

EARLY CHRISTIAN PRAYERS

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Edited by

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Translated by

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Certain passages in Prayers 1-36, where the translator has gone back to the original Greek, differ slightly from translations of the Vulgate, but these changes have no dogmatic or exegetical significance.

Part One

PRAYERS FROM
THE INSPIRED BOOKS

I

Prayers from the Gospels

The Lord's Prayer¹

This . . . is to be your prayer:

1 OUR Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.²

Other Prayers Composed by Jesus

ON THE RETURN OF HIS DISCIPLES
FROM THEIR FIRST MISSION

At this time, Jesus was filled with gladness by the Holy Spirit, and said:

2 O FATHER, who art Lord of heaven and earth,
I give thee praise that thou hast hidden all this
from the wise and the prudent,
and revealed it to little children.
Be it so, Lord, since this finds favour in thy sight.

¹ St. Luke (11:1-4) provides us with a shorter version of the Pater Noster. He adds the detail that Jesus gave this prayer to his disciples at their own request. Polycarp's letter to the Ephesians (6:2), written at the beginning of the second century, is evidence that the early Christians were familiar with the 'Our Father'. The Didache (8) tells us that it was said three times a day. From the fourth century onwards, it is found among the liturgical prayers for the eucharist and baptism. Its use in the liturgy doubtless accounts for the doxology, 'for thine are kingship, power and glory, yea thine for ever'. For ancient commentaries on the 'Our Father', see Part Four.

² The Greek fathers translate: 'deliver us from the Evil One'.

AT THE TOMB OF LAZARUS

Jesus lifted his eyes to heaven and said:

- 3 FATHER, I thank thee for hearing my prayer. For myself, I know that thou hearest me at all times, but I say this for the sake of the multitude which is standing round, that they may learn to believe it is thou who hast sent me.¹

THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST²

4 ST. LUKE

Then he took bread, offered thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body, given for you; do this for a commemoration of me. And so with the cup, when supper was ended. This cup, he said, is the new testament, in my blood which is to be shed for you.

ST. MARK

And while they were still at table, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, Take this; this is my body. Then he took a cup, and offered thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said, This is my blood of the new testament, shed for many.

ST. MATTHEW

And while they were still at table, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my body. Then he took a cup, and offered thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink, all of you, of this; for this is my blood, of the new testament, shed for many, to the remission of sins.

*The High-Priestly Prayer,
Offered by Jesus at His Leave-taking³*

- 5 FATHER, the time has come; give glory now to thy Son, that thy Son may give the glory to thee. Thou hast put him in authority over all mankind, to bring eternal life to all those thou hast entrusted to him. Eternal life is knowing thee, who art the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have exalted thy glory on earth, by achieving the task which thou gavest me to do; now, Father, do thou exalt me at thy own side, in that glory which I had with thee before the world began.

¹ The place of honour in these two prayers is occupied by thanksgiving. This was to be an essential feature of the prayer of the early Christians.

² It seemed worth while to give the gospel narratives of the institution of the eucharist, even though they do not tell us exactly what psalms and blessings were used by Jesus and his disciples. They form the essential nucleus round which, as we shall see later, the whole of the liturgy of the eucharist, which is the heart of all Christian prayer, was built.

³ The object of this farewell prayer is to promote the glory of the Lord and to produce unity among the apostles and among all those who, in the course of the Church's history, will come to believe in Jesus. It is known as the 'prayer for unity' or, more usually, the 'high-priestly prayer'. The latter designation alludes to vv. 17-19, in which Jesus announces the sacrifice that is to take place on the morrow.

I have made thy name known to the men whom thou hast entrusted to me, chosen out of the world. They belonged to thee, and have become mine through thy gift, and they have kept true to thy word. Now they have learned to recognise all the gifts thou gavest me as coming from thee; I have given them the message which thou gavest to me, and they, receiving it, recognised it for truth that I came from thee, and found faith to believe that it was thou who didst send me. It is for these I pray; I am not praying for the world, but for those whom thou hast entrusted to me; they belong to thee; as all I have is thine, and all thou hast is mine; and in them my glory is achieved.

I am remaining in the world no longer, but they remain in the world, while I am on my way to thee.

Holy Father, keep them true to thy name, thy gift to me, that they may be one, as we are one. As long as I was with them, it was for me to keep them true to thy name, thy gift to me; and I have watched over them so that only one has been lost, he whom perdition claims for its own, in fulfilment of the scripture. But now I am coming to thee; and while I am still in the world, I am telling them this, so that my joy may be theirs, and reach its full measure in them.

I have given them thy message, and the world has nothing but hatred for them, because they do not belong to the world, as I, too, do not belong to the world. I am not asking that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them clear of what is evil. They do not belong to the world, as I, too, do not belong to the world: keep them holy, then, through the truth; it is thy word that is truth. Thou hast sent me into the world on thy errand, and I have sent them into the world on my errand; and I dedicate myself for their sakes, that they too may be dedicated through the truth.

It is not only for them that I pray; I pray for those who are to find faith in me through their word; that they may all be one; that they too may be one in us, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; so that the world may come to believe that it is thou who hast sent me. And I have given them the privilege which thou gavest to me, that they should all be one, as we are one; that while thou art in me, I may be in them, and so they may be perfectly made one. So let the world know that it is thou who hast sent me, and that thou hast bestowed thy love upon them, as thou hast bestowed it upon me.

This, Father, is my desire, that all those whom thou hast entrusted to me may be with me where I am, so as to see my glory, thy gift made to me, in that love which thou didst bestow upon me before the foundation of the world. Father, thou art just; the world has never acknowledged thee, but I have acknowledged thee, and these men have acknowledged that thou didst

send me. I have revealed, and will reveal, thy name to them; so that the love thou hast bestowed upon me may dwell in them, and I, too, may dwell in them.

Prayer at Gethsemani

6 ABBA,¹ Father, all things are possible to thee; take away this chalice from before me; only as thy will is, not as mine is.

On The Cross

Jesus said:

7 FATHER, forgive them; they do not know what it is they are doing.

Jesus cried out with a loud voice:

Eloi, Eloi lamma sabachthani?

which means:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

And Jesus said, crying with a loud voice:

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

THE FIRST HYMNS

Mary's Song: The Magnificat²

8 MY soul magnifies the Lord;
my spirit has found joy in God,
who is my Saviour,
because he has looked graciously
upon his handmaid's lowliness.
Behold, from this day forward,
all generations will count me blessed;

¹ 'Abba' is an Aramaic word meaning 'Father'. It implies a filial attitude to God. Pascal's comment on the incident, in the 'Mystère de Jésus', is that Jesus is praying without any certain knowledge of the will of God and that he is afraid of death. The petition, 'Thy will be done', in the Lord's Prayer, is here thrown into tragic relief because Christ is experiencing its urgency in his very being.

² Of all the evangelists, St. Luke is the one who says most about prayer. He is also the only one to have preserved the three songs composed in thanksgiving by Mary, Zachary and Simeon. The Magnificat, with its mosaic of biblical phrases, is surely the hymn par excellence to the goodness and kindness of God. The Church sings it at vespers, the evening service, held at the hour when Christ offered the 'evening sacrifice' to his Father on the cross.

for he who is mighty, whose name is holy,
has wrought for me his wonders.
He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has done valiantly with the strength of his arm,
driving the proud astray in their hearts' conceit;
he has put down the mighty from their seat,
and exalted the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty-handed.
He has protected his servant Israel,
keeping his merciful design in remembrance,
according to the promise he made to our forefathers,
Abraham and his descendants for evermore.

Zachary's Song: the Benedictus¹

9 BLESSED be the Lord, the God of Israel;
He has visited his people
and wrought their redemption.
He has raised up a sceptre of salvation for us
among the posterity of his servant David,
according to the promise which he made
by the lips of holy men,
his prophets from the beginning;
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us.
So he would carry out his merciful design
towards our fathers,
by remembering his holy covenant.
He had sworn an oath to our father Abraham,
that he would enable us
to live without fear in his service,
delivered from the hands of our enemies,
passing all our days in holiness
and approved in his sight.
And thou, my child, wilt be known

¹ The song of the priest Zachary recalls the main phases of Jewish history, from which can be discerned God's intention of saving his people. In the Roman liturgy, the Benedictus is used to greet the dawn, at lauds.

for a prophet of the Most High,
going before the Lord
to clear his way for him;
thou wilt make known to his people
the salvation
that is to release them from their sins.
Such is the merciful kindness of our God,
which has bidden him come to us,
like a dawning from on high,
to give light to those who live in darkness,
in the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet
into the way of peace.

*Simeon's Song: the Nunc Dimittis*¹

IO RULER of all, now dost thou let thy servant go
in peace, according to thy word;

for my own eyes have seen that saving power of thine
which thou hast prepared in the sight of all nations.
This is the light which shall give
revelation to the Gentiles, this is the glory
of thy people Israel.

¹ Simeon's song emphasises the universality of salvation. It was used for evening prayer as early as the end of the fourth century, as the Apostolic Constitutions show. The Roman Church still uses this hymn of thanksgiving today in the office of compline.

2

Prayers from the Acts of the Apostles

Besides continuing to pray as they did when they were Jews (Acts 2 : 46; 3 : 1), the first Christians are found meeting together for the breaking of bread (the eucharist) and for prayers (Acts 2 : 42). Their cheerfulness is remarked upon; their praise of God centres on the memory of his resurrection and the expectation of his return.

The Prayer of the Faithful when the Apostles were Released¹

II RULER of all, thou art the maker of heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them. Thou hast said through thy Holy Spirit, by the lips of thy servant David, our father:

What means this turmoil among the nations?
why do the peoples cherish vain dreams?
See how the kings of the earth stand in array,
how its rulers make common cause,
against the Lord and his Christ.

True enough, in this city of ours, Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel to aid them, made common cause against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou hadst anointed, and so they accomplished all that thy power and wisdom had decreed. Look down upon their threats, Lord, now as of old; enable thy servants to preach thy word confidently, by stretching out thy hand to heal; and let signs and miracles be performed in the name of Jesus, thy holy Son.

¹ This prayer, the earliest one to come down to us from the original Christian community, still has a Jewish cast of thought about it. It invokes God in the old way, as the sovereign Lord of all that is. The new and specifically Christian element in it is that its petitions are made through Jesus.

The Last Prayer of Stephen, the Deacon¹

While they stoned him, Stephen prayed, saying:

12 LORD Jesus, receive my spirit.

Then, kneeling down, he cried aloud:

Lord, do not count this sin against them.

¹ This moving prayer of Stephen's, so reminiscent of his Master's, is the first one to be found addressed directly to Christ. Subsequent martyrs, too, were to invoke in their last moments the God-man who had been before them with his martyrdom, on the cross. He seemed to be all the closer to them when once the time had come for them to go to their meeting with him.

3

Prayers from the Epistles

What gave Paul's prayer its vital impulse was the fact that ever since his conversion he had been possessed by the Spirit: 'God has sent out the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:6). This inner urge was so strong that it revealed itself in all his letters (especially the Letter to the Ephesians)—they are all shot through with prayers, whether implicit only or couched in the accepted forms.

Thanksgiving for God's blessings was an essential part of his prayer. As with the Jews, it issued in adoration. This bent towards worship found expression particularly in doxologies and blessings. The prayer of petition is often found, either for Paul's personal needs or, more often, for his ministry.

His prayers are usually addressed to the Father, the source of all grace—a rule later to be followed by the Church. Christ appears as Mediator. Prayer is hardly ever addressed to him directly.

Besides this personal prayer, Paul's letters provide us with fragments of hymns and acclamations from the primitive liturgy. These new compositions are now found side by side with the old psalms of expectation.

'Let your contentment,' the apostle says, 'be in the Holy Spirit; your tongues unloosed in psalms and hymns and spiritual music, as you sing and give praise to the Lord in your hearts. Give thanks continually to God, who is our Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph. 5:19-20).

LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Hymn to God's Wisdom

- 13 How deep is the mine of God's wisdom,
of his knowledge;
how inscrutable are his judgements,
how undiscoverable his ways!
Who has ever understood the Lord's thoughts
or been his counsellor?
Who ever was the first to give,
and so earned his favours?

All things find in him
 their origin, impulse, and goal;
 to him be glory throughout all ages. Amen.

Petitions for the Brethren

- 14 **MAY** God, the author of all endurance and all encouragement, enable you to be all of one mind according to the mind of Christ Jesus, so that you may all have but one heart and one mouth, to glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

May God, the author of our hope, fill you with all joy and peace in your believing; so that you may have hope in abundance, through the power of the Holy Spirit. . . .

May God, the author of peace, be with you all, Amen. . . .

God, who is the author of peace, will crush Satan under your feet before long.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Doxology

- 15 **THERE** is one who is able to set your feet firmly in the path of that gospel which I preach, when I herald Jesus Christ; a gospel which reveals the mystery,¹ hidden from us through countless ages, but now made plain, through what the prophets have written; now published, at the eternal God's command, to all the nations, so as to win the homage of their faith. To him, to God who alone is wise, glory be given from age to age, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

Thanksgiving

- 16 **GRACE** and peace be yours from God, who is our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God continually in your name for that grace of God which has been bestowed upon you in Jesus Christ; that you have become rich, through him, in every way, in eloquence and in knowledge of every sort; so fully has the message of Christ established itself among you. And now there is no gift in which you are still lacking; you have only to look

¹ 'Mystery' is a term dear to St. Paul. As it is so rich in content, it can take on various shades of meaning. Here it denotes God's plan for our salvation. Through Christ Jesus, God wants to save all men and make them his people.

forward to the revealing¹ of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will strengthen your resolution to the last, so that no charge will lie against you on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. The God, who has called you into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful to his promise.

Hymn to Love

17 I MAY speak with every tongue that men
and angels use;
yet, if I lack charity,
I am no more than echoing bronze
or the clash of cymbals.
I may have powers of prophecy,
no secret hidden from me,
no knowledge too deep for me;
I may have utter faith,
to the moving of mountains;
yet, if I have not charity,
I count for nothing.
I may give all I have away
to feed the poor;
I may give up my body
to be burnt at the stake;
but if I lack charity,
it goes for nothing.

Charity is patient, is kind; charity feels no envy;
charity does not boast, is never
self-important, indecorous,
does not claim its rights, cannot be provoked,
does not brood on injury;
takes no pleasure in wrong-doing,
but rejoices when truth has the victory;
sustains, believes, hopes, endures
to the last.

