

UNIT FIVE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITURGIES

- We can get some idea of early patterns of Christian worship from documents such as *The Didache*, *Justin Martyr's First Apology* and *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*.
- The Greek noun '*leitourgia*' means 'service' – in the Old Testament this referred to some form of ritual service, in Hebrews to the priestly ministry of Jesus, and in the rest of the New Testament to the service that Christians can have to one another.
- The language of service came to be applied to the meeting of Christians for worship – 'liturgy', derived from the Greek, came to mean a form of service for public worship.

THE DIDACHE

- *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, or *The Didache* (Greek for 'teaching'), dates from the early second century AD, but is thought to contain first century material.
- It indicates how one early Christian group viewed topics such as baptism, fasting, the Lord's Supper and the organisation of congregational ministry.
- Several things are of interest to us:
 - Direction about how to baptise 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'.
 - Direction that the Lord's Prayer should be said three times a day.
 - An injunction to come together 'on every Lord's day – his special day – and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure'.
 - Three prayers of thanksgiving, which may be offered 'in connection with the cup', 'in connection with the bread' and 'after you have finished your meal'.
 - The prayers are meant to be patterns, not fixed forms.

JUSTIN MARTYR'S FIRST APOLOGY

- Justin, a Christian from Palestine, writing in Rome in about AD150, gives us the only outline of a complete service from the first three centuries.
- This apology (reasoned defence of the Christian faith and its practices) is addressed to the Emperor, his sons and colleagues as a plea for toleration and as a form of propaganda for the faith and an appeal for conversion.

- Justin describes two services:
 - Communion following a public baptism
 - Baptism takes place away from the normal place where the believers gather, because the newly baptised are led to the assembled congregation.
 - Prayer is offered for the newly baptised and then the whole congregation, followed by greeting with a kiss – this is not included in the normal Sunday service.
 - Bread and wine are brought to the ‘president of the brethren’ who says a prayer of thanksgiving, after which the bread and wine are distributed.
 - Only those who believe and are baptised may take part, ‘for we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink’.
 - Possibly based on John 6, Justin conceives the flesh and blood of Christ as having a nourishing and transforming effect on believers.
 - The bread and wine are meant to be signs or symbols of Jesus’ flesh and blood, but later developments of this thinking led to the doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’.
 - A regular Sunday service
 - Great importance is given to the reading and exposition of Scripture (‘the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets’).
 - There is a time of common prayer, and then bread and wine are again brought to the president who gives thanks ‘to the best of his ability’.
 - The bread and wine are again distributed to the congregation.
 - Justin explains the reasons why the services took place on a Sunday.
 - This document shows how the Lord’s Supper became separate from the context of an ordinary meal, as a more formal rite emerged.

THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION OF HIPPOLYTUS

- Fifty years after Justin’s apology was written, Hippolytus came to prominence as a theologian in Rome, eventually setting himself up as a rival to the Pope.
- His *Apostolic Tradition* is dated by some to AD200, by others to slightly later in the third century.
- He sets forth the rites and ceremonies that were part of the tradition of the Roman community at the turn of the third century, including the consecration of bishops, the Lord’s Supper and orders for Baptism and Confirmation.

- His writings reveal something of the basic shape found in both eastern and western prayers in subsequent decades.
- We find a Eucharistic prayer with a preface, involving a dialogue between the presiding minister and the congregation, which still appears in most Communion liturgies today, in almost exactly the same words.
- The main part of the prayer is called the *Canon*, from the Greek word for ‘rule’ — according the Hippolytus, this is the proper way to do it.
- Several times in the prayer, reference is made to ‘the oblation’ or ‘offering’ of bread and wine to God as a sacrifice.
- This is a serious misunderstanding of Jesus’ intentions — at the Last Supper he was not inaugurating a new sacrificial ritual for Christian priests to perform, but inviting the disciples to eat and drink in remembrance of his unique sacrifice.

THE ROMAN MASS

- **The earliest centuries**

- It is not possible to trace developments in Eucharistic practices in detail, but we can see how the Eucharist was separated from ordinary meals and lay people lost their roles as the Eucharist became something the clergy must do for the people.
- Sacrificial language was introduced and often justified on the basis of Old Testament precedent, and like Israel Christians were to have altars and sacrifices, priests and holy places.
- This language was used without regard for the way New Testament writers used it in connection with the unique work of Christ.
- Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (248-258AD), appears to have been the first to expound a theory of ‘Eucharistic sacrifice, where the priest acts as the representative of Christ.
- The priest re-enacts Christ’s passion by presenting the bread and wine to the Father as the body and blood of his Son.
- Ambrose, bishop of Milan (374-397AD), was chiefly responsible for introducing the language of the doctrine which came to be called ‘transubstantiation’.
- For the next few centuries, theology was dominated by the writing of Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa, who did not hold to this view.
- He said “Believe and you have eaten...do not prepare the throat but the heart.”

- **The shape of the Latin Mass**

- The fourth century brought imperial recognition of Christianity, and the end of official persecution.
- Differences between liturgies were resolved by mutual agreement, but in the fifth century the collapse of political unity in the Roman Empire led this to change, and East and West split.

- In the East, the rite which prevailed in the Orthodox churches was that of Byzantium, in the West it was the Roman rite which prevailed as the 'Latin Mass'.
- 'Mass' may be the least appropriate name to have been given to the Lord's Supper — coming from the Latin *missa* (dismissal).
- The structure of the ministry of the Word and prayers followed by the Eucharist or Lord's Supper follows the pattern first seen in Justin's *Apology*, but is considerably expanded.
- The preparation of the priest and his attendants
 - Prayers are said in the vestry, and continue as they approach the altar. There is no congregational confession, confession is expected to be private and before coming to the service.
- The ministry of the Word and prayers
 - This varied according to the day and the season, different prayers and readings were provided for each day. The Nicene Creed was included, and much was made of bringing the bread and wine to the priest.
- The Eucharistic prayer (also called 'The Canon')
 - This was only to be attended by the baptised, and began with the preface first used by Hippolytus. Requests were made for God to accept and bless the offering of bread and wine, and once they were consecrated they were shown to the people and presented to God.
- Communion and dismissal
 - The communion of the priest and his attendants followed with great ceremony. As time went by, the people were only allowed to receive consecrated bread, and detailed instructions were given for cleaning the vessels and the hands of the priest.