

THE FORMATION OF A FIVEFOLD CURSUS OF DAILY PRAYER  
IN PRE-CONSTANTINIAN CHRISTIANITY:  
BACKWARD INFERENCES FROM LATER PERIODS

Stig Simeon R. Frøyskov

*I. Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

In recent years Stefano Parenti has devoted part of his research to the daily office,<sup>2</sup> and it is a pleasure to honor him with an essay within this field. The time period of my topic falls outside of that within which both he and I usually work. Indeed, I shall approach this early period as what I am first of all, a student of post-Constantinian periods, and this will be reflected in my method: inferring earlier liturgical practice from that documented in later periods. Hopefully, my use of this somewhat risky method will nevertheless not fall too short of the high level of sound scientific quality that characterizes Parenti's numerous works.

In this paper I shall take a closer look at the formation of the early Christian cursus of daily prayer. Daily prayer will here include both private or individual prayer and public liturgy; indeed, it is a complicated question whether one should distinguish at all between two such types of prayer in the pre-Constantinian church<sup>3</sup>. Only at the end of this essay shall I suggest a possible differentiation in this sense. The Constantinian watershed will be used here as a convenient demarca-

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of a paper presented at 'Workshop on Ritual in Early Judaism and Early Christianity', Helsinki, August 26-29, 2009. The term "daily office" is somewhat ambiguous in that it may signify the total cursus of day and night, which is the most common sense, or the diurnal part only. I use the term in the latter sense in the title for the sake of simplicity. For citations from the Septuagint I use the recent NETS translation, available online at: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/24-psalms-nets.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The latest is "Un fascicolo ritrovato dell'horologion Sinai gr. 863 (IX secolo)", OCP 75 (2009) 343-358. Parenti is preparing the edition of one of the oldest preserved witnesses to the Horologion, as announced in id., "Nota sul salterio-horologion del IX secolo, Torino, Biblioteca Universitaria B.VII. 30," BBGG III s., 4 (2007) 275-287. He has also written a commentary to the Horologion, Cambridge Harvard Greek 3, a.D. 1105, to be edited in OCA by Jeffrey C. Anderson.

<sup>3</sup> This is the view of Robert Taft, among others; cf. id., *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: the Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today*, Collegeville <sup>2</sup>1993, 29.

tion line, both because the celebration of the daily office was particularly affected by it and because it marks a significant increase of preserved sources for the period that followed it.

In the non-Eucharistic worship of most Christian liturgical traditions from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards, we find the same overall daily cursus, consisting of two different groups of diurnal (daytime) offices: a) two large offices or ‘Major Hours’: Vespers in the evening and Matins in the morning; and b) several smaller offices or ‘Minor Hours’: First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours. In addition we have night prayer with one, two or more offices such as Compline,<sup>4</sup> the Midnight Office and Nocturns. This cursus is documented in numerous 4<sup>th</sup> century sources; for instance, John Cassian claims that all monasteries of the Orient celebrate the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours in addition to Vespers and Matins.<sup>5</sup>

I shall be focusing on the fivefold diurnal part of such a cursus. The problem consists in explaining how the two Major Hours become so dominant, given the following two facts: first, prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century there are very few witnesses to a twofold daily cursus and, second, a much larger number of sources speak of the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours (or morning, noon and evening) as the daily cursus of Christian prayer. Part of this problem concerns source material: it is a fact that our preserved sources for pre-Constantinian Christian daily prayer cover only certain geographical areas;<sup>6</sup> significantly, we lack sources from the Antiochian<sup>7</sup> and Palestinian regions.

The possibility that I shall discuss in what follows is that the two post-Constantinian Major Hours, in spite of the lack of present evidence, may actually have constituted, at least in some tradition(s), a separate cursus of independent origin, or even the principal pre-Constantinian daily offices. Developing this theory further, I shall reflect briefly on the possibility that they in some way or other (ritually or ideologically) may originate in the two daily Temple sacrifices or the twofold Jewish prayer patterns derived from this.

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<sup>4</sup> Compline is celebrated before sleep, but is considered a night office (the first) in first millennium Horologia (Sinai Georgian O.34, Sinai Greek 863).

<sup>5</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes* 11,1 and 111,3. First Hour is a later addition in imitation of the three other Minor Hours.

<sup>6</sup> What we have mostly belongs to North Africa: the Alexandrian area in the east and the Latin one in the west.

<sup>7</sup> With the early exception of the Didache, commonly (but not definitively) located in Syria, and possibly of the so-called Apostolic Tradition, attributed by some to St. Hippolytus of Rome but in many respects reflecting Syriac tradition.

A premise for my investigation is the idea, which can be questioned but which seems to be agreed upon by most scholars, that the two post-Constantinian Major Hours were not created from scratch in the 4<sup>th</sup> century but, like much of other 4<sup>th</sup> century liturgical life, represented the continuation and elaboration of existing services.<sup>8</sup> Part of my method will consist in going backwards from the better known 4<sup>th</sup> century period to the less known period prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas such a procedure within historical research is generally viewed as dangerous in that it may lead to reading later practices into earlier data which did not actually possess them, I believe that the case of liturgical history is somewhat different. Ritual has a strong tendency to retain structures and elements through shifting contexts, whether they be political, religious or social.<sup>9</sup> In the end, however, my findings do not stand or fall by this theoretical support: on the contrary, they will themselves constitute an argument for reading liturgical history backwards from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. I shall point out features of post-Constantinian liturgy that present an internal logic and a mutual relationship that strongly indicate their pre-Constantinian origin.

