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Chapter 32

The Ritualization of Time in Late Antique Christianity

Juliette J. Day

32.1 Introduction

The historical development of the Christian use of time, in relation to daily and weekly prayer, and to the origin and development of festivals and fasts has been very well explored in recent times. Robert Taft's very detailed *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today* (1986) charted the development of the structure, frequency and contents of daily prayer from the New Testament to the modern period, with an emphasis upon the origins of the patterns which become normative in later centuries (see Phillips, chapter 33). For the annual cycle of festivals, the liturgical year or calendar, Thomas Talley's *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (1991) has been the standard treatment, until recently joined by an updated survey of the historical developments by Bradshaw and Johnson (2011). Additionally there are studies of individual festivals which draw upon a range of methodological approaches: among these Susan Roll's *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (1995) stands out. None of these, however, draws upon theories derived from Ritual Studies, indeed that was not their intention.

From the discipline of Ritual Studies, the rituals and rites which mark out daily, annual and other cycles have received attention, but there has been little which looks at the phenomenon and function of time in ritual activities. So, for example, it is not a topic in Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (2014), and although Catherine Bell identified 'Calendrical Rites' as one of her ritual categories she

provided no theoretical framework by which we could investigate the early Christian evidence (1997: 102–8). A rare perspective is offered by Roy Rappaport (1992) who sees the disruption of sequential time by ritualized events and periods as a fundamental ‘entailment’ of ritual; that is, it is an essential component of the way in which ritual operates. The symbolic value attached to moments and periods has been noted by sociologists, theologians and liturgical scholars in which, according to the early Christian evidence and the origin of ritual commemorations, the ritual use of the biblical narrative is a key interpretative feature. Sociologists have commented on the strategies for defining and marking time as elements of group identity formation and their insights offer useful observations which enable us to challenge the dominance of theological justifications for early Christian practice which are so prominent in sermons, for example, and to place it more concretely in its social, political, and ecclesial contexts.

Human apprehension of time is not stable and fixed, but determined through perceptual and conceptual frameworks (see Bradley 1991). ‘Natural time’ may appear external and objective in that it is based upon human perception of how the world/universe functions—the rising and setting of the sun, the waxing and waning of moon, and the seasons are used to mark and organise activity and rest. ‘Chronological time’ is abstracted from these observations of natural time, by which order and regularity is introduced to produce hours and minutes, and almost imperceptible seconds, to give names/numbers to days, months and years. Its abstract nature is masked in contemporary experience by the normative and regulatory function of watches and timetables. But the sense of time is subjectively experienced and perceived: from birth to death; in the blink of an eye or the beat of the heart; by sleep and wakefulness; by the intentional manipulation of time to make a pleasurable experience ‘last forever’, or the sense that an unpleasant one drags on (see Flaherty 2011). ‘Ritual time’ is not divorced from these notions of time but, because of its connection with history and myth, is considered to operate quite distinctly. Ritual implies repetition, of the ritual event itself, as well as of the actions and texts which constitute it. The ritual event may be conceived as outside the present time as it recalls and re-presents past events, prefigures future ones, or enters eternal time.

Ritual time can then disrupt these other times by offering alternative markers of change, or can appropriate or transform them through the application of the dominant myth.

One problem for early Christian commentators, and enduring until modernity, was the coming together of a notion of God as Timeless Absolute inherited from the Greek philosophers and the biblical narrative of a God who acts in time, and even agrees to operate in time (Lucas 2002). Augustine considered the problem of divine and human time in *Confessions* XI, presenting the observable and intuitive human understanding of time, measured in years, in the movement of sun and moon, and in the time taken to utter sentences, as a theological problem concerning eternity:

Your (God's) years do not come and go. Our years pass and new ones arrive only so that all may come in turn, but your years stand all at once, because they are stable: there is no pushing out of vanishing years by those that are coming on, because with you none are transient. In our case, our years will be complete only when there are none left. Your years are a single day, and this day of yours is not a daily recurrence, but a simple 'Today', because your Today does not give way to tomorrow, nor follow yesterday. Your Today is eternity, and therefore your Son, to whom you said, Today have I begotten you, is coeternal with you. You have made all eras of time and you are before all time, and there was never a 'time' when time did not exist. (*Conf.* XI.14, 16; Rotelle 1997: 295)

Although J. R. Lucas (2002) has critiqued the way in which Christian theologians have built upon this Platonic and theological model to posit an unchanging and timeless God, we need to acknowledge that the ritual practices which mark time and the theological, symbolic interpretation of time that developed in early Christianity were based upon such conceptions.

