

History of liturgical development

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Introduction

The task of this article is to give an analysis of the liturgical developments that took place in the Roman Rite during the Medieval Period. These developments can be traced between the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. The shape of the Roman rite liturgy can be attributed to the progress in distinctive practices in the liturgy of the medieval Christian West which were entrenched in Christian antiquity, like the early liturgical forms of Initiation and Eucharist and also the observance of daily prayer. In this way, the medieval period encountered a widening elaboration and expansion of the liturgical life of Christians in various dimensions. A careful examination of the various liturgical books compiled and used during these medieval centuries, books used for Mass, for the Divine Office, and for other liturgical rites can be another better way to study the growth and diversity of liturgical in this epoch.

The Historical Development of the Roman Liturgy

The Roman Rite is the most widespread liturgical rite in the Catholic Church, as well as the most popular and widespread Rite in all of Christendom, and is one of the rites which gradually became the leading rite used by the Western Church (Oxford Research). It is also the oldest and enjoys the Apostolic foundation. It can be pointed out that the Medieval liturgy of the Roman rite was rooted in the liturgical developments which took place in the late antiquity; therefore it is worthy to briefly mention the fundamental acts of worship of the early Church. These included “the celebration of the Eucharist, the rites of the Sacraments, prayer in common and the liturgical sermons” (Klauser 5). Some of the practices which gave shape to what became the Roman rite were borrowed from the liturgical customs of Judaism like the festivals of Easter and Pentecost. Not only that but also it

borrowed practice like cult of martyrs and elements in the liturgy of hours such as the morning and evening devotions (6).

Another influential factor is the reality that the Roman liturgy was not the only existing liturgical system during the early medieval period. Originally, different western rites, developed in several areas, including Rome, Benevento, and the Ambrosian Rite of Milan in Italy, Spain (the Mozarabic Rite in Spain, and the Gallican Rite in France (Oxford Research). In the beginning of the seventh century, the early Roman rite was diffused to many other areas of the western church and continued its development with lesser or greater local adaptation. This is especially true of the strong Gallican (and later, Germanic) influence on the shape and content of the Roman liturgy (Oxford Research).

At a point in time, there was an era of transition in Roman liturgy simply known as the ‘period for liturgical exchange’. During this epoch, there was the beginning of the mixture of the Roman and the Gallican-Frankish liturgies. The adoption of the Roman rite had become common in many regions. For instance, Boniface (an Anglo Saxon missionary bishop) found it significant to bind his Germanic tribes more closely with Rome and its liturgy (Adam 27). Also King Pepin in 754 prescribed the Roman liturgy for his kingdom. Charlemagne did likewise by issuing laws that would bring a complete use of the Roman liturgy. Subsequently, the Roman rite had already underwent the some adaptations and revisions with the Gallican rite. These were evident in the multiplication and lengthening of prayers and rites and the subjective silent prayers by the Bishops and Priests (27).

Towards the end of the eighth century, the elements used and actions done during Mass were profoundly elucidated to the faithful. As Adam Adolf says in his book *Foundations of Liturgy* that, “everything got significance: vestments, persons, church, vessels, utensils, dates, actions and motions” (27). During this era, the sense of sinfulness and

unworthiness grew among the faithful; this led to the frequency in the confession of sins.

The Roman Liturgical Year

Most of the Roman liturgical rituals were influenced by the array of seasons and feasts celebrated over the course of a year. There were two cycles of liturgical time: the *temporal* cycle, which was connected with the commemoration of events in the life of Christ; and the *sanctoral* cycle, that was composed of the feasts and commemorations of universal and local saints (Oxford Research). In this period also, the Church realized several liturgical seasons of the year: two of them were periods of preparation: Advent, which preceded Christmas; and Lent, which came before Easter (Klauser 86). The date of Easter followed the lunar cycle as in the Jewish celebration of Passover, and is thus it is a feast that can shift. Essentially, Easter fell on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The date of Christmas was set as December 25 in the middle of the fourth century and was therefore celebrated on that fixed date (Eisenhofer and Luchner 223).

The *sanctoral* cycle was composed of feasts of the saints. These feasts were for celebrating the life of the early Christian martyrs and confessors at Rome and other places. With time, other pious figures of the surrounding communities were also considered for veneration as saints (Eisenhofer and Luchner 39). By tradition, the commemoration of a saint was done on the day he or she died; which they considered as the day of birth into eternal life. Some saints' feast days would be celebrated universally, while others might be celebrated locally by members of certain religious orders or associations (40).

Such a framework of liturgical time had a positive influence on the texts of the liturgy especially the Eucharistic prayers and the Divine Office. Copies of this liturgical calendar came to be included in the Missal and the Breviary, with local additions for feasts observed on the local level of diocese or religious order (Oxford Research).

