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PERFORMATIVE FEATURES IN THE DIDACHE'S EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

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Recent studies of the Didache's Eucharistic prayers have drawn attention to their clear compositional *structure*. But less attention has been paid to the performative, oral qualities of the prayers, suggested by these structural elements.¹ In this paper, I will first rehearse the structural elements in question, and then pursue THREE insights these structural elements suggest about how these prayers were *performed* in the community that used these prayers.

IDENTIFYING THE STRUCTURE

Didache 9-10 does not contain a single eucharistic prayer. Instead, the prayer strophes in chapter 9 are to be said *prior to* the meal, and those in ch. 10 *after* the meal [handout: Two-Fold Structure]. This rubrical clue is confirmed by the nature of the strophes themselves: as has frequently been observed, the strophes in chapter 9 largely parallel those in chapter 10.²

However, there are not simply TWO prayers here: there are at least THREE:

- 1) Cup-prayer (9.2)
- 2) Bread-prayer (9.3-4)
- 3) After-dinner-prayer (10.2-5)

This conclusion is required by a still more precise parallelism. That is, the *first* strophe in each of these sets is a highly formalized prayer of the *eucharisteo* type. Each contains the following ingredients [consult your handout]:

Euχaristouμεν σοι, πατερ _____,	We give thanks to you, Father _____,
υπερ _____	for _____,
ην εγνωρισαν ημιν	which you made known to us
δια του σου παιδου σου.	through Jesus your servant/child.
σοι η δοξα εις τον αιωνα.	To you be the glory for ever.

¹ Draper, "Ritual Process," 139: they "provide the template for oral performance"; and 153: the prayers were "flexible" in the sense that "the structure and framework ... would have been the same at each community celebration, but the specific content would have varied with the context". Draper points out that Audet also shared this conviction. Milavec (*Didache*, 365) also perceives that expansion of these prayers was customary. Neither of these excellent studies offers precise details for how this was accomplished.

² So, most recently, Niederwimmer (*Didache*, 139), Draper ("Ritual Process," 129-30), van de Sandt and Flusser (*Didache*, 298-301), and Milavec (*Didache*, 355-56).

This highly formalized structure, repeated verbatim three times, indicates that we are ultimately dealing with *three* Eucharistic prayers [one for the cup, one for the bread, and one for the meal / gathering as such].

Apart from these three leading strophes, additional strophes are attached to the bread-prayer and the after-dinner-prayer. These are demarcated by *verbally identical* “doxologies” (which I will return to below). Thus:

- 1) Cup-prayer (one strophe)
- 2) Bread-prayer (two)
- 3) After-dinner-prayer (three)

This observation, finally, yields the somewhat complex structural geometry of the diagram on your handout [bottom of page].

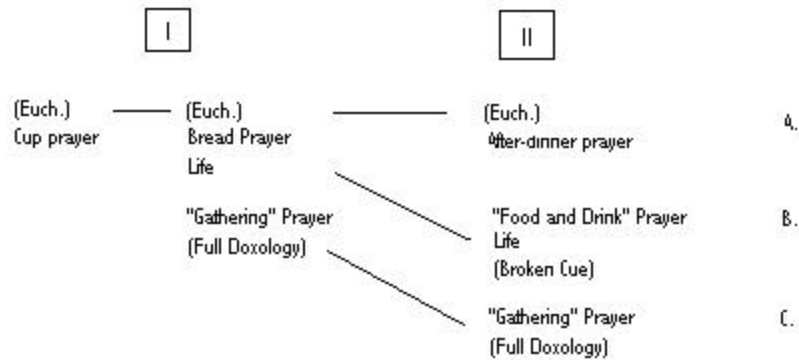


Fig. 1

Notice that, in this structure, there are three eucharistic-prayers proper, and also three much less rigidly governed prayer-units (strophes). These less formal units fall, in each case, *after* the formal *eucharisteo*-prayers: one looser petition before the meal, and two after it. The result is a series of links and connections that run in various directions. Seen from one angle, there are two sets of three prayers (Fig. 1, Roman numerals I and II). These two sets are divided, as we have seen, in the most natural way: by the meal itself. On the other hand, as we have seen, the formal qualities of each opening prayer lead one to see the cup and bread prayers as parallel to one another and to the opening after-dinner prayer (Fig. 1, letter A).

There is more to this structural analysis than meets the eye: such clues have much to tell us about how these prayers would have functioned in actual Eucharistic practice, for the communities that used them.