Though the time will come when we
shall outgrow prophecy, when speaking with tongues
will come to an end, when knowledge
will be swept clean away;
we shall never be finished with charity.

¹ 'Revealing' and 'day' are synonymous terms denoting Christ's second coming, in glory, at the end of time.

Our knowledge, our prophecy,
 are only glimpses of truth;
 glimpses to be swept away
 when the time of fulfilment comes.
 Just so, when I was a child,
 I had the intelligence,
 the thought of a child;
 since I became a man,
 I have outgrown childish ways.

At present we see in a mirror
 a confused reflection;
 then, we shall see face to face.
 Now I have only glimpses of knowledge;
 then I shall recognise God,
 as he has recognised me.
 Meanwhile, faith, hope and charity
 persist, all three;
 but the greatest of them
 is charity.

Blessing

- 18 GRACE and peace be yours from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God who gives all encouragement. He it is who comforts us in all our trials; and it is this encouragement we ourselves receive from God which enables us to comfort others, whenever they have trials of their own.

LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Blessing

- 19 BLESSED be that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, in Christ, with every spiritual blessing, higher than heaven itself.

He has chosen us out, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to be saints, to be blameless in his sight, for love of him; marking us out beforehand (so his will decreed) to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ. Thus would he manifest the splendour of that grace by which he has taken us into his favour in the person of his beloved Son.

It is in him and through his blood that we enjoy redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. So rich is God's grace, that has overflowed upon us in a full

stream of wisdom and discernment, to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will. It was his loving design, centred in Christ, to give history its fulfilment by resuming everything in him, all that is in heaven, all that is on earth, summed up in him.

In him it was our lot to be called, singled out beforehand to suit his purpose (for it is he who is at work everywhere, carrying out the designs of his will); we were to manifest his glory, we who were the first to set our hope in Christ.¹

In him you too² were called, when you listened to the preaching of the truth, that gospel which is your salvation. In him you too learned to believe, and had the seal set on your faith by the promised gift of the Holy Spirit; a pledge of the inheritance which is ours, to redeem it for us and bring us into possession of it, and so manifest God's glory.

Well then, I too play my part; I have been told of your faith in the Lord Jesus, of the love you show towards all the saints, and I never cease to offer thanks on your behalf, or to remember you in my prayers. So may he who is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father to whom glory belongs, grant you a spirit of wisdom and insight, to give you fuller knowledge of himself. May your inward eye be enlightened, so that you may understand to what hopes he has called you, how rich in glory is that inheritance of his found among the saints, what surpassing virtue there is in his dealings with us, who believe.³

Prayer

20 I FALL on my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth takes its title. May he, out of the rich treasury of his glory, strengthen you through his Spirit with a power that reaches your innermost being.⁴ May Christ find a dwelling-place, through faith, in your hearts; may your lives be rooted in love, founded on love. May you and all the saints be enabled to measure, in all its breadth and length and height and depth,⁵ the love of Christ, to know what passes knowledge. May you be filled with all the completion God has to give.

¹ The reference is to the Jews, who, in the designs of providence, were the first to be called.

² The converts from paganism.

³ To the apostle, the Church is a kind of workshop, in which the activity of every worker is directed the whole time towards finishing the work. Hence the emphasis he gives to the ideas of hope and promise.

⁴ The depths renewed by baptism and continually under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

⁵ The various factors in God's plan for us.

He whose power is at work in us is powerful enough, and more than powerful enough, to carry out his purpose beyond all our hopes and dreams; may he be glorified in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, to the last generation of eternity. Amen.

LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Thanksgiving

- 21 I GIVE thanks to my God for all my memories of you, happy at all times in all the prayer I offer for all of you; so full a part have you taken in the work of Christ's gospel, from the day when it first reached you till now. Nor am I less confident, that he who has inspired this generosity in you will bring it to perfection, ready for the day when Jesus Christ comes.

It is only fitting that I should entertain such hopes for you; you are close to my heart, and I know that you all share my happiness in being a prisoner, and being able to defend and assert the truth of the gospel. God knows how I long for you all, with the tenderness of Jesus Christ himself.

And this is my prayer for you; may your love grow richer and richer yet, in the fulness of its knowledge and the depth of its perception, so that you may learn to prize what is of value; may nothing cloud your consciences or hinder your progress till the day when Christ comes;¹ may you reap, through Jesus Christ, the full harvest of your justification to God's glory and praise.

LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Prayer

- 22 So, ever since the news reached us, we have been praying for you in return, unceasingly. Our prayer is, that you may be filled with that closer knowledge of God's will which brings all wisdom and all spiritual insight with it. May you live as befits his servants, waiting continually on his pleasure; may the closer knowledge of God bring you fruitfulness and growth in all good. May you be inspired, as his glorious power can inspire you, with full strength to be patient and to endure; to endure joyfully, thanking God our Father for making us fit to share the light which saints inherit, for rescuing us from the power of darkness, and transferring us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, . . . in whom we find the redemption that sets us free from our sins.²

¹ The day of the second coming, the day of Christ's manifestation, is continually before the apostle's mind.

² The considerations that move the apostle to prayer should be the chief inspiration of our petitions, too, as we learn from Jesus himself in the 'Our Father'.

Hymns and Chants Quoted by St. Paul

- 23 AWAKE, thou that sleepest,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give thee light.¹
- 24 HONOUR and glory
through endless ages
to the king of all the ages,
the immortal,
the invisible,
who alone is God.
Amen.²
- 25 NO question of it, it is a great mystery we worship.
Revelation made in human nature,
justification won in the realm of the Spirit;
a vision seen by angels,
a mystery preached to the Gentiles;
Christ in this world, accepted by faith,
Christ, on high, taken up into glory.
- 26 THE blessed God
who alone enjoys dominion;
the King of kings
and Lord of lords;
to whom alone immortality belongs,
who dwells in unapproachable light;
whom no human eye has seen
or ever can see:
to him be glory and everlasting empire.
Amen.
- 27 WE are to share his life
because we have shared his death;
if we endure,
we shall reign with him,
if we disown him,

¹ Theodoret tells us that some of his predecessors regarded this as a fragment of an early hymn. It would be particularly appropriate to the ceremonies of baptism, which are so full of the symbolism of death and resurrection.

² The Church has included this magnificent doxology among the liturgical prayers for the hour of prime.

he in his turn will disown us.
If we play him false, he remains true to his word;
he cannot disown himself.

That is why, when we give glory to God,
it is through him that we say
our Amen.¹

ST. JUDE'S LETTER

28 THERE is one who can keep you clear of fault, and enable you to stand in the presence of his glory, triumphant and unreprieved; to him, who alone is God, to him, who gives us salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, glory and majesty and power and domination are due, before time was, and now, and for all ages. Amen.

¹ St. Paul is here alluding to the liturgical Amen, which was taken over by the Church from the Synagogue and used at the end of the thanksgiving as an expression of assent.

4

Chants from the Apocalypse

The action of the Apocalypse¹ takes place within the framework of Christian worship. The seer assigns his visions to the 'Lord's day' (1:10), i.e. to the time when the community was assembled. He regards the Church's worship as an anticipation of the liturgy of heaven: the two celebrations are parallel and there is continuity between them.

For this reason, reminiscences of the liturgy, of hymns and of prayers, are found scattered throughout the Apocalypse, from the doxology at the end of the salutation (1:6) to the 'Marana tha', the 'Come, Lord Jesus' that closes the book (22:20). The first five chapters together seem to be following the course of the liturgy.

Doxologies

- 29 HE has proved his love for us by washing us clean from our sins
in his own blood;
he has made us a royal race of priests,²
to serve God, his Father;
glory and power be his throughout endless ages,
Amen.

Each of the four figures had six wings, with eyes everywhere looking outwards and inwards; day and night they cried unceasingly:

- 30 HOLY, holy, holy is the Lord,
God the Almighty,
who ever was, and is, and is still to come.³

¹ 'Apocalypse' means 'revelation'.

² The promise made to the Jewish people (Exod. 19:6) is fulfilled for the Church, which is the true Israel. The Church is a nation whose king is God and whose members, in conjunction with Christ the Priest, offer the whole universe to God as a sacrifice in his praise.

³ The Sanctus, inspired by Is. 6:3, may have been used as a doxology as early as the time of the apostles. From the fourth century onwards, it comes at the end of the preface in the mass.

Chants in Honour of the Lamb

The twenty-four elders . . . threw down their crowns before the throne, crying out:

- 31 THOU, our Lord God, claimest as thy due
glory and honour and power;
by thee all things were created;
nothing ever was, nothing was ever created,
but in obedience to thy will.

It was a new hymn¹ they sang:

- 32 THOU Lord art worthy to take up the book and break the seals that are on
it.
Thou wast slain in sacrifice;
out of every tribe, every language, every people, every nation
thou hast redeemed us with thy blood and given us to God.
Thou hast made them a royal race of priests, to serve God;
they will reign as kings over the earth.

*Then I heard the voices of a multitude of angels, standing on every side of the throne,
where the living figures and the elders were, in ten thousands of ten thousands and
thousands of thousands, and crying aloud:²*

- 33 POWER and riches, wisdom and strength,
honour and glory and blessing
are his by right, the lamb that was slain.

*And every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth and on the sea, and
all that is in them, I heard crying out together:*

Blessing and honour and glory and power,
through endless ages,
to him who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.

Then the four living creatures said:

Amen.

¹ The new hymn, which takes up where Moses' hymn leaves off, corresponds to the new and final order established by Christ.

² The theme of the gathering of the court of heaven about the throne recurs in the Didache, 9:4.

The Song of the Lamb

Theirs is the song of God's servant Moses, theirs is the song of the Lamb:

34 LORD God almighty, the deeds thou doest
are great and wonderful;
King of the nations,
thy ways are just and true.
Lord, thou alone art holy;
who shall refuse reverence
and glory to thy name?
All the nations shall come
and fall down before thee,
now that thy just retribution
has been made known.¹

Triumphal Chant

Thereupon I heard, as it seemed, the voices of countless multitudes crying out in heaven:

35 ALLELUIA;
salvation and glory and power
belong to our God;
his sentence is ever true and just,
and now he has given sentence
against the great harlot,
who poisoned the earth with her harlot's ways;
now he has called her to account
for the blood of his servants.

And again they cried:

Alleluia,
the smoke of her burning
goes up everlastingly.

¹ The song of Moses was a thanksgiving for the deliverance of the chosen people from slavery in Egypt. The exodus was a sign of the salvation to come, the paschal lamb foretold the sacrifice of Christ.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus gave his life to deliver us from the powers of darkness and incorporate us into the kingdom of God. That is why the elect sing both the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb in the same breath, as it were. The continuity of God's designs for our salvation is thereby brought out to perfection. The song of the Lamb is composed of verses from the Old Testament, as if to mark the parallelism.

These points have been developed in *La Rédemption et l'histoire du monde*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1951.

Then the twenty-four elders and the four living figures fell down and worshipped God, where he sits enthroned, crying:

Amen, Alleluia.

And a voice came from the throne, which said:

Praise our God, all you that are his servants,
and all you that fear him, little and great alike.

Thereupon I heard, as it seemed, the noise of a great multitude, like the noise of water in flood, or the noise of deep thunder, as they cried out:

Alleluia,
the Lord our God, the Almighty,
has claimed his kingdom;
let us rejoice and triumph
and give him the praise;
the time has come
for the wedding-feast of the Lamb.
His bride has clothed herself
in readiness for it;
hers it is to wear
linen of shining white.¹

Prayer for the Lord's Coming

The Spirit and the bride say:

36 COME.

Let every one who hears this read out say:

Come.

He who gives this warning says:

Indeed I am coming soon.
Be it so, then; come, Lord Jesus.²
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
be with you all.
Amen.

¹ In sharp contrast to the infidelities of Babylon, which are compared to the sins of a prostitute, the people of God, seen as finally united to him, is compared to the Church married to Christ. The image, a favourite one with the prophets—Osias and Jeremias particularly—and the subject of considerable elaboration in St. Paul, is here given its full development.

² The *maranatha* said at the liturgical assembly (1 Cor. 16:22; 11:26) was the Christian summons to the Christ who was to return as sovereign Lord. It occurs again in the Didache (10); see no. 155 below.

Part Two

PRAYERS COMPOSED IN
THE FIRST FEW GENERATIONS
(c. 100–225)

I

The Oldest Christian Literature

The Church was well aware that she was the true Israel and the heiress to all that was of divine origin in the history of the Jews. In the Psalms, which were always on her lips, she possessed a legacy from her fathers, the prayer of her own childhood. And there is much to remind us of the Old Testament in the new forms of prayer, for they are shot through with biblical reminiscences.

What is entirely new is the doctrine of the mediation of Christ. That is the link between the two Testaments. Henceforth, all prayer is offered through Christ and sometimes is even addressed to him directly, though generally it is to the Father that the Church offers her praise, thanksgiving and supplication, as Jesus had taught her. Origen confesses that he has searched the Old Testament in vain for a prayer venturing to call God Father (De Oratione, 22, 1).

Doxologies, too, are at first addressed to the Father. The Son is sometimes associated with him, and in the third century the Holy Spirit also appears.

Approaching our objective by a number of convergent paths, we will try to see how the prayer of these first few generations of Christians took shape.

CLEMENT OF ROME

St. Clement was one of the earliest successors of St. Peter in the see of Rome, and as such, intervened in the affairs of the Christian community at Corinth. The letter he wrote to them in the year 96, or thereabouts, was regarded as highly authoritative; so much so that it is found in some MSS. immediately after the letters of the apostles.

It contains the oldest Christian prayer known outside Scripture. This prayer closely follows the Eighteen Blessings, recited daily by the Jews, and it gives us some idea of what the improvised prayer in the earliest forms of the liturgy must have been like.

It embraces all needs. The emotion behind it is controlled, sober and dignified, foreshadowing the Roman liturgy. It is 'biblical and traditional, respecting and loving the past, yet at the same time aquiver with joys and hopes that are new'.

Prayer for All Needs

37 MAY he who created everything
keep the number of his chosen people, throughout the world,

up to the strength he fixed for them
 through his dear Child,¹ Jesus Christ.
 Through him he called us from darkness to light,
 from ignorance to knowledge
 of the glory of his name.

We have confidence in you:
 you were at the beginning of creation;
 you have opened our inward eyes
 to give us knowledge of you,
 who alone are the Most High, in highest heaven,
 the Holy One, at ease among the holy.

