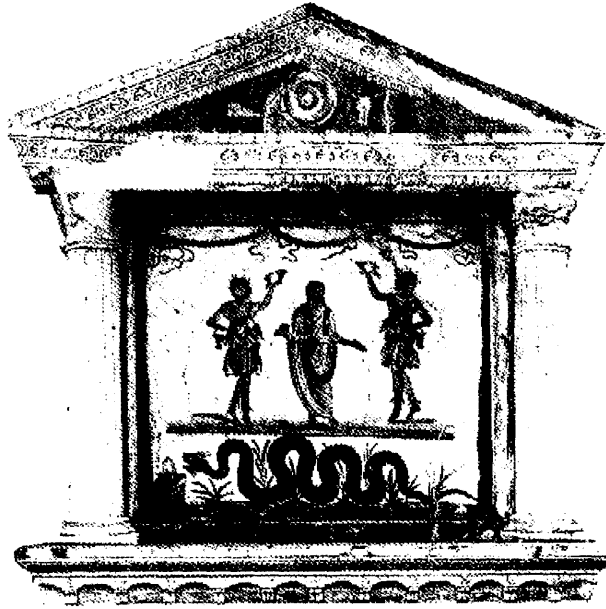
²³⁵ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 429.

²³⁶ Dillon, op. cit., p. 31.

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of peoples' favourite gods. Every family had their household shrine *lararium*, see fig. 4. and the *paterfamilias* performed religious rites such as daily prayers and sacrifice to the family's *Lar* for protection of the household and its occupants.²³⁷

Fig. 4. Illustration of a *lararium* from the House of Vetti, Pompeii.²³⁸



Examples of the times when worshippers in Graeco-Roman world incorporated special food, banquets and rites into situations of worship can be found in three papyri invitations to banquets, to be held in honour of the god Sarapis (who was associated with Isis), dating from about the second to third centuries CE, which were found in Egypt:

1. Nikephoros asks you to dine at a banquet of the lord Sarapis in the Birth-House on the 23rd, from the 9th hour.
2. Herais asks you to dine in the (dining-) room of the Sarapeion at a banquet of the Lord Sarapis tomorrow, namely the 11th, from the 9th hour.
3. The god calls you to a banquet being held in the Thoereion tomorrow from the 9th hour.²³⁹

The cult was widespread and scholars agree that the banquet was of a religious character and Sarapis was considered to be present at the banquet.²⁴⁰ The banquets could be held at the Sarapeion or room attached to it or in private homes. The three invitations also put the time of the banquet as commencing on the ninth hour; the ninth hour was the same as one of the prayer

²³⁷ Shelton, op. cit., p. 373.

²³⁸ Smith, M. A. op. cit., p. 76.

²³⁹ G. H. R. Horsley, (ed.) *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1977*, New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity, Vol. 1, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1981, p. 5.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

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times for both the Jews and Christians. These banquets, *kline*, were a 'meal at which one reclined',²⁴¹ which was a common Greek custom in those times.

5. Mystery

The quote above from the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* about 'the Gentiles every day when they arise from sleep run to their idols to worship them and before all their work and all their labours do first of all pray to them',²⁴² illustrates the sincerity of the worshippers. Apart from daily worship at the different temples and sanctuaries of the various mystery religions in the Graeco-Roman world there were many banquets which incorporated prayer and rituals held at various times of the year.²⁴³

6. Jewish

'The practice of praying throughout the day was one of the distinctive marks of Judaism'.²⁴⁴ In the Old Testament the psalmist appeals:

But I call upon God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon
I utter my complaint and moan and he will hear my voice. (Ps. 55:16-17.)

Continual prayers for the king (Solomon) are exhorted

...May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day
long.' (Ps. 72:15.)

Daniel said his prayers three times a day and when he was in exile and he would:

get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him just as he
had done previously. (Dan. 6:10.)

By the first century CE Jewish hours of prayer had been fixed to three times a day: 'sometime between seven and ten for morning prayer, between three and four for afternoon prayer but with no exact time assigned to evening prayer'.²⁴⁵

7. Christian

The apostles also prayed at the set times of Jewish customs such as 'the ninth hour':

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer at three
o'clock in the afternoon. (Acts 3:1.)

However Paul exhorts the Christian communities to 'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,' (1 Thess. 5:16-17.)

8. Church Fathers

In later writings such as the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* c. 120 CE Christians are exhorted to pray the Lord's Prayer 'Thrice in the day'.²⁴⁶ Polycarp's habit of prayer night and day was shown

²⁴¹ Horsley, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 8.

²⁴² 'Constitutions of the Holy Apostles', *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, p. 423.

²⁴³ See next Chapter 8, 'Community Prayer'.

²⁴⁴ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1977, p. 223.

²⁴⁵ Werner, op. cit., p. 3.

