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THE FOURTH-CENTURY ORIGIN OF THE GRADUAL*

The conventional view on the origin of the gradual was stated succinctly by Peter Wagner: 'The Responsorial solo in the mass is of apostolic origin . . . in imitation of the Jewish liturgy a solo from the psalmist was inserted between the readings.'[1] The precise form this view has taken more recently in the works of both musical and liturgical historians can be summarised as follows.[2] The early Mass or Eucharist consisted of two major parts. The essential part, the Eucharist proper, had its origins in the Last Supper, a Jewish ceremonial meal, possibly the Passover Seder. This was preceded by a 'service of the Word', made up of four elements: scripture reading, discourse on the reading, congregational prayer and psalms sung in response to the readings. This pre-eucharistic service was plainly and simply an adoption *en bloc* of the ancient synagogue service.

If this scheme were factual in every respect, then Wagner would have been right and the gradual – as foremost among those psalms sung in response to the readings – would indeed have originated in the ancient synagogue. However it is not factual in every respect; while there is much about it that is true and admirable, it breaks down precisely where psalmody is concerned.[3] Psalms were sung of course in the great Temple of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus; an instrumentally accompanied psalm was performed with much ceremony at the climax of the daily Temple service just as the limbs

* The present article is based on a paper of the same name presented at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, at Vancouver, British Columbia, in November 1985.

1 *Introduction to the Gregorian Melodies*, trans. by A. Orme and E. Wyatt (London, 1907), p. 72.

2 For references see J. McKinnon, 'On the Question of Psalmody in the Ancient Synagogue', *Early Music History*, 6 (1986), pp. 181–2, and J. A. Smith, 'The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing', *Music and Letters*, 65 (1984), p. 17.

3 What follows is a brief summary of the two studies cited in the previous note.

of the sacrificial lamb were being consumed by fire. But there is no evidence that anything similar took place in the local synagogues of the period. While the New Testament presents the synagogue as a thriving institution, its functions were at least as much civic in character as religious. It was the town meeting place and seat of government where judicial proceedings were carried out. It is true that regular meetings of a quasi religious character were also held there, and the central activity of these meetings consisted in the first two of the four elements cited above: the reading of Scripture, especially the Law (the first five books of the Bible), and discussion of those readings. However, the third element, prayer, is another matter. While it would be dogmatic to insist that there was no prayer at all, the evidence suggests that prayer in the sense of a regularised liturgical order was absent from the synagogue until established by the rabbinical council at Jabneh as a substitute for Temple services after its destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70. Psalmody came still later. The Mishnah, redacted in about A.D. 200, and the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, redacted in about A.D. 400 and 500 respectively, make no mention of it. We must wait for the eighth-century tractate *Sopherim*, which even at this late date expresses scruples over reciting the daily psalms because of their intimate association with the Temple sacrifice.

Thus, if there was no psalmody in the synagogue at the time of Jesus, there can be no question that the gradual psalm derived from the synagogue. To make this limited denial is not to speak against a broad influence upon Christian liturgy by Jewish institutions including the synagogue. The Christian liturgy followed the synagogue in its most revolutionary trait – that congregants gathered within a meeting room rather than in a temple square to witness sacrifice. More specifically the Church adopted the Jewish practice of reading from a canon of sacred books, while the Christian homily or sermon was in all probability a direct descendant of synagogue discourse upon the reading. Congregational prayer was another Jewish innovation adopted by Christianity, even if by a less direct route than generally supposed, and so too was psalmody in spite of what has been said above.

There is in fact one well-documented instance of early Christian psalmody in direct continuity with Jewish custom; it involves not the synagogue but a Jewish ceremonial meal. I refer of course to the Last

Supper, the conclusion of which is described by Matthew (26.30) and Mark (14.26) in the same words: 'And when they had sung a hymn [ὑμνήσαντες], they went out to the Mount of Olives.' The three Synoptic Gospels place the Last Supper on the eve of Passover. If they are correct in doing so, the hymn sung by Jesus and his disciples would have been the Hallel (Psalms 113–18), recited by all Jews at the Passover Seder. One exercises caution over this identification only because the Gospel of John suggests that the Last Supper was held on the following day. If one follows John, then, as would some exegetes, the meal would not be the Passover Seder and the hymn less probably the Hallel; but the meal would be a Jewish ceremonial meal nonetheless and the hymn in all likelihood a selection from the Book of Psalms. (It is, incidentally, elementary to the study of early Christian references to music that the term 'hymn' as often as not refers to one of the Old Testament psalms, and that conversely the term 'psalm' is a more general term that refers equally to an Old Testament psalm or a newly composed one.[4])