You curb the arrogance of the proud,
 frustrate the designs of the Gentiles,
 lift up the modest
 and bring the mighty down,
 give riches and poverty,
 death and life.

You alone watch over the interests of spiritual beings,
 you are the God of all flesh.
 You gaze into the depths,
 you watch what men are doing.
 You are our help in danger,
 you save the despairing,
 Creator and Keeper of all that is spiritual.
 You give increase to the peoples of the earth,
 and from them all you chose us out who love you,
 through Jesus Christ, your dear Child,
 who brought us instruction, holiness and honour.

We beg you, Lord,²
 to help and defend us.
 Deliver the oppressed,
 pity the insignificant,
 raise the fallen,
 show yourself to the needy,
 heal the sick,

¹ The Greek *παῖς*; has been rendered 'child', but it could also be 'servant'. 'Son' would not be correct.

² These petitions foreshadow the deacon's litanies as they are found in all the ancient liturgies, with their mention of all the objects for which prayer can be offered. See below, nos. 47, 170, 183.

bring back those of your people who have gone astray,
 feed the hungry,
 lift up the weak,
 take off the prisoners' chains.
 May every nation come to know
 that you alone are God,
 that Jesus Christ is your Child,
 that we are your people, the sheep that you pasture.

You have shown by what you have made and done
 how the world has been planned from eternity.
 The earth is your creation, Lord,
 yours that are true to every generation,
 just when you judge,
 your strength and splendour a marvel.
 Such competence yours in creating,
 such skill in setting firm the things you make,
 your goodness apparent in this world we see.
 You are loyal to those who trust you,
 merciful, compassionate.
 Forgive us our sins, our injustice,
 our falls, our jarring deeds.

Do not count every one
 of your servants' sins,
 but cleanse us with the cleanness of your truth
 and guide our steps in . . . inward holiness,
 that so we may do what is just and pleasing
 to you and to our rulers.¹
 Let us see your face, sovereign Master,²
 and we shall peacefully pursue what is good,
 protected by your strong hand,
 kept from all sin by your mighty arm,
 preserved from those who hate us without cause.

Give concord and peace
 to us and to all living on the earth,
 as you gave them to our fathers

¹ Though written when Domitian was persecuting the Church, this prayer is full of the spirit of obedience and prays for those who are the trustees of God's power.

² The word *δεσπότης*, 'sovereign', denotes not a tyrannical master but a good and kindly one.

when they prayed to you, believing truly,
ready to obey the All Powerful, the All Holy.

To those who rule and lead us on the earth
you, sovereign Master,
have given their authority and kingship
—so marvellous that power of yours words fail to express—
that seeing the glory and honour
you have provided for them,
we should be subject to their rule,
not resisting your will.

Grant them, Lord,
the health, peace, concord and stability
to use aright
the sovereignty you have bestowed on them.
For you, King of heaven, Lord of the ages, you it is
that give to mortal men
glory, honour and power
over what is on the earth.
Lord, make their counsels conform to what is good
and pleasing to you,
that using with reverence,
peacefully, gently,
the power you have given them,
they may find favour with you.

You alone have the means to do this for us,¹
this and more than this.

We thank you for it through Jesus Christ,
the High Priest, our souls' Protector.
Glory and splendour be yours through him,
now at this moment,
in every generation,
age after age. Amen.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

(†c. 107)

The letters of St. Ignatius contain no prayers properly so called, but only expressions of his heart's desires and longings, uttered to the Father or to Christ. God is not so much the Lord to him as the Father, and St. Ignatius prays to him through Jesus. In their

¹ The doxology is addressed to the Father alone, through Jesus Christ.

spontaneity, his ejaculations are the earliest evidence we have of the live, inward quality in personal prayer.

Singing to the Father

38 YOUR . . . presbytery¹ . . . is one with its bishop, as the strings are one with the lyre: that is why in your concord and in the harmony of your love there is praise for Jesus Christ. And you have all been formed into one choir, to . . . sing God's song together and praise the Father with one voice through Jesus Christ, that when he hears you he may realise from what you have done so well that you are of his Son's members.

Christian Prayer

39 YOU ought all to behave as God does and respect one another; none of you should look at his neighbour in a merely natural light: no, you must love one another in Jesus Christ whatever happens. Do not tolerate anything that may divide you, but stay united round your bishop and your leaders: that will be a sign and token of the life you will lead in eternity.

. . . Do not imagine that any good can come of acting on your own, in opposition to the community. You should all be as one in your prayers and petitions, one in outlook, one in relying on love, which will bring you wholesome delight. Then you will be as the one Jesus Christ: there can be nothing better than that.

. . . Lose no time in gathering together in God's one temple, round its one altar—the one Jesus Christ, who, coming from the one Father, was still one with him and now has gone back to him.²

Prayer

40 I AM God's wheat. May I be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts until I become the fine white bread that is Christ's.

My passions are crucified, there is no heat in my flesh. A stream flows murmuring inside me; deep down in me it says: Come to the Father.³

¹ The presbytery is the college of priests grouped round the bishop. A glossary of difficult words and technical terms will be found at the end of the book.

² The stress here laid on the idea of oneness recalls the Epistle to the Ephesians, 4:4-5, where St. Paul speaks of the oneness of God in himself, the oneness of Christ with God, and the oneness of Christians with Christ and with one another.

³ Here again we find the eager expectancy that shows through the latter part of the Apocalypse. This time it centres round the Father.

Resolutions

41 NOW at last I am beginning to be a disciple.

Woe to any creature that dares grudge me the possession of Jesus Christ. The Devil may inflict his ugly penalties on me—fire, the cross, wild beasts in hordes; he may tear me to pieces, quarter me, dislocate my bones, crush every part of my body—if only I can come at Jesus Christ.

No earthly pleasure can bring me any good, no temporal kingdom. It is better for me to die and obtain Jesus Christ than to rule over the ends of the earth . . . For he it is I am seeking, and he died for us; he that I am determined to have rose again for us. I am on the point of achieving my desires. Understand my position, brothers. Do not prevent me from living, do not try to kill me: do not give to the world or coax with material things one who wants to belong to God. Let me win through to the clear light; that done, I shall be a man. Let me suffer as my God suffered. If you have God in you, try to understand what I want, and when you see what straits I am in, give me your sympathy.¹

IRENAEUS OF LYONS

(†c. 202)

Born at Smyrna, St. Irenaeus was taught by St. Polycarp, who had known St. John. He became Bishop of Lyons. As a witness to the faith of this age, he is among the most expressive. His antidote to the different varieties of gnosticism is first and foremost the teaching handed down by the apostles and preserved by the infallible Church.

As in St. Paul's writings and later in Origen's, in his too prayer is never far from the surface. His prayer is traditional, addressed to God the Father, inspired by his love for the Church and for souls.

Prayer to God the Father

42 I APPEAL to you, Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob and Israel, you the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Infinitely merciful as you are, it is your will that we should learn to know you. You made heaven and earth, you rule supreme over all that is. You are the true, the only God; there is no other god above you.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, grant that all who read what I have written here may know you, because you alone

¹ St. Ignatius is here speaking either to Jesus or to his Father, without distinguishing between them. Christ appears in this prayer as the God-Man.

are God; let them draw strength from you; keep them from all teaching that is heretical, irreligious or godless.¹

Prayer for the Conversion of Heretics

- 43 I PRAY that they may not remain in the pit that they themselves have dug, but may part from this Mother, leave the Abyss and abandon the Ogdoad.² May they turn to God's Church and be born the proper way; may Christ take shape in them; may they realise that it is the one true God and Lord of all who has fashioned and made this universe. In praying after this fashion, I am loving them to some purpose; my love is more to the point than the love they imagine they have for themselves, and since it is real, it will do them good, provided that they respond to it. Like a drug which, though bitter, removes from a wound the superfluous flesh that does not belong there, it will reduce to the normal state the swelling their pride has produced. For that reason I strive as manfully as I can to hold out a hand to them. I shall never tire of doing so. In the next book I intend to quote the Lord's own words on these questions, in the hope of convincing some of them by what Christ himself taught. May I succeed in persuading them to give up these errors and to stop blaspheming against their Creator, the only true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME

(†235)

Hippolytus may have been of eastern origin. He was ordained priest at Rome, where he set up in opposition to Pope Calixtus. He was reconciled to the Church before he died, in Sardinia, to which he had been deported during the persecution of Maximinus.

In addition to the 'Apostolic Tradition', which will be considered later, Hippolytus composed a treatise on Easter. This treatise inspired the Easter homilies from which the following two hymns are taken.

Easter Hymn

I

- 44 THIS is the paschal feast, the Lord's passing:
so cries the Spirit.

¹ The saint's prayer is made to the Father, who was revealed in the old Law as well as in the new. This idea of continuity in God's scheme of salvation, as it unfolds in the course of history, is a favourite one with Irenaeus. When he asks for the gift of the Spirit, he goes to the Father for it.

² The allusion is to some of the fabrications of the Gnostics.

No type or telling, this,
no shadow;
Pasch of the Lord it is, and truly.
The blood that is shed is a sign of the blood to be shed,
the first indication of what the Spirit will be,
a glimpse of the great anointing.
'I, seeing the blood, will protect you.'¹

You have indeed protected us, Jesus,
from endless disaster.
You spread your hands like a Father
and fatherlike gave cover with your wings.
Your blood, a God's blood, you poured over the earth,
sealing a blood-bargain
for men because you loved them.
What anger threatened you turned away from us;
instead you gave us back God's friendship.

The heavens may have your spirit, paradise your soul,
but O may the earth have your blood.

This feast of the Spirit
leads the mystic dance through the year.
The pasch came from God, came from heaven to earth;
from earth it has gone back to heaven.
New is this feast and all-embracing;
all creation assembles at it.

Joy to all creatures, honour, feasting, delight.
Dark death is destroyed
and life is restored everywhere.
The gates of heaven are open.
God has shown himself man,
man has gone up to him a God.
The gates of hell God has shattered,
the bars of Adam's prison broken.
The people of the world below have risen from the dead,
bringing good news:
what was promised is fulfilled.
From the earth has come singing and dancing.

¹ Exod. 12:13.

This is God's passing.
 Heaven's God, showing no meanness,
 has joined us to himself in the Spirit.
 The great marriage-hall is full of guests,
 all dressed for the wedding, no guest rejected
 for want of a wedding-dress.
 The paschal light is the bright new lamp-light,
 light that shines from the virgins' lamps.
 The light in the soul will never go out.
 The fire of grace burns in us all,
 spirit, divine,
 in our bodies and in our souls,
 fed with the oil of Christ.

We pray you, God, our Sovereign, Christ,
 King for ever in the world of spirits,
 stretch out your strong hands over your holy Church
 and over the people that will always be yours.
 Defend, protect, preserve them,
 fight and do battle for them,
 subject their enemies to them,
 subdue the invisible powers that oppose them,
 as you have already subdued those that hate us.
 Raise now the sign of victory over us
 and grant
 that we may sing with Moses the song of triumph.
 For yours are victory and power
 for ever and ever. Amen.

2

- 45 Do you honour God? Do you love him?
 —here's the very feast for your pleasure.
 Are you his servant, knowing his wishes?
 —be glad with your Master, share his rejoicing.
 Are you worn down with the labour of fasting?
 —now is the time of your payment.

Have you been working since early morning?
 —now you will be paid what is fair.
 Have you been here since the third hour?
 —you can be thankful, you will be pleased.

If you came at the sixth hour,
 you may approach without fearing:
 you will suffer no loss.
 Did you linger till the ninth hour?
 —come forward without hesitation.
 What though you came at the eleventh hour?
 —have no fear; it was not too late.

God is a generous Sovereign,
 treating the last to come as he treats the first arrival.
 He allows all his workmen to rest—
 those who began at the eleventh hour,
 those who have worked from the first.
 He is kind to the late-comer
 and sees to the needs of the early,
 gives to the one and gives to the other:
 honours the deed and praises the motive.

Join, then, all of you, join in our Master's rejoicing.
 You who were the first to come, you who came after,
 come and collect now your wages.
 Rich men and poor men, sing and dance together.
 You that are hard on yourselves, you that are easy,
 honour this day.
 You that have fasted and you that have not,
 make merry today.

The meal is ready: come and enjoy it.
 The calf is a fat one: you will not go hungry away.
 There's kindness for all to partake of and kindness to spare.

Away with pleading of poverty:
 the kingdom belongs to us all.
 Away with bewailing of failings:
 forgiveness has come from the grave.
 Away with your fears of dying:
 the death of our Saviour has freed us from fear.
 Death played the master: he has mastered death . . .
 The world below had scarcely known him in the flesh
 when he rose and left it plunged in bitter mourning.

Isaias knew it would be so.
 The world of shadows mourned, he cried, when it met you,
 mourned at its bringing low, wept at its deluding.

The shadows seized a body and found it was God;
 they reached for earth and what they held was heaven;
 they took what they could see: it was what no one sees.
 Where is death's goad? Where is the shadows' victory?

Christ is risen: the world below is in ruins.
 Christ is risen: the spirits of evil are fallen.
 Christ is risen: the angels of God are rejoicing.
 Christ is risen: the tombs are void of their dead.
 Christ has indeed arisen from the dead,
 the first of the sleepers.

Glory and power are his for ever and ever. Amen.

CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

(†258)

Cyprian was born into a rich pagan family. He felt the promptings of grace when he was at the height of his brilliant career as a rhetorician at Carthage. As bishop, he had to govern the Church during the terrible persecution set on foot by Decius. He began writing as a means of fulfilling his pastoral obligations. The prayer that welled up spontaneously as he wrote has the same rhythm, compactness and sobriety as the Roman liturgy. His commentary on the Lord's Prayer will be found in a later section.

Prayer for All Needs

46 LET us pray to the Lord without duplicity, in tune with one another, entreating him with sighs and tears, as befits people in our position—placed as we are between the many, lamenting that they have fallen away, and the faithful remnant that fears it may do the same itself; between the weak, laid low in large numbers, and the few still standing firm.

Let us pray that peace may very soon be restored to us, help reach us in our dangers, to draw us from our dark retreats, and God's gracious promises to his servants find fulfilment.—May we see the Church restored and our salvation secured; after the rain, fair weather; after the darkness, light; after these storms and tempests, a gentle calm.

Let us ask him to help us, because he loves us as a Father loves his children, and to give us the tokens of his divine power that are usual with him. So will our persecutors be stopped from blaspheming, those who have fallen away repent to some purpose, and the firm, unwavering faith of the steadfast be crowned with glory.