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in the 'Letter from the Church at Smyrna' c. 155 CE, about the martyrdom of Polycarp,²⁴⁷ when Polycarp was persuaded to leave the city for his own safety and:

He departed, therefore, to a country house not far distant from the city. There he stayed with a few [friends], engaged in nothing else night and day than praying for all men, and for the Churches throughout the world, according to his usual custom. (Ch. 5:1b)²⁴⁸

As the Christian community developed the times of prayer were set out by various Church Fathers. By c. 215 CE Hippolytus of Rome defined in his *Apostolic Tradition* a constitution of the Roman Church, which included certain rules of Christian living. Specific hours of prayer were set out to encourage the observance of Paul's exhortation to 'pray without ceasing'. These hours were on rising, at the morning assembly if there was one, at the third, sixth and ninth hour, before retiring, then again at midnight and then at cockcrow.²⁴⁹ Cyprian in his *Treatise IV*²⁵⁰ written 252 CE, backs up Tertullian in saying that one should pray every hour especially the third, sixth and ninth hour and at daybreak and sunset. (Ch 34-36) The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* encourages bishops to instruct their people to 'assemble...together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house'.²⁵¹

9. Concluding Summary

Times for Christian prayer followed the Jewish custom of three times a day. Tertullian says that prayer should be made at dawn and dusk as well as before meals, before bathing, then on greeting one's friends and before leaving them. The Greek custom was for prayer at dawn and before any major undertaking and also at times of festivals as prescribed by the priests also was followed in Mystery religions. Roman times of prayer were similar as prayers were said at times prescribed by the priests, at festivals, dedications and games and before any important event. Daily prayers were also said to the household gods. There are inscriptions stating the time of banquets in celebration of a god or goddess, times to be from for example, the ninth hour. Jewish times of prayer were most probably throughout the day, which entailed three times a day for public prayers and at other times, before and after, meals and at dawn and dusk. Prayer times in the New Testament era were similar to Jewish prayer times. Jesus also said that one was to pray for all one's needs, and Paul said to pray without ceasing. Most early Church Fathers exhorted Christians to pray at least three times a day, although Hippolytus stated at least seven times over the day and night. The need to pray every day seemed to be universal.

²⁴⁶ 'Teaching of the Twelve Apostles' *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7. p. 379.

²⁴⁷ 'Letter from the Church at Smyrna' *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 39-44.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁴⁹ Lucien Deiss, *Early Sources of the Liturgy*, trans. Benet Weatherhead, Geoffrey Chapman, Dublin, 1967, p. 69-73.

²⁵⁰ Cyprian, 'Treatise IV', pp. 447-457 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5.

²⁵¹ 'Constitutions of the Holy Apostles', *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, p. 423.

Community Prayer

1. Introduction

Community prayer took a prime part in most religions. Many prayers of the Greeks and Romans were publicly prayed aloud on behalf of the community or the community would respond at set times throughout the prayer so as to be part of the prayers prayed on their behalf.

2. Tertullian

Tertullian urges community prayer and responses to the psalms by the community so as they could be united in prayer:

The more diligent in prayer are wont to subjoin in their prayers the 'Hallelujah,' and such kind of psalms, in the closes of which the company respond. And, of course, every institution is excellent which, for the extolling and honouring of God, aims unitedly to bring Him enriched prayer as a choice victim. (Ch. 27)

He bases this instruction on his belief that if the Christian community was united in prayer they would be bound together and the prayer would be 'enriched'. The 'Hallelujah', an acclamation of praise meaning 'Praise the Lord', was a confirmation of faith and was usually found at the beginning of a doxology or a psalm.²⁵² It could be at the beginning and the end of a psalm as in Ps. 106. The Hallelujah psalms, psalms 146 to 150, were used in public worship in Jewish liturgy and could have been 'a priestly device to organise popular participation in the divine service'.²⁵³ In early Christian communities acclamations were usually spontaneous expressions of prayer included in 'praying in the spirit'. A spontaneous acclamation such as the public blessing and praise proclaimed by a 'multitude of the disciples' is described by Luke in his gospel as Jesus:

...was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!' (Lk. 19:37-39.)

Paul and the early Church Fathers urged such acclamations and responses as well as the affirmation 'Amen' (so be it) to include the community in prayer.

The communal aspect of prayer also played a part in most religions in the form of rituals and festivals. Rituals and festivals had developed from ancient times as part of worship throughout the Graeco-Roman world. These had been accepted as correct ways of performing certain religious rites or celebrating anniversaries or periodic religious feasts. They could be public rituals and festivals presented on behalf of the community by one or many, or domestic rituals

²⁵² Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

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with family or individual rites. Prayer sometimes prefaced the performance of a ritual, or prayer could accompany the actual ritual. Certain community aspects of rituals and festivals were common to the Greek, Roman, Mystery, Jewish and Christian traditions. These included sacrifice, a communal meal, ritual washing and purification. The festivals also could include processions and drama and continue over a period of days or weeks. Rituals of sacrifice, purification and initiation and communal feasting and festivals, gave to the participants a feeling of being in state of worthiness and of belonging to a community.