The question of Jewish origins aside, the psalmody of the Last Supper is of considerable significance to the history of early Christian ecclesiastical music. The crucial point is that this singing took place at a common meal; the available evidence suggests that the common evening meal was the principal venue of Christian psalmody in the first three centuries of the Christian era. Reference to liturgical song became abundant in the fourth and fifth centuries while it was relatively sparse before that time. Yet within this sparseness several vivid passages depicting singing at Christian meals stand out. These meals no longer accompanied the Eucharist, but they were nevertheless descendants of the Last Supper. In the earliest years of the Church's existence the Eucharist was celebrated in conjunction with a community meal called the agape, the love feast. Apparently because of abuses such as those described by Paul at Corinth (1 Cor 11.17–34) the Eucharist was separated from the meal and moved to the early morning. Common evening meals, however, whether the agape or not, remained a Christian custom of some importance for several centuries, and the singing of psalms and hymns, biblical and newly composed, appears to have figured prominently at these gatherings.

[4] See the general index of J. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge, 1987).

Tertullian (d. 225), writing at Carthage toward the close of the second century,[5] describes singing at the agape:

> Our meal reveals its meaning in its very name; it is called that which signifies love among the Greeks . . . . After the washing of hands and the lighting of lamps, each is urged to come into the middle and sing to God, either from the sacred scriptures or from his own invention. In this way is the manner of his drinking tested. Similarly the banquet is brought to a close with prayer.[6]

One should not be distracted here by the intriguing reference to testing 'the manner of his drinking'; of more relevance is the impromptu nature of the singing – a general characteristic of early Christian song that should always be borne in mind.

Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), writing at approximately the same time as Tertullian, devoted a chapter of his *Paedagogus* to the subject of 'How to Conduct Oneself at Banquets'. The entire chapter is a diatribe against musical excess at pagan banquets and an exhortation to sing psalms with restraint at the Christian's 'sober symposium'. He says at one point: 'Just as it is appropriate for us to praise the creator of all before partaking of food, so too is it proper while drinking to sing to him as the beneficiaries of his creation.'[7] A few decades later Hippolytus of Rome (d. *c.* 236) described an agape attended by the bishop, towards the end of which psalms were sung with the Alleluia refrain.[8] It is not at all unlikely that this is a reference to the Hallel – perhaps the most prominent group of psalms with an Alleluia refrain – and hence an important musical link with the Last Supper. The final passage from this group appears in a letter of Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) to his friend Donatus; it is a particularly warm recommendation of psalmody at the evening meal that merits quotation in its entirety:

> Now as the sun is sinking toward evening, let us spend what remains of the day in gladness and not allow the hour of repast to go untouched by

[5] For a recently revised chronology of Tertullian's works, see T. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 30–56.

[6] *Apologeticum* XXXIX, 16–18 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 1, pp. 152–3; this series, initiated at Turnhout, 1953, is hereafter abbreviated CCL). The reader will find all patristic passages quoted or cited here, newly translated with complete bibliographic information, in McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*.

[7] *Paedagogus* II, iv (J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia graeca, cursus completus*, VIII, col. 444; this series, published at Paris, 1857–66, is hereafter abbreviated *PG*; the companion Latin series, published at Paris, 1844–64, will be abbreviated *PL*).

