

LITURGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASS—I

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HE Catholic layman, attending Mass regularly, becomes familiar with the various parts of the Mass. To him, the Mass is something stable and unchangeable. But does he realize that the Mass as it is to-day is not the product of one definite period but the gradual evolution of centuries? How little is known of the history of the practices which have been incorporated in the majestic ritual of Church. The layman kneels before the altar of God, he hears the prayers and sees the priest perform various sacred actions—and in many cases he knows little of the history of what he hears and sees of the ceremonial which adds so much to the beauty of Catholic worship. A clear understanding and knowledge of the liturgy will do much to aid the layman in his appreciation of the spiritual treasures with which the liturgy abounds.

Jesus Christ Himself offered the first Eucharistic Sacrifice, ordering at the same time its continuance in His Church. Christ's example was the norm for the Apostles. At the celebration of the Sacrifice, they did as He had done; and the essential and fundamental features of the sacrificial rite were preserved with fidelity in the churches founded by them. In the course of time, as it seemed necessary, the rite and celebration was developed and enlarged upon, enriched and perfected, yet after a different manner in the churches of the East and West. Thus there originated at various times and among diverse nations different liturgies, that is formulas for the celebration of the Mass. In the essential points of the Sacrifice, all the many rites of the Mass agree.

In the Roman Rite, the *Kyrie Eleison* (Lord, have mercy) is said immediately after the Introit. During the first and second centuries, the liturgy at Rome used the Greek language. At first sight, it would seem that the *Kyrie Eleison* is a fragment surviving from this period, but such is not the case. The first certain example of the use of these invocations in the liturgy is in the eighth book of the *Apostolic Constitutions* (compiled during the third and fourth cen-

turies). Here it is the answer of the people to various litanies chanted by the deacon. This is still the ordinary use in the Eastern rites. The form was borrowed from the East and introduced into the Latin Mass later. Early ecclesiastical writers, Tertullian, Cyprian, make no mention of it. The first evidence of its use in the Western liturgy is in the third Canon of the Second Council of Vasio (Vasio in the province of Arles) in 529. From this Canon it appears that the form had been recently introduced into Italy and at Rome: "Since both in the Apostolic See and as also in the provinces of the East and in Italy a sweet and most pious custom has been introduced that the *Kyrie Eleison* be said . . . it seems good to us too that this holy custom be introduced at Matins and Mass and Vespers."¹

Pope Gregory I (590-604), in defending the Roman Church from the charge of imitating Constantinople in the use of its form, wrote to John of Syracuse pointing out the difference between its use at Rome and in the East: "We neither said nor say *Kyrie Eleison* as it is said by the Greeks. Among the Greeks all say it together, with us it is said by the clerics and answered by the people, and we say *Christe Eleison* as many times, which is not the case among the Greeks. Moreover, in daily Masses some things usually said are left out by us, we only say the *Kyrie Eleison* and the *Christe Eleison*, that we may dwell longer on these words of prayer."² From this it appears that the *Kyrie* was at one time the conclusion of a litany, and up until the twelfth century the *Kyrie* was omitted if a litany had been said immediately before.

After the *Kyrie* the *Gloria* usually is said. It is called the Greater Doxology, because in comparison with the *Gloria Patri* etc. (Glory be to the Father, etc.) it contains a fuller and greater praise of the Trinity. The compiler of this beautiful hymn (the part added to the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* of the angels) cannot be historically ascertained. Only this much is certain, that the *Gloria* is not of Latin but of Greek origin. The Latin text is therefore not original but a translation of the original Greek, which for sound reasons is ascribed to St. Hilary of Poitiers.

With regard to the insertion of the *Gloria* into the Roman Mass, only obscure and uncertain accounts remain. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Pope Telesphorus (136 or 138) prescribed that the Angel's Hymn be said on Christmas Night; and Pope Symmachus

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia*. "Kyrie Eleison," vol. viii, p. 714.

² Gihl, *The Sacrifice of the Mass*, p. 349, note 4.

(514) prescribed it for Sundays and feasts of martyrs. Until the close of the eleventh century the rubrics prescribed by the *Gregorian Sacramentary* prevailed, which granted or prescribed the recitation of the *Gloria* by the Bishop on all Sundays and feast days; by the priest only at Easter. But from that time this privilege of the bishops was extended also to priests. Since the revision of the Missal by Pope Pius V (1572) the following rule holds good: as often as the *Te Deum* occurs in the Matins of the Office, the *Gloria* is said in the Mass corresponding to the Office; but if the Hymn of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine is omitted in the Office, then in the Mass of the day the *Gloria* is not to be recited. The *Gloria* and the *Te Deum* are sublime chants, full of joy and exultation. Hence they are omitted on days and in seasons mainly devoted to mourning and penance, or which at least are without a festive nature.

