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The liturgical creation of a Christian past: identity and community in anaphoral prayers

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For the vast majority of Christians in late antiquity, the past they absorbed was the past that they heard. With the rapid conversion of the populace to Christianity in the course of the fourth century, this 'unclassical past' was primarily biblical. Attending church exposed late Roman Christians, both literate and illiterate, to readings from the Bible and to preaching that exhorted them to more moral forms of life by calling on them to identify with the biblical narrative. In church services, biblical history became Christian history, and congregations came to understand themselves within the sweep of biblical visions of the past and the future. The inculcation of the biblical past extended beyond the Liturgy of the Word to shape the eucharistic offering as well, as the sweep of a Christianised human history received ritual expression in the prayers of thanksgiving and consecration that marked the height of Christian liturgical celebration.

Christian ritual practice in late antiquity deployed biblical narrative to shape both a Christian past and a liturgical present. Hymns, sermons and the emerging calendar of feasts brought stories of Jesus to life.¹ Even with the great variety of forms in use in late antiquity, at the centre of nearly all eucharistic liturgies lay the recollection and re-enactment of Jesus' deeds at the Last Supper in the offering of bread and wine as his body and blood. With the repetition of the words of institution ('This is my body ... This is my blood') and the attendant priestcraft, the historical anthropologist can envision a Christian melding of myth and ritual.² But the predominant eastern Christian eucharistic liturgies also emphasised an earlier past, a past that spanned the time from Creation and the Fall through the Law and the prophets, thus setting a historical context for God's acts of salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Unlike the variable preface prayers of the Roman and other Western liturgies that focused the celebration of the mass on the

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¹For an example at the night vigils in sixth-century Constantinople, see Frank (2006).

²For a study of the Roman Rite from the perspective of contemporary ritual and performance studies, see McCall (2007). For excellent overviews of the history of the liturgy in late antiquity and early Byzantium, see Taft (2006c), (1992); Caseau (2004); Wybrew (1990).

liturgical season, these eastern liturgies invariably set the eucharistic sacrifice within the huge sweep of time from creation to redemption.³ The anaphoras (the eucharistic prayers of offering and consecration) of the so-called West Syrian type, including those associated with the development of the *Liturgy of St Basil*, constructed a biblical past not through ritual re-enactment, but through the ritual recitation of the history of salvation.

From the late fourth to the early seventh century, when Christians assembled for the Divine Liturgy in congregations throughout the eastern Mediterranean, they tended to hear encapsulations of biblical tradition during the anaphora. Priests began to recite the anaphora silently around the middle of the sixth century, and the silent anaphora had become customary by the third decade of the seventh. During the period when congregants heard the anaphora, however, the eucharistic prayers served in the construction of a Christian identity grounded in the biblical past. My concern here is not to demonstrate the obvious fact that Christian liturgies exposed lay Christian congregations to unclassical traditions, but rather to consider the liturgical mechanisms for inculcating a sacred history – an interpretation of the past – that, through ritual participation, Christian congregations came to inhabit. These prayers raise questions about the relative importance of narration and performance in late ancient Christian ritual. The inquiry also moves from the shape of the liturgy to glimpse the goals and priorities of the shapers of the liturgy, the authors and the audiences that made these liturgies their own, and in turn the effects of the liturgy in shaping them.

The emphasis on the narration of the biblical past before the consecration of the bread and wine was especially prominent among a family of liturgies that scholars have termed West Syrian: the earliest extant example derives from the region of Antioch in the late fourth century.⁴ At its first textual appearance, in a compilation known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the form shows ample evidence of prior development, indicating that the basic outlines are much earlier. The most enduring member of this liturgical family is the Byzantine *Liturgy of St Basil*, some form of which had become standard in Constantinople before the early sixth century. It remained the principal liturgy of the Byzantine Orthodox Church until the eleventh century when it was replaced by the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* at all but ten services per year. Within this family, the placement of the historical narrative varies, sometimes occurring before the *Sanctus* prayer, and sometimes

³The eastern-influenced Gallican Rite (used in France until around 800 CE) does include a brief recounting of the Creation and Fall in its *contestatio*; *Lit. Gal.* 16–19 (ed. F. Mone in Hänggi and Pahl [1968] 467–8). Such a narrative of salvation history is lacking in the *Ordo Romanus Primus* (*Lit. Rom.*) in Hänggi and Pahl (1968) 424–47.

⁴Jasper and Cuming (1990) collects, translates and comments on most of the extant early eucharistic prayers. The major texts appear in the original Greek where extant and in Latin translations of other languages – Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian – in Hänggi and Pahl (1968). Shepherd (1961) remains a useful and cautious overview of the early formation of Antiochene liturgical traditions.

after it. In either position, the recitation of biblical history frames the re-enactment of the Last Supper and participation in communion.