REPETITION AS PERFORMANCE CUE - FIRST

The Didache's eucharistic prayers would have been performed *orally*, without the aid of printed programs. This obvious fact carries with it a neglected ramification: in an oral matrix, IDENTIFIABLE CUES must be given to participants to signal the *beginning* and *ending* points of various phases of a ritual celebration. The same observation applies to prayers and other verbal communication within an oral setting: participants must be cued with recognizable formulas. These formulas are recognizable as formulas precisely because of their *exact repetition*.

The structural elements of the prayers in Didache 9-10 consist almost entirely of set phrases that are repeated at precise locations in the course of the ritual. These are helpfully seen as a series of *cues to participants* in the Eucharistic ritual. The most obvious cues are found in the three-fold, highly formal *eucharisteo*-prayers:

Euχaristoumen soi, pater _____,	We give thanks to you, Father _____,
upek _____	for _____,
hē egnōrisav hēiē	which you made known to us
dia_χsou tou_paidou sou.	through Jesus your servant/child.
soi h(dota eiθ tou_ aiθnav.	To you be the glory for ever.

This completely fixed sequence of clauses has the ability to signal both the beginning and the end of a Eucharistic prayer: the verb euχaristoumen is the first word. Participants immediately know “this is a thanksgiving prayer.” As the prayer unfolds, there are variables permitted, until one reaches the phrase, “which you made known to us through Jesus your servant.” At exactly this point in all three prayers, the concluding doxology occurs (to you be the glory for ever).

Martin Dibelius long ago suggested this concluding doxology was a “congregational response.” This idea has been adopted also by Kurt Niederwimmer, with good reason.³ The phrase “through Jesus your servant” is limited to precisely this location (before the doxology) throughout the Didache's Eucharistic prayers [with one exception, discussed below]. It is sufficiently *fixed* to perform the function of a *verbal cue* to the Eucharistic participants. Wherever this phrase occurs, it evokes *the same* response: “To you be the glory for ever.”⁴ Dibelius's suggestion makes the most sense of this *precise repetition and location*.

We have, then, a strong indication of *ritual dialogue*: the prayer leader three times begins a *eucharisteo*-prayer with identifiable cue words and fixed internal structure, and

³ Dibelius, “Mahl-Gebete,” 119, 121-22; Neiderwimmer, *Didache*, 145, 148, 149, etc.

⁴ Compare “The Lord be with you” in 4th-century liturgies—like modern ones—where this phrase recurs frequently and in each case the congregation knows exactly when and what to respond: “And with your spirit.”

concludes with a verbal cue, evoking a response from the other participants—i.e. the doxology.⁵ What, then, of the doxology elsewhere in Didache 9-10?

The concluding doxologies, like the strophes they conclude, fall into two sets of three:

soiḥ(doṭa eiṠ touṠ aiṠṠav.

To you be the glory for ever.

soiḥ(doṭa eiṠ touṠ aiṠṠav.

o#i sou=est in h(duhamiv kaiḥ(doṭa eiṠ touṠ aiṠṠav

Because yours is the power and the glory forever.

The third is clearly the fullest of the set of doxologies, and naturally is therefore climactic, as one would expect. [However, the third doxology varies slightly in the first case, probably due to textual corruption.]⁶ This fuller doxology falls after the Third (9.4) and Sixth (10.5) prayer strophes [consult the bottom of your handout]. These prayers are much less fixed/formulaic than the *eucharisteo* prayers. However, when you compare them, they exhibit a closely related phrase, falling toward the very end of the petition: an imperative of the verb “gather” (sunagw) + your assembly [or “it”] + from (apod) the corners/four winds + *into your kingdom* (exact verbal match). In 9.4, this phrase “into your kingdom” is followed *immediately* by the full doxology. In 10.5, a further clause appears, modifying the “kingdom.” This could be the result of textual corruption, but that is doubtful. Instead, one can infer that a group accustomed to praying such prayers together, are awaiting a reference to the “gathering ... *into the kingdom*,” to signal the end of the third prayer-unit in each series. To assist things, this fuller doxology begins with its own cue-word, if you will: o#i. It is plausible that the person praying could add a phrase modifying the term “kingdom” in this way, without the group missing their cue to enter, for they are listening not only for the phrase “into your kingdom,” but also the word “because” (o#i), at which point they will be able to join.⁷ Gathering into the kingdom from the ends of the earth, then, becomes a looser but still sufficiently formal component to allow for verbal give-and-take, i.e. ritual dialogue.