## *II. The problem of the fivefold diurnal cursus: A brief history of the research*

The history of the research on this question up till 2002 has been summarized by Paul Bradshaw, and what follows draws on his work.<sup>10</sup> Against most earlier scholars, C. W. Dugmore in 1944 claimed a line of continuity between Jewish and Christian daily prayer.<sup>11</sup> Dugmore's idea that the two Major Hours represented the Christianization of the daily morning and evening prayers of the synagogue reigned for several decades until it was challenged by Paul Bradshaw, undoubtedly the leading scholar today within the field of daily prayer in early Christianity, in his major study *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* ([Alcuin Club Collection 63], London 1981). Bradshaw, drawing on significant advances in Jewish liturgical studies, alerted scholars to the

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Taft's demonstration of historicizing features in pre-Constantinian feasts ("Historicism revisited", 31-49, in: Id., *Beyond East and West. Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Rome 2001).

<sup>9</sup> This is recognized not only in liturgical studies; cf. the social anthropologist Paul Connerton, for whom ritual is characterized by an 'endowment with invariance', since «there remains a potential for invariance that is built into rites, but not into myths» (*How Societies Remember*, Cambridge 1989, 57).

<sup>10</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University, 2002, 171-178.

<sup>11</sup> C. W. Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office* (Alcuin Club Collection 45), London 1944.

new insight that early Rabbinic worship was in fact much more diverse than hitherto believed and that there is no certain evidence that there actually were two regular daily gatherings in the first century synagogue.

Further, concerning the two Major Hours of the fourth century, Bradshaw explained the influence of Dugmore's position: "Because morning and evening prayer emerge as preeminent in the fourth century, other scholars have tended to follow Dugmore in assuming that it is these hours that must be of greatest antiquity."<sup>12</sup> Against this, in 1981 Bradshaw had claimed, on the basis of numerous early sources, that the early Christian pattern was to pray not two but *three* times a day: morning, noon and evening. However, he did not give any convincing explanation of the development of prayer from three times to five times per day.

A more convincing hypothesis, which builds on and develops that of Bradshaw, was presented in 1989 by Edward Phillips, according to whom the fivefold cursus was the result of the conflation of *two threefold* daily cursus. In an article entitled "Daily Prayer in the *Apostolic Tradition*", he suggests that whereas the first cursus sets the prayer times at morning - noon - evening, according to a solar pattern, "the second is based on the chronology of the Passion narrative and/or the morning and evening sacrifices in the Temple,"<sup>13</sup> that is, at the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours. These two timetables were then fused into one, which gave only five Hours because noon was common to both. Bradshaw accepted this revision of his original hypothesis.<sup>14</sup>

The most recent attempt at solving the problem of the fivefold cursus has been proposed by Alistair Stewart-Sykes. After discussing various possible explanations, he basically adopts Phillips' hypothesis of a conflation of two threefold timetables. However, he develops this theory by suggesting Jewish origins for both of the threefold cursus.<sup>15</sup>

I see two weaknesses in the hypotheses of these three British scholars. Firstly, explaining the fivefold cursus as the result of a 'threefold + threefold' conflation appears less logical than seeing it as the result of a 'twofold + threefold' fusion. Secondly, they downplay or overlook the importance of the Temple cult for the development of Jewish

<sup>12</sup> Bradshaw, *The Search*, 175.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989), 399.

<sup>14</sup> Bradshaw, *The Search*, 175-176. P. 176: «These two traditions seem later to have been conflated into the fivefold pattern that we first encounter in third-century North Africa».

<sup>15</sup> "Prayer Five Times in the Day and at Midnight: Two Apostolic Customs," *Studia Liturgica* 33 (2003), 1-19.

and Christian daily prayer. One scholar who puts forward the second point is the Qumran scholar Daniel Falk in his critique of Bradshaw (and of Roger Beckwith).<sup>16</sup>

At one point Stewart-Sykes did support the hypothesis of the ‘twofold + threefold’ fusion. In his 2001 translation of the *Apostolic Tradition* he suggests that the (as he understands it) fivefold prayer pattern of this document “probably derives from the conflation of two ancient but independent patterns of prayer, both rooted in Judaism, one of which consisted of prayer in the morning and evening, the other of which involved the offering of prayer three times in the day.”<sup>17</sup> Again, in 2003 Stewart-Sykes envisages the ‘twofold + threefold’ solution, connecting each of the two timetables to a Rabbinic prayer pattern, but this time he rejects it:

“It might be possible to argue that the fivefold pattern derive not from a combination of two distinct threefold patterns but from a combination of a threefold order (the *Tefillah*) and a twofold order (the *Shema*) but this stumbles across the same difficulty met by Phillips’ similar hypothesis of a conflation of two threefold orders, namely that it accounts neither for prayer at noon nor for prayer at midnight.”<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, Phillips touches the possibility that the Temple cult could have played a role in the formation of Christian daily prayer. As we have seen, Phillips hypothesizes that one of the two threefold cursus has a connection with Temple sacrifices, but his argument is weakened by the fact that the number of daily Tamid sacrifices was not three but two.<sup>19</sup> Like Falk, the Jewish liturgical scholar Lawrence Hoffmann emphasizes the importance of the Temple cult.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Daniel K. Falk, “Jewish Prayer Literature and the Jerusalem Church in Acts,” in Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, Carlisle/Grand Rapids 1995, 267-301, here 294 («Both of them also miss the importance of the Temple as a place for daily public prayer»).

<sup>17</sup> Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*. An English Version with Introduction and Commentary by Alistair Stewart-Sykes, Crestwood, NY 2001, 171.

<sup>18</sup> “Prayer five times”, 17.

<sup>19</sup> These weaknesses appear also, for instance, in Bradshaw’s critique of Dugmore. Even though Bradshaw describes both twofold and threefold cursus of daily prayer in various Jewish traditions before and after Christ, he surprisingly criticizes Dugmore for holding that Christians «should have been so selective in this case as to have retained only two of the three hours of prayer observed by the Jews.» (*Daily Prayer*, 47.)

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the following statement about the bond existing between Temple and Rabbinic worship: «Succeeding Rabbinic generations accepted the Temple’s sacrificial system as paradigmatic for ideal worship and looked forward to a rebuilt Temple with a restored cult at the end of time. Until then, they consciously modeled their worship after real or imaginary cultic blueprints, characterizing prayer itself, for example, as ‘an offering of the lips,’ and announcing that the primary Rabbinic prayer, the *Tefillah*, had replaced the defunct *Tamid*

We may summarize that among recent scholars there seems to be a consensus that the fivefold cursus constitutes the fusion of two independent timetables of daily prayer; the disagreement concerns *which* two. In the rest of this paper I shall present some data and some considerations that in my view help overcome the impasse and contribute to a better solution to the problem. Primarily this contribution consists in employing data posterior to the first three centuries, on the basis of the above mentioned presupposition that ritual is inherently conservative and that early elements may therefore be preserved in later sources.

### *III. The two major daily offices in early Christianity: Matins and Vespers*

My first search for a pre-Constantinian existence of the two post-Constantinian Major Hours will concern one of the most significant elements of daily offices: selected or fixed psalmody. The two post-Constantinian Major Hours seem at an early stage to have one psalm, or at least one main psalm, and I regard the identity of this psalm, on the basis of the conservatism habitual in ritual, to be susceptible of having stayed constant through the Constantinian watershed. The identity of psalms is not specified in sources earlier than the fourth century, and for this reason the following overview covers the period from the fourth century onwards.

#### *A. Evening psalm: 140*

In Late Antiquity psalm 140 became *the* evening psalm in Christian liturgy. As Gabriele Winkler's general study of the Vespers office indicates,<sup>21</sup> this psalm is found in virtually all historical traditions: most clearly in all rites of the Jerusalemite and Antiochian areas (Hagiopolite, Armenian, West Syrian, East Syrian and Constantinopolitan); less so in the Alexandrian (Egyptian and Ethiopian) and Western (various Latin rites) areas, but even here there are elements or remnants showing that ps 140 is or has been present in virtually all traditions within these two latter areas.<sup>22</sup>

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or daily sacrifice.» – Lawrence Hoffmann, "Liturgy of Judaism: History and Form", in: Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, William Scott Green, eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, vol. II, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000, 823-832, here 823.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriele Winkler, "Über die Kathedralvesper in den verschiedenen Riten des Ostens und Westens," *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 16 (1974), 53-102.

<sup>22</sup> For the various rites of the Alexandrian and Western areas, see also Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 249-259 (Coptic), 261-271 (Ethiopian) and 93-163 (Western). A

Why was ps 140 chosen as the evening psalm? One might logically presume that it was because of v. 2, which mentions the evening time: “Let my prayer succeed as incense before you, a lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice”. It was normal to choose a psalm for its aptness to the time of the office in question. But the psalm does not speak only about evening, but specifically about *sacrifice* in the evening. We shall return below to the significance of this.

### B. Morning psalm: 50

There is no single morning psalm found in all traditions, but rather two psalms: 50 and 62. However, of these two, ps 50 is clearly the most widespread one.<sup>23</sup> We find it in the liturgical traditions of Jerusalem, Cappadocia, Armenia, Constantinople, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gallia, Spain, and Rome.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, in the city of Antioch the morning psalm is 62.<sup>25</sup> This psalm is a night psalm in many of those traditions in which ps 50 is the morning psalm.