In the ritual event, time collapses as the present and historical past combine in the ritual event and as they signify union with God; while the ritual event takes place, it is 'Today'. This was a key feature of the mystagogical and typological instruction on baptism, such as that which explained the immersion rituals experienced at Easter to the neophytes in Jerusalem around the turn of the fifth

century:

You were asked, one by one, whether you believed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; you made that saving confession, and then you dipped thrice under the water and thrice rose up again, therein mystically signifying Christ's three days' burial. For as our Savior passed three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth, so you by your first rising out of the water represented Christ's first day in the earth, and by your descent the night. . . .

The strange, the extraordinary, thing is that we did not really die, nor were really buried or really crucified; nor did we really rise again: this was figurative and symbolic; yet our salvation was real. Christ's crucifixion was real, His burial was real, and His resurrection was real; and all these He has freely made ours, that by sharing His sufferings in a symbolic enactment we may really and truly gain salvation. (*Myst. Cat.* 2: 4–5; FOTC 64: 164–5)

The collapse of time denotes sacramental efficacy.

Although the effect of ritual participation may be to place the participant outside time, ritual very much functions within chronological and natural time and within history; ritual requires these other time concepts in order to assert the distinctiveness of the time within which sacred ritual takes place. Eliade distinguished between sacred and profane time: the former interrupts the ceaseless flow of time as normally experienced and, through festivals, places the participants in a primordial or mythical time which is considered sacred. Susan Roll has summarized, 'Sacred time in its own essence stands above the relatively monotonous sequential time of everyday activity. . . to represent a perpetual reference point to give orientation and meaning to the ephemeral flow, the appearance and disappearance, of contingent realities couched in profane time.' (Roll 1995: 19; Eliade 1959: 68–70) The religious mind perceives this transcendent reality to be the 'reference point and guarantor for the stability of life in time', and its status is further enhanced by being 'discovered, not invented, by humans.' (Roll 1995: 19)

Investigating time and ritual in early Christianity can involve multiple perspectives. We can approach the topic in relation to the role of time in ritual—how, as we have just seen, the past, present and future, or eternity, are understood to be present in a single ritual act. Here we would investigate the symbolic and theological interpretation of the ritual/rite rather than the rite itself; we would be concerned with notions of ‘sacred’ and symbolic time. Alternatively, one could investigate the way in which the passing of chronological time is marked by certain rituals, this is closer to what Bell (1997) called ‘Calendrical Rites’, such as those which mark the changing of the seasons and which occur periodically, or the regular commemorations of a community’s history or of significant ancestors. Yet another approach would be to study selected rites among the Calendrical rites and to relate them to the development of annual cycles of events and commemorative periods; this would be the principal approach in historical Liturgical Studies. And, if we move away from the rituals themselves we might investigate how the ritualization of time functions within and between communities following, especially, insights from sociologists. In what follows we shall explore these themes as a way of showing how some insights from Ritual Studies may provide interesting ways of reading the evidence concerning the early development of the Christian calendar.

32.2 Ritual Time: Periods and Intervals

As Augustine (*Conf.* XI.16–17) noticed, even if we can mark out periods of time with regularity, our sensation of time passing can be very different: time ‘drags’ or ‘flies by’. Roy Rappaport (1992) suggested a model by which we could understand how ritual distinguishes the passage of time by clearly delineating the ritual event from that which was before and that which follows; these he calls ‘phases’ and the time in which they unfold as ‘periods’. The rituals which comprise each phase ‘sever seamless durations into distinct periods and may also invest those periods with significance’ (1992: 11). In his nomenclature and interpretation, these ‘periods’ are made distinct by ‘intervals’

which belong to neither one period or to the next; the intervals may comprise just one ritual or a series of clearly distinguished ones. Periods and intervals mark the two ‘temporal conditions’: mundane or ordinary time in periods, and ‘extraordinary or sacred time in the intervals (1992: 12). In liturgical calendars the recurrence of rituals indicates a circularity, and an alternation of periods and intervals, of mundane and sacred time (1992: 15). The interruption of mundane time with rituals attempts to bring the sacred into the world, rather than escape from it, and notice must also be taken of the frequency with which rituals recur—high frequency embeds more forcibly what is encoded by the ritual than low frequency (1992: 18). A final observation from Rappaport which will be useful in our investigation of the liturgical calendar is that the intervals should be ‘Long enough to experience *being in them*’ (1992: 19, my italics).