Liturgical Books

As for the Roman liturgical books, it is told that they had contained almost nothing but only texts. The books did not give the way or directions for carrying out rituals and ceremonies during the course of service. With the development of this rite, the liturgical books began to come into existence; these books contained what they called ‘ordines’ or the methodical arrangements, which we call ‘rubrics’ today (Adam 29). Later, these ordines were compiled to make comprehensive liturgical books. In the earliest period, there were a number of different collections or books used during the celebration of the Mass, the Divine Office, and other liturgical rites (King 175). Some of these books could vary, except a few, with the titles used for them. Then in the later centuries, there was a marked propensity to compile small sets of volumes that were more comprehensive in which a single book could contain at least most of the textual material which were required for that specific rite or by that specific presider (Oxford Research).

Some of the liturgical books for the Roman rite were:

The *Missale*, which contained all of the texts necessary for the priest or bishop to celebrate Mass with also the scriptural readings and basic chants. The *Pontificale* : the book for the bishop, containing the texts for the rites at which he was expected to preside. The *Rituale* was the priest’s book, containing the texts of the rites that formed part of his liturgical ministry. The *Breviarium* (breviary), the book(s) used by the major clergy as well as men and women members of religious orders for the daily celebration of the Divine Office (Oxford Research).

In addition there were other liturgical books which were also used, both in the earlier and later medieval periods; for example, books used by those involved with liturgical music or those charged with preparation for individual liturgical celebrations (King 176). Some were more fully expounded extracts from one of the major liturgical books for use on specific occasions, for example, liturgical processions held at certain times of the year called the *Processionale*

(176). In addition, some liturgical books used by monastic communities would differ in a number of ways from those used by diocesan clergy or communities of canons associated with a cathedral.

The Liturgy of the Roman Rite from Gregory VII to Reformation

Under the papacy of Gregory VII (1073-1085), the Church in Rome underwent a period of consolidation of liturgical and ecclesiastical life (Adam 30). All the bishops were encouraged to follow the liturgical practice of the Roman Curia. This move did not achieve much until the emergency of the Franciscan Order in the thirteenth century who promote the use of the Roman Curia and spread it abroad (30). However, the liturgical books of this era permitted the celebration of private Masses, thus liturgy became more and more clerical, at which the priest alone could do everything during the celebration. The participation of the faithful during Mass was suppressed. Nevertheless, the introduction of new feasts of the Lord, Mary and the cult of Saints, led to the expansion of the liturgical year (30).

It is also important to mention that the medieval liturgy of the Roman liturgy was also characterized by the effects of the crusades. The crusades intensified the veneration of the humanity of Jesus involving all the phases of his earthly life; for example the devotion to the passion of Christ and of mysticism; also veneration of Saints' relics (Oxford Research). Pilgrimages became prevalent. During the second half of the thirteenth century, the feast of the *Corpus Christi* having a procession together with Christmas and its Crib came to be the favorite feasts of the year. Even during the time for the Eucharist people would want to gaze upon the Lord who is present in the consecrated host (Adam 31). On the other side, it can however not be forgotten that regardless of the prevailing distortions, there was a significant growth and development of people's deep and interior faith in addition to the spirit of self-sacrifice which characterized a large number of people. There were great figures who rose at this period like Bernard of Clairvaux. Life of prayer and worship of the Church was improving (33).

The Celebration of Mass

At the heart of medieval liturgical life was the celebration of the Eucharist (the Mass) regardless of the season. It is therefore worthwhile to briefly analyze the interaction between medieval Eucharistic theology and the actual celebration of the Mass. Progressively, the celebration of Mass had been extended to every day of the week, with the exception of Good Friday, on which no Mass was offered, but communion was distributed from previously consecrated hosts (Oxford Research). The texts and music used would vary according to the liturgical season, feast, or day of the week. The practice of offering private Masses developed from the earlier custom of offering a more simple version of the Eucharist with small groups on certain occasions or for certain intentions or reason. Some of these were developed more formally into *votive* Masses with their own proper sets of prayer texts, or formularies (King 208).

In the later medieval centuries, the number of these private Masses increased dramatically; the theological theme of the Mass as sacrifice, a depiction or recurrence of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, played an important role in this development (Walker and Dijk 51). These Masses could be offered for any one of a number of special intentions or reasons, but came to be most frequently offered on behalf of a deceased person, for which the priest would be offered a stipend which was normally a small sum of money (52). This is the period when the doctrine of purgatory developed and it stated that persons who died either in a state of lesser or venial sin, would need to be spiritually purified before admission to Heaven. However, the prayers of the living on their behalf could shorten this period of purifying penitential suffering, so the powerful spiritual benefits of the Mass could be applied to the deceased on whose behalf it was offered (Oxford Research).

Conclusion

The above assertion is an analysis to establish the liturgical developments which took place in the sacred liturgy of the Roman rite in the Medieval period. It can be concluded that the development of the Roman liturgy was a process. Beginning from adoption of some of the Jewish practices and latter amalgamation with other rite like Gallican from France, all these led to the gradual development of the rite. Several contributions were also done by the Popes like Gregory VII and others. The contribution of the Monks and religious Orders such as the Franciscans cannot be underestimated.

List of Sources

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