The morning character of ps 62, or more precisely, its late night character, resides in its first verse, “O God, my God, early I approach you (πρὸς σὲ ὀρθρίζω)”. But why was ps 50 chosen as morning psalm? There is no mention of morning in it at all. It definitely has a penitential character, and starting the day with repentance is emphasized in early Christian literature, but the psalm does not fit well with festal morning offices. This is problematic in view of the common assumption that festal offices were generally primary for daily or regular offices. On the contrary, ps 50 has a strong sacrificial theme:

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recent study of the daily office of all rites, with more emphasis on their theological meaning, is Gregory W. Woolfenden, *Daily Liturgical Prayer: Origins and Theology* (Liturgy, Worship and Society), Aldershot 2004. For the Ethiopian rite, see Habtemichael-Kidane, *L'ufficio divino della Chiesa etiopica. Studio storico-critico con particolare riferimento alle ore cattedrali* (OCA 257), Rome 1998. For Western rites, especially the Spanish rite, see Graham [= Gregory] Woolfenden, *Daily Prayer in Christian Spain: A Study of the Mozarabic Office* (Alcuin Club Collection 76), London 2000: «the balance of probability argues in favor of more frequent use of Psalm 140 at a primitive stage of the old Spanish Vespers [than what the sparse cases in preserved sources indicate]» (p. 12); «a verse of Psalm 140, quite possibly a relic of the use of this psalm in full, was a main feature of the primitive Roman Vespers» (p. 10).

<sup>23</sup> See Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer*, 82: «[ps 50] may well have originated in the cathedral tradition, since it is a universal feature of later rites;» Woolfenden, *Daily Prayer in Christian Spain*, 69: «It is then reasonable to conclude that Psalm 50 was once almost universally used as the opening element of the service of morning prayer.»

<sup>24</sup> For each of these traditions, see Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*.

<sup>25</sup> According to the evidence of *Apostolic Constitutions* 11,59 and St. John Chrysostom's *Antiochian Commentary on Ps 140, 1*. See Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 42-48.

“O Lord, my lips you will open, and my mouth will declare your praise, because if you had wanted sacrifice, I would have given it; with whole burnt offerings you will not be pleased. Sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God will not despise” (50:17-19).

### *C. Two Major Hours in Latin North Africa*

In his treatise *On Prayer*, written perhaps around 200, Tertullian describes quite clearly a daily cursus astonishingly like that of the post-Constantinian church: ‘Terce - Sext - None’, surrounded by the “obligatory prayers” of morning and evening: “This [the three prayers], of course, is in addition to the statutory prayers (*legitimis orationibus*) that are due, without particular requirement, at the coming in of the day and of the night” (ch. 25).<sup>26</sup> Stewart-Sykes admits that these obligatory or statutory prayers could represent exactly an early case of a twofold cursus of prayer at sunrise and sunset, but he rejects seeing in them the original Christian pattern of daily prayer:

“They are of venerable antiquity, but their appearance on their own in Tertullian’s tract cannot be attributed to their being the ‘original’ daily prayers of the Church, in part because there is no evidence that this pattern occurred among early Christians, and in part because Tertullian is himself far removed from the origin of the *horarium*.”<sup>27</sup>

Cyprian, in his similar treatise *On the Lord’s Prayer* (34-35), written ca. 250, describes the same fivefold cursus. However, he curiously seems to reverse the order of which of the two groups of daily prayers is the most ancient. For Cyprian, the three are older than the two.

Stewart-Sykes correctly points out the lack of preserved evidence that the twofold pattern was practiced among early Christians. But the evidence that is extant shows that in Latin North Africa around 200 the fivefold cursus was already established as we find it almost universally observed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and that the morning and evening prayers occurred as a distinct entity within the fivefold cursus. One may interpret this differently, but its existence at this time and place cannot be doubted.

<sup>26</sup> *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord’s Prayer*. Translated and introduced, with brief annotations, by Alistair Stewart-Sykes, Crestwood, NY 2004, 61.

<sup>27</sup> “Prayer Five Times in the Day and at Midnight,” 17.

*D. Considerations on the possible pre-Constantinian existence of the two Major Hours*

Both these psalms, 50 and 140, are characterized by explicit references to the Temple sacrifices of morning and evening. Furthermore, ps 50 speaks explicitly of the abolition of these sacrifices and their replacement by prayer, which is signified by the gesture of the lifting of hands. Christians likewise interpreted ps 140 as promoting the replacement of temple sacrifice, here by a spiritual act, humility.

With regard to the preceding centuries, how should we interpret the fact that we find these two psalms almost universally employed in the fourth and fifth centuries? Here we need to take into consideration the ritual diversity reigning in Late Antiquity, as well as the ecclesiastical situation connected with it. Unlike the liturgical homogeneity that resulted from several unification processes from around the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards,<sup>28</sup> in Late Antiquity more or less every ecclesiastical center (archbishopric, later: patriarchate) had its own liturgical tradition and rule.

The crucial question is now: in the absence of one central ecclesiastical authority, could the two psalms have been chosen independently by all the local traditions in the 4<sup>th</sup> century? I would answer that this is highly unlikely; such a coincidence is just not credible. Instead, the almost universal agreement between these scattered and independent traditions allows us to infer two implications. First, a morning service with ps 50 and an evening service with ps 140 certainly existed in several pre-4<sup>th</sup> century local traditions. Secondly, the universal use of these two psalms in the 4<sup>th</sup> century points to some older common roots.