St. Augustine defines a Symbol of faith as a brief and great rule of faith; brief in the number of words, great in the authority of doctrines. There are a great number of such ecclesiastical Symbols. First in origin and simplicity is the Apostles' Creed, which forms the basis for the development of later Creeds. After the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan holds the most prominent place. It is called Nicene, because the definition of the First Council of Nice (325) regarding the divinity of the Son is almost literally contained therein; it is called Constantinopolitan, because it was received and confirmed as Catholic by the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381). The fact that the Creed emphasizes not only the divinity of the Father but also of the Son and the Holy Ghost made this Creed particularly suited for the profession of faith at divine worship—mainly in opposition to the Macedonian heresy which occasioned its admission into the liturgy of the East towards the end of the sixth century.

Following the action of the Orient, the great National Council of Toledo in Spain (589) decreed that in the Mozarabic Rite this profession of faith should be recited aloud by all the people. Towards the end of the eighth century, the same Creed was incorporated into the constituent portions of the Mass rite in France and Germany. It is more difficult to determine the period when the Roman Church began to recite or sing the *Credo* during the Mass. According to the clear and reliable information of the Abbot Berno of Reichenau (1048) the general admission of the *Credo* into the Roman Mass rite took place only at the commencement of the eleventh century by order of Pope Benedict VIII, at the request of Emperor Henry II.

The *Credo* is recited on feast days whose historical foundation or dogmatic subject is contained in the symbol, i. e., one of the mysteries expressly mentioned therein or at least acknowledged as contained therein. Among such days are numbered all Sundays, all feasts of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother. The Symbol is also recited on the feasts of the Apostles Evangelists and Doctors of the Church. Another reason for the insertion of the Creed in the ritual of the Mass is some special solemnity, that is, the profession of faith is sung or recited publicly to enhance the exterior splendor of the Mass. According to this, the *Credo* would be said on the patronal feast of a church or place, at solemn votive masses which on general and important occasions are celebrated by order or with permission of the bishop.

In all rites the Canon of the Mass is prefaced by a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for the benefits bestowed upon man. The *Sanctus* is simply a continuation of the *Preface*. It is one of the elements of the liturgy of which we have the earliest evidence. St. Clement of Rome (d. about 104) mentions it. He quotes the text of *Isaias* vi, 3, and goes on to say that it is also sung in church; this at least seems to be the meaning of the passage: "for the Scripture says . . . Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts, full is every creature of his glory. And we, led by conscience, gathered together in one place in concord, cry to Him continuously as from one mouth, that we may become sharers in His great and glorious promises."³ It seems clear that the people's cry is the text just quoted. Origen (d. 254) quotes the text of *Isaias* and continues: "The coming of my Jesus is announced, wherefore the whole earth is full of His glory."⁴ There is nothing to correspond to this in the Prophet. It seems plainly to be an allusion to the liturgical use and so agrees very well with the place of the *Sanctus*, that is, shortly before the Consecration. From the fourth century on we have abundance of testimony for the *Sanctus* in every liturgical center. In Egypt, St. Athanasius (d. 373); at Antioch, St. John Chrysostom (d. 407); in Spain, Isidore of Seville (d. 636) testify to its use; while Germanus of Paris (d. 576) bears witness to its use in the Gallican Rite. The *Gregorian Sacramentary* gives the text exactly as we have it.

The *Agnus Dei* is the name given to the formula recited thrice by the priest in the Roman Rite. It occurs towards the end of the Canon. Pope Sergius I (687-701) is said to have been the first to

³ *Catholic Encyclopedia*. "Sanctus," vol. xiii, p. 432.

⁴ *Catholic Encyclopedia*. *Ibid*.

order that at the breaking of the Host, the *Agnus Dei* should be sung by the clergy and people. The original rite differs in some respects from the present one, which was developed from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Its remote source is the declaration of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world,"⁵ supplemented by the cry of the blind men: "Son of David, have mercy on us."⁶ This declaration of the Baptist was commemorated earlier in the *Gloria*. In a slightly different form it is found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Its first appearance in the Mass at Rome was, appropriately enough, in the first Mass of the Nativity. Pope Symmachus (498-514) extended its use to episcopal Masses. The distinct and condensed formula of the *Agnus Dei* itself, however, was not apparently introduced into the Mass until the time of Pope Sergius.

⁵ *John*, i, 29.

⁶ *Matt.*, ix, 27.