Prayer in the Form of a Litany¹

- 47 LET us pray for those who have fallen away,
 that they may recover their footing.
 Let us pray for those standing firm,
 that they may not be tempted to their downfall.
 Let us pray for those of whose fall we have been told,
 that they may admit the gravity of their sin
 and realise that the remedy it calls for is anything but superficial.
 Let us pray that when they have received full forgiveness, they may do
 penance,
 and remembering their guilt, may decide to be patient for a time.
 The Church is still unsteady. May they not upset it altogether, its own
 members turning to persecution within it and crowning their many sins
 with the sin of trouble-making.

Moderation is particularly desirable in those who are blamed, among other things, for a tendency to interfere. By all means let them knock at the door, but they ought not to go so far as to break the door open. They may come to the threshold of the Church, but they ought not to rush inside. They may guard the gates of the camp with the rest of heaven's army; but if they remember that they have been deserters, they will take courtesy for their weapon.

They will do well to take up the trumpet again, but they should play hymns on it and not use it to give the signal for battle. They should fit themselves out with humility's weapons and pick up their shields—their faith—which they threw away when, through fear of dying, they denied what they believed in. They can then be sure that they are properly equipped to fight against our enemy, the Devil, and not against the Church that is still grieving over their defection. They will find it very useful to pray humbly, make their petitions with due respect and . . . be really patient. Their tears will be their ambassadors to tell of their grief; the sighs they fetch from their inmost hearts will plead in their defence and prove their sorrow and shame for the crime they have committed.

Prayer for Peace

- 48 WE beg and beseech the God whom the enemies of the Church are forever provoking and irritating that he would tame their wild hearts. May their rage subside and calm return to their hearts; may their minds, clouded by the darkness their sins produce, repent and see the light; may they seek the bishop's prayers and not his blood.

¹ This prayer anticipates the litanies found in the eastern liturgies, with their petitions about matters of general concern. There is a hint of them as early as the 'Martyrdom of St. Polycarp', chapter 8.

Prayer for Perseverance

49 YOUR prayers are more likely to be answered now, for it is easier to obtain what you ask when you are being persecuted. Beseech the good God, then, as earnestly as you can that we may all confess his name to the end, and that we too may emerge unscathed and glorious from the snares of this world and its darkness. As we have been linked together by charity and peace, and together have withstood persecution from the pagans, so may we rejoice together in the kingdom of heaven.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

(† before 215)

From the end of the second century there was a school at Alexandria, under ecclesiastical supervision, to prepare the younger members of the more cultivated Christian families in the Greek community for baptism. Clement and, later, Origen both taught in the city—Clement privately, Origen at the official school, where he introduced a course of advanced studies.

Coming of a pagan family, Clement had received the usual Greek education; he was also deeply grounded in Scripture. The aim of his book, the 'Paedagogus', was to put the new converts to school with the one and only master, Christ. The book ends with the famous hymn to Christ, which was perhaps the school-song of the 'school of Alexandria' (Altaner). The hymn is a work of enthusiasm, inspired by the Bible and Plato and preceded by a prayer to the Saviour in which, in the final doxology, the Father and the Holy Spirit are associated with the Son.

Prayer to the Divine Tutor

50 BE kind to your little children, Lord: that is what we ask of you as their Tutor, you the Father, Israel's Guide; Son, yes, but Father as well. Grant that by doing what you have told us to do, we may achieve a faithful likeness to the Image and, as far as is possible for us, may find in you a good God and a lenient Judge.

May we all live in the peace that comes from you. May we journey towards your city, sailing through the waters of sin untouched by the waves, borne tranquilly along by the Holy Spirit, your Wisdom beyond all telling. Night and day until the last day of all, may our praises give you thanks, our thanksgiving praise you: you who alone are both Father and Son, Son and Father, the Son who is our Tutor and our Teacher, together with the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ This is one of the earliest forms of Trinitarian doxology in ancient Christian literature. It shows the Spirit as one being with the Father and the Son, but his presence is not so

All things belong to the One. He it is who makes them exist and exist as one; he makes eternity and gives us all a share in his own life. To him be glory for ever.

All belongs to God, the good, the beautiful, the wise, the just.
To him be glory, now and age after age. Amen.

Hymn to Christ the Saviour

51 YOU who bridle colts untamed,
who wing unerring birds in flight,
who steer ships along their course
and shepherd the royal lambs,
gather together
your artless children
for honest praising,
guileless hymning
of Christ, the guide of his children.

King of the saints,
invincible Word
of the Father most High,
wisdom's Prince,
Ground of exertion,
eternal Joy;
Jesus, Saviour
of this mortal race,
you the Shepherd,
Cultivator,

marked in the body of the prayer. Clement there expresses the full intensity of his belief in the Father and the Son and his gratitude to them.

The same impetuous outpouring is found in a contemporary prayer ascribed to the dying apostle Peter by the apocryphal Acts of that saint:

You are a father and a mother to me, a brother, a friend, a servant; you manage my house for me;

you are all that is, and all that is in you; you are that which exists, and nothing else exists, save only you.

You too, brothers, should take refuge with him. When you have learned that you exist in him alone, the things of which you are told that 'no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart conceived' them, will be yours.

We ask you for what you promised to give us, Jesus undefiled. We praise you and thank you; we give you glory, men though we are and weak; we acknowledge that you alone are God and that there is no other.

To him be glory, now and for all eternity. Amen.

you the Helmsman
and the Rider,
you the Wing that lifts to heaven
all the company of the saints;
Fisher of men:
them you came to deliver
from the waters of sin;
to fish untainted
by the envious sea
you cast the bait
of sweet fresh life.
Guide your flock
of spiritual sheep;
guide, holy King,
guide your unsullied children.
The prints of Christ's feet
show the way to heaven.

Word everlasting,
Age without end,
undying Light,
Fountain of mercy,
Doer of virtuous deeds,
exalted Life
of them that sing God's praises.

Jesus Christ,
celestial Milk out-pressed
from a young bride's fragrant breasts
(your Wisdom's graces),
your little children
with their tender mouths
slake their thirst there,
drink their fill
of the Spirit flowing
from those incorporeal nipples.

Let us together
sing simple praises,
true hymns
to Christ the King,
our blessed reward
(such is his life-giving teaching).

With hearts undivided
 let us sing to the Son in his might.
 Votaries of peace,
 we the Christ-born,
 people of wisdom,
 hymn we together
 the God of tranquillity.

ORIGEN

(†253)

It is beyond question that Origen represents the 'school of Alexandria' better than anybody else. He was born in Alexandria; his father was a Christian and died a martyr. He became head of the ecclesiastical school at a very early age and his lectures were extremely brilliant. His wonderful intellectual gifts were supplemented by deep faith and a mystical enthusiasm that led him to martyrdom.

Origen is the greatest theologian the Greek Church has produced. A centre of controversy during his lifetime and still more so after his death, he is much studied today. He combined an extensive secular culture with a quite remarkable knowledge of Scripture, which shows through his writings at every turn. He made a critical edition of the Bible and then commented on the text with a view to discovering its allegorical or spiritual meaning.

In addition to his treatise on prayer, long extracts from which will be found below, there are the prayers which end his commentaries and homilies. Prayer flowed out as he wrote his commentaries; it was generally addressed to Jesus, and its strongly individual note—the affection in it and the devotion to Christ that prompted it—was novel and anticipated Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi. Some of his ideas have had their day, but the essential part of his achievement still seems astonishingly alive.

SERMON ENDINGS¹

Noe's Ark and the Flood

52 GOD can do anything. Let us beg him to take pity on us and make us not merely listen to what he tells us but do it as well. May he send the flood of his waters over our souls, destroy in us what he knows is in need of destruction and give life to what he considers should live, through Christ our Lord and his Holy Spirit.

To him be glory, age after age, for all eternity. Amen.

¹ The doxologies at the end of the homilies are generally addressed to Christ; the Father is sometimes mentioned, but the Holy Spirit and the Trinity as a whole hardly ever. The homilies from which these extracts are taken were delivered at Caesarea.

The Circumcision of Abraham a Sign of the Covenant

- 53 THE Lord grant that we may believe in our hearts, declare with our mouths and prove by our deeds that his covenant with us has been sealed in our flesh. May men see that what we do is good and praise our Father in heaven for it, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom glory will be given throughout eternity.

The Opening of Agar's Eyes

- 54 LET us be on the watch and say with the prophet: 'Never shall these eyes have sleep, these eyelids close, until I have found the Lord a home, the great God of Jacob a dwelling-place.'

His are glory and power, his they will be throughout the endless succession of ages. Amen.

God says to Jacob: 'Joseph shall lay his hands on your eyes'.

- 55 MAY the Lord Jesus put his hands on our eyes also, for then we too shall begin to look not at what is seen but at what is not seen.

May he open the eyes that are concerned not with the present but with what is yet to come; may he unseal the heart's vision, that we may gaze on God in the spirit, through the same Lord, Jesus Christ, whose glory and power will endure throughout the unending succession of ages. Amen.

The Spiritual Understanding of God's Law

- 56 WE should ask God and the Holy Spirit¹ graciously to dispel every shred of those clouds and vapours, the product of our filthy sins, which with their darkness impede our hearts' vision. Then we shall be able to understand the spirit of his Law and the marvels of it: which was what the prophet meant when he said: 'Clear sight be mine, to contemplate the wonders of thy law.'

Knowledge of Scripture

- 57 LET us keep the Scriptures in mind and meditate upon them day and night, persevering in prayer, always on the watch. Let us beg the Lord to give us real knowledge of what we read and to show us not only how to understand it but how to put it into practice, so that we may deserve to obtain spiritual grace, enlightened by the law of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose power and glory will endure throughout the ages. Amen.

¹ This prayer is an exception to our rule, in that it comes at the beginning of a homily and not at the end.

Spiritual Understanding of Scripture

- 58 LET us ask the Lord to broaden our ideas, make them clearer and bring them nearer to the truth, that we may understand the other things too that he has revealed to his prophets. May we study the Holy Spirit's writings under the guidance of the Spirit himself and compare one spiritual interpretation with another, so that our explanation of the texts may be worthy of God and the Holy Spirit, who inspired them. May we do this through Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom glory and power belong and will belong through all the ages. Amen.

For Peace of Mind

- 59 LET us pray that Jesus may reign over us and that our land may be at peace—i.e., that our bodies may be free from the assaults of fleshly desires. When these have ceased, we shall be able to rest, beneath our vines, our fig-trees and our olives.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit will shelter us as we rest, our peace of mind and body once recovered.

Glory to God the eternal, age after age. Amen.

To Bid Jesus Welcome

- 60 LET us have clean hearts ready inside us for the Lord Jesus, so that he will be glad to come in, gratefully accepting the hospitality of those worlds, our hearts: he whose glory and power will endure throughout the ages. Amen.

Loyalty Amid Trials

- 61 LET us beg the Lord with all our hearts that we may fight for the truth body and soul to the very end. If circumstances arise that put our faith to the test (for our faith is tested in danger and persecution, just as gold is tested in the furnace), and even if persecution breaks out, may he find us ready. Otherwise, our houses might fall in that winter; the building might be blown down by the storms, as though it had been built on sand.

When the Devil, the worst of the wicked spirits, blows with his winds, may our conduct stand up to him, as it has until now—unless it has been covertly undermined—and by preparing ourselves for the campaign, may we show what love we have for God and Christ Jesus, to whom glory and power belong and will belong for ever and ever. Amen.¹

¹ This prayer, with its absorption in the thought of martyrdom, is especially moving when read in the light of Origen's own history. His whole life was coloured by the persecutions. His father died a martyr. He himself was put in prison during the savage persecution of Decius. There he was tortured atrociously and he died, at Tyre, in consequence of his injuries, as he had prayed might happen.

The Example of Simeon

62 LET us too stand in the Temple and hold God's Son and embrace him; and that we may deserve leave to withdraw and start on our way towards a better land, let us pray to God, the all-powerful, and to the little Jesus himself, whom we so much want to speak to and hold in our arms.

His are glory and power now and always. Amen.

PRAYERS FROM THE COMMENTARIES

'Who, then, will cleanse me? Who will wash my feet?'

63 JESUS, my feet are dirty. Come and slave for me; pour your water into your basin and come and wash my feet. I am overbold, I know, in asking this, but I dread what you threatened when you said: 'If I do not wash your feet, it means you have no companionship with me.' Wash my feet, then, because I do want to have companionship with you. And yet, why am I saying: 'Wash my feet'? It was all very well for Peter to say that, for in his case all that needed washing was his feet: he was clean through and through. My position is quite different: you may wash me now, but I shall still need that other washing you were thinking of, Lord, when you said: 'There is a baptism I must needs be baptised with.'¹

*'Rebellious children, come back to me,
and I will heal your wounds'*

64 NOTICE how God urges us to go back to him—not just a little way but all the way—promising us that if we go back, right back, to him, he will heal our wounds, through Jesus Christ. And we, in turn, not postponing or delaying our salvation, say in reply, as Israel did: 'See, we will be your servants.'

When God said: 'Come back, rebellious children, and I will heal your wounds,' the nations replied: 'We will be your servants. We were servants before, though not yours: we served demons and powers opposed to you.

'When you divided up the nations, mighty Sovereign, you did not choose us for your portion; we were not included with Jacob's people in the part you allotted to yourself: we fell to the lot of others. Yet now that you have said: "Come back, rebellious children, and I will heal your wounds," in others' portions though we have been, we still reply: "We will be yours."

¹ It is all the more remarkable that this prayer is addressed to Jesus in that Origen's habitual concern was to refer all worship and prayer to the Father, as being the principle of the godhead. Cf. 'De Oratione', 15 and 16.

All that we were waiting for was to be asked. Some were invited and made excuses, but we are not like them: you have asked us and we have not excused ourselves.

'We are told in the parable in the gospels that of those who were invited before, one said: "I have got married, and so I must ask you to excuse me"; and another: "I have bought five pair of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out: do accept my apologies." But we made no such excuses when you summoned us from paganism. How could we? What fields have we to bother about? What woman can attract any of us? What else is there to occupy our attention at all?'

God has said to us too: 'Come back, rebellious children, and I will heal your wounds.' When we consider our wounds and his promise to heal them, our answer comes at once. 'We will be yours,' we say, 'because you are ours—our Lord and our God.' We yield to his wishes and tell him: 'We will be yours.'