[8] *Apostolic Tradition* 25 (B. Botte, ed., *La Tradition apostolique de Saint-Hippolyte*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 39 [Münster in Westphalia, 1963], pp. 64–6).

heavenly grace. Let a psalm be heard at the sober banquet, and since your memory is sure and your voice pleasant [*uox canora*], undertake this task as is your custom. You will better nurture your friends, if you provide a spiritual recital [*spiritalis auditio*] for us and beguile our ears with sweet religious strains [*religiosa mulcedo*].[9]

Again, references to psalmody in the Christian literature of the first three centuries are not as plentiful as the music historian might wish, but these descriptions of singing at the evening meal stand out sufficiently to create the impression that the vaunted – perhaps exaggerated – early Christian enthusiasm for psalmody found its principal vehicle during the first three centuries at such meals. If one grants this point, then, is there evidence from the period that has a more direct bearing on the question of the gradual psalm? There are just three passages that can be taken to describe the pre-eucharistic 'service of the Word'. The most explicit and unambiguous is Justin Martyr's (d. *c.* 165) mid-second-century description of Sunday morning Eucharist at Rome. Three of the expected four elements of the service are given in proper order: readings, discourse and prayer, but psalmody is not mentioned.

> And on the day named after the sun there is an assembly . . . the memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the Prophets are read as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has finished, he who presides speaks, giving admonishment and exhortation to imitate those noble deeds. Then we all stand together and offer prayers. And when . . . we are finished with the prayers, bread is brought, and wine and water.[10]

The omission of psalmody is particularly telling here because of the manner in which the service is described; the impression of a precise and complete sequence is created by the use of adverbs meaning 'then'.

The other two passages are both from Tertullian. The first stands at the beginning of the same chapter of his *Apologeticum* that later describes the agape. It is not made explicit that its subject is the pre-eucharistic service, but its placement might be said to suggest this. In any case it mentions prayer, reading and discourse, but not psalmody. Quoted here are the descriptive portions of the passage, omitting the author's commentary:

[9] *Ad Donatum* xvi (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 3/i, p. 16; this series, initiated at Vienna, 1866, is hereafter abbreviated CSEL).

[10] *Apology* i, 67 (*PG* vi, col. 429).

I myself shall now set down the practices of the Christian community . . . . We come together in an assembly and congregation to surround God with prayer . . . . We gather together to consider the divine Scriptures . . . . And at the same time there is encouragement, correction and holy censure.[11]

The third passage does describe a pre-eucharistic service, and this time, finally, all four elements appear to be present. Tertullian writes of a charismatic woman undergoing her ecstatic transports at the Sunday liturgy:

There is among us today a sister favored with gifts of revelation which she experiences through an ecstasy of the spirit during the Sunday liturgy. She converses with angels . . . she sees and hears mysteries, reads the hearts of people and applies remedies to those who need them. The material for her visions is supplied as the scriptures are read, psalms are sung [*psalmi canuntur*], the homily delivered and prayers are offered.[12]

At first reading the passage seems clear enough, but one must consider it in context. Tertullian, writing here in his later years, was a representative of the Montanist heresy, a sect which placed a premium upon ritual spontaneity and inspiration. They were religious descendants of the irrepressible Corinthians whom Paul reproached for their overemphasis upon spiritual gifts. In doing so he outlined a gathering of Corinthians that might suggest to some the pre-eucharistic service: 'What then brethren? When you come together, each one has a psalm, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation' (1 Cor 14.26). The key word here is the 'lesson' of the Revised Standard Version; the term 'lesson', derived as it is from the Latin *lectio*, suggests scripture reading. But the original Greek is διδαχή, and a more neutral translation would be simply 'teaching' or 'instruction'. Now the context of the passage suggests overwhelmingly that this teaching would not have been a regulated scripture reading but rather whatever edifying 'lesson' a particular Corinthian was inspired to utter before the brethren. It would seem that the same is true of the 'psalm'; it could have been some individual's favourite biblical psalm but it is just as likely to have been a new psalm or an entirely personal lyrical outburst. While nothing was excluded, it is clear that the behaviour of the Corinthians at their

[11] *Apologeticum* xxxix, 1–4 (CCL 1, p. 150).
[12] *De anima* ix, 4 (CCL 2, p. 792).

meeting was spontaneous and charismatic; there was a premium placed upon idiosyncratic expression.[13]