In Graeco-Roman times ‘the characteristic form of worship both public and private was the sacrifice’.²⁵⁴ The varying forms of worship could include the sacrifice of animals or offerings of cereal, wine or incense to their gods or God. With these sacrifices prayers were usually said. ‘Many groups in the Graeco-Roman society [also] met regularly for ritual banquets’.²⁵⁵ At some of these banquets it was thought that the god or goddess was present or the meal was a memorial to some facet of the god’s involvement in the life of the community. The Jewish memorial of the Passover was an annual feast, which incorporated a communal meal and some mystery religions had their communal meals. ‘Ritual washing was [also] common in both pagan and Jewish practice, as part of some other ceremony requiring physical or spiritual cleanliness’.²⁵⁶

3. Greek Rituals and Festivals

The earliest Greek prayers were usually attended with sacrifice. This prayer of Chryses, in Homer’s *The Iliad*:

‘Oh hear me, master of the silver bow, protector of Tenedos and the holy towns, if while I prayed you listened once before and honoured me, and punished the Achaeans, now let my wish come true again. But turn your plague away this time from the Danaans.’ And this petition too Apollo heard. (IL. 1, 460).²⁵⁷

was preceded by a hand washing ritual and the throwing of barley grains, as ‘they led the bullocks around the compact altar, [they] rinsed their hands and delved in barley-baskets’ and then:

When prayers were said and grains of barley strewn, they held the bullocks for the knife, and flayed them, cutting out joints and wrapping these in fat, two layers, folded, with raw strips of flesh, for the old man to burn on cloven faggots, wetting it all with wine. (IL. 1, 450).²⁵⁸

Festivals with sacrificial processions and rituals were part of everyday life in the Greek City State (polis) and each polis had its various local festivals. For the Greeks ‘the high points of life would

²⁵⁴ Stambaugh & Balch, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁵⁷ Homer. *The Iliad*, p. 13.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.,

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be the city festivals', which consisted of processions, prayer, sacrifice, theatre and games.²⁵⁹

Among the many festivals were the *Thesmophoria*, a women's festival held in honour of Demeter, the *Anthesteria*, a three-day festival of Dionysus; and the greatest Athenian festival, the *Panathenaia*. Aristophanes' hymn to Demeter lines 1148-59 in his play *Thesmophoriazusaie* is his interpretation of one of the prayers that were said at the *Thesmophoria*. It is a call to the goddesses to be present with the women as they celebrate the ancient rite:

Come in grace and kindness,
goddesses to your grove,
where no men may look on
the holy rites, as in torchlight
you reveal your immortal faces.
Come, O come, we pray you
Our Ladies of the Festival.
If ever you have come in answer
To our prayers, come now, be present
With us here, we implore you.²⁶⁰

There were annual Dionysian festivals in Attica such as the December *Lenaea* festival of the winepress which was a winter festival with the offering of the new wine pressing. At the *Anthesteria*, which was a death and renewal festival, and great floral festival, over January and February²⁶¹ a Cask Opening day called *Pithoigia* was held on the eleventh day of February. According to Plutarch on opening the casks a libation was poured and prayers were said for protection from the effects of the 'powerful draught' before drinking any of the wine.²⁶²

Because Dionysus was said to be the master of deception he became the patron of the Attic drama festival, the Festival of Dionysus, which took place in early spring. The Greeks' participation in the festival of Dionysus was 'the incorporation of Dionysiac cult into the civic religion'.²⁶³ This was a religious festival and everyone attended the week's entertainment and festivities.

Traders, mercenaries, conquerors and slaves also brought into Greece their own religious preferences so that by the time of early Christianity, cults of all kinds, Oriental and mystery religions with their ancillary rituals, as well as various philosophies were all influencing Greek worship.

4. Mystery Rituals

Apart from the public face of Greek religion there were secret cults with rituals that were assumed to give the individual a personal relationship with a god. These were the mystery

²⁵⁹ Ferguson & Chisholm, op. cit., p. 203

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

²⁶¹ G.S. Kirk, *Nature of Greek Myth*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1974, p. 230.

²⁶² Ferguson & Chisholm, op. cit., p. 184.

²⁶³ E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Uni of California Press, Berkeley, 1951, p. 77.

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religions such as the Eleusinian²⁶⁴ and Dionysian (Bacchic) mysteries, and an initiation was necessary for an individual to take part in the rituals. Although the rites were for the individual with individual initiation into the cults there was a community aspect to the rituals.

Dionysus is mentioned across the whole Graeco-Roman literary corpus e.g. by Catullus, Cicero, Strabo, Pliny and Apollodorus; and also in Hesiod's *Theogony*, Homeric hymns, and in various Greek plays such as Aristophanes' *Frogs* and Euripides' *Bacchae*. Dionysus did not have a big part in Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*; apparently Dionysus was 'not at all a god fit for heroes'²⁶⁵ however in the *Iliad* Bk. 14. 325, Homer has Zeus refer to 'Dionysus, joy of men'.²⁶⁶ With the Dionysian Mysteries the rituals could lift the burdens of the individual by giving them freedom from responsibility while they were possessed by the temporary madness of wine and the frenetic dance. Dionysus was very popular and was worshipped everywhere; 'He was a god of the people, his joys were accessible to all including slaves, he was essentially a god of joy'.²⁶⁷ In artistic representations his popularity was shown by well over 40,000 pictures in mosaics, paintings, frescoes and vases especially in his representations on vessels used mainly for drinking or storing wine such as kraters, amphoras or skyphies. Dionysian rituals enabled the Greeks to release their inhibitions and so give them freedom from their immediate environment.