Can we identify these roots? The fact noted above that pre-Constantinian sources do not specify *which* psalms are used in prayer and liturgy leaves us with conjectures. Paul Bradshaw allows for a connection with the Old Testament sacrifices, but does not see it in particular offices or psalms: “although earlier [than the 4<sup>th</sup> c.] generations of Christians had regarded the offering of praise and prayer as a sacrifice, as we have seen, no attempt had been made to equate particular times of prayer with specific Old Testament sacrifices: instead it was *continual* prayer which was seen as the fulfillment of the morning and evening sacrifices of Israel.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> This concerns both Greek and Latin Christendom: especially from the 11th century onwards, the Greek and Latin churches more and more exclusively observed one single liturgical tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer*, 73.

However, the choice of pss 50 and 140 at morning and evening prayers, which we consider to be pre-4<sup>th</sup> century, seems to have been motivated by the psalms' idea of replacing the temple sacrifice. The choice further suggests that Christians even prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century thought of Matins (morning office) and Vespers (evening office) as a replacement of the daily Temple sacrifices.

In view of the massive dominance of Matins and Vespers in post-Constantinian daily worship, the pre-Constantinian evidence of a two-fold timetable of Christian daily prayer is surprisingly meager. In fact, it is limited to North Africa and the witnesses of Tertullian and Cyprian, and the two Church Fathers contradict each other as to whether the twofold cursus in Latin North Africa came prior to the threefold one or *vice versa*.

Does this meager evidence prove the hypothesis of a 'threefold + threefold' conflation, according to which the two Major Hours of 4<sup>th</sup> century Christianity constitute the first and the last of one threefold cursus? I shall discuss this question below and my answer will be negative.

#### *IV. The three minor Hours in early Christianity: the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours*

In addition to the two Major Hours, most historical liturgical traditions, as we have stated above, have in their daily worship three Minor Hours, connected with the civil watches of Roman chronology of day and night: the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours.<sup>30</sup> There has been little research on the history of the Minor Hours.<sup>31</sup> But even if there had been more, the Minor Hours would be less useful in a comparative perspective for our purposes, since the Minor Hours of the various historical traditions, unlike the Major ones, to a large degree seem to lack common elements like identical psalms.

We find evidence in pre-Constantinian Christianity of a threefold cursus of daily prayer, the earliest being the admonition of the *Didache* to recite the Lord's Prayer thrice a day (8,3). In third century

<sup>30</sup> These have been less well preserved than the Major Hours; for instance, the present West Syrian ones have lost their psalmody altogether and consist only of hymns and prayers.

<sup>31</sup> One of the few recent works is Carolina Lutzka, *Die kleinen Hören des byzantinischen Stundengebetes und ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung* (Forum Orthodoxe Theologie 7), Berlin 2007. A major study of the Minor Hours remains E. P. Diakovskij, *Послѣдование часовъ и изобразительныхъ. Историческое изслѣдование* [The office of the Hours and the Typika. An historical investigation], Kiev 1913. Accessible online at <http://www.mzh.mrezha.ru/books.htm#EPDdia>.

Alexandria we find two coexisting threefold cursus; their difference may be real or only terminological. Origen speaks of prayer at least three times a day, plus at night (*On Prayer*, 12:2); the biblical citations with which he legitimizes these prayers indicate their times: morning, 6<sup>th</sup> hour, evening, night. It is impossible to know whether Origen describes prayer at the sixth hour, or if this specified hour appears because the biblical warrant for prayer at midday (noon) happens to take place at this hour. But his predecessor Clement specifically mentions that some Christians habitually pray at the third, sixth and ninth hours (*Pedagogue* 2:9).

Recent research<sup>32</sup> tends to equate these two threefold cursus, considering them to vary only terminologically. In other words, scholars tend to think that ‘Third Hour’ is just a more precise way of saying ‘morning’ and that, in reality, we are dealing with the same prayer time; likewise in the case of the ‘Ninth Hour’ / ‘evening’. The assumption is that the vaguer times ‘morning, noon, evening’ at some times or in some places are made more concrete and specific.

Daily prayer at the third, sixth and ninth hours is found in North Africa (Greek and Latin) and in the *Apostolic Tradition* (Syrian?), while for Antioch, Constantinople, Cappadocia, Palestine and other areas there is no preserved evidence.

I want to pursue here the methodology that I applied to the Major Hours, that is to read backwards from later, more specific evidence. Two post-Constantinian liturgical traditions which are very close with regard to the Minor Hours are of interest to us: the Palestino-Byzantine tradition of daily worship, which perhaps is the rite<sup>33</sup> that has best preserved to this day its Minor Hours of Late Antiquity, and the 4<sup>th</sup> century liturgy of Cappadocia according to the writings of St. Basil the Great (d. 379).