One might argue from analogy that the Montanist pre-eucharistic service that inspired Tertullian's visionary woman was of a similar sort, and that its 'psalms' were not necessarily biblical. This possibility approaches probability when one considers another passage from Tertullian's writings. Here he speaks against Marcion, denying to his followers the same kind of ecstatic gifts he prizes among his own: 'So let Marcion display the gifts of his god . . . Let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer; only let it be of a spirit, while in ecstasy, that is a state beyond reason . . . Let him also show me a woman of his group who has prophesied.'[14] The elements are remarkably similar to those of the Carthaginian pre-eucharistic assembly; one is struck especially by the mention of an ecstatic woman and of course the psalm, in this case clearly an inspired utterance and not an Old Testament psalm. The followers of Marcion are reproached for their inability to compose a 'psalm' in a genuinely god-sent state of ecstasy, whereas the adherents of Tertullian, presumably, can do so. All this does not prove conclusively that Tertullian referred to the same sort of lyric entity in describing the Carthaginian pre-eucharistic service, but it suggests that he very well might have. At the least it performs the negative function of casting doubt on the single item of evidence for psalmody in the pre-eucharistic service of the first three centuries.

Before summarising the evidence of the first three centuries, there is a further point to be made: it involves the minor clerical officials who performed the liturgical tasks relevant to our subject – the lector and the cantor. The lector, who read the scriptural readings of the pre-eucharistic service, was a well-established figure already in the mid-third-century sources, while the cantor did not make an appearance until the last decades of the fourth century.[15] To summarise, then, while sacred song was fostered at Christian ceremonial meals and while scripture reading was an essential part of the pre-eucharistic 'service of the Word', psalmody cannot be established as

[13] For recent exegesis on the passage see W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven, 1983), pp. 144–8.

[14] *Aduersus Marcionem* v, viii, 112 (CCL 1, p. 688).

[15] For sources see E. Foley, 'The Cantor in Historical Perspective', *Worship*, 56 (1982), pp. 194–213.

a regular feature of this rite. It would be simplistic to say that psalms were never sung at it, and certainly they must have been selected occasionally as Old Testament readings. But the available evidence speaks against psalmody as a distinct and essential part of the service, of the sort that an author like Justin Martyr would single out as he did the readings, and whose musical exigencies would require the creation of a special clerical officer. It is true, however, that this impression is based on relatively sparse evidence, and prudence dictates an examination of the more abundant fourth- and fifth-century references before arriving at hard and fast conclusions.

Before taking up those late fourth-century sources that point unequivocally to a gradual psalm, it is necessary to describe briefly a more general psalmodic phenomenon: that great wave of enthusiasm for the Old Testament psalms which swept from east to west in the second half of the fourth century. Nothing quite like it has been observed either before or after in Christianity or Judaism. The most distinguished church fathers wrote rhapsodic encomiums of psalmody: Basil (d. 379),[16] John Chrysostom (d. 407)[17] and Ambrose (d. 397)[18] made eloquent contributions to the genre which culminated in Niceta of Remesiana's (d. *c.* 414) remarkable sermon *De utilitate hymnorum*.[19] They argued in fervent prose that everything that is good and true in the entire Bible is best exemplified in the Book of Psalms; they specified how there are individual psalms that speak to every human need and condition; and they explained approvingly how the melodiousness of the psalms made their texts more accessible to the faithful than those of other biblical books. There are also descriptive passages from the period that reveal clergy, monks, nuns and laity participating in extended vigils at which the singing of psalms was the most prominent activity. To mention only the most obvious examples, Basil[20] and Egeria (fl. late 4th c.)[21] describe such vigils, while Augustine (d. 430) tells us how Ambrose introduced similar practices at Milan when his congregation was besieged by Arians.[22] A disgruntled minority failed to share the general

[16] *Homilia in psalmum i*, 1–2 (*PG* xxix, cols. 209–13).
[17] *In psalmum xli*, 1–2 (*PG* lv, cols. 156–8).
[18] *Explanatio psalmi i*, 1–9 (CSEL 64, pp. 5–8).
[19] C. Turner, ed., 'Niceta of Remesiana ii, Introduction and Text of *De Psalmodiae bono*', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 24 (1922–3), pp. 225–50.
[20] Epistle ccvii, 3 (*PG* xxxii, col. 764).
[21] *Itinerarium Egeriae* xxiv, 8 (CCL 175, p. 69).
[22] *Confessiones* ix, vii, 15 (CCL 27, pp. 141–2).

enthusiasm, but their objections were swept aside by the most eminent ecclesiastical figures of the period.[23] Augustine meanwhile – uniquely scrupulous and introspective – provided a special perspective on the phenomenon by expressing his anguish over the intense pleasure he experienced in hearing Milanese psalmody.[24] This is not the place to attempt an explanation of the phenomenon's origin,[25] but its existence and its chronological placement should be noted as background to what follows.