After the Sanctus prayer ('Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts'), the Byzantine *Liturgy of St Basil* has the priest recount to God the history of the Creation and Fall of humanity.

For you took dust from the earth and formed the human; you honoured him with your image, O God, and set him in the paradise of pleasure, and promised him immortality of life and enjoyment of eternal good things in keeping your commandments. But when he had disobeyed you, the true God who created him, and had been led astray by the deceit of the serpent and had been subjected to death by his own transgressions, you, O God, expelled him in your righteous judgement from paradise into this world and turned him back to earth from which he was taken.⁵

This protological account ends with a foreshadowing of redemption, reminding God that he was also already dispensing to humanity 'the salvation by rebirth which is in your Christ.'⁶ The historical sweep then moves quickly through the shape of the Old Testament narrative as read through a Christian lens: 'You sent forth prophets; you performed works of power through your saints ... you spoke to us through the mouth of your servants the prophets, foretelling to us the salvation that should come; you gave the Law for our help; you set angels as guards over us.'⁷ Throughout this narrative, the recipient of God's action appears in the first person plural. The liturgical repetition of the narrative thus constructs and interpellates the congregants as the 'us.' Through ritual narration, the Christian community becomes the subject of the biblical narrative, those upon whom God has acted. Only after they are formed by this biblical story do the participants re-enact Christ's Last Supper.

What the congregation heard

Understanding the liturgy as a vehicle for conveying and maintaining an unclassical conception of the past requires a fuller exploration of the content of late ancient Christian anaphoral prayers. Although at the very end of antiquity the anaphoral prayers had come to be recited silently in most parts of the eastern Mediterranean, previously these prayers had been audible. When the prayers could be heard, what exactly was spoken? To answer this we must reconsider the history of anaphoral practice in early Christianity.

The received text of the *Liturgy of St Basil* provides a critical endpoint for our investigation, although it is difficult to date. The earliest witness appears in a liturgical

⁵*Lit. Bas.* 15.2; citations of this text follow the edition of Parenti and Velkovska (2000); English translation in Jasper and Cuming (1990) 117, modified.

⁶*Lit. Bas.* 15.2.

⁷*ibid.*

manuscript known as the Barberini Euchologion (Vat. gr. 336), possibly dating from around 790; but the text reflects earlier practice.⁸ Scholarly attempts to identify Basil of Caesarea himself as the author or redactor of the prayer rest more on tradition and piety than on hard independent evidence.⁹ Basil's name is associated with a liturgy in sixth- and seventh-century sources, and the Barberini manuscript ascribes this liturgy to Basil, while the liturgy generally attributed to John Chrysostom appears there without attribution. But, as we shall see below, other related liturgies also circulated in Basil's name. We can only say with certainty that early Byzantines believed this liturgy and others to have been composed by Basil. At the same time, scholars generally agree that the form contained in the manuscript had its origins in the late fourth or the fifth century, as related liturgical prayers can demonstrate. The text contained in the Barberini Euchologion marks the culmination of a trajectory from improvised to set prayers, and from the audible recitation of these prayers to a silent anaphora. We must concede, however, that it is possible that no lay congregants ever heard the received text in the precise form that the Barberini Euchologion preserves.

The development of eucharistic prayers in earlier Christianity offers some perspective on the particular features of the *Liturgy of St Basil's* narrative and historical emphases. Anaphoral prayers were initially extemporaneous and of varying lengths, although church authorities expected them to conform to guidelines regarding their content.¹⁰ Writing around 150, Justin Martyr explains that after receiving the bread and wine, the man presiding over the congregation 'offers up prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his ability' (*Apol. I. 67*); he also explains that these prayers were 'lengthy' (*Apol. I. 65*). The *Apostolic Tradition*, once attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, and now believed to date from the third or the fourth century, contains a set prayer for the anaphora in chapter 4, but in chapter 9 states that it is not necessary for the bishop 'to say the same words we gave above, as though striving [to say them] by heart, when giving thanks to God; but let each one pray according to his ability'. While the bishop might even offer a shorter prayer, the author of the *Apostolic Tradition* requires that 'his prayer be soundly orthodox'.¹¹ Worshipper and church authorities could neither appreciate the varying content of these prayers nor assess their orthodoxy unless celebrants offered them aloud.¹²

⁸Parenti and Velkovska (2000) 19–20.

⁹Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* (PG 86:1368C) (c. 546 CE); C. Trullanum 32 (ed. J.-D. Mansi XI 957) (692 CE); Fenwick (1986) 6; Parenti and Velkovska (2000) 57.

¹⁰Bouley (1981); Hanson (1961); Taft (2006a) 27–32.