The Dionysiac ritual developed a cathartic element, which was manifested in a 'dancing mania' and 'collective hysteria',²⁶⁸ accompanied by wild shouts, especially the cry *euboi* – transcribed as *evoe* in Latin- and also *thriambe*.²⁶⁹ The participants in the ritual were known as Bacchantes. The freedom of nature was exhibited in the rituals of self-expression through complete abandonment to the dance and ritual. The Greeks embraced the therapeutic element of this ritual because they were feeling insecure in the Archaic age, as the old solidarity of the family and city state (*Polis*) society was giving way to the 'burden of individual responsibility', and Dionysian rites gave them a community outlet.²⁷⁰ From archaeological excavations it was found that for the early worship of Dionysus there were no elaborate structures built to him, just small altars. Women seemed to be the most devoted followers of Dionysus and it was through women his cult was propagated. Slaves and refugees fleeing from Hannibal hastened the spread of the Dionysian mysteries to Rome where Dionysus was worshipped as Bacchus. In 186 BCE in Rome the rites the Bacchanalian cult became the object of a senate enquiry, because of its popularity among the poor classes and slaves, and of their secret nature. The Senate had a fear

²⁶⁴ Cf Ch. 2, p. 16.

²⁶⁵ Kirk, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁶⁶ Homer. *The Iliad*, p. 248.

²⁶⁷ Dodds, op. cit., p. 76.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.,

²⁶⁹ H.S. Versnel *Triumphus*, 1970, in Burkert *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, refers to footnote 13, p. 74.

²⁷⁰ Dodds, op. cit., pp. 76-7.

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that secret societies 'might become centres of rebellion or conspiracy against the state'.²⁷¹ As a result of this fear the societies had been banned, however, individuals could still worship Bacchus.

Another mystery cult, which was brought to Rome, was the cult of Magna Mater (the great mother). When a temple dedicated to Cybele and her cult was built in Rome 191 BCE the Roman magistrates were soon surprised at 'the extreme emotionalism and sensual rites associated with the cult'.²⁷² The worship of this ancient Phrygian fertility goddess Cybele and her escort Attis included 'flamboyant Galli (eunuchs of the Great Mother) and Metragyrtai (mendicant priests of the Great Mother), and the gory *taurobolia* (ritual slaughter of bulls)'.²⁷³ The Senate restricted the priests to the confines of the sanctuary and banned Roman citizens from taking part in the frenzied orgiastic rituals. However the noisy rites that included self-mutilation intrigued many Romans and various adaptations of the oriental cult were soon incorporated into Roman paganism. The poet Catullus in the first century BCE in his Poem 63 describes the mythical Attis' 'amorous' madness and resulting castration and then finishes his poem with a prayer for protection from the Earth Mother's rage:

Great Goddess, Goddess Cybele, Goddess lady Dindymus,
May all your fury be far from my house.
Incite the others, go.
Drive other men mad.²⁷⁴

One Roman festival in honour of the Great Mother (and her escort Attis) took place in Spring, commencing March 15th, with a procession of 'reed bearers' into the sanctuary, then over the next few days the participants would fast from specific foods and abstain from sexual intercourse. On March 22nd the tree-bearers carried a pine tree into the sanctuary. On March 24th the frenzied ritual and self-mutilation and sprinkling of blood on the altar gave this day the name 'Day of Blood', representing for the participants the myth of the death of Attis.²⁷⁵ A vigil is said to follow the funeral ceremonies of Attis, according to Firmicus Maternus in his *The Error of Profane Religions*, XXII, I,²⁷⁶ when prayers and lamentations are chanted rhythmically until a light is shone and a priest anoints the throats of the worshippers saying softly:

Take courage, ye *mystae*, the god is saved
So shall salvation be ours, sometime, from all need.²⁷⁷

The following day, March 25th, was a day of feasting, a *Hilaria*, in honour of the Great Mother,

²⁷¹ Bradley, op. cit., p. 216.

²⁷² Ibid., pp. 215-6.

²⁷³ Meyer, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 128.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁷⁶ Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, Translated by Antonia Nevill, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 1996, p. 46.

²⁷⁷ Grant, Frederick C. *Ancient Roman Religion*, p. 146.

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with the resurrection of Attis bringing joy and renewed hope.²⁷⁸ Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, 2.15 describes the following accompanying formula *synthema* for the initiation of worshippers:

I have eaten from the drum (*tympanon*, tambourine);
I have drunk from the cymbal (*kymbalon*);
I have carried the sacred dish (the *kernos*);
I have stolen into the inner chamber (*pastos*, shrine).²⁷⁹

The flute, tambourine and cymbal were the instruments used by the Galli to accompany their frenzied dancing and singing processions.²⁸⁰ Frederick C Grant in *Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism* proposed that the primitive worship with blood sprinkling and savage, barbaric enthusiasm of the Galli, and those seduced by their ritual, appealed to the Romans possibly because of 'a sort of fanatical devotion to death' that the Romans had.²⁸¹ The cult of Attis and Cybele attained official recognition under Claudius (emperor from 41 - 54 CE).