Let us remind ourselves that by telling him we will be his servants, we make ourselves his subjects. And since we have told him that we will be his, let us not give ourselves to any other power—to the spirits of anger, sadness or evil desire, to the Devil or to his angels. No, we have heard his summons and have made our answer: 'See, we will be yours.'

Since we have declared that we are his, let us prove by our conduct that we have no other master but him. 'You, Lord,' we must tell him, 'are our God.' And indeed we do not acknowledge any other god—not our stomachs, like the gluttonous, who worship their bellies; not money, like the miserly, or covetousness, which is a kind of idolatry. We make a god of nothing, we deify no creature. . . . Our God is above all things, pervades all things and is in all things. Our only attachment is to charity, for that binds us to God; in fact, it rivets us to him. 'We will be yours,' we say, 'because you are ours—our Lord and our God.'

*The Wounds Love Left Me With*¹

65 IF your wounds are inflicted by love, that is a fine thing, that is as it should be. In some cases, the weapon that makes its way in is carnal love; in others, the injury comes from the love of what is earthly. But in your case, the arrow is a thing of beauty, for God is the archer. You have only to bare your flesh and yield.

Listen to what Scripture has to say about this arrow, or rather, listen to the arrow itself: that will compel your admiration the more. 'I am an

¹ This and the following piece are given by way of example, although they are rather meditations than prayers properly so called.

arrow,' it says, 'that he has chosen out carefully and kept in his quiver. He told me, too, that it was a great privilege for me to be called his servant.'¹

Ponder on the arrow's words and try to realise how it has been specially chosen by God. What a blessing it is to have that arrow wound you, as the three apostles had who said to one another: 'Were not our hearts burning within us when he spoke to us on the road, and when he made the Scriptures plain to us?'

All Mine, My True Love, and I All His

66 'I WILL come and live in them and walk up and down in them,' this King says. He is thinking of those who open their hearts wide to God's Word—for then he can aptly be said to walk up and down in them: the paths of a broadened mind and a fuller knowledge are spacious enough to allow it.

In the same sense, he is said to lie down in the soul, if it is like the one the Lord himself speaks of in the prophecy where he says: 'To whom shall I look for rest but to the humble and quiet, the man who stands in awe of my words?'

This King, then, who is God's Word, takes to resting in a soul when once it has come within sight of perfection—when it has no serious blemish but is really devoted to him and amply provided with piety, faith, charity, peace and all the other virtues. That was the kind of soul the Lord had in mind when he said: 'My Father and I will come to supper with him and make our home with him.' And if Christ brings his Father to supper in a place and makes his home in it, why should he not lie down there as well?

Boons indeed the expansive heart and receptive mind, if that is where the Father and the Son lie down with the Holy Spirit, eat their supper and make their home, as I am sure it is. The food they eat must be choice and plentiful. What do you suppose it is? Peace is the first course; humility is served, with patience, forbearance and gentleness, as well as purity of heart, which they consider a very great delicacy; but the principal dish at the meal is charity.

METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS

(†c. 311)

Not much is known about Methodius. He lived at Olympus, in Asia Minor, and was an opponent of Origen. Of his works, the only one to survive in anything like a complete state is the 'Symposium of the Ten Virgins', a book in praise of virginity. Both the title and the literary genre show the influence of Plato. The book concludes with a hymn in which, with every mark of the warmest affection, the virgins offer their purity as a tribute to Christ and his spotless bride, the Church.

¹ Is. 49:2, 6 (LXX).

The Virgins' Hymn to Christ

Antiphon

67 MY purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 1

That cry from the heights, virgins,
could have wakened the dead.
'Out to the Bridegroom together,' it said;
'take your lamps and white dresses;
make for the east.
Wake up, or else the King
will be indoors before you.'

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 2

Not for me the pale joys,
the pleasures, loves, of an existence
fed with mortal pleasure.
I long for you to take me in your arms
and give me life;
I want to look at you for ever,
my Blessed One, my Beauty.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 3

Men offered me their beds: I scorned them;
scorned their houses too.
For you, my golden King,
I come in this fresh white dress.
I cannot wait to go inside that blissful place
and be with you.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 5

I have forgotten the land I was born in,
 so deep your grace absorbs me, Word.
 I have no heart for friendly girls and dances,
 I no more care who my forebears were.
 You, Christ, you, are all in all to me.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
 Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 6

Joy to you, Christ, Master of life's ballet,
 Light of our days, undimmed at evening.
 The virgins acclaim you; take what they bring you:
 Flower of all flowers, our Love, our Joy,
 Understanding, Wisdom, Word.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
 Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 7

Stand by the open doors,
 queen in the glittering gown;
 bid us too welcome to the marriage-room.
 Virgin your body, bride,
 splendid your victory,
 sweet the scent of your breath.
 See us now beside Christ,
 dressed like you, ready to celebrate
 your marriage, blest branch of God's olive.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
 Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 11

Clear the colours Abel used
 to paint your death before you died,
 my Blessed.
 Down streamed his blood,
 his eyes sought heaven, as he said:
 'My brother's hand has made this cruel wound.
 Take me, Word, I beseech you.'

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 17

John washed the crowds in the cleansing waters:
you were to wash them too.
A bad man sent him undeserved to death,
for purity.
Blood drenched the dust, but still he cried to you:

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 18

The mother, my Life, that bore you
stood firm and fast in your grace.
The womb that held you, spotless Germ,
no man had sown with his seed.
Virgin she was, though seeming to betray
the marriage-bed. Big with her blissful fruit she said:

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

*Hymn to the Church**Psalm 20*

We the bridesmaids
sing your praises,
happy woman, bride of God,
virgin still, Ecclesia.
Snow your body is, dark the waves of your hair,
sound, unblemished, lovely creature.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 21

Decay is destroyed; disease,
with its pain and its tears, has gone.

Death is no more, folly has fled
and grief, that gnaws the mind,
is dead. A sudden shaft of joy
from Christ our God,
and now this mortal world is shining.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 23

So with a song that is new
the band of virgins takes you up to heaven,
bright queen.
Wreathed with white lily-buds they go,
the lamps in their hands ablaze with light.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

Psalm 24

Blest Father, beginning never,
holding all things ever
in strength together,
taking the spotless heavens for your home:
may we too pass beyond the gates of life,
welcomed by you, O Father, and your Son.

Antiphon

My purity intact for you, my lamp alight in my hand,
Bridegroom, I come out to meet you.

2

Prayers of the Martyrs

The Acts of the Apostles gives us the last prayer of the first of the Church's martyrs. The Letters of St. Ignatius are the saint's expression of his love, in all its purity, just before he gave the testimony of his blood. The Acts of the Martyrs in turn have preserved—true, sometimes, to the letter—many of the prayers made by Christians as they went to their death, especially during the great persecutions of Diocletian and Decius.

The prayers of the martyrs (the shorter they are, the more likely they are to be authentic) are addressed, as a rule, to the Father but often, too, to Christ, as was the case with the deacon Stephen, the first martyr—the only true martyr, the confessors of Lyons called him, the only Witness to God.

Besides praising God and thanking him, the witnesses to the faith call in their prayers for God's help at the critical moment. They ask him to put their sins out of his mind, to forgive their executioners and to strengthen the faith of their brethren. Then they resign their souls into their Father's hands.

What makes these prayers so moving is that they are essentially the expression given in the imminence of death to a faith soon to be sealed with blood.

POLYCARP OF SMYRNA

(†c. 156)

St. Polycarp died at the stake at the age of eighty-six. His martyrdom is described in a letter from the Church of Smyrna to the faithful at Philomelion, and half-way through the account the words of his last prayer are given.

It is a solemn prayer, inspired by Scripture and addressed to God the Father through Christ, his 'beloved Child'. It contains many characteristically Johannine touches and in tone anticipates that great doxology, the Gloria.

As he stood at the stake, Polycarp was reminded of the sacrifice he used to offer in the midst of his priests: reminiscences of the liturgy are scattered throughout his prayer.

Prayer At The Stake

They did not nail him to the stake: they simply tied him up. With his hands bound together behind his back he stood there, like some splendid ram chosen out of a

vast flock for the sacrifice, ready to be made into a burnt offering, acceptable to God. Looking up to heaven, he said:

68 LORD God almighty, Father of Jesus Christ, that dear Child of yours, through whom we have come to know you, God of the angels and powers, God of all creation, God of the race that lives in your presence, the race of the just.

I bless you because you have thought me worthy of this day and hour,¹ worthy to be numbered among the martyrs and to drink out of the cup your Anointed has drunk from, so to rise and live for ever, body and soul, in the incorruptibility that is the Holy Spirit's.

May I be admitted with them to your presence today, a satisfying, welcome sacrifice. You have made my life a preparation for this; you showed me that this was to be and now you have brought it about, like the veracious and truthful God that you are. For this and all your blessings I praise you and give you glory, through the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ the heavenly, your dear Child.

He is with you and the Holy Spirit. Through him may glory be given you now and in the ages to come. Amen.

*Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonike*²

Standing at the stake, Papyrus raised his eyes heavenward and said:

69 LORD Jesus Christ, receive my soul.

And he yielded up his soul.

Carpus was fastened to the post. As the flames began to burn him, he gave a loud shout and said:

Blessing to you, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God: you have thought me fit to share this fate with you, sinner though I am.

So saying, he yielded up his soul.

When Agathonike's turn for the stake came, she said:

Lord, Lord, Lord, come to my help; I turn to you for refuge.

¹ This reference to the day and hour recalls John 12:27.

² Carpus was a bishop, Papyrus a deacon, Agathonike a married woman and the mother of a family. They were martyred at Pergamum, in Asia Minor, under Marcus Aurelius. The account of their sufferings comes from eye-witnesses.

Lucian and Marcian¹

70 WE offer you our poor praises, Lord Jesus, because you have defended us—sorry, undeserving creatures though we are—from the errors of paganism and in your mercy have brought us to these supreme sufferings, which it is such a privilege to undergo for the honour of your name, and have given us a share in the glory of your saints.

Praise to you, and glory. To you we commend our souls and our spirits.

Pionius of Smyrna²

Pionius and Metrodorus turned their eyes, and their hearts as well, towards the east. Pionius closed his eyes and, praying silently, asked God for rest. Then he looked at the fire. His face shone with joy and he said:

71 AMEN.

Then:

Lord, receive my soul.

Cyprian of Carthage

After this preamble, the proconsul read out his sentence from the tablet: 'Our decision is that Thascius Cyprianus shall die by the sword.'³ Bishop Cyprian said:

72 DEO gratias (God be thanked).

Rogatian and Donatian of Nantes

It was a great grief to the blessed Rogatian that he had been arrested before he had received the grace of baptism;⁴ but his faith was so strong that he thought a kiss from his brother, who was a Catholic, would do instead. When the blessed Donatian realised this, he prayed to the Lord for his brother, saying:

73 LORD Jesus Christ, when the wish is heartfelt, you take it for the deed. Where the obstacle to its realisation is simply lack of power to carry it out,

¹ Two martyrs who were arrested during the persecution of Decius and martyred at Nicomedia, the capital of Bithynia, in Asia Minor, c. 250.

² Pionius lived at Smyrna. He was a cultivated person and a priest. He died with Metrodorus, at a very advanced age, on the 25th of February, 250.

³ Records are extant of the two examinations which prepared the way for Bishop Cyprian's condemnation to death. For Cyprian's prayers, see nos. 46-49.

⁴ Donatian and Rogatian were brothers. Rogatian was still unbaptised when he was arrested.

we can be sure that the mere intention is sufficient: you have given us the ability to choose what we would like to do, but the power to do it is yours alone. May the pure faith of your servant Rogatian count, then, as though it were the gift of baptism; and if the governor is inflexible and puts us tomorrow to the sword, may the shedding of his blood be to him like the sacrament of his anointing.¹

*Euplus*²

74 THANK you, Christ, for this. Take care of me, because it is for you that I am suffering. I worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I worship the holy Trinity, apart from whom there is no God. Perish the gods; they had not the power to make heaven and earth and the things that are in them. . . .

Thank you, Christ, for this. Take care of me, Christ, because it is for you that I am suffering.

Because he was full of the Holy Spirit, he burst into song. And he sang:

Great the glory, Lord, that you receive from those of your servants whom in your mercy you have summoned to you.

He prayed, too, for those who were following him, saying:

Lord, protect your servants: stay with them to the end, and then they will be able to glorify your name for all eternity.

He quickened his pace, for victory was near and at any moment now he would receive the crown. Then, stretching out his hands towards heaven, he said:

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ: your strength has been my consolation; you have not allowed my soul to perish with the wicked; you have given me your grace, the grace of your name. Now is the time for you to consolidate what you have achieved in me and so to confound the Adversary's impudence.

Then, looking at the people, he said:

Listen, dear brothers. Pray to God and fear him with all your hearts; for those that fear him he keeps in mind while they are in this world, and when they leave it, angels will come to meet them and take them to his holy city, Jerusalem.

And when he had finished what he had to say, he knelt down, bared his neck and was beheaded.

¹ An allusion to the anointing at baptism.

² Euplus was a deacon. His martyrdom took place at Catania, in Sicily, c. 304.

Theodotus of Ancyra and the Seven Virgins¹

75 LORD JESUS CHRIST, you created heaven and earth; you never forsake those who put their trust in you.

Thanks be to you: you have made us fit to live in your city in heaven and share your kingdom.

Thanks be to you: you have enabled me to master the dragon and crush its head.

Give your servants rest; turn the violence of their enemies on to me.

Give your Church peace;² deliver it from the tyranny of the Devil.

Genesius of Rome³

Though he had been stretched on the rack, long tormented and torn with the claws, and burnt with torches into the bargain, he still stood firm in confessing the faith, saying:

76 THERE is no King but him whom I have seen; he it is that I worship and adore. Were I to be killed a thousand times for my allegiance to him, I should still go on as I have begun, I should still be his man. Christ is on my lips, Christ is in my heart; no torments can ever take him from me. I am very sorry for the mistake I made in sneering at the holy name in holy men and coming so late to worship the true King, thinking I knew better than to be a soldier of his.

Felix of Tibiucca⁴

The proconsul decreed that he should die by the sword.

In firm tones Felix said:

77 THANKS be to you, Lord. How merciful it is of you to give me this release.

On reaching the place where he was to die, Bishop Felix looked up to heaven and said in a steady voice:

O God, thanks be to you.

I have spent fifty-six years in this world. I have kept myself a virgin,

¹ Theodotus was martyred with seven virgins at Ancyra, in Asia Minor, under Diocletian, c. 302.