¹¹*Apost. Trad.* 9 (ed. B. Botte); trans. Bouley (1981) 123.

¹²Taft (2006a) 31.

By sometime in the seventh century, custom in most places – and eventually canon law – demanded that priests say the anaphoral prayers silently or privately.¹³ Indeed, the rubrics preceding the anaphora of St Basil in the Barberini Euchologion direct: ‘ὁ ἱερεὺς μυστικῶς λέγει (the priest says silently)’;¹⁴ raising the possibility that the text of this anaphora as preserved in the manuscript was never recited audibly, even if it developed from a prayer once pronounced regularly with a full voice. The silent recitation of the anaphora was in fact a relatively new practice. In earlier times, those presiding over the eucharistic sacrifice recited their thanksgiving aloud. The *Life of Melania the Younger* reports that while the saint was on her deathbed in 439 she asked Gerontius to celebrate ‘the holy offering (τὴν ἁγίαν ἀναφορὰν)’ on her behalf (66). Gerontius (died 485), himself the author of the *Life*, relates that his grief was so great that he was unable to speak up. When Melania could not hear him, she said, ‘Raise your voice so that I will hear the epiclesis [literally, the ‘invocation’ or the ‘naming’]’. Robert Taft has shown that, in keeping with contemporary usage, “epiclesis” refers in this instance to the entire eucharistic prayer, not just to the anaphoral invocation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Obviously both Melania and Gerontius expected the prayer to be audible, as had Justin and the author of the *Apostolic Tradition*.

The slow shift toward a silent anaphora seems to have begun in the early sixth century in Syria.¹⁶ By the very end of Justinian’s reign the practice had spread widely enough to be the object of imperial opprobrium. A law issued in 565 (Just. *Nov.* 137) complains in its preface that some clerics ‘do not know even the prayer of the holy oblation (τῆς ἁγίας προσκομιδῆς) or of holy baptism.’¹⁷ In its concern to root out those priests who say the prayer incorrectly, the legislation assumes that the text of the anaphora was fixed and expresses the desire that it be said consistently – each time the same prayer in the same way. The law orders ‘all bishops and presbyters to say the prayers used in the divine oblation and holy baptism, not inaudibly, but in a voice that can be heard by the faithful people, so that the souls of those who listen may be moved to greater compunction (εἰς πλείονα κατάνυξιν) and raise up glorification to the Lord God’ (137.6). It is most likely that a party of church leaders requested the ruling and had a hand in shaping its text.¹⁸ In demanding an audible anaphora, the law expresses concern for the effect that hearing the

¹³For a definitive discussion of the evidence for the recitation of the anaphora aloud in the East through the seventh century, see Taft (2006a).

¹⁴*Lit. Bas.* 15.1.

¹⁵Taft (2006a) 34. See Taft (1996) 212, 235–6; Lampe *sv.* ἐπικλήσις, B4.

¹⁶Taft (2006a) 37–8 cites Ps.-Narsai *Homily* 17 and Jacob of Serugh, although the evidence is far from decisive.

¹⁷Trans. in Taft (2006a) 38–9.

¹⁸The law’s preface cites ‘various complaints’ regarding ‘clerks, monks and certain bishops’ who have not observed church canons. The provincial governors are directed to compel ‘metropolitans and other bishops’ to convene synods to enforce the law (137.6.1).

prayers should have on the laity. From the legislation's point of view, the anaphoral prayers served to prompt the conscience of Christian listeners: they encouraged congregants to recognise themselves as sinners in need of salvation and to express gratitude toward God for their redemption.¹⁹ While the law of 565 offers solid evidence that some churchmen were reciting the anaphora silently in the mid sixth century, it also confirms that the practice was far from universal. Furthermore, the effect of the sanctions enumerated in the legislation likely – if briefly – curtailed the silent praying that it cited as an abuse.

While the third- or fourth-century *Apostolic Tradition* presents the option of a set anaphoral prayer, evidence that fixed prayer was the standard custom emerges late, with firm evidence only from the middle of the sixth century on. Moreover, the proliferation of different anaphoras between the fourth and eighth centuries confirms that even as churches, dioceses and patriarchates moved toward set prayers, these prayers varied from region to region and from one doctrinal community to another.²⁰ In the face of this apparent diversity, Justinian's law assumes that the prayer of offering is (or should be) uniform.