The early Christian liturgical calendar does not mark the changing seasons (in contrast to the contemporary Western, northern hemisphere churches where the symbolic language attached to Christmas requires Winter, and that of Easter Spring) but imposes its own rather haphazard pattern upon the year. So, although contemporary scholars might interpret the calendar in terms of a narrative of divine-human relations revealed in scripture, the narrative is not straightforwardly behind the framework. Bradshaw and Johnson have rightly remarked:

Christians in antiquity did not view the various festivals, fasts and seasons that they experienced through each year as forming a unity, a single entity, and indeed those events themselves did not emerge in any planned or co-ordinated fashion but instead as a number of unrelated cycles, with the result that they tend to overlap or conflict with each other. (Bradshaw and Johnson 2011: xiii).

By the end of the fourth century, evidence from the major episcopal sees tells of an apparently co-ordinated and coherent ordering of the year into separate commemorations of biblical events or martyrs, to which are attached preparatory and/or celebratory days and weeks depending on the

importance of the commemoration. The principal ritual focus of the year is the annual feast of Easter celebrating Christ's passion and resurrection. Originally a feast occurring on a single day which was to be distinguished from other days, even from other Sundays, the constituent events each acquired their own commemoration spread over three days, the Triduum, and a succeeding eight days (an octave) of focussed celebration. The Triduum contains separate rituals for Christ's death on the Friday, and resurrection on the Sunday; in later liturgical practice this period was conceived to be one liturgical event so that even though the ritual events were separated in time, they were not distinguished by ritual introductions and conclusions. These preceding and succeeding periods became longer and more precisely defined. Before Easter, there developed a three-week and then 40-day preparation for baptism and of fasting (see Johnson 1990), which was intensely focussed during the last week, Holy or Great Week. After Easter, festal time was extended for 40 days to incorporate the individual feasts of the Ascension and then Pentecost. Bradshaw noted that eventually the feast of Easter would dominate a quarter of the liturgical year. (Bradshaw 1999: 2). This whole cycle was clearly distinguished from the rest of the year, even after the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle gave the feast of the Incarnation a similar structure of extended preparation and celebration.

Rappaport's observation that an interval should be long enough for participants to experience being in it seems most useful here—the multiplicity of rituals around Easter and the extension of the preparation enables the abrupt change of tone at Easter to be more highly remarked and the extended celebratory period following, during which fasting was forbidden as well as kneeling in prayer, is certainly long enough. This raises an interesting question whether in seeking to highlight the feast by extending it, the experience of the feast itself diminishes.

The cult of martyrs (see Eastman Chapter 40 in this volume) involved commemorations of local heroes occurring annually on the date of their death. These dates were preserved locally but the commemorations could spread internationally through hagiographies and martyrologies. Because of the ban upon the dissemination of body parts, such commemorations would be very particular to the

local church and it is not until Jerusalem acquires a disproportionate influence in liturgical development from the end of the fourth century that martyrs become internationalised. This we see most effectively with the dissemination of the relics of St Stephen after their discovery in Jerusalem; the so-called ‘Trier Ivory’ which depicts the ‘adventus’ of St Stephen’s the relics into Constantinople (see Holum and Viken 1979) and Augustine’s account of miracles worked by the martyr in North Africa (*Civ.* 22.8). These intervals/events are to be contrasted with the development of the Christological cycles, focussed upon Easter as a common celebration of all Christians regardless of the date upon which it was actually celebrated (see 32.4).

Durkheim concentrated on the social function of rituals, as that which governs human behaviour in the face of the sacred, and thus the periodic gatherings enabled the participants to experience what he called ‘a collective effervescence’, a heightened emotional state through which they were able to identify with the gods (1965: 52–3). Periods of fasting, penance and catechetical preparation for baptism, and the extensive Holy Week rites drive the congregation towards the celebration of the resurrection, and facilitate a more intense experience of celebration after the privations of the previous weeks. The content of preaching foreshadows the celebration. Thus Pope Leo ‘the Great’ reminds his congregation of the theme of his previous sermon, on the death of Christ, as he preaches on the resurrection:

In my last sermon dearly-beloved, not inappropriately, as I think, we explained to you our participation in the cross of Christ, whereby the life of believers contains in itself the mystery of Easter, and thus what is honoured at the feast is celebrated by our practice. And how useful this is you yourselves have proved, and by your devotion have learned, how greatly benefited souls and bodies are by longer fasts, more frequent prayers, and more liberal alms. . . . Since, therefore, by our forty days’ observance we have wished to bring about this effect, that we should feel something of the Cross at the time of the Lord’s Passion, we must strive to be found partakers also of Christ’s Resurrection, and ‘pass from death unto life (1 John 3:14),’ while we are in this body. (*Sermo* 71.1; NPNF 2.12: 182)

32.3 Calendrical Rites

The ever more complex annual cycle masked the distinctive dynamic which shaped the separate units within the year and no more so than when complete calendars are produced which name festivals on particular days and assign to them specific biblical texts. The first and most complete of these from the third to fifth century is the so-called Armenian Lectionary (*AL*. See Renoux 1969–71) which lists the feasts for the city of Jerusalem in the early decades of the fifth century. The three manuscripts of the lectionary indicate some development since the decades when Egeria recorded the Jerusalem festal cycle but the broad outline of the calendar is consistent. *AL* begins with the feast of Epiphany on 6 January, with its preceding vigil and followed by an octave; then comes a mixture of commemorations of biblical and ecclesial saints and martyrs until the Lenten and Easter cycle appears in its approximate position in the calendar. After which, the individual commemorations in May resume the calendar, but this is again interrupted by Ascension and Pentecost placed in their approximate position. The lectionary concludes on 29 December, and we note that on 25 December Jerusalem and Armenia keep the feast of James and David, although the lectionary does note that elsewhere the Birth of Christ is kept on that day. Feasts are provided with a psalm and antiphon, some with an Old Testament reading, most with one from the ‘Apostles’ (Acts or the epistles), and occasionally a non-biblical reading, another psalm to accompany the Gospel reading and the Gospel reading itself, normally from Matthew. Egeria frequently noted that a distinctive feature of the Jerusalem liturgy was that the readings were always appropriate to the time and the place. Thus they were chosen with care to explain or justify the feast, but they also control the range of possible interpretations of it.

The list reveals a number of interesting features. First, the hierarchy of major feasts is determined by the presence of a preparatory and commemorative period surrounding the feast itself. The space devoted to the cycle from the beginning of Lent, through Holy Week, Easter and its octave occupies

over half of the contents. Only two other feasts have octaves attached (eight-days of celebration after the feast)—Epiphany and the feast of the Dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The former is quite understandable as a Christological feast universally commemorated, but the latter is peculiar to Jerusalem. The Dedication (*Encaenia*) was the annual commemoration of the dedication of the church and thus of Constantine's building programme in Palestine. The Lectionary informs us that at this feast the relics of the True Cross were displayed and venerated, a ritual which commemorated Helena's discovery of the Cross and not the Crucifixion. There are three other imperial commemorations in *AL*: the death of Theodosius on 19 January, of Constantine on 22 May, and of the apparition of the Cross in the sky on 7 May, about which Bishop Cyril wrote to Constantius upon his accession as a sign of divine favour. These feasts demonstrate the local church's assertion by ritual of the political importance of Jerusalem both within the empire and within the church (see Day 2014).

Secondly, we notice that, hand in hand with the Christianization of the Palestinian countryside through the construction of shrines, monasteries and churches at the locations of biblical events, the ritual calendar of Jerusalem also laid claim to numerous 'Old Testament' saints: the prophets Jeremiah, Zacharias/Zechariah, Elisha, Isaiah; but also, rather unexpectedly, the 'Ark of the Covenant', and the Maccabees. Thirdly, we notice that Jerusalem boasts no martyrs of her own. In his *Martyrs of Palestine*, Eusebius records none from the city during the persecutions; however, the church promoted St Stephen internationally as 'proto-martyr' through the dissemination of relics and Stephen's martyrdom became the focus of imported commemorations such as the 'Forty Martyrs' who originate from Sebaste in Asia Minor (celebrated on 9 March).

As the list of commemorations expands in the fourth and fifth centuries, bishops were required to assert the validity of new feasts through appeal to their historicity and theology, and to indicate their place in the hierarchy of festivals. Thus in Antioch, John Chrysostom urges recognition of the new feast of the Nativity in a sermon preached in honour of sermon of St Philogonios:

. . . a feast is approaching which is the most solemn and awe-inspiring of all feasts. If one were to call it the metropolis of all feasts, one wouldn't be wrong. What is it? The birth of Christ according to the flesh. In this feast, namely Epiphany, holy Easter, Ascension and Pentecost have their beginning and their purpose. For if Christ hadn't been born according to the flesh, he wouldn't have been baptised, which is Epiphany. He wouldn't have been crucified, which is Easter. He wouldn't have sent the Spirit, which is Pentecost. So from this event, as from some spring, different rivers flow—these feasts of ours are born. (*Philog.*; Mayer and Allen 2002: 191).