Mithraism entered the Roman religious stage about the second century CE. Adherents to the cult recruited into the Roman army during various campaigns introduced it. The 'movement of the troops throughout the empire...was a major factor in the spread of the cult'.²⁸² The cult of Mithras flourished in the third and fourth century CE and was a rival to Christianity.²⁸³ The initiates were exclusively male. There were seven stages of initiation into its mysteries namely: the Raven, the Bridegroom, Soldier, Lion, Persian, Courier of the Sun and Father. These stages led one to a transformation of rebirth and creation. There were no public ceremonies; but hidden purification and initiary rites were held and 'an ordinary and perhaps daily liturgy assembled the Mithraists to share a meal'.²⁸⁴ These rites and ceremonial meals were held in their sanctuaries, Mithraea, which resembled caves.²⁸⁵ The presence of facing benches in these sanctuaries indicated that the shared meal was taken in the Roman dining manner of reclining. According to iconography representing the cult's myth of the bull's slaying and banquet by Mithras and Sol it is also concluded that the meal was 'sacrament as well as fellowship'.²⁸⁶ Archaeological evidence of Mithraic symbolisms illustrated the Mithraic myth. The scene usually depicted in the cavern-like sanctuaries was of the god Mithras slaying a bull; also present in the scene are a dog, a scorpion, a snake, a raven, a lion, a cup and torch bearers. The scene was sometimes bordered by the twelve signs of the zodiac, symbols of the sun and the moon and

²⁷⁸ Turcan, op. cit., p.46.

²⁷⁹ Meyer, op. cit., p. 115.

²⁸⁰ Cf Ch 2, p. 16. Clement's description is very similar to that of his description of the Eleusinian mystery rituals in 2.16 and possibly adapted by him to back up his condemnation of the mystery rituals.

²⁸¹ Grant, Frederick C., *Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism*, p. xxxvii.

²⁸² C. M. Daniels, 'The role of the Roman army in the spread and practice of Mithraism', pp. 249-274 in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. John R. Hinnells, Vol. 2, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1975, p. 250.

²⁸³ Grant, Frederick C., *Hellenistic Religions: The Age of Syncretism*, p. xxxviii.

²⁸⁴ Turcan, op. cit., p. 233.

²⁸⁵ Meyer, op. cit., p. 199.

²⁸⁶ Roger Beck, 'The Mysteries of Mithras', pp. 176-185 in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. John S Kloppenborg and Stephen G Wilson, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p. 182.

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other heavenly bodies.²⁸⁷ Because of the piety of the initiates the emperors encouraged the cult with Commodus (emperor from 180-192 CE) initiated into the Mithraic religion and in 307 CE, Diocletian, Galerius and Licinius restored a cavern of Mithras at Carnuntum, giving him the title of 'Protector of the Empire'.²⁸⁸

5. Roman Rituals and Festivals.

Not much is known of the prayer forms of the varying mystery rituals but exactly the opposite can be said of ancient Roman religion. As shown in chapter 4, Roman religion was static and formal. 'Year after year, century after century, the same procedures were repeated, the same words were spoken in the same order, accompanied by the same actions'.²⁸⁹ A wide variety of public festivals to maintain right relationship with the gods were held throughout the year so the average Roman was used to sacrifice and prayer. These festivals were celebrated both publicly and privately according to the religious calendar.

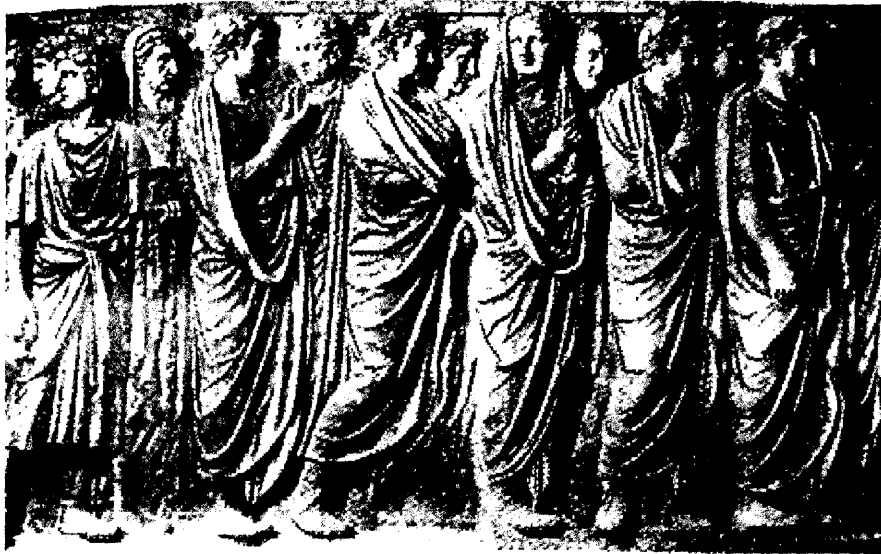


Fig. 5. Illustration of Sculpture relief of Roman procession included the priests with their heads covered.²⁹⁰

An account by Tacitus (55 - 118 CE) of the restoration of the Temple of Jupiter the Best and Greatest on the Capitoline Hill in 70 CE, during the reign of Vespasian, describes how ancient ritual was rigidly adhered to. After Tacitus gives an account of the procession and blessing of the site he describes the sacrifice and how the public prayers were said to the gods:

After this, Helvidius Priscus, the praetor, first purified the spot with the usual sacrifice of a sow, a sheep, and a bull, and duly placed the entrails on turf; then, in terms dictated by Publius Aelianus, the high-priest, besought Jupiter, Juno, Minerva,

²⁸⁷ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, p. 16.