Additional evidence for a general custom of set anaphoral prayers comes indirectly in hagiographical accounts composed in the early seventh century. John Moschus' *Spiritual Meadow* contains a miracle story in which an unordained monk recites the words of the anaphora while carrying bread from the village back to the monastery, thus effecting its canonically irregular transformation into the body of Christ (26). In another story, Moschus tells how when children were playing a game of 'church' with loaves on a flat rock, one child recited the words of oblation (προσκομιδή), which he had learned by heart (196). Both stories depend on the use of a set and audible prayer that could be memorised.²¹ In the story of the children's game, Moschus explains that 'it was the custom in some places for the priests to say the prayer aloud,' indicating that the early seventh century was a period of transition from an audible to a silent anaphora and that Moschus assumed that his audience might find an audible anaphora unusual. At the same time, it remains unclear which anaphoral prayer Moschus, who died in 619, or his travelling companion Sophronius, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem, who died in 638, would have expected this memorised prayer to be: the anaphora of the Byzantine *Liturgy of St Basil*, or one of its prototypes, or perhaps a version of the related *Liturgy of St James*, which was

¹⁹ For the role of prayer in the formation of subjectivity in sixth-century Byzantium, see Krueger (2006).

²⁰ A great number of these forms are collected in Hänggi and Pahl (1968) and translated in Jasper and Cuming (1990).

²¹ For further discussion of these stories, see Krueger (2009) 267–70; Taft (2006a) 35; Déroche (2002). For another version of the story about the monk, see Antony of Choziba, *Mir. B.V.M. in Choz. 5* (ed. Houze [1888] 366–8).

common in Jerusalem and Antioch through the seventh century and remains in use among the Syrian Orthodox.²²

For most of late antiquity, then, the anaphoral prayers of the eucharistic liturgy, whether extemporised or fixed, and varying from place to place, were recited aloud. Were the people listening? For the most part, they could hear. The spaces where Christians attended their liturgies were not obstructed by tall barriers separating the sanctuary from the nave of the church. In most places a low screen or *templon* separated the laity from the celebrants during the eucharistic phase of the ritual action, but the ritual action of the Liturgy of the Faithful remained visible, unshielded by curtains or veils.²³ While in large churches, such as Hagia Sophia, the priest's recitation of the anaphora may well have been hard to hear, in general Christians in the late ancient world could both see and hear the offering.²⁴ Taft has shown that participation in communion remained high, especially on feast days, through the seventh century, after which point the numbers of those taking communion – although not necessarily those in attendance – declined.²⁵

But how much attention did the laity pay during the service? To be sure, John Chrysostom's sermons lament his congregation's wandering minds, boredom, talking and milling about.²⁶ Such activity likely persisted everywhere from time to time.²⁷ But the complaints also suggest that church leaders expected lay congregants to be attentive. As a Syrian church order composed in the sixth century for a bilingual Syriac and Greek congregation demonstrates, those in attendance at the liturgy chanted the Kyrie during processions, joined in the singing and responses to the psalms and were exhorted to listen to the readings.²⁸ The *Narration of the Abbots John and Sophronius* reveals that near the turn of the seventh century, the people attending the *Liturgy of St James* sang a variety of hymns and *troparia*, including the 'Holy God', the Cherubic Hymn and the communion psalm

²² On the *Lit. Jac.* see Fenwick (1986) 11–16; Jasper and Cuming (1990) 88–99; Tarby (1972). In the earliest surviving ms., Vatican gr. 2282, penned in or near Damascus in the ninth century, the Greek text of the *Liturgy of St James* already shows some influence from the traditions of the *Liturgy of St Basil*. This version includes mention of the Creation, Fall, Law and prophets in the post-Sanctus of the anaphora. For this text, see Hänggi and Pahl (1968) 244–61. The text in Brightman (1896) 31–68 is based on a fourteenth-century ms. The received Syriac text (see Brightman [1896] 69–110 and Hänggi and Pahl [1968] 269–75) includes a shorter version of this encapsulation of salvation history. The *Narration of the Abbots John and Sophronius* suggests that Moschus and his companion were familiar with the *Liturgy of St James* (see Taft [2000]), although in their extensive travels they surely encountered a variety of eucharistic liturgies.

²³ Taft (2006b) 40–5. Egypt may provide important exceptions: see Bolman (2006).

²⁴ On the history of the *templon*, see Gerstel (2006); Mango (1979). On church architecture and the liturgy, see T. F. Mathews (1971); Ousterhout (1998). The eucharist contained important tactile dimensions as well: communicants still received the host in their hands in this period: see Caseau (2002).

²⁵ Taft (1997) 87–110, (2006b).

²⁶ Maxwell (2006) 94–5; Taft (2006c) 76–7, (2006b) 38–9.

²⁷ Taft (2006c) 77–8 cites Anastasius of Sinai, *Oratio de sacra synaxi* (PG 89:829–32) (c. 700 CE).