² The martyrs are continually thinking of the Church—of their own brethren in the first place and then of the whole community.

³ Genesius had been an actor at Rome. It was said that he was visited by grace while he was acting a parody of martyrdom. He is supposed to have been martyred under Diocletian, c. 285.

⁴ Felix was Bishop of Tibiucca, in Africa. He was martyred c. 304.

followed the gospel, preached the faith and taught nothing but the truth. Lord God of heaven and earth—Jesus Christ—I bow my neck to you in sacrifice, to you, the ever enduring.

Glory and majesty are yours and always will be, throughout the ages. Amen.

Irenaeus of Sirmium¹

God's holy martyr gave thanks, saying:

78 THANKS be to you, Lord Jesus Christ: in all my trials and sufferings you have given me the strength to stand firm; in your mercy you have granted me a share of eternal glory.

And lifting his hands to heaven, he prayed, saying:

Lord Jesus Christ, your mercy made you suffer to save the world. May your heavens open for angels to receive the spirit of your servant Irenaeus, who is suffering now for your sake and for all who owe their life to your Catholic Church of Sirmium. Be so good, I beg and implore you, merciful Lord, as to take me to yourself and to strengthen them in their faith.

The Martyrs of Abitine²

Thelica ran out to be martyred, full of joy. They put the iron claws on him and tore his flesh. He said:

79 DEO gratias (God be thanked). Christ, Son of God, by the power of your name deliver your servants.

His blood flowed and his prayers flowed with it. He asked the Lord to forgive his executioners, whom he reproached (and the proconsul too) for their cruelty, saying:

God most high, do not regard these deeds of theirs as sins. . . . You should do what the Most High God commands. You are being unjust, poor men; you are torturing the innocent—we are not murderers, we have committed no fraud.

God, have pity on them. . . . For your name's sake, Lord, give me the strength to bear what I have to bear. Deliver your servants from the prison of this world. Thanks be to you. I cannot thank you, God, enough.

¹ Irenaeus was Bishop of Sirmium, in Hungary. He was martyred under Diocletian, c. 304.

² Abitine is a town in North Africa. The martyrs died there c. 304.

As the blood flowed, the proconsul said to him: 'You will soon see what you have to suffer.'

He replied:

It is for the glory of God. I thank God for it, the God of all royal power. The eternal kingdom is in sight, the kingdom that knows no corruption. Lord Jesus Christ, we are Christians, we are your servants; you are our hope, the hope of Christians. God most holy, God most high, God almighty: we praise you, we praise your name.

After Thelica, came the senator Dativus. He repeated over and over again the prayer:

O Lord Christ, let me have no cause for shame.

He was subjected to the most barbarous of tortures, and all the time he prayed:

I beg you, Christ, let me have no cause for shame.

When they put him on the rack, he paid no attention to the pain in his body but prayed to the Lord, saying:

Help me, Christ, I beg you; have pity on me. Keep my soul safe. . . . Let me have no cause for shame. I beg you, Christ, give me the strength to bear what I have to bear.

The priest Saturninus suffered horribly. His flesh was so badly torn that the bones were visible. And while the executioners went on with their work, he said:

Listen to me, Christ, I beg you. O God, thanks be to you. Tell them to behead me. I beg you, Christ, have pity on me. Son of God, help me.

Emeritus suffered similar tortures and prayed in much the same way:

I beg you, Christ, accept my praises. Deliver me, Christ: it is for your sake that I am suffering. I have only a short time to suffer; I am glad to suffer, Lord Christ. May I have no cause for shame.

Ampelius said:

Praise to you, Christ. Listen to me, Christ.

And the young Saturninus:

I beg you, Christ, give me the strength to bear what I have to bear. I trust in you to give me life.

*Afra of Augsburg*¹

80 LORD God almighty, Jesus Christ, you did not come to call the just; you came to call sinners to repentance.

Your promise is clear; it admits of no doubt. You were so good as to say that as soon as a sinner turned away from his evil deeds, you would say no more about his sins. Accept, then, as a sign of my repentance, the sufferings I am now undergoing, and by this fire that is waiting to burn my body for a time, deliver me from the eternal fire that burns body and soul alike . . .

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ: in your mercy you have chosen me to be a victim for the glory of your name—you who offered yourself on the cross as a victim for the salvation of the whole world, you the innocent for us the guilty, you the good for us the wicked, you the blessed for us the cursed, you the sinless for all us sinners.

To you I offer my sacrifice, to you who are one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, with whom you live and reign, as you always will, age after age. Amen.

*Boniface of Tarsus*²

81 LORD, Lord almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I am your servant; come to my help. Send me your angel; take my soul and give it peace. That will stop the foul dragon with his reek of blood from blocking my way; no malice of his will then obstruct my soul, none of his stratagems will deceive me.

Give me rest in the company of your martyrs; save your people, too, Lord, from oppression by the godless. For it is fitting that you should have honour, you and your only Son and the Holy Spirit, throughout the ages. Amen.

*Severus of Thrace*³

He knelt down and prayed to the Lord, saying:

82 TO all who are tossed by the waves, you are the calm of the harbour; you are the hope of the hopeful.

¹ We know that Afra was a martyr and that she died under Diocletian, c. 302; but apart from that, we have little information about her. According to her Passion, which was written much later, she had lived a dissolute life and had afterwards mended her ways.

² Boniface, like St. Paul, came from Tarsus, in Asia Minor. He died in 306.

³ Severus was a priest at Heraclea, in Thrace (Greece). He died c. 304. This prayer may have come from a very old Ritual. It was not prayed by the martyr in the form in which we have it.

You are the health of the sick, you relieve the needy and guide the blind.
To those exposed to punishment on every count you are merciful, to the
weary a wall, in darkness light.

You created the land, you rule the sea, you set every element in its place;
a word from you and the heavens, the stars and all else was made, and
made perfect.

You kept Noe safe and gave wealth to Abraham,
let Isaac go free and provided a victim in his stead,
wrestled with Jacob, to his sweet confusion,
took Lot away from the accursed land of Sodom.

Moses you let see you; to Jesus, son of Nun, you gave prudence.
In your mercy you went with Joseph on his way and brought your people
out of the land of Egypt, leading them to the land they had been promised.
You protected the three children in the furnace: your dew, Majesty, flowed
over them and the flames could not touch them.

You closed the lions' mouths, gave life, gave food to Daniel.

You did not allow Jonas to perish in the depths of the sea, and when the
cruel sea-beast caught him in its jaws, you let him escape unhurt.

You gave Judith the weapons she needed; Susanna you saved from the
unjust judges.

Esther had her triumph from you; you procured the downfall of Aman.

You brought us from darkness to eternal light, Father of our Lord and
Saviour, Jesus Christ, light yourself unquenchable, you who gave me the
sign of the cross, the sign of Christ.

I beg you not to decide, Lord, that I am unworthy of these sufferings that
my brethren have been allowed to undergo. Let me share the crown with
them; let me be with them in glory, as I have been with them in prison.
Let me rest with them, as I have confessed your glorious name with them.

Simeon and the Persian Martyrs¹

Simeon began to pray. He said:

- 83 GIVE me this crown, Lord; you know how I long for it, for I have loved
you with all my heart and all my being. When I see you, I shall be filled
with joy and you will give me rest. I shall no longer have to live in this
world and see my people suffering, your churches destroyed, your altars
overthrown, your devoted clergy everywhere persecuted, the weak defiled,
the lukewarm turned from the truth, and my flock that was so large reduced
at the time of testing to a handful.

¹ Simeon bar Sabba'e was Bishop of Seleucia, in Persia. He and his companions died
in the persecution set on foot by Sapor, between 339 and 344.

I shall not see the many that seemed to be my friends undergo an inward change, become hostile and seek my death; or find those that were my friends for a while taken from me by persecution, at the very time when the killers are snapping their fingers at our people and lording it over them.

Yet I mean to persevere in my vocation like a hero and to walk bravely along the path marked out for me, so that I shall still be an example to all your people in the east. I have had the first place at table, I will have the first place too when it comes to dying; I will be the first to give my blood. Then with my brethren I shall enter on that life in which there are no cares, no anxiety, no solicitude, a life where there is neither persecutor nor persecuted, neither oppressor nor oppressed, neither tyrant nor victim of tyranny. No threatening kings, no blustering prefects shall I see there. No one there will cite me before his tribunal or upset me with repeated menaces; there will be no one to do me violence or bully me.

I shall stumble no more, when once I have gained a firm footing in you, the Way we all must walk in. My weary limbs will find their rest in you, for you, Anointed, are the Oil that is to anoint us. The grief in my heart will be forgotten when I drink of you, the Chalice of our salvation. The tears in my eyes you will wipe away, O Joy, O Consolation.

2

Gustazad, the chief of the king's eunuchs, who had at first apostatised but later returned to the faith, was martyred on Holy Thursday. When he reached the place where he was to die, he turned to the east, knelt down and said:

84 PRAISE to you, Lord Jesus: I was a lost sheep, and you brought me back; I had strayed from your holy fold, and by the exertions of that most capable of your shepherds, Simeon, you found out where I was.

He went out to look for me, and he put me with those of your sheep that had been fattened for the slaughter. I was to be a son to the apostles, a brother to the martyrs who had received the garland in the west, a good example to your people in the east.

Let them not fall away, let them not lose the true faith—faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the truly Existing, the glorious King, whom all that worship the Holy Trinity, in heaven and on earth, confess and ever will confess, age after age. Amen.

3

When he heard the news of Gustazad's martyrdom, Simeon was transfigured. His face glowed like a red rose. He said to them all: 'Tomorrow, the day of Christ's passion, I too shall be put to death.' Then he said:

85 RISE, 'friends, rejoice we in the Lord's honour; cry we out merrily to God,

our strength and deliverer' (Ps. 94:1), because he has saved his servant Gustazad from death and snatched him from the grasp of hell. 'With praises court his presence' (Ps. 94:2), for in his mercy he has promptly come to his aid, delivered him from the power of error, freed him from the evil spirits' yoke, removed him from the gloom and darkness that Satan casts about, brought him back to the light from which he came, and set him down in the kingdom of Jesus, your Son, from which he had been cast out. The portion he has been honoured with is that which falls to the saints in the place where light is.

'Come,' *Bishop Simeon said*, 'let us give ourselves the joy of commemorating him. Let us link his passing with the Pasch¹ of Jesus Christ; let us receive the body and blood of the Lamb, the Living One, who takes the world's sins away and shows us in these mysteries the mystery of his own immolation: his body is sacrificed now not by the Jews but by his own holy servants, in the Church.' *He celebrated the holy mysteries, and he said:*

'May this mystery of the Lord's body bear us company until the day of his manifestation, when he is to come from the sky on clouds, with his army of holy angels, to raise our bodies from the dust and restore our souls to them, to take us up to heaven with him and fill us with delight at the sight of him, to give us a share in his glory and a cause for rejoicing in the kingdom of heaven for ever. Amen.'

Simeon's Prayer Before His Martyrdom

86 LORD Jesus, you prayed for those who had crucified you and you taught us too to pray for our enemies. Stephen, your deacon, prayed for the people who had stoned him, and you received his spirit. Receive as well the souls of our brethren, receive my spirit with them. Set us among the martyrs who have received the garland in the west, among the holy apostles and the blessed prophets. Do not count it as a sin that these men persecute your people and kill our bodies, but grant them, Lord, the grace of conversion. May they come to know that you are God and realise that you are the Lord.

Bless, Lord, the towns and cities in the east which you entrusted to my care. Protect all the faithful of these lands as you would the apple of your own eye. May they find shelter under the shadow of your wings until these troubles are over. Stay with them until the consummation of the world, as you promised that you would.

Bless, Lord, this city, the city of our capture and our crowning. May your cross keep it true to the faith, now and for ever, age after age. Amen.

¹ Etymologically, the word 'pasch' means 'passing'. Like the death of Christ, the martyrdom of Gustazad was a 'passing' from the earth to eternal life.

*Prayers to the Martyrs*¹

87 TRULY fearless, truly fortunate martyrs, called and chosen to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ! If any man magnifies the Lord, honours and adores him, these are the models for him. If he reads about them, he will find that though they are modern, they are not inferior to the ancient ones: they will edify the Church just as much. These new examples of virtue will prove that it is one and the same Holy Spirit who was active then and is active now, one and the same omnipotent God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose glory and power are boundless and always will be, age after age. Amen.

2

88 HAPPY the martyrs, tried in the fire and found to be of worth, like gold. Faith was the breast-plate, salvation the helmet each was equipped with. Unfading the wreaths and garlands that crown them, because they have crushed the Devil's head.

Happy the martyrs, whose merits have won them a place of honour in heaven, where they stand at Christ's right hand, blessing God the almighty Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, his Son.

The Lord has taken his martyrs to himself and given them peace, because their witness was as it should have been.

His are honour and glory, his will they be for ever, age after age. Amen.

¹ These prayers, taken, like the preceding extracts, from the Acts of the Martyrs, are given here because they illustrate the confidence and trust that Christians had in the confessors of the faith at a very early date and the cultus they paid to them. The first, which may be by Tertullian, is interesting because of its Trinitarian doxology. Cf. P. de Labriolle, 'Tertullien, auteur du prologue et de la conclusion de la Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité', in *Bull. anc. litt. arch. chrét.*, 3 (1913), 126-32.

3

Prayers from Papyri and Potsherds

In 1708, Montfaucon asserted that he had never seen a papyrus. Since the nineteenth century, a great many have been brought to light by excavation—often mere fragments but sometimes complete rolls. Of these documents a certain number have made a real addition to our knowledge of the Christian past. Some have provided us with texts of biblical writings, others with parts of prayer-books.¹

It will thus be an act of piety to assemble some of these anonymous products of the early Christian period and see what they can teach us about the liturgical and private prayer, the faith and the life of Christians in an age that was still close to the beginnings of our religion. Taken as a whole, they seem to be very ancient; they stretch from the third century to the sixth. In the majority of cases, it is hardly possible to determine the date of their composition; at most, the age of the manuscript (which can be inferred from an examination of the type of writing used) provides a rough approximation.

The characteristic features of the prayers are, however, easier to discern. They are inspired by the Bible; both liturgical phraseology and private devotion are based on Scripture. Their background is the liturgy—the eucharist and the mysteries of the Christian year. The personal element becomes more prominent, especially in petitions for forgiveness. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin makes its appearance, in a biblical context.