The present Minor Hours of the Byzantine tradition have three psalms, but one of these seems to be the principal one. This is seen from the fact that important later sources<sup>34</sup> have only one psalm (monopsalm) at the Minor Hours, and that other sources have monopsalms at certain periods of the year.<sup>35</sup> The central position of a single psalm in these cases further makes it probable that

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer*, 47 ff; Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Actually, this tradition exists historically in two rites: the Palestinian and the Byzantine.

<sup>34</sup> For instance the codices Turin University Library B.VII. 30, 9<sup>th</sup> century (ed. in preparation by Parenti – cf. above, note 2); Erlangen University Library A2, 1025 CE; Jerusalem Holy Cross 43, 1122 CE (“Anastasis Typikon”).

<sup>35</sup> This psalm always figures in larger psalm groups for the same Hour (three or more psalms).

these Minor Hours were originally monopsalms. The monopsalms of Jerusalemite Terce, Sext and None are respectively pss 50, 90 and 85; monopsalms Compline (like Sext) has ps 90. In his *Longer Rules* (37,5) St. Basil describes the daily office of his Cappadocian ascetic community; it is not always clear whether a psalm citation means that the psalm in question was actually performed but it seems we can extract the following scheme, close to that of Jerusalem: Matins has ps 50, Terce has pss 50 and 142, Sext has ps 90 (and 54:18), there is nothing about None, Compline has ps 90, and the Midnight Office has ps 118.<sup>36</sup>

One immediately notices that the psalm of Terce (ps 50) of these two traditions is identical to the morning psalm of the same two (and most other) traditions. In addition to this we find the doubling of ps 90; in both traditions this psalm figures both at Sext and at Compline. We shall now reflect upon the implications of these two duplications.

*V. The fivefold cursus of daily Christian prayer: Conflation of two threefold cursus, or fusion of a twofold and a threefold cursus?*

We have found evidence of the existence of both a twofold and a threefold cursus of daily prayer in pre-Constantinian Christianity. We have also noted the disagreement among scholars as to whether Matins and Vespers represent a twofold cursus or only the first and the last of a threefold one. Is there any evidence capable of solving this disagreement?

The evidence of the Jerusalemite and Cappadocian traditions of daily prayer, which we have just described, seems to be such evidence, yielding a conclusion valid at least in their case and possibly more widely. The remarkable doubling of the principal psalms or monopsalms of two daily offices, ps 50 used at Matins and Terce, and ps 90 at Sext and Compline, is difficult to explain other than by hypothesizing that they originally belonged to two different and independent systems of daily prayer. The logic of non-repetition<sup>37</sup> precludes that such a coexistence would have been consciously and purposely construed within the same liturgical system or rite. The main psalm of a daily office constitutes a very significant (and stable)<sup>38</sup> element of the Hour's identity, so significant that I find it improbable that two

<sup>36</sup> I follow here Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, 84-87.

<sup>37</sup> It must be admitted that history, including liturgical history, is not always logical. Thus it is not to be excluded that the 'logic of non-repetition' was not in fact operative. But I believe this logic is a justifiable premise for research today.

<sup>38</sup> Much more stable, for instance, than daily office prayers.

daily offices could have been given the same psalm. The doubling of pss 50 and 90 therefore seems to indicate two things: firstly, that the fivefold cursus results from two separate cursus, which is worth noticing even though there is today general consensus on this point. Admittedly, this conclusion is weakened by the fact that the Third Hour in most sources is thematically connected with the sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:15).<sup>39</sup> Ps 50 suits eminently even this theme: “A clean heart create in me, O God, and an upright spirit renew within me. Do not cast me away from your face, and your holy spirit do not take from me” (v. 12-13). However, the meaning given to third hour prayer in the *Apostolic Tradition*, based on the Markan chronology (Jesus crucified at the third hour), is again connected with Jesus’ passion.<sup>40</sup> This part of the *Apostolic Tradition* may be just as old as the period at which Tertullian was writing, or even older.<sup>41</sup>

The theme of the Spirit in the Third Hour could then be explained as new theme given to it after the original theme of sacrifice, through the fusion of the two systems, was provided for by Matins. Such a thematic change would have been convenient in the sense that ps 50, relevant to both themes, could be retained. The meaning of the Passion given to Terce in the *Apostolic Tradition* would then have been the earlier and more traditional one.

Secondly, the duplication of ps 90 indicates that one of the two fusing timetables must have been twofold. This interpretation is supported by the rather complex argumentation that follows: the threefold cursus has pss 50, 90 and 85 at Terce, Sext and None respectively; the second cursus has ps 50 at Matins and ps 140 at Vespers, as well as a nocturnal part consisting of ps 90 at Compline and ps 118 at Midnight. If the second diurnal cursus had had a Sext office, its psalm would not

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<sup>39</sup> The Holy Spirit theme is found in early theologians including Tertullian (*On Prayer*, 25), Cyprian (*On the Lord's Prayer*, 34), Basil (*Longer Rule*, 37,7), and in traditional liturgies such as the Byzantine, Coptic and Armenian ones.