And in Milan, Ambrose is required to explain precisely the historical and miraculous discovery of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius who would jointly become an important focus for Milanese devotion as well as bolster his own political and ecclesial power. In his letter to his sister Marcella, he indicates opposition which suggests some had doubts about their authenticity:

And they who usually do so have a grudge against this solemnity of yours; and since because of their envious disposition they cannot endure this solemnity, they hate the cause of it, and go so far in their madness as to deny the merits of the martyrs, whose deeds even the evil spirits confess. . . . And the Arians say: 'These are not martyrs, and they cannot torment the devil, nor deliver any one, . . . ' (Ambrose, *Ep.* 22.16; NPNF II.10: 439)

32.4 Ritualized Time and Community Boundaries

In certain respects, the ritual calendar functions in a similar way to other forms of ritual participation, through a symbolic system it asserts internal group identity and segregation from others, and it regulates social life. In the period under consideration in this part of the volume, the third to fifth centuries, we can see Christianity increasingly asserting itself in public life to the point where its feasts and festivals dominate the life of the empire. This simplistic narrative of social dominance should not obscure points of conflict and of assimilation, but the development of the

ritual calendar, the liturgical year, was in some instances the result of explicit separation from Judaism. Thus, the choice of Sunday as a Christian holy day is in distinction to the Sabbath/Saturday, or the choice of Wednesday and Friday as regular Christian fasting days in opposition to the Jewish weekly fasts of Monday and Thursday (see *Did.* 8:1), but it is particularly with the feast of Easter that these issues come sharply into focus.

Easter emerges as the primary universal festival for Christians and, as we have seen, is the focus around which the whole year was ordered, but it was in numerous conflicts about the date on which the feast was to be celebrated (rather than how it was to be celebrated) which indicate clearly its function as a boundary marker. At the end of the second century the newly appointed bishop of Rome, Victor, sought to enhance his fragile situation by insisting that Easter was kept on a Sunday and not on the same day as the Jewish Passover, 14 Nisan; the custom of celebrating Easter on the that day was the traditional practice of those from Asia Minor. This may well have begun as an attempt to bring unity among the multi-cultural Christian groups in Rome, but Victor's insistence that other bishops hold synods to condemn the practice escalated the controversy. Victor's strategy was not successful because of a reluctance to excommunicate Christians who were adhering to what they asserted was an apostolic tradition, although they were henceforth to receive a distinctive name—'Quartodeciman'. Letters from this second century controversy were preserved by Irenaeus of Lyon and then quoted in full without apparent condemnation of either party by Eusebius of Caesarea in the decades before Nicaea. (See *Hist. eccl.* 3:23–24)

Nevertheless, concerns about the connection between the Passover and Easter extended into subsequent centuries; even though Christians and Jews were separate religious communities, calculating the date of Easter relied upon the Jewish calendar and this provided the impetus for an alternative method of calculation. In third century Alexandria, the church moved from the lunar calendar to determining the date of Easter in relation to the vernal equinox, thus it was to fall on the Sunday after the full moon after the 14 Nisan. One of Constantine's key aims for the Council of Nicaea, according to Eusebius, was to get agreement on the date of Easter; in his letter to the

churches after the Council he makes it clear that distinctiveness from Jewish practice and the unity of Christians are the principal issues. (See *Vit. Const.* 3:18)

In the first place it was decreed unworthy to observe that most sacred festival in accordance with the practice of the Jews . . . What could these people calculate correctly, when after the murder of the Lord, after that parricide, they have taken leave of their senses, and are moved not by rationale principle, but by uncontrolled impulse . . .

It is furthermore easy to see that in such an important matter, and for such a religious feast, it is wrong that there should be a discrepancy. . . . how dreadful and unseemly it is, that on the same day some should be attending to their fasts while others are holding drinking parties . . . (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3:18; Cameron and Hall 1999: 128–9)

The ‘unanimous decision’ of the majority at Nicaea condemned the Quartodecimans as heretics; ironically their traditional ‘apostolic’ Christian practice was now considered entirely Jewish in origin.