PRAYERS TO GOD THE FATHER²

Morning Prayer

89 HELPER of men who turn to you,
Light of men in the dark,
Creator of all that grows from seed,
Promotor of all spiritual growth,

¹ As the price of papyrus was relatively high, the less affluent made do with *ostraca*, or pieces of broken pottery. The orthodoxy of the prayers found in the papyri is not always above suspicion.

² To avoid complication, the prayers from the papyri are classified according to their subject-matter. Details of date and provenance are given, as far as possible, with the references. The dots indicate gaps in the papyri.

have mercy, Lord, on me
 and make me a temple fit for yourself.
 Do not scan my transgressions too closely,
 for if you are quick to notice my offences,
 I shall not dare to appear before you.
 In your great mercy,
 in your boundless compassion,
 wash away my sins, through Jesus Christ,
 your only Child, the truly holy,
 the chief of our souls' healers.
 Through him may all glory be given you,
 all power and honour and praise,
 throughout the unending succession
 of ages. Amen.¹

*Another Prayer*²

90 HOLY the God who from my youth
 has shown me life and the light.
 Holy the God and Father of all that exists.
 Holy you are, who have existed from the beginning.
 Holy you are, whom all your creatures know as God. . . .
 Holy you are, who created all things by your Word.
 Holy you are, whose nature has never lost its brightness.
 Holy you are, whose nature . . .
 Holy you are, and stronger than any other power.
 Holy you are, and greater . . .
 Holy you are, and above all praise.

Accept the words that from my heart and soul
 strain to reach you,
 Ineffable, Inexpressible, speaking in silence.
 Let me not, I pray, be balked of knowledge
 of our essential nature.
 Stoop to me, make me strong,
 and I will transmit that grace, as charity bids,
 to my brothers, your sons.

¹ A private prayer, addressed to the Godhead through Christ and provided with a doxology to the Father.

² This prayer first pays homage to the holiness of God, who 'speaks in silence'. It goes on to pray, indirectly, to the Spirit, and then turns to the Father, to whom the final doxology also is addressed.

My spirit is the Holy Spirit's.
 Therefore I believe and confess my faith,
 which is the source of light and life to me.
 Blessed Father,
 man, your creature,
 would have you make him holy like yourself,
 for you have given him every means to become so.
 Glory is yours, now and always,
 age after age. Amen.

Prayer Called 'A Prayer of Peter and the Other Apostles'

91 HOLY you are, Lord God almighty,
 Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 delightful Garden,
 kingly Sceptre,
 lavish Love,
 Hope assured and firm,
 Counsel . . .
 Holy you are, Lord God,
 King of kings and Lord of lords.¹
 You alone have immortality;
 you live in light that none can approach,
 and no man has ever seen it;
 you sit above the cherubim and thrones,
 you ride on the wings of the winds;
 you created the heavens, the land, the sea
 and all that is in them . . .
 you make the winds your messengers
 and the fiery flames your servants;
 you made man like yourself,
 an image of yourself you made him;
 you measured heaven with the span of your fingers
 and the whole earth with the palm of your hand . . .
 Fair indeed your works are to you.

Prayer for Help

92 GOD almighty, you who made
 the heavens, the land, the sea and all that is in them:
 help me, have mercy on me,

¹ From this point onwards, the biblical reminiscences are very noticeable.

wash away my sins;
 save me now and in the time to come,
 through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
 Through him may glory and power be given you,
 age after age. Amen.

*Thanksgiving*¹

93 ON you I call, God of the heavens, God of the earth, . . .
 Fulness of Life . . .
 He came into the world and drew Death's claws,
 came through Gabriel, came in the womb
 of Mary the virgin,
 was born at Bethlehem, reared at Nazareth,
 crucified . . .
 he rent the temple-veil,
 was laid in the tomb,
 rose from the dead on the third day,
 showed himself in Galilee,
 ascended into highest heaven . . .
 Countless myriads of angels on his left,
 countless myriads, too, of angels on his right;
 as one their voice, threefold their cry:
 Holy, holy the King of the world:
 his godhead fills the heavens.
 He takes the winds for roads to walk on.
 See where he comes, Mercy, God of the world.
 He ascended to the seventh heaven,
 to the Father's right hand,
 he, the blessed Lamb.
 His blood gave souls release. The brazen gates
 opened of themselves for him. He burst the iron bars
 and freed the prisoners from the dark.
 Death he unmanned. He took the apostate Enemy captive
 and thrust him into his proper solitude.
 The heavens exulted, earth rejoiced,
 because the Enemy was far from them;
 to all creation, sighing after its Lord,
 Jesus had given freedom.

¹ A hymn addressed to the Father. It takes the form of an anaphora, goes through the chief mysteries of the life of Jesus and uses the Trisagion from the liturgy.

His the voice that declares our sins forgiven
 whenever we call upon his holy name.
 Princedoms and powers,
 lords of the dark,
 spirits of impurity,
 swooping demons of the midday hours,
 agues cold and hot and intermittent,
 men's ill will,
 the Adversary's powers:
 none of these can avail against the Icon¹
 your godhead has fashioned.
 Yours the strength that triumphs through the ages.

*Prayer for Use on Saturdays*²

94 ON you we call, Lord God,
 all-wisc, all-surveying, holy,
 the only true Sovereign.
 You created the universe,
 you watch over all that exists.
 Those that lie in darkness,
 overshadowed by death,
 you guide into the right road, the safe road.
 Your will is that all men should be saved
 and come to knowledge of the truth.

With one voice we offer you
 praise and thanksgiving;
 full-hearted, full-throated we sing you
 the hymn you have a right to at this hour.
 In your mercy you called to us
 (holy the calling!),
 taught us and trained us,
 gave understanding, wisdom, truth to us,
 life eternal.

¹ The image. The reference is to Christ, whom St. Paul calls the image or likeness of the God we cannot see (Col. 1:14).

² A magnificent prayer, which seems to mark the culmination of the week and is doubtless intended for the evening. It begins by recalling that this is the time for giving thanks and goes on to pray for loyalty to God's law.

The use of the plural suggests that the prayer is liturgical and meant for recitation in the assembly. It is addressed to the Father and in the doxology brings in the mediation of the Son.

You bought us back
with the pure and precious blood
of your only Son,
freed us from lies and error,
from bitter enslavement,
released us from the Devil's clutches
and gave us the glory of freedom.
We were dead and you renewed the life
of our souls and bodies in the Spirit.
We were soiled and you made us quite spotless again.

We pray you, merciful Father,
God from whom all encouragement comes,
give us strength to act as befits men with such a vocation,
such calling to worship, such newness of life.
We mean to observe the sacred commands
of the divine law;
we long to come closer to you, closer today,
long to have light from you, light to know you and serve you.

We pray you, give us the strength
to do all this with a will.
Do not think of the sins we have committed
or of those we still commit.
Put out of your mind the failings we give way to
night and day.
Do not impute our offences to us,
whether we did them on purpose
or whether we could not help them.
Remember, Lord,
that men are apt to make slips;
we are a spineless race, given to blundering:
think of our build, our limitations.
Our skins may be sound, but there are sores underneath. . . .

O God, you are well disposed to us:
give us the strength of your support.
Give us encouragement, give the light that goes with it.
Make us live by the dogmas of the faith
preached by your holy apostles
and the high teaching of the gospels
of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

May we not be content only to hear and to speak of them
but behave and act as they bid us,
for then our conduct will deserve reward.

Teach us to look upwards,
to seek out and probe the heavenly,
not the earthly.
If that is our attitude and if you act in us,
what glory for your power,
all-holy, omnipotent, worthy of all praise;
glory through Jesus Christ, your beloved,
with the Holy Spirit,
now and throughout the ages.
Amen.

A Woman's Prayer

95 O QUICK; defend me from the claws of the dog, from the unicorns' horns,
and I will praise you, my God, among my brethren, in the assembly.
At the request of your martyrs Sabbatius, Probatius, Stephen and Cyriacus,
protect your servant, gracious God; rid her of every weakness in her soul.
For it is through the name of the Lord, the living God, that salvation comes.

Many have been at pains to set forth the history of what time has brought
to fulfilment among us.

A record of the ancestry from which Jesus Christ was born.

At the beginning of time the Word already was, and God had the Word
abiding with him, and the Word was God.¹

St. Phocas, St. Mercurius, protect your servant.²

Absolution

96 GOD eternal, all that is hidden is known to you,
all that will come to pass you see before it happens;
it is not your will that sinners should die:
you want them to repent and be saved.
Look, then, on this poor thing,
pitiful, sinful, your servant.³

¹ Opening words of the gospels according to Luke, Matthew and John.

² It is worth noting that the woman who wrote this prayer twice asks for the intercession of the saints.

³ Perhaps a preparatory prayer for the celebrant before mass.

Ejaculatory Prayer

97 GOD to whom we owe our crosses,
 help your servant
 Apphouas.
 Amen.

Doxologies

98 GLORY to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 Holy God, deathless, strong,
 pity us, save us,
 Son of God, our Saviour.
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

98a MAY none of God's wonderful works
 keep silence, night or morning.
 Bright stars, high mountains, the depths of the seas,
 sources of rushing rivers:
 may all these break into song as we sing
 to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 May all the angels in the heavens reply:
 Amen! Amen! Amen!
 Power, praise, honour, eternal glory
 to God, the only Giver of grace.
 Amen! Amen! Amen!

MYSTERIES CELEBRATED IN THE LITURGY
 AND PRAYERS TO CHRIST

Christmas Hymn

99 ARE you in earnest, mortal men,
 with your talk of justice?
 Do you incline to neither side,
 earthborn, in your judgements?
 See, we confess the God born of a virgin,
 God made man, but God no less for that.
 He was born before the ages, had a Father then
 (what can we know of his fatherhood?)
 and now a maiden mother's given him flesh.
 He fills the world,
 yet stays distinct from it, unmingled with it.

Therefore our cry to him shall be:

Mercy is yours, Lord: glory be to you.

O holy God:

how you have stooped, born a virgin's baby.

Holy and strong:

nothing would content you but support of Mary's arms.

Holy Immortal:

coming to Adam, leading him from Hades.

O Christ, our God, mercy, mercy on us.¹

Grace-filled, unspotted, God-bearing virgin,
holy your womb: Emmanuel lay in it.

You fed at your breast the Food of the world.

What praise can reach you, what glory touch you?

Hail, God's mother, delight of the angels;

hail, full of grace, foretold by prophets' preaching.

The Lord is with you. The Child you bore

has saved the world.

From a Christmas Liturgy

100 AT Bethlehem, shepherds were awake in the fields.

An angel came from the Lord to them, bringing good news,
telling the birth of Emmanuel.

Round about the shepherds shone the Lord's glory,
and the angel said: There is nothing to fear.

He told them there was joy for them, great joy, for all the people:
'Christ has been born today, the King and God and Saviour,
born in David's city.'

So with the angels we too must sing to him:

Glory to God in the height of the heavens,
peace on the earth to men that are his friends.

Epiphany Antiphon

101 AT Bethlehem born,
at Nazareth brought up,
he lived in Galilee.

A sign in the sky; we saw it ourselves.

¹ Embedded in the prayer is the threefold invocation characteristic of the Eastern liturgies and found also in the Latin rite, in the liturgy for Good Friday (cf. no. 142). As applied to Christ, it is a formal acknowledgement of his divinity.

See the liturgy of the Syrian Jacobites, Brightman, 77. For the Copts, see *ib.*, 155.

How the star shone! The shepherds that night
 in the fields fell to their knees in amazement and said:
 Glory to the Father, alleluia.
 Glory to the Son and Holy Spirit.
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.¹

On the back:

The 5th of Tybi.² Illustrious is St. John the Baptist,
 who preached throughout the world
 that to have our sins forgiven
 we must repent.

Easter Hymn

102 GLORY let us give him, let us sing: Glory, Lord, be yours.
 Christ was born of the Holy Spirit,
 born to bring us life.
 In mercy he came and lived among us.
 Worship let us give him, let us sing: Glory, Lord, be yours.
 See how the Virgin gave birth to Emmanuel.
 Down he came from heaven, took from Egypt³
 his people gone astray.
 Let us acclaim his greatness, let us sing: Glory, Lord, be yours.
 He came to make us triumph,
 the Lord, over the Enemy,
 came and lived in Mary;
 he the Invisible was seen in the flesh.
 Let us adore him, let us sing to him: Glory, Lord, be yours.
 The Word, the Truth, rose again because of us,
 the Lord enfleshed of a virgin never deflowered.
 Let us extol him, let us sing to him: Glory, Lord, be yours.
 From the dead he rose for us,
 Light proceeding from the Light,
 Christ the King.
 He delivered our souls from the land of Egypt.
 Join voice to voice and so let us sing to him: Glory, Lord, be yours.

¹ Note the fine Trinitarian doxology, with the concluding Alleluias.

² The 5th of Tybi is the 5th of January. The present Roman liturgy still commemorates the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan on the feast of the Epiphany.

³ An allusion to the enslavement of the Jews during their stay in Egypt. Moses, who delivered them from their slavery, has always been regarded as a figure of Christ.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

I

103 WE are proclaiming your death, Lord;
we praise you, Christ, for your holy resurrection.
It is fitting, you say, for us to approach the table
of these ineffable mysteries.

Let us be eager, then, to receive our share
of the spiritual gifts here spread before us;
let us sing with the angels
the triumphal Alleluia.

God the Word, he in the Father's bosom,
was lately here upon the cross as well.
He was laid in a tomb like any mortal
—stooped so low, would have it so;
but on the third day rose again and gave us
O what gift of mercy.¹

2

104 ON Sinai's mountain once
you spoke to Moses.
Now you have taken a body
—though from a stainless virgin,
though it is free from sin,
still, you have taken our flesh.

Time was when Israel
had food from you.
Now you have taken food yourself
—though from an ever virgin mother,
still, you have taken her milk.
Wonder of wonders!

You used to make small count of kings,
but now you've run away from one,
to Egypt.

Having the highest of thrones,
you lie now cramped in a manger.
What though you still are His Majesty?

¹ A prayer perhaps sung during the communion. Note the juxtaposition of the two mysteries, the Passion and the Resurrection. See 'La Rédemption et l'histoire du monde', 2nd ed., Paris, 1951, pp. 87-114.

This believing, let us call the mother blessed,
let us sing our hymns to the Child.

God in heaven had no mother;
God, you'd say, on earth, is fatherless.¹
Glory, God, to you.

Communion Hymn

105 HE gave them bread from heaven
and men ate angels' bread;
he gave them bread from heaven.
Blessed the bread we have received.