We have seen sufficient cues, therefore, for a kind of ritual dialogue in five of the six prayers. There remains only the fifth prayer [see handout], the least structured (by the nature of the animal), the prayer with the least parallels. This prayer falls between two stools [as you can see in the diagram at the bottom of the page]: first, its structural counterpart is the very formal eucharistic prayer for the bread of 9.3, which (because of that higher-order structural logic) does not parallel this prayer except in the single word “life” and in its doxology; second, the prayer of 10.3-4 as a whole has been cut loose

⁵ With Draper I view the “Amen” found in *Did.* 10 in the Coptic fragment as a later development (“Ritual Process,” 129, n. 10). If one adopts the Coptic reading, however, the congregational response is even clearer: “Amen” appears after each prayer unit (one would have to assume this was true of *Did.* 9 as well, as does Audet). In that case, the fixed doxology would easily function as the ritual cue for the “Amen.”

⁶ Compare the doxology in *Did.* 8.2, which follows the form I give here. The anomalous doxology of 9.4 does not really undermine my basic thesis here, though, even if it is adopted as it stands.

⁷ Compare the reciting of the prayer of confession in a modern, Anglican eucharistic service: “Most merciful God” is usually spoken solo by the priest before the congregation joins in.

from all recoverable restraints and might be free to roam in whatever direction, with whatever verbs and on whatever topics that were available in the vocabulary of the one praying. Indeed, there is no imperative verb in this prayer and no “petition” of any kind. [It is of that variety of prayer that “reports”.]

Here, then, my theory of verbal cues and ritual dialogue meets its strongest test. Nevertheless, *it would work perfectly*, if one were to remove the phrase that falls just before the doxology, for then we would have the familiar cue, “through Jesus your servant,” once more (exactly as in Strophe 2). Instead, however, and puzzlingly, the verb *eucharistoumen* is reintroduced and is followed by a cryptic phrase, “because/that you are able.” There may be some internal logic here: this gratitude is contrasted to the kind that thinks only of food and drink, i.e. the kind shared by all humanity. Nevertheless, it breaks the cue, in just the location where the participants would be expected to leap in with the doxology. Several scholars have toyed with the idea that this sentence is a later interpolation, on other grounds;⁸ in support of this supposition, one should note that it breaks from the fixed grammar of the *eucharisteo*-prayer elsewhere in Didache 9-10, reading *eucharistoumen soi* [no name] *o#i* instead of *eucharistoumen soi, pater - , u#ek*; and that it interrupts the flow of clauses in this prayer. In addition, it would resolve my problem completely!⁹ In any case, this broken cue makes a weak counter-argument to the clearer instances of ritual dialogue elsewhere in the prayers.

In my view, then, Dibelius’s suggestion makes the best sense of the precise repetition of certain formulaic expressions, indicating that in these Eucharistic prayers, we encounter a ritual dialogue with three major nodes: cup, bread, and meal / gathering. Throughout, we encounter plausible cues for oral performance, signaling when the prayer leader has begun and completed the thanksgiving for each of these items; and allowing for additional petitions in fixed locations, with fixed responses.

One can therefore say that the whole ritual dialogue, with its two sets of three, marked off by mirror doxologies, creates a *form* for the spoken parts of the ritual as a whole. This form is both rigid and flexible, in carefully prescribed ways. It is rigid precisely in such a way as to make it a recognizable *eucharistia*, susceptible of oral performance, and it is flexible enough to accommodate the various phases of the ritual meal at its heart, and, if need be, other community concerns.

[Since we have only one sample here, however, it is impossible to certify that more prayers could not have been said, and what parameters would have governed them. Nevertheless, the structure is sufficiently clear to demonstrate that there *need* not have

⁸ E.g. Lietzmann, *Mass*, 191-92. Niederwimmer (*Didache*, 159) and Dibelius (“Mahl-Gebete,” 124-25) struggle with its lack of organic relationship to its context. Draper takes this phrase as part of the congregational response, a solution that is possible but does not strike me as probable (“Ritual Process,” 146).

⁹ Another, though not likely, option would be that this phrase has been transposed from its original location, perhaps at the beginning of prayer six. Against the idea of an interpolation stands the witness of the Coptic fragment of Did. 10, which corroborates the Jerusalem manuscript here. However, the Coptic manuscript introduces “Amen” as the congregational response to each of the prayer units identified here—i.e. it may be a still later redaction of our present text.

been any more prayers *as such*—after all, as we shall see, there was plenty of opportunity for extending and adapting the prayers that are listed.]