²⁸⁸ Turcan, op. cit., p. 244.

²⁸⁹ Shelton, op. cit., p. 372.

²⁹⁰ Bradley, op. cit., p. 45.

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and the tutelary deities of the place, to prosper the undertaking, and to lend their divine help to raise the abodes which the piety of men had founded for them. (*Tacitus' History* 4, 55.)²⁹¹

In this public celebration, Helvidius Priscus, the *praetor*, is described as repeating the prayer dictated by the high priest for the god's favour in the restoration of their temple. Many rituals similar to this were performed before important events to find out the gods will and invoke their protection.

6 Jewish Ritual and Festivals

Sacrifice was a central act of worship in Judaism, hence the importance of the Temple. Accompanying the sacrifice were 'public prayers and various rites of purification and consecration'.²⁹² Of the ancient festivals indicated in the Torah (Pentateuch) 'the New Year (Rosh ha-Shanah), that ushers in ten days of penitence culminating in the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)' was the most solemn period.²⁹³ The three 'pilgrim festivals', the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) in the early summer, the Feast of Booths (Succot) in the autumn and the Passover (Pesach) in the spring were times for 'the farming population to bring their offerings to the Temple in Jerusalem and mingle with crowds of pilgrims from the Diaspora communities'.²⁹⁴ The Passover was originally a pastoral celebration offering the finest spring lamb to God in thanksgiving for a new flock but later it became the celebration of the delivery of the Jewish nation from Egypt as described in Exodus 12-15. 'In the time of Jesus, the ritual celebration of the Passover meal comprised principally the eating of the Passover lamb and the blessing of three cups'.²⁹⁵ At the end of the ritual Jesus and his disciples sang a psalm following the Passover meal as described in the Gospels: 'When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives' (Mt. 26:30, Mk. 14:26).

In the Jewish tradition there was also the weekly observance of the Sabbath, which was a special day, consecrated to God. In Old Testament times it was originally a religious holiday and people could travel about freely. In New Testament times there were meticulous restrictions on people's actions and strict observance of the Sabbath with special prayers and liturgy at the beginning and the end of the Sabbath. In the time of Jesus there was also the daily ritual in the temple of two holocausts (burnt offerings) carried out.²⁹⁶

²⁹¹ Tacitus, *History*, 4, 55. p. 630.

²⁹² Castelot & Cody, op. cit., p. 1273.

²⁹³ Joan Comay & Beth Hatefutsoth., *The Diaspora Story : The Epic of the Jewish People among the Nations*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1981, p. 55.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.,

²⁹⁵ Deiss, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁹⁶ Castelot & Cody, op. cit., p. 1275.

7. Christian Rituals and Festivals and Community Prayer.

In the Gospels Jesus taught his disciples to have confidence in community prayer and pray together whenever they wanted anything when he said:

...if two of you agree about anything you ask it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' (Mt. 18:20.)

The New Testament portrays the earliest Christians as praying in the Temple and in synagogues according to Jewish custom. The Temple and the synagogues had been the customary place for prayer for the early Christians, however as the Jewish authorities became more antagonistic towards the new sect the early Christians were forced to pray elsewhere so they assembled for community prayer in their own houses. From apostolic times Christians had been gathering together for common meals and prayer and these groups were probably meeting weekly.²⁹⁷

To outsiders these Christian groups were thought to be the same as voluntary associations, such as the funerary societies, guilds of professionals, social clubs or the religious sects devoted to worship of a particular deity. These associations had become a 'familiar feature in the cities of the Roman Empire'.²⁹⁸ The Christians referred to themselves as *ecclesia* or 'church'²⁹⁹ and they gathered together for encouragement, teachings and prayer. St Paul described part of what happened at these assemblies³⁰⁰ when he wrote to the Corinthians saying 'When you come together, each has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation'. (1 Cor. 14:26b.)