We have taken the Lord's body and his precious blood.
The Lord has transformed the bread . . .
The saving cup is brimming with life.
We have received the holy bread.

Let us bless the God who has done such wonders
throughout the earth.
Praise God, all you peoples,
just souls, rejoice in the Lord:
you have received Christ's body and blood.

Thanks to you, Christ, our God:
you have thought fit to give us a share
of your body and blood;
you have gladdened our hearts. . . .

Prayer to Christ, the Firstborn

106 THE bright stars
and the forces in movement
are all eclipsed and robbed of lustre
by the sight of your light
and your great superiority.
You alone shine out, display²
the image of the Father's eminence
and show us the greatness
of Father and of Son.

¹ The original reads 'motherless'; *ἄνευ μητρός*. What one would expect, however, is 'fatherless', which has, accordingly, been put.

² The whole of this prayer is one long paraphrase of the first chapter of Colossians, which describes the place of Christ in creation.

What the great Father is
 to the heavenly spheres
 (all-blessed they),
 that are you, his Child,
 to this world of ours.
 You are the First,
 the Leader of the dance
 and Lord of all the powers,
 a second Greatness
 flowing from the Father's,
 the eternal Upholder
 of the whole world's foundations.
 You are a Token to us;
 you set our ranks in order,
 row us across the stream
 and guide us on our way.
 You are the Door that opens on to light,
 the Token of justice,
 our constant Star and Brightness.
 We give you thanks and praise and blessing.
 Confident, we fall upon our knees before you.

We ask you to give us all that will make for our good.
 Grant that we may be firmly established in our faith
 and give us the bodily health we need to praise you well.
 Then shall we hymn your glory incessantly,
 in every circumstance,
 O God whom all men worship,
 God the undying, unresting, eternal.
 You are the Token whereby we can see
 what our souls are meant to be like;
 you are our Father:
 you, blessed King, you, our God.
 If we look, Lord, at you,
 we shall never die;
 if we confess your name,
 we shall never be cut off from you;
 if we pray to you,
 we shall never be put to shame.
 Restore to us, Lord,
 the strength we had to begin with,

and make us maintain it
right to the end.
May we be confirmed in it and grow in it
until we reach our full stature
and perfection.

I praise you, Lord, because
you are powerful, bright, serene and luminous,
I praise you for your angels,
for those you send to guide and strengthen
all living souls,
for all who draw their life from you
and live as one with you
and do what you want them to do.
Great indeed, honoured and high above the rest
are those who sincerely call upon your name
and sing you the praises their faith has taught them.

In your lustrous clouds,
O God whom all men worship,
Undying, Unresting, Eternal,
you are the Token whereby we can see
what our souls are meant to be like:
you, blessed Father, you, our sovereign Leader,
borne in beauty on clouds of light,
going in mystery.
You are my Father, O Saviour, Upraiser,
O Giver and Taker of strength.
You make it clear what mould we were cast in;
to living souls you bring purity. . . .

You are the First,
and in every work of quality
you play the leading part.
When your beams pour down on your creatures
and shine amidst their errors,
then the angels,
the powers that guide our lives,
the images that represent you
in heaven and on earth,
the bright stars and the forces in movement
are all eclipsed and robbed of lustre

by the sight of your light and the beauty
of your great superiority.

PRAYERS TO MARY THE VIRGIN

Antiphon

107 TO you we flee for shelter and compassion, mother of God. You alone are chaste and blessed; do not disregard our prayers in this hour of need, but deliver us from danger.¹

Hymn

108 HAIL Mary,²
full of grace;
the Lord is with you,
the Holy Spirit too.
Your priests shall be robed in justice,
they that honour you shall rejoice and exult.
For David's sake, your servant, Lord,
save, Lord, your people, bless your chosen portion.

Hail to the glorious virgin,
Mary, full of grace.
The Lord is with you.
Blessed you are above all other women
and blessed is the fruit of your womb:
for he you conceived was Christ, the Son of God,
and he has redeemed our souls.

Prayer

109 HAIL, full of grace; the Lord is with you.³
The choice has fallen on you because
you are pure, spotless, responsive to God
and have always been
of the highest merit.

¹ This prayer has become very popular in a slightly different form. The *Sub tuum*, as we know it today, differs little from the original text. It may be rendered: "To you we flee for shelter and protection, holy mother of God. Do not disregard our prayers in this hour of need, but deliver us from all dangers, ever-virgin, glorious, blessed."

² An ancient form of the Ave Maria.

³ An elaboration of the angel's greeting to Mary. It quotes liberally from Scripture: Lk. 1:28-36.

You have found favour in God's eyes.

And see, you will give birth to a son
and will call him Jesus.

He will save the nations and will be called
the Son of God.

The Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father,
and he will rule over Jacob's house for ever.

His kingdom will never come to an end.

'How can that be, if I keep myself a virgin?'

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
the power of God will cast its shadow on you.

That is why the Child to be born of you
will be called the Son of God.

'I am at the Lord's service:
be it as you say.'

O blessed above all women, it was the Lord that spoke to
you;

he it was that ordered the good news to be told you:

'Through your Son all the tribes of Judca
and all the races of the Gentiles
shall be saved.'

With the archangel and the angels

let us too do her honour.

Hail, beloved of the Lord,

seated by the Highest, hail;

hail, God-receiving,

hail, our link with the Saviour.

She is the dove that has led men away from destruction:
rejoice, then, brood of the virgin.

Hail, God-receiving,

received of God in heaven.

Hail, virgin,

hail, Mary,

O book for virgins to read in,

book that tells of the Light eternal;

hail, all hail.

4

Prayers Cut in Stone

Further traces of the prayer of the early Christians have been preserved in stone. A wealth of epigraphical material—inscriptions on houses, baptisteries and churches and, in particular, epitaphs recalling the memory of the brethren or the martyrs—shows what the prayer of these ancient times was like at its most spontaneous and personal, its least conventional. As Mommsen observes, 'inscriptions belong not to literature but to life'.

On the threshold of eternity, when men lie defenceless before death, their faith and hope are strangely like those oil-lamps that are so often represented on tombs in the catacombs. The light they give seems to penetrate the barriers of the senses and reach as far as the throne of God.

The prayers used for inscriptions reveal deep faith in God. They are frequently Trinitarian in form, but often they are addressed to Christ and sometimes to the Holy Spirit alone. The faithful ask that the departed, or the 'sleepers', as they call them, may receive forgiveness, life, rest and peace, and that they may be one with God, or with Christ.

To Christians, the dead are more alive than the living; hence, in epitaphs, they ask for the intercession of the dead and beg them to remember their brethren who are still waiting for God to call them to him. Parents are found invoking their children.

The faith that underlies the inscriptions is given expression, with the greatest delicacy of feeling, through phrases borrowed from the Bible or the liturgy, particularly in the case of the longer ones. Most of them come from Egypt. They show a marked increase in number from the fourth century onwards, after the time when Constantine had brought peace to the Church.

But in none of these prayers is there any suggestion of weakness or insincerity. There is suffering, but there is nothing effeminate about it, and the hope that is expressed is of the strongest. The difference between these inscriptions and pagan ones, whether in the ancient world or in the modern, cannot fail to strike anyone who compares the two.

ACCLAMATIONS

Acclamations were an ancient form of prayer. They were used as ejaculatory prayers, in the liturgy, in the various circumstances of everyday life and more especially as

inscriptions on tombs. The examples given here are classified according to their subject-matter.

Peace and Rest¹

- 110 PEACE to them that are gone to God.
 May Ecymete be at peace.
 Peace be with you.
 The peace of Christ be with you.
 He sleeps the sleep of peace.
 May he sleep in peace.
 May he live in peace.
 At peace in a place of refreshment.
 Depart in peace.
 May you sleep in the peace of the Lord.
 Live for ever at peace.
 In the peace of sleep.
 With God in peace.

Living With God

- 111 MAY he be with God.
 May he be with the living God.
 May he be with the immortal God.
 May he be in God's hands.
 May he be where the great name of God is.
 May he be where God's greatness is.
 May he be with the living God
 now and on the day of judgement.
 Live in God, live in eternal delight.

With Christ

- 112 MAY he be with Jesus Christ.
 In Christ.
 Jesus Christ, help the writer
 and all his household.
 In the peace of Christ.
 Live in Christ.

¹ The idea of peace needs defining. The word denotes the serene and lasting possession of God's friendship: Ephesians 2:14. The inscription 'In Peace' is found as early as the first century. The reader will not need to be told that each line corresponds to a separate inscription.

Christ bid you welcome.
May your spirit be at peace in Christ.
In the name of Christ Jesus.

Prayers for Forgiveness

- 113 BEGGING forgiveness for his many sins.
For salvation and forgiveness of sins.
In your mercy, overlook his shortcomings
—the sins he knew he had done
and the faults he was not aware of.
Grant him forgiveness for his sins.

The Intercession of the Dead

- 114 PRAY for your parents.
Pray for your children.
May he pray for us.
Pray for us. Pray that we may be saved.
Pray for the one child you have left behind you.
Live in Christ and pray for us.

Waiting for God's Call

- 115 *MARANATHA*
Fearful the sentence God will give
on the day of judgement.
In hope of the resurrection.
In hope of the resurrection
and of Christ's mercy.
In hope of rising again and living for ever.
Let us be ready for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.

The Holy Spirit

- 116 IN God's holy Spirit.
To Cyriacus, dearest of sons:
Live in the Holy Spirit.

EPITAPHS INSPIRED BY THE BIBLE AND THE LITURGY

Many epitaphs, the longer ones especially, draw their inspiration from the Bible or the liturgy. There is nothing surprising in that: it is after all only to be expected that

the forms in which faith is expressed in baptism and the liturgy should seem equally natural in private prayer as well. The epitaphs invoke God, the Trinity and Christ; and some, like the inscription on the tomb of Pectorius, mention the Eucharist.

Biblical Themes

- 117 LOVE God with all your heart
and your neighbour as yourself.
It is more blessed to give than to receive.
Share your bread with the hungry.
Of life and death, tongue holds the keys.
The words of the wise are like stars.
Speech uttered was ever the wise man's passport to fame.
[On the very day of a man's death
God can] give him his deserts.
How few there are that find it [life].¹

Abraham's Bosom

- 118 REMEMBER your servant Chrysis
and give her a place where there is light,
a place where she may find refreshment,
in Abraham's bosom, Isaac's, Jacob's.²
- 119 O GOD the all-powerful, existing always,
now and in the past and in the future,
Jesus Christ, Son of the living God:
remember that your servant ZONEÏNE
has ceased her labours and is at rest.
She was devout and loved your commandments.
Make her, then, fit to follow the lead
of Michael,³ your holy archangel, into the light,

¹ These examples are all exclusively composed of verses from Scripture.

² At this period, when the theology of the last things had yet to be worked out, 'Abraham's bosom' was regarded as a provisional resting-place for the soul before it was granted direct sight of God. It was thought that the martyrs alone were admitted to God's presence immediately after death; practically everyone else would have to wait until the end of the world. The Roman liturgy still speaks of Abraham in this connection, in the Subvenite, which is sung at funerals.

³ St. Michael is often represented in art as weighing souls. This function of his is not limited to iconography; it is recognised in the liturgy as well—the offertory of the present mass for the dead invokes his aid in this connection. The reason is that the Jews traditionally regarded the archangel as a sort of counsel for the defence of the dead before

into the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
 the holy patriarchs.
 Yours are glory and power
 throughout the ages. Amen.

- 120 'LET me come in,' she said, 'Lord, into your house, Anointed.'
 Quickly she had what she asked: God's light is now her possession.
 Zosime, my holy sister, fallen in time of great danger,
 sees them that died with her, died in that same holy combat, and seeing,
 wonders to find them about her, rejoices to have them beside her.
 Spirit so bold in only a girl amazes the fathers.
 Vying with one another to welcome her to their numbers,
 each would be foremost, clasping, embracing, giving ovation.
 Great is the kingdom she sees and splendid the sights that she savours,
 great her rejoicing because her merits have had their reward.
 Death she despised, like you, Paul; like you she holds the garland;
 she kept her faith, as you did, and ran the race to the end.¹
- 121 IN the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
 O God of spirits and of all flesh,
 you have conquered death, trampled Hades underfoot
 and given life to the world.
 Give rest to the soul of my father, Sinethe . . .
 in the bosom of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob,
 a place of light and refreshment,
 where no sorrow is, or pain, or sighing.²
 Forgive him every sin he committed,
 of word and deed and thought,
 for you are kind and have men's good at heart,
 and there is no man living that is without sin.
 You alone are God and free from sin,
 your justice is an eternal justice
 and your word is truth.
 Give rest to the soul of my father, Sinethe . . .
 for you are the resurrection.

God's throne. The Epistle of Jude (ch. 9) alludes to the tradition and cites the (apocryphal) 'Assumption of Moses' in support of it. It was introduced into the Christian liturgy by converts from Judaism.

¹ An obvious allusion to 2 Tim. 4:7.

² There is a similar passage in the canon of the Roman mass, at the memento of the dead, where the Church asks God to give them refreshment, light and peace.

To you we give glory, to you we sing praises,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 Amen.

Prayers to the Trinity

122 IN the name of God, the all-powerful Father, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, and of the Holy Paraclete: Eusebius, their unworthy servant, restored the whole of this cemetery.

123 FATHER, Son and Holy Spirit,
 have mercy on the soul
 of Hanni, who found rest
 on the 15th of Michir.
 Amen.

124 JESUS Christ has conquered.
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 have mercy on Ageni,
 the son of Kakbul.
 Amen.

125 NO justice so great as that of the God who is merciful!
 She was born of the Holy Spirit, born for Christ's glory.
 That she may be able to join the blessed and enter his service,
 I pray you, God, to whom all is possible,
 let her enter the paradise where all is light.

He that set up this inscription, in fulfilment of a vow, honours
 the Father and the Son.

126 GLORY to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

On The Tomb of Agape

127 AND you, brethren, I beg you, when you come here to pray and you call in your prayers on the Father and the Son, do not forget to spare a thought for Agape. May the God of all power preserve Agape for eternal life.¹

On The Tomb of Lucifera

128 TO Lucifera, gentlest of wives, a gentle reception. Her departure was a great grief to her husband. This inscription was put up to remind the

¹ An epitaph dating from the end of the second century. It invokes the Father and the Son only, the theology of the Holy Spirit not yet having been worked out to any extent.