²⁸ Bibliotheca Rahmani Codex Syr. 303 (eighth or ninth century): text in Rahmani (1908). For translation and discussion, see Taft (2006c) 40–1, 64–7, (2000), (1978) 40–2.

or *koinonikon*.²⁹ Indeed, the end of antiquity marks a high point in lay participation at the Eastern Orthodox eucharistic service. People must have been paying some attention. The Barberini Euchologion has the people responding 'Amen' to various prayers, including the anaphora. Indeed the eighth-century rubric (*Lit. Bas.* 16.1) requires that the priest raise his voice at the end of the prayer (Ἐκφώ[νησις]) in order for the people to know when to respond with the 'Amen' that had been their standard practice at the end of the anaphora from the time of Justin.³⁰ While these prayers were audible, the laity must have listened at least some of the time; and the repetition of set patterns and, eventually, fixed prayers, meant that congregants would have become very familiar with their content over time. As to whether the average church-goer would have understood what she or he was listening to, it is worth observing that the language of the *Liturgy of St Basil*, while full of biblicalising turns of phrase, did not diverge so significantly from the late ancient Greek found in contemporary saints' lives; furthermore, Justinian's law expects that the prayer is sufficiently comprehensible to compel the listeners to feel compunction and glorify God.³¹

Salvation history in the West Syrian anaphoral tradition

Earlier extant liturgies of the West Syrian family confirm the predilection among many late-antique liturgists and congregations for a ritualisation of the Old Testament past in the eucharistic prayers. A form known as 'The Egyptian Anaphora of St Basil' attests an earlier moment in the trajectory of the Byzantine *Liturgy of St Basil*.³² This prayer, still in use in Arabic in the Coptic Church, survives in its entirety in Bohairic Coptic, although it was originally composed in Greek. A Sahidic Coptic manuscript from the first half of the seventh century confirms the antiquity of this eucharistic prayer, although in this witness the first third of the prayer is missing. (The Sahidic fragment begins with Christ's descent into Hell, resurrection and ascension, immediately before the words of institution.)³³ Scholars tend to agree that this prayer derives from the late fourth or fifth century and that the anaphora of the Constantinopolitan *Liturgy of St Basil* expands either this text or, more likely, a common ancestor. The Egyptian Basil first invokes the Creation after the *Sursum Corda* ('Let us lift up our hearts'). Addressing the prayer to God, the

²⁹Text in Longo (1965–66); discussion in Taft (2000).

³⁰*Lit. Bas.* 16.2; *Just. Apol.* I.65, 67.

³¹The style of the *Lit. Bas.* corresponds to the 'middle style' identified by Ševčenko (1981). For perspectives on the linguistic levels of popular Christian works in the period, see Horrocks (1997) 164–5, 185–8.

³²Jasper and Cuming (1990) 67–73; Engberding (1931); Mitchell (1976). The Greek text (Hänggi and Pahl [1968] 347–57) is based on a single fourteenth-century ms., Paris gr. 325. See now Budde (2004).

³³Doresse and Lanne (1960). See also Fenwick (1986) 6–10.

priest intones, 'you made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them' as well as 'all things visible and invisible.'³⁴ The phrase 'you sit on the throne of your glory' introduces the scene of the angelic liturgy and sets up the Sanctus. The subsequent post-Sanctus salvation history is brief: 'You formed us and placed us in the paradise of pleasure; and when we had transgressed your commandment through the deceit of the serpent, and had fallen from eternal life, and had been banished from the paradise of pleasure, you did not cast us off forever, but continually made promises to us through your holy prophets.'³⁵ This encapsulation of an Old Testament past, with its first-person-plural insertion of the congregation into the story, functions as prologue to Christ's work of salvation. The Egyptian Basil thus confirms the emphasis within this liturgical tradition on shaping the congregation as the subjects of the entirety of salvation history; but this earlier and shorter prayer also permits an appreciation of the work of the liturgists who produced the expansion of the narrative in the Byzantine Basil.

A general rule in the study of liturgical history states that over time shorter forms get elaborated and expanded, but this is not always the case.³⁶ The church order known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, compiled toward the end of the fourth century probably near Antioch, contains the earliest surviving nearly complete text of a Christian eucharistic liturgy.³⁷ Its particularly lengthy anaphoral prayer demonstrates the composer's interest to integrate history and ritual.³⁸ The extensive renarration of Old Testament history occurs before the Sanctus. After the *Sursum Corda* (here, 'Up with your mind'), the prayer recounts the creation of the world and the history of Israel through the battle of Jericho over the course of twenty-two paragraphs (*Const. Apost.* 8.12.7–26). This entire pre-Sanctus narrative is addressed in the second person to God, raising questions about why a fourth-century West Syrian congregation or polity would offer God such an extended *logos*. The length of the anaphoral prayer has raised some doubt as to whether the form was ever actually used, but Louis Bouyer estimated that the entire prayer might take about fifteen minutes to recite, well within the liturgical tolerance of worshippers in late antiquity.³⁹ This deployment of Israel's history is likely in part polemical: in a region that into the fifth century continued to contain significant populations of both Jews and Marcionites, the liturgical repetition of Old Testament narrative asserted its relevance to

³⁴Jasper and Cuming (1990) 70.