Eviatar Zerubavel (1982) has noted that the debate over the date of Easter was phrased in an entirely anti-Jewish framework and the aim was ‘to totally dissociate the calendar’. The adoption of the Alexandrian dating system ensured that the two feasts could never coincide, and the complicated Christian solution—a feast which changes date every year according to a solar calendar—was, he says, ‘most suggestive of the intimate link between calendars and group identity’ (Zerubavel 1982: 288). Clearly this is one issue in the emergence of a distinctive Christian festival but it does not obviously explain every aspect of it.

32.5 Ritualized Time and Symbolism

In early Christian ritualization of time we can see how the narrative of salvation, particularly in relation to Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection, became a template for the year but also

provided an aetiology for the day and the week. One notes that this narrative of salvation is expressed in the gospels, and not in the Hebrew Scriptures or Acts.

On the one hand, as Dario Zadra points out, the narrative provides the thematic continuity so that the community move through the narrative in 'real time' which is also symbolic or ritual time; the narrative is ordered chronologically (Zadra 2005: 8918). In places, the ritual actions of the participants model those of Christ, these are not exact matches but are sufficient for the participants to believe they are sharing in the foundational event. Bell noted that ' . . . Mircea Eliade drew attention to how the ritual reenactment of founding events is able to generate a meaningful, mythic, and cyclical sense of time, a temporal sense in which it is *as if the original events are happening all over again* (my italics). He thought this reenactment of sacred events released something of their original transformative power'. She remarks how calendrical rituals shift between the historical and cosmic dimension and 'these calendrical systems exist only insofar as a rite evokes other rites to form a temporal series that molds time into a cycle of holy events and affords people the experience of some version of original events.' (Bell 1997: 108)

This is particularly evident in the elaboration of the Holy Week ceremonies in Jerusalem by the end of the fourth century as described by Egeria. The whole week is modelled upon the events leading to the crucifixion and resurrection and the rituals are played out in the physical context of the city and its environs. Jerusalem was not the only city in which there were 'stational liturgies': John Baldovin's important study also describes those in Rome and Constantinople. In *The Urban Character of Christian Worship*, John Baldovin aimed to show the essential commonality between the function and practice of stational liturgy in these three cities as they demonstrate the Christianization of late antique cities (see Latham, chapter 40). The differences between these cities are primarily to do with topography as worship develops 'in the dialectic between Christian faith and a particular social and cultural milieu' (Baldovin 1987: 234). But as his focus is on the impact of Christian ritual upon cities, he does not attend to the distinctive symbolic power of the liturgies in each city. Uniquely in Jerusalem, it was possible to achieve greater correlation by celebrating the

ritual event in the very place where it supposedly took place, enabling a more direct apprehension of the foundational historical event and the cosmic and salvific significance.

The commemorations begin on the Saturday before Palm Sunday when the community commemorates the raising of Lazarus; here the liturgy correlates event, place and time. The bishop, clergy and people assemble at Bethany because, Egeria says ‘They do it on this day because the Gospel describes what took place in Bethany “six days before the Passover”, and it is six days from this Saturday to the Thursday night on which the Lord was arrested after the Supper’ (*It. Eg.* 29.1; Wilkinson 1999: 151) Before arriving at the Lazarium in Bethany, the Jerusalem congregation were met by the Bethany congregation outside the town at ‘the spot where Lazarus’ sister Mary met the Lord’—thus there is an attempt to relate the narrative and the ritual actions quite closely. However, the participants are not simply reconstructing the biblical events because in the Lazarium the gospel reading continues with the ‘announcement of Easter’ (Pascha) and afterwards the participants return to the Anastasis (the place of the resurrection) for Lucinarium; the focus, therefore, remains continually on Christ’s resurrection. So, although in the Jerusalem Holy Week ceremonies there is a desire to locate ritual events in the time and place of the gospel events, the congregation are in no doubt that these events only make sense in light of the resurrection. Throughout her account Egeria comments on the verisimilitude of the readings, the rituals and the place while also noting that these ‘stational liturgies’ end at the Anastasis. As Eliade, we can see that the ‘dominant myth’ does indeed dominate, and as Bell remarked, each individual calendrical rite derives its significance from its connections to others.