<sup>40</sup> What is very interesting for our purposes is that the *Apostolic Tradition* also links the third hour prayer with the Old Testament sacrifices: «For this [reason] in the old [testament?] the law orders that the bread of offering should be offered at the third hour as a figure of the holy body and blood of Christ» (*The Apostolic Tradition. A Commentary* by Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips. Edited by Harold W. Attridge (Hermeneia), Minneapolis 2002, 41,6, p. 196, tr. from the Arabic version).

<sup>41</sup> «With so many more obvious biblical examples available and in actual use in third-century Christian texts, the community from which this particular horarium originates appears either to represent a very early stage in the history of the church, when the influence of its Jewish roots was still felt, or else is a later one that was outside the mainstream of Christian practice» (*The Apostolic Tradition*, 215).

have been 90, since Compline<sup>42</sup> has this psalm. And if it had had a Sext with a psalm other than 90, in the resulting, fused cursus this psalm would have been preferred to ps 90 in order to avoid a duplication of ps 90. This consequently shows that the second timetable did not have a Sext office and that its diurnal cursus was twofold.

In addition to this, there is other, more circumstantial evidence. The most important piece of evidence may be the existence in the fourth century of just *two* major offices: if both the conflating cursus were threefold one would expect *three* major offices in the fourth century. Further, if the two Major Hours sprang out of a threefold pre-Constantinian timetable, it is impossible to explain how Terce, Sext and None were added *en bloc* to them, since Sext (or noon prayer) would have then had to pre-exist Terce and None and since Terce, Sext and None are really a block of identically structured offices. Finally, whereas the threefold cursus is clearly documented, there does also exist evidence for a twofold cursus, especially for Latin North Africa and, if my interpretation is correct, the twofold cursus may be conjectured on the basis of the unanimous psalmodic elements (pss 50 and 140) of the various 4<sup>th</sup> century rites.

I therefore conclude, on the basis of internal and circumstantial evidence, that the fivefold cursus is the result of a fusion of one twofold and one threefold cursus. This holds good for Jerusalem and Cappadocia, as well as for third century Latin North Africa. For other regions other patterns and evolutions could be the case, but it could also be that the evolution which seems to have taken place in some regions was the same everywhere, albeit with different tempi.

Was one of the two traditional cursus primary to the other? Jerusalem seems to have had primarily a two-office cursus prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century because, according to *Itinerarium Egeriae* (27,4), there is not even a daily Third Hour during the regular Church year, but only in Lent. The primary tradition of early Jerusalem would in this case have been that of Matins, Vespers and Nocturns; the secondary one would have been that of Terce, Sext, None and a night Hour (the Midnight Office?). How far back in time would such a twofold Hagiopolite cursus go? Not necessarily to the first century; one could imagine that this two-office cursus, primary in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and some time prior to that, was introduced in the second place, let us just suggest in the

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<sup>42</sup> The uncertainty of the time at which the Compline office appeared in Jerusalem (Egeria does not mention it, whereas the "Georgian" Horologion of Sinai Georgian 0.34, of basically 6 c. content, does have it) makes the Cappadocian material the effective argument here.

2<sup>nd</sup> century, pushing an even more pristine threefold cursus to a secondary position.

#### VI. *Early Jewish daily prayer - background and parallel to Christian prayer*

With this conclusion about both a twofold and a threefold cursus of daily prayer in early Christianity, the question naturally arises concerning the relationship between these two cursus and the two same cursus found in Second Temple and Early Judaism. Bradshaw has recently given an update on the question of Jewish influence on early Christian liturgy.<sup>43</sup> His conclusion goes in the direction of regarding the relationship between early Christian and early Judaic liturgies not as parent-child, but as siblings.

This seems convincing. After the fall of the Temple of Jerusalem, Jewish worship found itself in a situation not completely unlike that of Christian worship. In a certain sense, both - albeit for different reasons - had to work out a ritual system to replace the Temple cult. For Jews, the absence of the Temple was a loss and what came instead was bound to be less valuable; Christians would consider the sacrifice of Jesus Christ superior to Temple sacrifices in any case, independently of whether the Temple was there or not. Jewish and Christian daily prayer of Late Antiquity evolved side by side with a similar heritage but with different presuppositions. And, as Falk pointed out,<sup>44</sup> there was a third sibling, the community of the Dead Sea scrolls, which in its own way developed a liturgical life separate from, but dependent upon, the Temple cult.

We find both early Christian timetables also in Early Rabbinic Judaism. Twofold daily prayer existed in early Judaism: the recitation of the Shema' twice daily; the daily prayer at sunrise and sunset among the Therapeutae according to Philo (*On Cont. Life*, 27-28) and the Es-

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Bradshaw, "Jewish Influence on Early Christian Liturgy: A Reappraisal", available online at: <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=2988> (accessed Dec. 12, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> «In the Temple, the prayers of the people remained disparate, brought into proximity only by their somewhat loose connection with the Temple service. When the Yahad adopted and adapted these elements for communal use away from the Temple, and thus without sacrifice as a centre, they combined these for the first time in a comprehensive and coherent liturgy of their own. A similar process can be suggested for the synagogue. Finally, the importance of the Temple as a focus for public and corporate prayer coincides with the picture in Luke and Acts, for the early Christians in Jerusalem prayed regularly at the Temple and maintained a distinctive presence there» (Daniel K. Falk, *Daily, Sabbath, and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 27), Leiden 1998, 254-255).

senes according to Josephus (*War*, 2.128-9), and in the Qumran community (4Q503 Daily Prayers and others). These occurrences naturally point to the Temple, with its ancient tradition of two daily offerings, as their origin or inspiration. The threefold Jewish prayer, on the other hand, is linked with the thrice daily recitation of the ‘Amidah (the eighteen benedictions).