The Acts of the Apostles referred to features of rituals that the Christian community continued to perform in common with their Jewish heritage. The first Christian communities are described as praying together publicly (Acts 2:46-47a) as previously described in chapter 3 with 'The breaking of bread and the prayers' as they broke bread at home, and they also spent 'much time together in the temple' according to their Jewish practice of daily prayer in the temple. The 'breaking of bread' took on a different meaning for Christians from the Passover of Jewish tradition. It was to commemorate a new covenant of Jesus passion and resurrection, a 'pass over' and commemoration from death to life. (1 Cor. 11:23-26.) This 'breaking of bread' along with baptism were the two most important rituals in the earliest Christian communities.³⁰¹ The word baptism, from the Greek word *baptizein*, means to 'plunge' or 'immerse'.³⁰² It was externally similar to a form of Jewish baptism, such as the baptism that St. John the Baptist practiced when he baptized with water. (Mk. 1:4-5.) However the Christian ritual of baptism was accepted as the

²⁹⁷ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1983, p. 143.

²⁹⁸ Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians As The Romans Saw Them*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1984, p. 35.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁰⁰ Meeks, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁰² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, St Pauls, Strathfield, NSW, 1994, p. 312.

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symbol of belonging. The washing of baptism was the once only Christian purification initiation ritual that was essential before one could join in other rituals of the community.

Paul's Prayers and Instructions for Community Prayer

The community was important to the early church and Paul in his letters was always encouraging people to pray together as shown in the following examples. Paul asks for community prayer as part of his salutation in his second letter to the Corinthians:

As you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. (2 Cor. 1:11.)

He also exhorts the community to pray for him as part of his final exhortation to the Thessalonians as he says 'Beloved, pray for us' (1 Thess.) 5:25.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians he tells them how he prays for their community, giving thanksgiving for their perseverance in the faith:

To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess. 1:11-12.)

In his closing chapter he includes a request for prayer of petition for him by the community:

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you. (2 Thess. 3:1.)

Paul describes the purpose of public prayer when he instructs Timothy to ensure that prayers are said in thanksgiving for all in the community as well as those who are in control of the government:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. (1 Tim 2:1-2.)

Paul advises the Ephesians to thank God and to sing hymns and psalms as part of Christian community living:

As you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 5:19-20.)

Paul thanks God for the Colossian community:

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Col. 1:3& 9.)

And gives instructions on how to live as a Christian and also to pray for him:

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Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. (Col. 4:2-4.)

Paul asks for prayers for the Jewish community saying salvation is for all:

Brothers and sisters, my hearts desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. (Rom. 10:1.)

Paul describes the marks of a true Christian when he writes to the Romans;

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. (Rom. 12:12.)

Paul also prays for the Community of (Ephesians 3:14-21.)

8. Early Church Fathers and Community

The prayers and instructions included in the writings of the early Church Fathers primarily stressed the need for community prayers of petition. The communities were encouraged to trust that when they prayed together they would have their petitions granted.

Ignatius

In Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians³⁰³ he commended the whole community to unity in prayer:

For if the prayer of one or two possesses such power that Christ stands in the midst of them, how much more will the prayer of the bishop and of the whole Church, ascending up in harmony to God, prevail for the granting of all their petitions in Christ! (Ch. 5.)³⁰⁴

He instructed them to come together frequently to praise God:

Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. (Ch. 13.)³⁰⁵

He exhorted the community to pray for others:

And pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God. (Ch. 10:1.)³⁰⁶

He also asked for prayer for his own community, the church in Antioch.

Pray ye for the Church of Antioch which is in Syria, whence I am led bound to Rome, being the last of the faithful that are there, who yet have been thought worthy to carry these chains to the honour of God. (Ch. 21.)³⁰⁷

Ignatius in his letter to the Magnesians³⁰⁸ explained why the community should be committed to unity with their bishop in prayer, that there is one Jesus Christ and he did nothing without the Father:

³⁰³ Ignatius, 'To the Ephesians' pp. 49-58 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.53-4.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁰⁸ Ignatius, 'To the Magnesians' pp. 59-65 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1.

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As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by Himself nor by the apostles, so neither do ye anything without the bishop and presbyters. Neither endeavour that anything appear reasonable and proper to yourselves apart; but being come together into the same place, let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope, in love and in joy undefiled. There is one Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is more excellent. Do ye therefore all run together as into one temple of God, as to one altar, as to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father, and is with and has gone to one? (Ch. 7:1b-2.)³⁰⁹

He asks for united prayer for himself and his community in Antioch as he is being taken to Rome to be martyred:

Be mindful of me in your prayers, that I may attain to God; and of the Church which is in Syria, of whom I am not worthy to be called bishop. For I stand in need of your united prayer in God, and of your love, that the Church which is in Syria may be deemed worthy, by your good order, of being edified in Christ. (Ch. 14.)³¹⁰

Polycarp

Polycarp wrote a letter to the Philippians³¹¹ pleading with the community to pray for all, including their enemies:

Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings, and potentates, and princes, and for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all, and that ye may be perfect in Him. (Ch. 12:3.)³¹²

In the 'Letter from the Church at Smyrna' c. 155 CE, about Polycarp's martyrdom he had prayed for all:

Now, as soon as he had ceased praying, having made mention of all that had at any time come in contact with him, both small and great, illustrious and obscure, as well as the whole Catholic Church throughout the world, the time of his departure having arrived, they set him upon an ass, and conducted him into the city, the day being that of the great Sabbath. (Ch. 8:1.)³¹³

Justin

Justin (110 - 165 CE) was a teacher of Christianity in Rome and wrote his First Apology c. 155 CE. He had been born in Palestine but his 'cultural and intellectual formation was certainly Greek'.³¹⁴ Although attracted to Platonism he saw the truth in Christianity and the 'wisdom of the prophets of Israel as expounded by the Church'.³¹⁵ Justin's description of Christian community worship can be regarded as a true picture of what occurred in Rome in the second century. Chapters 61-67 in Justin's First Apology³¹⁶ described Baptism and the Eucharist and the essential community prayer. He also wrote that the reception of new believers into the community by the 'washing with water' (Baptism) is only done after prayer and fasting:

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God

³⁰⁹ Ignatius, 'To the Magnesians', p. 62.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

³¹¹ Polycarp, 'To the Philippians', pp. 33-36 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1.