To turn finally to late fourth- and early fifth-century references to psalms in the pre-eucharistic service, the first point one observes about them is that they appear most often in homilies or sermons on the psalms. Collections of such homilies covering the entire Psalter or large portions of it have been preserved from the writings of central patristic figures like Basil,[26] John Chrysostom,[27] Jerome (d. 420)[28] and Augustine.[29] An individual homily takes as its text a single psalm, or more often a single verse of the psalm, and creates an edifying commentary on it in the allegorical manner in vogue at the time. There are remarks scattered throughout the homilies that tell us much about their original circumstances. They tell us that many of them were preached at the Sunday morning Eucharist and that they took as their text the refrain verse of the psalm which the congregation had sung earlier in the service in response to the cantor or reader's chanting of the psalm. One best constructs this picture from a composite of the literally dozens of such extant remarks, but several of the essential elements are present in a single passage of John Chrysostom:

> The portion of the psalm which the people are accustomed to sing in response [ὑποψάλλειν] is this: 'This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice in it and be glad' (Ps 117.24). It arouses many, and the people are especially accustomed to respond with it at that spiritual assembly and heavenly banquet. We however, if you will, shall pursue the entire psalm

[23] Basil, Epistle CCVII, 3; Augustine, Epistle LV, 34–5 (CSEL 34, pp. 208–9) and Niceta of Remesiana, *De utilitate hymnorum* 2.

[24] *Confessiones* X, XXXIII, 49–50 (CCL 27, pp. 181–2).

[25] It is my view that it can be traced to the psalmody of desert monasticism, but to demonstrate this would require an additional study.

[26] *Homiliae in psalmos* (*PG* XXXIX).

[27] *Homiliae in psalmos* (*PG* LV).

[28] *Tractatus siue homiliae in psalmos* (CCL 88).

[29] *Ennarationes in psalmos* (CCL 38–40). For additional references and further discussion on the subject, see P. Jeffery, 'The Introduction of Psalmody into the Roman Mass by Pope Celestine I (422–432)', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 26 (1984), pp. 159–61.

from the beginning, not from the verse of the response, making our commentary from the very introduction.[30]

One observes that Psalm 117 was sung responsorially and that the congregational response was verse 24, 'This is the day which the Lord has made' (*Haec dies*, the Easter gradual); the liturgical occasion at which the psalm was sung was 'that spiritual assembly and heavenly banquet', that is, the Eucharist: and finally John in this particular case chose to base his homily on the entire psalm rather than just the refrain.

Jerome, in his *Tractatus siue homiliae in psalmos*, preached to his monastic community at Bethlehem in the early fifth century, makes it explicit that Sunday was the day on which they were heard: 'Last Sunday the sixth psalm was read and we due to illness were not able to interpret it; now however the seventh psalm is read.'[31] Incidentally the passage suggests that the psalms were performed at Bethlehem Sunday to Sunday in numerical order.[32] This was probably an exceptional arrangement and certainly one not employed at Augustine's Hippo; in his discourse on Psalm 138 he writes: 'We had prepared for ourselves a short psalm, which we had ordered to be sung by the reader; but as it seems, when the time came he was confused and read a different one.'[33]

A point to be observed in all these references is that only a single psalm was sung. This confirms the impression that the service in question was the Sunday Eucharist and not the early Sunday morning vigil where a great many psalms would have been sung. Further confirming the impression are passages which indicate that the Gospel had been read at the same service: 'For what we just now heard when the Gospel was being read', says Augustine in commenting upon the first verse of Psalm 29.[34] That these passages refer to the singing of only one psalm raises another question, one in a sense irrelevant to this study but too important to be ignored altogether. If only one psalm was sung at this service – presumably the forerunner of the gradual – what of the Alleluia psalm? Whether it existed at this time or not is a question of equal scope to that of the gradual's