EXTENDING THE PRAYERS IN PERFORMANCE - SECOND

The six prayer strophes recorded in Didache 9-10 display a model structure for the prayers of a *eucharistia*.¹⁰ This structure is both fixed and variable, in precise ways that deserve our attention. Here I can only sketch out some of the ways the variable elements work in our model structure.

The first thing to notice is that *the object of thanks varies from prayer to prayer*. That is, although upon first examination the three *eucharistio*-prayers have a rigid structure, they also have a built-in element of variability. [Consult handout.] So, for the cup, one gives thanks for (υπεκ) one thing, for the bread, something else, and for the meal, notice, two things. Here we have an important clue for the performance of these prayers.

That is, precisely because the structure of these prayers is fixed, the thing given thanks for can be *changed in performance* without affecting the authenticity of the prayer. Because the form “we give you thanks, Father, for ---“ *already* carries the ritual function of being an appropriate eucharistic prayer, the thing after the “for” can be supplied on the spur of the moment by the person praying. This variable element is then “contained” by the concluding expression, “which you made known to us through Jesus your servant.” This indicates that the terms supplied here in Didache 9-10 are only examples (though appropriate, suggestive ones), allowing for the prayer-leader to display some ingenuity in performance, or sensitivity to the community’s needs, or what have you.

We can see this at work already in the sample prayers here. The most telling clue is the after-dinner-prayer, which has two υπεκ-clauses [Consult handout].¹¹ There is every reason to suppose that this duplicating of υπεκ-clauses was available to the prayer leader in all three *eucharistio*-prayers. The procedure is simple enough: the prayer leader simply connects υπεκ-clause with υπεκ-clause by the word “and” (και), until he or she wishes to conclude the prayer, at which point he or she adds “which you made known, etc.”—the cue that the prayer is ending. Notice that up to this concluding point, the *relative* (“which ...”) *clause is also variable*. This duplication, then, is one way to extend out the prayers in an actual performance—a way that is modeled already in Didache 10.2.

Another kind of extension is suggested in Prayer Six: “Remember, Lord, your assembly, to ____.” One can easily imagine a prayer leader adding here a number of relevant petitions (two samples are already given to model this procedure). The construction is again simple: a και plus an infinitive construction (see 10.5 “to save ... and to perfect”). Here, specific needs of the assembly could easily be canvassed: problems with crops and professions, with the governing authorities, with diseases, with malignant spirits, and so on, could without much effort be placed here. This variable element (the infinitive petitions) thus would allow for the less abstract, more concrete needs of the community

¹⁰ Again, see Draper, “Ritual Process,” 139 and Milavec, *Didache*, 365.

¹¹ Sometimes this double υπεκ is taken to parallel the *two* eucharistic prayers of *Did.* 9. The symmetry of the doxologies runs counter to this explanation.

to be touched on. Like the *eucharisteo*-prayer, however, this prayer ultimately is “contained” by adding the request to “gather ... into your kingdom”—the request that will cue the concluding doxological response.

On analogy with Prayer Six, the Third Prayer may have been more flexible than our present evidence would indicate. However, the metaphor of the assembly as grain scattered and gathered is a felicitous one, and in fact crops up in other ancient Christian texts, suggesting that this prayer was perhaps memorized and used as it stands.

Once again, finally, the Fifth Prayer occupies an anomalous position. Since there is nothing with which to compare it, we cannot know how fixed this prayer was. Our text suggests that it may customarily have been a prayer of the “declarative” type. Here God is apparently “told” what He has done for the people gathered. We might rather say that the people gathered are reminded of what God has done for them. This prayer type is common in both the Hebrew Psalms and in the history of Eucharistic prayer, and deserves some study. Here, we may speculate that the prayer could roam in a variety of directions, although the person who wrote down these sample prayers apparently thought the topic of “food and drink” was the logical (or customary) point of departure.

It should be clear that the prayer structure does allow for, and even demand, some improvisation by the person praying, but also that this spontaneity is strictly contained within the structure, at its *beginnings* and *ends*. The prayer form allows for, above all, the extending of its prayers to meet concrete community needs, but within a carefully articulated form that evokes the community’s affirmative responses. The payoff for this variable component is that the ritual dialogue does not become so rigid as to have no bearing on the community’s life situation. Instead, the dynamic, variable elements ensure that the orientation of the fixed elements take hold in the community.