³¹² Ibid., p. 36.

³¹³ 'Letter from the Church at Smyrna', pp. 39-44 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. p. 40.

³¹⁴ Richardson, op. cit., p. 229.

³¹⁵ Ibid.,

³¹⁶ Justin, 'First Apology' pp. 163-187 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1.

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with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. (Ch. 61.)³¹⁷

after they have been accepted into the community they join the assembly in prayers and the thanksgiving and they receive a portion of the blessed bread and wine, the Eucharist:

But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen. This word Amen answers in the Hebrew language to ... [so be it]. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion. (Ch. 65.)³¹⁸

The community expressed 'their assent' by use of the Hebrew acclamation 'Amen' this was continued from their Jewish roots. In Chapter 67 he also gives an outline of the normal Sunday celebration ritual of the Eucharist in which part of the structure is based along the lines of the Jewish synagogue service, that of the reading of Scripture and the prayers and the blessings (thanksgiving prayers) over the bread and cup of wine mixed with water.

Cyprian

Cyprian in his Epistle VII 'To the Clergy, Concerning Prayer to God',³¹⁹ told the clergy that Christians had a responsibility to pray as a community 'for all the brethren':

Let each one of us pray God not for himself only, but for all the brethren, even as the Lord has taught us to pray, when He bids to each one, not private prayer, but enjoined them, when they prayed, to pray for all in common prayer and concordant supplication. (Ch. 7.)³²⁰

³¹⁷ Justin, op. cit., p. 183.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

³¹⁹ Cyprian, Epistle VII "To the Clergy, Concerning Prayer to God", pp. 285-287 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 287.

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Another *'Epistle, XXX, The Roman Clergy to Cyprian'*,³²¹ written in 250 CE from the Roman Clergy to Cyprian urged constancy in their 'mutual' prayer for all, particularly those who had 'fallen' and to stand firm in their faith against persecution:

With mutual prayers, let us by turns cherish, guard, arm one another; let us pray for the lapsed, that they may be raised up; let us pray for those who stand, that they may not be tempted to such a degree as to be destroyed; let us pray that those who are said to have fallen may acknowledge the greatness of their sin, and may perceive that it needs no momentary nor over-hasty cure; let us pray that penitence may follow also the effects of the pardon of the lapsed; (Ch. 6.)³²²

The encouragement by the Church Fathers to community prayer for themselves and other communities was essential to give the members a feeling of belonging and a sense of others' needs. As also in other religions the involvement of participants in most festivals would bind them together to each other and their gods.

9. Concluding Summary

Community prayer was important to the Early Christians to encourage and bind them together. Tertullian urged the use of acclamations of praise or affirmation such as the responses 'Hallelujah' or 'Amen' to involve the community in the prayer.

Community prayer in all religions could be part of rituals, sacrifices and processions. For both Greek and Roman religion one of the main characteristics of worship was sacrifice accompanied by prayer usually preceded by ritual washing and followed by a communal meal or consumption of the sacrificial victim. Greek festivals took place at different seasons of the year and were usually community based. Gods and goddesses were called to take part in their festivals. Some of the cult festivals were very popular. Mystery religions had their processions and cult initiations and celebrations. The initiation rites and prayers in mystery religions were usually secret but the processions were public. Some cult practices included drinking, dancing and chanting and orgiastic rites, such as those of the Bacchic cult and the cult of Magna Mater, and were frowned upon by the Roman Senate. Others such as the Eleusinian mystery cult and Mithraism were encouraged because of the piety of the initiates. The Jewish rituals in Jerusalem centred around the festivals at the Temple before its destruction. There were also some home rituals in Judaism as well in preparation for the community religious festivals.

Christian community prayers and ritual followed the pattern of the Jews at first with their celebrations of the annual public festivals, prayer and fasting. Then they took on their own character as community gatherings took place in domestic situations. Prayer and a communal ritual meal became the centre of Christian worship with a once-only initiation and purification

³²¹ *'Epistle, XXX, The Roman Clergy to Cyprian'*, pp. 308-311 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 310.

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ritual. Paul wrote to the communities placing emphasis on the place of prayer in Christian gatherings and the importance of loving and caring for each other. The early Church Fathers also encouraged unity, community prayer and care of each other. They also wrote to request community prayers of petition and prayers for faith in times of persecution and heresy. Community prayer was a binding factor in all religions.