[30] *In psalmum cxvii*, 1 (*PG* LV, col. 328).
[31] *Tractatus de psalmo* vii (CCL 78, p. 19).
[32] See also *Tractatus de psalmo xiv*.
[33] *In psalmum cxxxviii*, 1 (CCL 40, p. 1990).
[34] *In psalmum xxix*, II, 1 (CCL 38, p. 174) and Jerome, *Tractatus de psalmo* cxliii (CCL 78, p. 313).

origins; it can be addressed here only to the very limited extent that the evidence under discussion requires it. Certainly the evidence suggesting the singing of a single psalm in the pre-eucharistic service does indeed speak against the existence of the Alleluia psalm. This is true also of those passages which give Alleluia as the response to the psalm, for example, when Augustine mentions 'the psalm to which we have responded Alleluia with one voice and one heart'.[35] The best explanation for such occurrences is that Alleluia would have figured as the response to the gradual psalm when the term appeared in the superscribed title of the psalm, for instance, the psalms of the Hallel mentioned above. It was traditional that Alleluia be sung as the response to such psalms and one would expect this to have been the case at this early stage in the history of the gradual. For the Alleluia as such to come into existence two responsorial psalms would have had to be sung regularly, the second of which would have had the response Alleluia, whether it appeared in the title or not. This is precisely the pattern that prevails in that ancient Armenian lectionary which is thought to reflect the liturgy of fifth-century Jerusalem,[36] but there is no similar evidence from the West for centuries to come.[37]

To return to our subject, there seems no reason to deny that these many references to a responsorial psalm in the pre-eucharistic service of the late fourth century are our first witnesses to the existence of the gradual psalm.[38] A point that is not so obvious follows from the circumstance that the references appear in homilies on the psalms. The early Christian homily, like its Jewish predecessor, was not simply a sermon on whatever edifying topic the preacher might wish to address; it took as its starting point a scriptural text read previously at the service in question. This suggests that the psalm of the pre-eucharistic service was not looked

[35] *Sermo XXIXA, de uerso 1, psalmi cxvii*, 1 (CCL 41, p. 378); I am indebted to Peter Jeffery for this reference.

[36] A. Renoux, 'Un manuscrit du lectionnaire Arménien de Jérusalem', *Museon*, 74 (1961), pp. 361–85.

[37] For a magisterial study of the early Alleluia, see A. Martimort, 'Origine et signification de l'alleluia de la messe romaine', *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, ed. P. Granfield and J. Jungmann (Münster in Westphalia, 1970), II, pp. 811–34. For sources prior to A.D. 450 and commentary, see McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*.

[38] Sound as this supposition might be, Peter Jeffery has taken the matter a step further. In his response to the paper on which the present article is based, he cited several medieval graduals retaining the same texts as gradual psalms from the patristic period.

upon as something 'interspersed' between readings as the conventional view would have it, or more specifically as something subordinated to a reading in the sense of a lyric response to it, but rather that it was considered a reading in its own right.

This suggestion is corroborated by several direct contemporary statements to that effect. Augustine, for example, exclaims: 'We heard the Apostle, we heard the psalm, we heard the Gospel; all the divine readings [*diuinae lectiones*] sound together so that we place hope not in ourselves but in the Lord.'[39] Augustine calls the psalm a sacred reading in the same sense as the Gospel and Epistle (the 'Apostle' refers of course to Paul, the author of the epistles). John Chrysostom, to quote just one additional example, conveys the same substance in more poetic fashion:

> Just as there are various flowers in the meadows and, since all in a row are exceedingly lovely, each draws the eye of the beholder to look upon them, so too can one view the Holy Scriptures. For blessed David attracts our understanding to himself, so too the apostolic passage concerning Timothy which was read, and further the bold Isaiah philosophizing on human nature, and their Lord Jesus, speaking to the disciples and saying, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few' (Mt 9.37). Come then, if we may, let us concentrate upon this verse and explain its sense.[40]

Thus what is implied in the existence of liturgical homilies based upon psalm texts is made explicit in these passages. At the very moment in history when we finally have undeniable references to the gradual psalm – the later fourth century – contemporaries speak of it not as something subordinate to the readings but as a reading itself. This suggests a hypothesis – the central point of the present study; I shall express it briefly now, and then go on in an attempt to marshal further evidence in aid of it.