³⁵*ibid.*

³⁶On the expansion of liturgies over time, see Taft (1997) 203–32.

³⁷*Const. Apost.* 8.12.4–51 (ed. M. Metzger). English translation in Jasper and Cuming (1990) 104–14. See Pitt (1958); Metzger (1985–87) II 81–4.

³⁸I leave to one side the debates about possibly semi-Arian Christological formulas in the text, except to say that the liturgy would fit comfortably in Apollinarian contexts. Turner (1915); but see Metzger (1985–87) II 10–18.

³⁹Bouyer (1968) 250–1. See Metzger (1985–87) III 179 n. 12.

the formation of Christian community.⁴⁰ Scholars have identified possible elements of a Jewish liturgy for the Day of Atonement in the eucharistic prayer.⁴¹ But even beyond competing claims about and over the Old Testament, the lengthy anaphoral history in the *Apostolic Constitutions* reinforces the relation of a biblically grounded account of salvation to the eucharistic rite by ritualising the past.⁴²

Space does not permit a full treatment of this eloquent reshaping of Old Testament narrative. The story of Creation (*Const. Apost.* 8.12.8–17) recalls the celebration of God as creator in Psalm 104, but also bears marks of the Christianisation of this narrative observable in roughly contemporaneous Christian cosmological literature, such as the *Hexaemeron* of Basil of Caesarea. Under the rubric ‘it is truly fitting and right to praise you before all things’ (*Const. Apost.* 8.12.6), the anaphora lauds God who ‘brought all things from non-existence into existence through your only-begotten Son’ (8.12.7). God ‘made all things through him ... and through him [he] granted existence’ (8.12.8). Before all other things, God made heavenly Powers, here enumerated in all their ranks, and thereafter ‘the visible world and all that is in it’ (8.12.8). God ‘set out the heavens ... established the earth ... fixed the firmament ... arranged night and day’ (8.12.9) and created the sun and moon. The protological narrative continues, citing God for making water ‘for drinking and cleansing’, life-giving air ‘for breathing in and out, and for the production of sound through the tongue striking the air and for hearing which is aided by it to receive the speech which falls upon it’ (8.12.10). In this case, the celebrant’s production of sound has barely begun. After recounting the creation of the other elements, fire and earth, the prayer turns to the creation of animals and plant life with a rhetorical flourish before narrating the creation of humanity: ‘[N]ot only have you fashioned the world, but you have made man in it, the citizen of the world, displaying him as the ornament of the world’ (8.12.16). Creation is thus the prehistory of the story of humanity.

The prayer’s author reveals a flair for drama in setting up the Fall in the garden. For although this man had ‘an inborn law, that he might have in and of himself the seeds of the knowledge of God’ (8.12.18), he ‘neglected to keep the commandment and tasted the forbidden fruit, by the deceit of the serpent and the counsel of the woman’, and was ‘justly [driven] out of Paradise’ (8.12.20). The subsequent encapsulated history of early humanity and of Israel recalls *Nehemiah* 9 and *Hebrews* 11. Stating as a general principle its view of Christian history, ‘you glorified those who remained faithful to you, and punished those who rebelled against you’ (8.12.21), the prayer reminds God that he

⁴⁰ On Marcionites and Jews in northwest Syria into the fifth century and the assertion of Christian use of the Old Testament, see Krueger (2004) 23–4. Jews, of course, would have claimed the history of Israel as their own, while Marcionites regarded the Old Testament as, at best, irrelevant.

⁴¹ Bousset (1916); Ligier (1960); Metzger (1985–87) 120–3.

⁴² On salvation history in the *Const. Apost.*, see Metzger (1985–87) II 19–23. See also Saxer (1983); Dalmais (1997).

accepted Abel's sacrifice but rejected Cain's; that he received Seth and Enosh, 'and translated Enoch' (8.12.21). The prayer recalls the flood, the salvation of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and the survival of Lot. The celebrant recounts, 'it was you who rescued Abraham from the godlessness of his forefathers and made him inheritor of the world; and you revealed your Christ to him; you chose Melchizedek to be high priest of your service' (8.12.23). After the patriarchs, the prayer turns to Moses and Aaron: God prevented the Hebrews from 'destroying the law of nature' (8.12.25) through idolatry and polytheism, and revealed the Law to Moses. 'You glorified Aaron and his descendants with the honour of priesthood, you punished the Hebrews when they sinned, and received them when they turned back' (8.12.25). The text then flashes back to Egypt to recall the ten plagues and the Exodus, ending with the call of Joshua and siege of Jericho (left unnamed in the text) where 'you laid walls low without machines or human hands' (8.12.26). The text thus highlights the rejection of paganism, God's providential relationship with those who have served him and the punishment or rejection of the wicked.