On Palm Sunday, the congregation meet on the Mount of Olives and after a reading about Christ’s entry into Jerusalem,

the bishop and all the people rise from their places and start off on foot down from the summit . . . All the people go before him with psalms and antiphons, all the time repeating ‘Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord’. . . . Everyone is carrying branches,

either palm or olive, and they accompany the bishop in the very way the people did when once they went down the hill with the Lord. They go on foot all the way down the Mount to the city and all through the city to the Anastasis . . . (*It. Eg.* 31.2–4; Wilkinson 1999: 152)

As the week progresses, they hear Christ's teaching read from the gospels 'in the very place where he taught', identified as a cave below the summit of the Mount of Olives (the Eleona). The people gathered to listen to the gospels and homilies, as Christ gathered with his disciples. This emphasis on his teaching overrides some gospel events which later become significant—on Holy Thursday, for example, there is no foot-washing and although a eucharist takes place 'Behind the Cross' on this day only, Egeria does not explicitly connect it to the Last Supper. In later years, it is Sion which is identified as the Upper Room, the place of the Last Supper, but Egeria's congregation only go there at Pentecost (see Day 2014). This confirms that the emphasis here is not on reconstructing the events through rituals, but by there being a minimal but sufficient correlation between the original event and the ritual event to create a sense that the participants experience the former.

In the literature on stational liturgies, the focus of historians has naturally been upon reconstructing the routes, texts and ritual performance as well as the impact upon the urban environment (see Baldovin 1987; and Latham **Chapter 40** in this volume). What has been lost is the way in which the embodied participation in the narrative of salvation impacts upon the participants of these liturgies, even though this has been studied for early Christian pilgrimage. In relation to this study of time, movement through space creates 'time between' places such that 'time in' the narrative can be experienced. Unlike pilgrimage though, this time is hierarchically determined and communally affirmed.

32.6. Festivals and Ideology

The success of the Christian calendar as it developed was to anchor the ritual commemorations within an historical interpretation of the dominant narrative set out in scripture, primarily the

gospels, and in the history of the local church. This gave authority and relevance to the community's celebration. But, there are other forces at work in the controversy-laden church of late antiquity. We noted in passing how the hagiopolite feast of Encaenia commemorated the historical event of the dedication of the new church building, but its principal function was to demonstrate the close alliance between the emperor and the Jerusalem church during a period in which the latter claimed the same ecclesial authority as the five ancient patriarchates. The overt political ambitions are only partially hidden behind a demonstration of pious loyalty to the house of Constantine.

Anton Baumstark and Christine Morhmann introduced the concept of 'idea-feast' to account for feasts which were not historical commemorations, but were either instituted anew or were elaborations of existing feasts to explain and promote theological positions (see Roll 1995: 25). For Baumstark and Morhmann this explained how the feast of the Epiphany was elaborated to commemorate the visit of the magi, Jesus' baptism and the miracle at Cana. As Roll also notes, 'idea feasts' are more in evidence in the medieval period with the institution of the feasts of the Trinity and Corpus Christi in the West; however, she argues that the spread of Christmas from the fourth century should also be considered in the same light: a feast to reinforce the Nicene doctrine of the incarnation imposed from the 'top-down' (Roll 1995: 26–7 and 165–211). The first concrete evidence for the feast is in the Roman Chronograph of 354 and about thirty years later we find John Chrysostom unsuccessfully urging his congregation to acknowledge the feast. Two theories had been common concerning the 'invention' of Christmas: the first known as the History of Religions thesis posited that the date, 25 December, was chosen to supplant a traditional solstice celebration; the other, the Calculation hypothesis, argued that the date was calculated from the feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, nine months previously. Long considered a Roman invention, explained perhaps by the absence of a 6 January Epiphany feast, there are possible hints of it in North Africa earlier in the century, although the concrete evidence suggests it was not much earlier than 360–61 (for a full account of the various positions see Bradshaw and Johnson 2011: 122–30; Roll 1995: 87–97 and 127–47). Roll shows how the adoption of the feast was uneven throughout the East but that

where it was promoted, it was as part of overt pro-Nicene rhetoric in cities riven by doctrinal factions. Thus in 380–81, Gregory Nazianzen explicitly counters Arian and Apollinarian doctrines in his sermon for Christmas. Chrysostom in Antioch in 386 (or 388) in his sermon *In diem natalem* urges the feast upon his listeners and provides three proofs of its importance related to the swift adoption of the feast and recent convincing demonstrations of the chronology of Christ's birth; this should be seen, though, in light of the surrounding sermons in which he asserts that the incarnation is the basis of all other feasts without expressly targeting his theological opponents. In Jerusalem, however, Christmas was kept only among Western Christians; the local church maintained its tradition of a pilgrimage to Bethlehem on 6 January as part of the Epiphany celebrations which endured until the onset of Marian theology after the council of Ephesus (Roll 1995: 189–95).