In earlier centuries the pre-eucharistic service centred on a group of scripture readings. Certainly a psalm would have been selected from time to time as one of these, but there was no separate event that one would call 'the psalm'. In the second half of the fourth century, however, in the period of great general enthusiasm for psalmody, it became the custom to include a psalm in every pre-

[39] *Sermo* CLXV, *de uerbis Apostoli, Eph.* III, 13–18, 1 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 902).
[40] *Homilia noua in Mattheum* ix, 37 (*PG* LXIII, col. 519). See also Augustine, *Sermo* CLXXVI, 1 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 950).

eucharistic service and thus the origin of the gradual psalm as a discrete liturgical item.

There are at least three points in addition to what has been said already that might contribute to the credibility of this hypothesis. The first involves evidence that the gradual psalm was looked upon as an innovation and that it stirred controversy. There are several late fourth-century references to a minority opposition to psalmody in general,[41] but just one to eucharistic psalmody in particular. It is Augustine's frequently quoted reference to Hilary, a Christian citizen of Carthage: 'Meanwhile a certain Hilary . . . attacked the custom which had begun then in Carthage . . . of singing [*dicerentur*] at the altar hymns from the Book of Psalms both before the oblation [*ante oblationem*] and while what had been offered was distributed to the people.'[42]

Few patristic passages on music have been subjected to more tortured exegesis, but its meaning seems simple enough in the present context. Hilary had objected to the innovation of psalmody at two places in the Eucharist: the second mentioned was during the distribution of Communion, and it so happens that we have our first unequivocal references to the singing of a Communion psalm from this very period;[43] the first mentioned was 'before the oblation', that is, before the Eucharist proper, within the pre-eucharistic service, where again we have our first uncontroversial references to the gradual psalm – and no other psalms – from the same period. Some see a reference to an offertory psalm in the psalm 'before the oblation', but this contradicts the obvious meaning of the language. If one takes the term 'oblation' in the restricted sense of the offertory portion of the Eucharist, the offertory psalm is eliminated on the grounds that it is sung *during* the offertory, not before it; while if one takes it in the broader and more likely sense of the entire Eucharist, the offertory is eliminated again as something taking place during the Eucharist, not before. Others believe the phrase points to the introit: this would suit the preferred meaning of 'before the oblation',

[41] See note 23 above.

[42] *Liber retractationem* II, 27 (CSEL 36, p. 144).

[43] See especially Pseudo Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* V, 20 (Sources Chrétiennes 126, pp. 168–70; the evidence points towards Cyril's successor, John of Jerusalem, as author of the *Mystagogical Catecheses*, thus dating them some time after John's consecration in 387; see this edition, pp. 18–40). See also *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, xiii, 16 (F. X. Funk, ed., *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* [Paderborn, 1905], I, p. 518).

but ignore the well-documented gradual psalm in favour of one for which there is not a shred of evidence from the period. It is true that some see a reference to the introit in the famous passage from the *Liber Pontificalis* that cites the psalmodic innovations of Pope Celestine I (d. 432): 'He decreed that the 150 psalms of David be sung before the sacrifice [*ante sacrificium*], which had not been done before; only the Epistle of Paul the Apostle and the Holy Gospel had been recited – and so were Masses celebrated.'[44] There are precisely the same difficulties with seeing a reference to the introit here as with the Augustinian passage: one must ignore the well-documented gradual psalm in favour of an otherwise unsubstantiated introit psalm. Actually the passage is a succinct statement of the central hypothesis of the present study. To paraphrase: before the time of Pope Celestine I only the Epistle and the Gospel were read 'before the sacrifice', that is, the Eucharist proper, but he added the regular singing of psalms. The passage nicely complements the Augustinian one in that it describes the establishment of the gradual psalm as an innovation of our period even if it does not mention the minor controversy surrounding its introduction.

The second point is a more subtle one: it involves a certain ambiguity of language in these early references to the gradual psalm. Many passages speak of the gradual psalm's being read while others say that it was sung.[45] There are passages that assign its performance to a lector and others to a singer.[46] It was emphasised above that the psalm was generally referred to as a reading, but there are a few passages from the period that clearly distinguish between psalmody and mere scriptural reading.[47] Perhaps this ambiguity can best be attributed to a time of transition, when the obsolete conception of psalm as reading was giving way to the new reality of psalm as musical event. The related distinction, moreover, between that which is sung melodiously and that which is more simply recited was now being made in the literature for the first time, nowhere more

[44] *Liber Pontificalis* XLV, *Caelestinus* (L. Duchesne, ed., *Le Liber Pontificalis*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1886–92], I, p. 89).