The historical narrative comes to an abrupt stop at this point in order to set up the Sanctus, shifting from world affairs to the 'unnumbered armies of angels ... eternal armies ... myriads and myriads of angels' (8.12.27) who sing the biblical Trisagion unceasingly. But the sentences immediately after the Sanctus return to establishing a historical context, although this time to offer an exegesis for the coming of Christ.

He did not despise the race of men as it perished; but after the law of nature and the warnings of the Law and the reproofs of the prophets and the guardianship of angels, when they were violating the natural and the written law, and casting out the memory of the Flood, the burning [of Sodom], the plagues of the Egyptians and the slaughter of the Palestinians, and were all about to perish as never yet, by your counsel it pleased him who was maker of man to become man, the lawgiver to be under the law, the high priest to be the sacrifice, the shepherd to be a sheep (8.12.30).

Here, perhaps, the author of the anaphora in the *Apostolic Constitutions* offers his most concise explanation for his own insistent renarrations of the history of Israel: it is precisely when the race of men were 'casting out the memory' of God's punishments of the wicked that they were in greatest peril of annihilation. Forgetting or not knowing the biblical story could lead to death. This lengthy anaphora endeavours to reproduce such a community thoroughly informed of God's previous dealings with humanity, a congregation liturgically reminded of, and thus liturgically formed by, the past. The prayer itself does not appear to have been in wide use beyond the region of Antioch or in use for a long period. The text's greatest value is in attesting the coverage of salvation history possible and even desirable in an era when anaphoral prayers were still often extemporised.

Liturgy and the making of the past

The anaphoral prayers of the West Syrian type considered here – the Byzantine *Liturgy of St Basil*, the so-called Egyptian Basil and the extensive eucharistic prayer contained in the *Apostolic Constitutions* – all feature theologically inflected narratives of a Christian and biblical past. Emphasising the pattern of the Creation, Fall, Law, prophets and redemption through the incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, these prayers construct and impart a salvation history to a ritually formed community. These anaphoras both produce a past and produce a people whose past it becomes.

In later centuries, the most significant repetition of salvation history in the eucharistic liturgy occurred not during the anaphora, but during the congregation's recitation of the Nicene Creed. The Creed contains an encapsulated narrative of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. As the words of the received text of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed put it:

He came down from heaven, and was enfleshed by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became human. And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; suffered and was buried. And rose on the third day according to the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.⁴³

The regular recitation of the creed in the course of the Byzantine liturgy began in the early sixth century in Constantinople. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Theodore Lector relates that Timothy, patriarch of Constantinople 511–518 and a non-Chalcedonian, 'ordered the symbol of faith of the 318 fathers be recited at each synaxis ... Formerly it was recited only once a year, on Good Friday, during the bishop's catechesis' (2.32).⁴⁴ When Chalcedonians regained the patriarchate, they retained the recitation of the creed, and it continues to be recited aloud in liturgical traditions to this day. However, between the late fourth century and the early to mid sixth century, in congregations where a West Syrian style anaphora was either extemporised, read or recited from memory, the laity and clergy alike absorbed their salvation history not from the ritual recitation of a creed but from hearing an anaphoral prayer pronounced over the bread and wine during the liturgy of the faithful. The sixth century thus emerges as a relatively brief period when both anaphora and creed were said aloud during the course of the liturgy.

That the introduction and spread of the recited creed occurred early in the same century that also saw the shift toward a silent anaphora raises questions about their relative

⁴³Greek text in J. N. D. Kelly (1972) 297 after Dossetti.

⁴⁴Trans. with discussion in Taft (1978) 398–9. Taft warns that the text introduced was likely not identical to the Chalcedonian text of the Nicene Creed. See also J. N. D. Kelly (1972) 348–451.

functions as ritual narrations of salvation history. In his *Mystagogy*, an explanation of the various elements of the liturgy, Maximus the Confessor, writing around 630, says that the 'divine symbol of faith [the creed] signifies (προσημαίνει) the mystical thanksgiving (εὐχαριστίαν) to endure through all eternity for the marvellous principles and modes by which we were saved by God's all-wise providence on our behalf' (18).⁴⁵ By terming the creed a sign of an eternal *eucharistia*, Maximus connects the ritual recitation of the Nicene Creed, and particularly its brief history of salvation, with the offering of the thanksgiving, or eucharistic prayer. Both texts, anaphora and creed, engage in the narration of salvation history as a form of thanksgiving.⁴⁶ This is all the more significant, given that Maximus does not discuss the content of the anaphora in his commentary, presumably because, in his experience, it is no longer recited aloud.⁴⁷ After the eclipse of the audible anaphora, the function of guiding the thankful recollection of biblical events fell to other liturgical elements, especially the creed.