What seems to be somewhat neglected in parts of recent studies on the early history of the daily office, however, is the mother of these three siblings, which in many respects was undoubtedly the Temple cult. We should search for relationships (roots, origin, parallel, etc.) of early Christian daily prayer not only with synagogue or Jewish sectarian worship, but also with that of the Temple.

I would like briefly to suggest a possible direction for future investigation and hypothesize on a way in which both early Christian cursus of daily prayer were related to Jewish prayer timetables: the two-fold cursus at some level would continue that of the Temple morning and evening Tamid sacrifices and of the Shema<sup>45</sup>; the threefold one at some level would continue or parallel that of the ‘Amidah prayer at morning, noon and evening. The idea that the two daily Temple sacrifices serve as background to the two emerging Christian Major Hours is corroborated by the choice of pss 50 and 140 which, as we have seen, clearly seems to have been motivated by their ideas of sacrifice replacement.

An interesting parallel between early Jewish and early Christian two- and threefold cursus of daily prayer emerges from the way in which the Jewish liturgiologist Stefan Reif, on the basis of the Talmud, distinguishes between the Shema<sup>46</sup> and the ‘Amidah:

“Furthermore, the tannaitic requirements in the case of the *shema*<sup>46</sup> are not identical with those of the ‘*amidah* and demonstrate that the former was a common custom attached to the beginning and end of the day while the latter was a more concentrated act of pious devotion. It is of course possible that these two central pillars of the later rabbinic liturgy originated in different contexts.”<sup>45</sup>

Reif’s interpretation offers a picture significantly resembling that of early Christian worship: not only were there two different daily cursus, which possibly resulted in five daily prayers at certain places and times,<sup>46</sup> but the two timetables have different natures in the sense that

<sup>45</sup> Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History*, Cambridge University Press 1993, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Ginzberg alleges, unfortunately without providing arguments, that this was the case according to the Palestinian Talmud: «We call attention however to the fact that, as

the two, morning and evening, are more statutory, perhaps more communal, and the three more linked with private devotion. In post-Constantinian Christian daily worship the three Minor Hours have become public, but in pre-Constantinian prayer they do seem rather private, more like an “act of pious devotion.” This interpretation is supported by the fact that in post-Constantinian liturgical traditions common psalms are found to a large degree in the Major Hours (pss 50 and 140) but only to a little degree in the Minor Hours. The way in which the two cursus were combined, however, was different in Jewish and Christian context: while they were fused into three daily prayers in Judaism, probably in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries,<sup>47</sup> they were juxtaposed in Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

### VII. Conclusion

The view held by Dugmore and others that the two Major daily Hours in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Matins and Vespers, go back to daily morning and evening synagogue prayer was challenged by Bradshaw and others, who claimed that the early Christian cursus of daily prayer was threefold (morning - noon - evening). This essay has sought to read liturgical history backwards by exploring structures and elements of post-Constantinian daily worship. The very widespread choice of pss 50 and 140 as the main psalms at Matins and Vespers in sources of the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as well as substantial evidence that such Matins and Vespers offices could not have been supplemented by noon prayer (Sext) to form a threefold cursus, strongly indicate that there also existed, at least in Jerusalem and Cappadocia for which there is evidence, a twofold daily cursus in early Christianity. The existence of a twofold cursus in these areas make it plausible that there was such a cursus also in North Africa at least from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In this sense Dugmore was right, but the twofold cursus should be linked with the Temple cult rather than that of the synagogue. The classical fivefold diurnal cursus should therefore be interpreted as the result of a fusion of this twofold cursus and a threefold cursus found in many early sources. There is a possibility that the twofold Christian cursus

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we can see from the Palestinian Talmud, the Jews in the Talmudic period met five times daily for prayer in the synagogue» (*On Jewish Law and Lore*, Philadelphia 1955, 57). I am indebted to Jonathan Klawans for this reference.

<sup>47</sup> See Reif, *op. cit.*, 85, n. 74 («the second- to third-century efforts to amalgamate the *shema*’ and the *amidah* into a compound liturgy»).

<sup>48</sup> It might not be a coincidence that the Muslim *salat* has the same number of daily prayers.

was of a more statutory and communal character and the threefold one of a more private character. In light of the backward inferences proposed by this study, the material of Latin North Africa suggests that the creation of a fivefold daily cursus through the fusion of a twofold and a threefold cursus had already taken place, in Western North Africa and possibly elsewhere, by 200 CE.

Professor of Liturgical Studies  
Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo  
s.r.froyshov@teologi.uio.no