[45] For a full discussion of the passage, including the anachronistic phrase 'antephanatim ex omnibus', see Jeffery, 'The Introduction of Psalmody'.

[45] See, for example, note 32 for a passage which uses 'read' and 'sing' interchangeably.

[46] To a lector: see, for example, the passage cited in note 32; to a singer: see, for example, John Chrysostom, *In I Corinthios*, *Homilia* XXXVI, 6 (*PG* LXI, col. 315).

[47] For example, Ambrose, *In psalmum i*, 9 and Augustine, Epistle XXIX, 10 (CSEL 39, pp. 121–2).

vividly than where Augustine, after expressing his scruples over taking pleasure in the melodious psalmody of Milan, declares: 'And safer it seems to me what I remember was often told me concerning Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who required the reader of the psalm to perform it with so little inflection [*flexu*] of voice that it was closer to speaking [*pronunciati*] than to singing [*canenti*].'[48] One might note also, for what it is worth, the chronological distinction: Augustine compares the melodious psalmody of the late fourth century with the drier type of several years earlier; Athanasius had died in 373 while Augustine was baptised at Milan in 387.

The third and final point does not bring new evidence to bear on the hypothesis but merely suggests an analogy that lends a degree of additional plausibility to it. We recall that in its first three centuries the Church boasted no ecclesiastical architecture in the proper sense. Its liturgical gatherings took place in undistinguished domestic settings, whereas the emancipated church of the fourth century enjoyed an architectural revolution with the building of magnificent stone basilicas in every city and town. It can be said that there was no ecclesiastical architecture as such during the first centuries of the Christian era,[49] and in view of this it seems less inappropriate to think of formal ecclesiastical music as a creation of the fourth century.

In closing I shall attempt to bring all the elements so far introduced into a fuller expression of the fourth-century hypothesis. In the earlier centuries the pre-eucharistic service centred on the reading of Scripture. It concluded with a homily based on one of the readings and a period of formal prayer. Without doubt psalms would have figured occasionally, functioning simply as Old Testament readings. Perhaps their inherent lyrical characteristics would have resulted in a somewhat more musical recitation than that employed for the other readings, but this potential was limited by the absence of a specialised cantor. In any case there was no event singled out in the service as 'the psalm' or 'psalmody'. The change came about during the second half of the fourth century. Christian song had been fostered at common meals in earlier centuries but now an unprecedented wave of enthusiasm for psalmody swept from east to west,

[48] *Confessiones* x, xxxiii, 50 (CCL 27, p. 182).

[49] See R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, The Pelican History of Art (2nd edn, Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 2–3.

and as numerous psalms were sung in the great basilicas at early morning vigils, according to the eminently practical and attractive responsorial method, it became the custom to include a responsorially sung psalm among the readings within every pre-eucharistic service. Thus singled out because of its properties as a psalm it was no longer merely another reading; it was a discrete musical event requiring the vocal skills of a clerical cantor and stirring opposition among a conservative minority. It was in a word, the gradual, although that term of course – derived from its performance on the steps of the ambo – could not be applied until the advent of the ambo in the West some centuries later.[50] Paradoxically, having achieved its musical independence from the readings, it rapidly assumed its medieval status of thematic subordination to them. Within a generation of the late fourth- and early fifth-century events described here, 'Musaeus, a priest of the church of Marseilles . . . selected . . . readings from the Holy Writings appropriate to the feast days of the entire year and responsorial psalms [*responsoria psalmorum capitula*] appropriate to the season and to the readings.'[51]

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[50] The first Western appearance of the ambo is in sixth-century North African churches built after the Byzantine re-conquest: see J. B. Ward Perkins and R. G. Goodchild, 'The Christian Antiquities of Tripolitania', *Archaeologia*, 95 (1953), p. 66.

[51] Gennadius, *De uiris illustribus* 79 (*PL* LVIII, cols. 1103–4).