The origin of Christmas does not present itself as a response to a ritual imperative; the church functioned perfectly well for three and a half centuries without the need to celebrate Christ's birth in an exclusive way. Although it attaches to itself a period of preparation and a continuation to absorb Epiphany, it does not affect the weight given to the Easter cycle; unlike the more ancient feasts of Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost, Christmas does not become a preferred feast for baptism. It remains a 'single-idea-feast' strongly rooted in history, without attracting the richer theological and salvific ideas of the others.

32.7 Some Final Reflections

Unlike other some ritual practices explored in this book, in which there is a distinction to be made between those able to participate fully and those excluded; the ritualization of time affects the unbaptized as much as the baptized. No restrictions can be placed upon private hours of prayer or outdoor communal celebrations; and indeed as Christianity takes on an increasingly public role in the late fourth and fifth centuries, even non-Christians would be subject to its organisation of time—be it imperial laws for the observance of Sunday or the ritual invasion of the city by

Christian festivals (see Latham, chapter 40).

In order to examine the effect of this ritualization of time, I have found it helpful to apply the insights of Douglas J. Davies in his 2011 book, *Emotion, Identity and Religion, Hope Reciprocity and Otherness*. Here, he does not so much examine the elements of individual rituals, as explore their effect and, in particular, the way in which ritual, emotion, memory and identity combine to generate meaningful events. Rituals promote the shared values of the group by transforming individual feelings into validated emotions, either through participation or instruction. They embed the values and narrative of the group, such that at moments of crisis, what he calls 'identity depletion', originating either ritually or socially, it is the ritual memory which is available to direct their responses and actions. The role of emotion in directing action and response is important as the emotions do not simply well up from some deep place in the human psyche but are 'expected',

What makes Egeria's account of the liturgical cycle in Jerusalem so interesting is not just that she orders the ritual events sequentially during the day, the week and the year and provides information about the liturgical celebrations, but also that in some cases she comments on the physical and emotional response to them. The account reveals her memories of the experience of ritual participation and we sense their impact. Thus, at Epiphany she describes with wonder the decorations in the basilica: the gold, gems and 'the hangings are entirely silk with gold stripes, the curtains the same, and everything they use for services at the festival is made of gold and jewels' (*It. Eg.* 25.7; Wilkinson 1999: 146). On the Wednesday of Holy Week, during the reading of the gospel concerning Jesus' betrayal by Judas Iscariot, 'The people groan and lament at this reading in a way that would make you weep to hear them' (*It. Eg.* 34; Wilkinson 1999: 153). And again at the reading of Jesus' arrest in the church at Gethsemane, 'By the time it has been read everyone is groaning and lamenting and weeping so loud that people even across in the city can probably hear it all' (*It. Eg.* 36.3; Wilkinson 1999: 154). Additionally the people are fatigued by long processions from the Mount of Olives or from the length of the vigils, such as that of the night procession with candles from the Mount to the Holy Sepulchre at Pentecost: 'It is quite a way from the gate to the Great

Church, the Martyrium, and they arrive there at about eight at night, going very slowly all the way so that the walk does not make the people tired' (*It. Eg.* 43.7; Wilkinson 1999: 160). These are striking inclusions given that Egeria gives little precise detail about memorable words and chants except to say repeatedly that they were appropriate to the time and the day; the actual content was presumably obvious to her and her intended readers. But, in these descriptions of the major festivals we note how the physical and emotional aspects of the ritual would become embedded in the memory of the participants, individually and collectively. From year to year, the repetition of the festal cycle reinforces not just the theological significance, but also ways of moving and being moved that become ritual components of each particular event.

Catherine Bell emphasises how the whole cycle influences human life and not just the individual feasts, and fasts within it; ritualizing time enables humans to consider themselves as time-bound, even as the events commemorated situate the participants outside present time—invariably to the past, but also orientated to a future. Chrysostom makes this very point:

And while these celebrations (on earth) are often finished at midday, the celebration in heaven isn't like that: it doesn't wait for periods of months, or cycles of years, or a number of days, but it takes place continually, and all the blessings it contains don't have an end, it knows no conclusion, it can't be out of date or lose its effectiveness—it's not subject to age or death. (*Philog.*; Mayer and Allen 2002: 188)

Suggested Reading

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