NON-VERBAL SIGNALS

Both fixed and variable elements, then, are present in these prayers, and these two types of elements have distinct performative functions: the fixed elements cue the progression of the ritual dialogue that structures the ritual itself; while the variable elements provide the performer with a means for weaving community concerns into this structure. The final type of “performance feature” I wish to address is a more general, ritual one. Here I am interacting with the ritual theory of Roy Rappaport, for whom *participation in a ritual is a powerful social signal sent by participants to one another*. That is, participants in a ritual index their agreement with the order that is being constructed in that ritual, *by virtue of their participation itself*. This phenomenon is all the more telling when there is ritual dialogue involved: if participants in the Didache ritual join in at the close of a prayer by reciting “to you be the glory,” they are in effect indicating to one another that they endorse what has been said. [This is still clearer with “Amen.”]

Here there is no time to discuss the nature of the order being constructed in the Didache ritual, but one should notice that the dialogue elements in the Didache prayers are *repeated frequently*: the doxologies are repeated four times (for the short form) and two times (for the long form), the phrase “through Jesus your servant” four times, the

eucharistio-prayer form three times, the “gather into your kingdom” twice. Even assuming that these prayers are only spoken once a week, this quantity of repetition must soon cease to communicate information and instead perform some other function. These phrases are doing more than communicating verbal messages.

Instead, these repetitions strongly suggest that a kind of *posture* suffuses the whole ritual, that the insistently repeated formulae will over time inculcate a certain *disposition* in the ritual participants. That disposition will be one of gratitude and dependence on a God who has placed a circle of “knowers” into a special relationship with himself, through the agency of “Jesus.” This disposition will also involve an eschatological orientation toward “gathering into the kingdom”, i.e. toward a moment that does not arrive within the ritual itself. This posture (and its penumbra of conceptualization) is evoked by each performance of the eucharistic structure that I have been laboring to elucidate. By their participation in this ritual, the members of the community send signals to one another of their agreement with the *order* implied by the ritual structure. They join in this posture, gesturing together verbally (and maybe, if only we had more information, bodily) their mutual acceptance of a certain *order of existence*, which they inhabit. (And perhaps *create*, by means of this very ritual structure!)

STRUCTURE OF THE DIDACHE'S EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

Jonathan Schwiebert

Two-Fold Structure :

9.1 Now as to the *eucharistia*,
offer the thanksgiving in this way.

10.1 And after eating your fill,
offer the thanksgiving in this way.

Three-Fold Structure :

9.2 First, concerning the cup:
We thank you, our Father
for (uθek) the holy vine of David
your servant

9.3 Then, concerning the fragment:
We thank you, our Father
for (uθek) the life and knowledge

10.2
We thank you, holy Father
for (uθek) your holy name,
which you made to reside
in our hearts
and for (uθek) the knowledge
and faith and immortality
which you made known to us
through Jesus your servant.

which you made known to us
through Jesus your servant.

which you made known to us
through Jesus your servant.

To you be the glory forever.

To you be the glory forever.

To you be the glory forever.

Anomalous Prayer Five (Cf. 9.3 [above]):

9.3 We thank you ...

for the life and knowledge

which you made known to us
through Jesus your servant.

10.3 You, Almighty Master, created all things
for the sake of your name,
food and drink you gave to mortals,
for their enjoyment,
that they might thank you
yet to us you granted
spiritual food and drink, and eternal life
through Jesus your servant.

10.4 For all things, we thank you,
because (oθi) you are able.

To you be the glory for ever.

To you be the glory for ever.

Third and Sixth Compared

9.4 Just as this fragment was
scattered upon the hills,
and gathered together, became one,
So let your assembly be gathered
from the corners of the earth,

into you kingdom.

For yours is the glory and the power
{through Jesus Christ} for ever.

10.5 Remember, Lord, your assembly
to rescue it from all evil
and to perfect it in your love
and gather it
from the four winds,
{after it has been made holy,}
into your kingdom,
which you prepared for it.
For yours is the power and the glory
for ever.

Geometry of the Prayers:

I

II

(Euch.)
Cup prayer

(Euch.)
Bread Prayer
Life

"Gathering" Prayer
(Full Doxology)

(Euch.)
~~After-dinner prayer~~

"Food and Drink" Prayer
Life
(Broken Cue)

"Gathering" Prayer
(Full Doxology)

A.

B.

C.