So long as the anaphoras of the West Syrian type could be heard, they shaped a congregation's understanding of, and relationship to, the past. In the Byzantine *Liturgy of St Basil*, the celebrant recites the epitome of the Old Testament over the bread and wine prior to their transformation into the body and blood of Christ. At the same time as the prayer offers thanksgiving to God for the dispensation of biblical history, it offers the congregation a Christian past rooted in biblical narrative. Significantly, the prayer does not treat the Old Testament narrative typologically, as a series of events that prefigure more relevant, and more real, events to come. The narrative treats the divine dispensation as a coherent whole. This history is not strictly speaking supersessionist, replacing Judaism with Christianity, although the effect is similar.⁴⁸ Instead the anaphora defines the congregation collectively both as humanity, created and fallen, and as Israel, the chosen people of God to whom God sent prophets and gave the Law. In the context of the ritual recitation, the biblical narrative recounts Christians' own past, not someone else's.

In the *Liturgy of St Basil*, a shorthand recounting of the life of Christ follows the Old Testament précis. The prophets and the Law (in that order here) precede the 'fullness of the times' when God the Son became incarnate.⁴⁹ The New Testament narrative

⁴⁵ Trans. Berthold (1985) 202.

⁴⁶ Taft (1978) 404–405 adds that the addition of the creed to the liturgy was 'superfluous' since 'the eucharistic prayer itself, with its account of salvation history and its repletion of the banquet of the New Covenant, is an entirely sufficient profession of faith'. This raises the question of whether the effect of the introduction of the creed at a time when the anaphora was beginning to be said silently meant that the creed came to fill the need for an audible liturgical recitation of the broad narrative of Christian faith.

⁴⁷ Taft (2006a) 41.

⁴⁸ In treating the history of Israel as the history of the church, the prayers engage in what Soulen (1996) 27–33 dubs 'economic supersessionism'.

⁴⁹ *Lit. Bas.* 15.2.

contained in the anaphora is slightly longer, recalling the incarnation, the virgin birth and Jesus' commandments. This narration includes events pared away in the spare outlines of the creed. '[He] cleansed us with water and sanctified us by the Holy Spirit, he gave himself as a ransom to death'. After the crucifixion, Christ descends into hell and rises again on the third day. Echoing Paul and referring to Christ as the 'first fruits of those who had fallen asleep', the text glances eschatologically to the time when the 'us' of the prayer would themselves experience resurrection. The anaphoral prayer thus frames the liturgical action of the recollection and re-enactment of the Last Supper and the consecration and distribution of the elements with an overarching narrative, a history both past and future. In this liturgical form, the community received definition both through its ritually enacted meal and its ritually recounted history. Moreover, the text of the anaphora recounts the biblical narrative in a dense fabric of quotations and echoes of Scripture.⁵⁰ Both the story and the language of the Septuagint and the New Testament render the central ritual of Christian practice an elaborate intertextual repetition of the Bible.

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The persistent recollection of biblical history in West Syrian anaphoras provides important evidence for the ways that late ancient Christians thought about their rites. Modern theorists have long debated the relationship between narrative and action, or myth and ritual, in religious celebrations throughout the world.⁵¹ In many instances, of course, rituals enact myths; and this is clearly the case with the repetition of the Last Supper in the words of institution, anamnesis (or memorial) and distribution of the elements in the eucharistic service.⁵² The anaphoras considered here, however, give evidence of a late ancient theory of ritual that emphasised the role of telling a story alongside acting one out. The recitation of salvation history not only provided the context for the eucharist, it worked independently to shape its participants. Authorities composing the liturgies and legislating its performance expected the ritualisation of communal memory to instil feelings of guilt and gratitude, to prompt introspection and praise. For the idealised subject of these liturgies, the eucharistic rite used salvation history to effect interior self-reflection and a contrite disposition in a biblically formed people. In recounting an unclassical Christian past, the anaphora had the power to produce an unclassical Christian self.

⁵⁰Parenti and Velkovska (2000) 66–7 identifies forty quotations and echoes of Scripture in the post-Sanctus of the anaphora with its recounting of salvation history. The text of the Barberini ms. breaks off just before the words of institution.

⁵¹For an overview see Bell (1997).

⁵²McCall (2007), Bell (1992) and Bourdieu (1990) have also observed that ritualisation often occurs independently of specific narrative contexts, particularly in the routine activities and quotidian habits that make up much of culture.