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Abstract: Recent studies on early Christian gatherings have demonstrated convincingly that the Greco-Roman banquet was the context in which Christians gathered for their meetings. What has not been provided, however, is a comprehensive discussion of what Christians did during said gatherings, and in what order they did it. This article attempts to discuss all known components of early Christian gatherings and to arrange them in their relative order.

Key terms: liturgy, early Christian gatherings, Greco-Roman banquet, meals

I. Introduction[1]

Over approximately the last twenty years, liturgiologists have been experiencing a paradigm shift in their field, with recent studies shifting away from looking to Greco-Roman and/or Jewish liturgies (especially the synagogue) as possible origins for early Christian liturgy,[2] and instead looking to the broadly defined Greco-Roman banquet.[3] This paradigm shift has forced liturgiologists to study afresh the original sources, and has resulted in many significant findings. However, there remain at least two interrelated lacunae, namely, to provide a comprehensive treatment of all

1. I would like to thank Andrew McGowan and Valeriy Alikin for their helpful discussion and comments on earlier stages of this article.

2. For a survey of this shift, cf. Valeriy Alexandrovich Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (SVC 102; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2-14.

3. Dennis Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 1-46; Alikin, *Earliest History*, 17-78; Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 1-24; Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 19-64.

known liturgical components that were practiced by Christians during their banquet gatherings in the first decades of the Christian movement's existence,[4] and to arrange them, to the extent possible, according to their relative order.

While it is true that during the last twenty years some studies have provided in-depth treatments of some of the known liturgical components (usually extending to cover the first few centuries), nothing yet exists that purports to set forth all of them from the first few decades of the Christian movement, and to do so in such a way that organizes them in their respective order. To this end, this article is divided into two parts: the first discusses some preliminary issues important to early Christian liturgy, and the second itemizes the various known liturgical components from the first few decades of the Christian movement and attempts to arrange them, to the extent possible, according to their respective order. As for sources, the New Testament writings form the primary sources,[5] while Greco-Roman, Jewish, and other early Christian sources have been relegated primarily to the footnotes and should be used to compare and contrast with the early Christian sources, rather than understood as strict parallels.

II. Preliminary Issues

Before discussing the various known liturgical components of early Christian liturgy, two preliminary issues must be discussed.

II.1. The Greco-Roman Banquet

First, it should be remembered that, as the new paradigm has demonstrated, the setting in which early Christian liturgy took place was the Greco-Roman banquet. Thus in 1 Corinthians 10-14 Paul discusses Christian gatherings at length and refers specifically to a δεῖπνον (*deipnon*; "evening meal", "banquet"[6]) in the context of their gatherings (11:17-32, esp. 20-21), and uses the verb συνέρχομαι (*sunerchomai*; "come together") to refer to both a gathering (11:17-18) as well as a meal (11:20-22, 33-34).[7] Such a claim does not negate any influence that Greco-Roman and/or Jewish liturgies

4. That is, approximately during the first century, or during the time period covered by the various New Testament writings.

5. For the sake of this article, I have included the (quite limited) data from Acts 1-2, even though technically speaking they occur before the founding of the Church, that is, before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The data from Acts 1-2 serve an ancillary role that is corroborated by other texts.

6. For the linguistic connotations of δεῖπνον from Homer to New Testament times, cf. Smith, *From Symposium*, 20-22.

7. Smith, *From Symposium*, 176. Paul also briefly discusses or alludes to early Christian gatherings in the context of a common meal in Rom 14:1-4, 13-23; Gal 2:11-14. It is within the banquet context that other New Testament texts make good sense; cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:18.

might have had on early Christian gatherings, but rather understands the structure of early Christian gatherings to be shaped by the two-part Greco-Roman banquet, in which the first part consisted of a meal during which diners reclined and ate at short tables, and the second part of a symposium during which the tables were removed, wine was served, and discussion and entertainment began.[8] As Andrew McGowan writes of the centrality of meals in Christian gatherings, "They were not merely one sacramental part of a community or worship life but the central act around or within which others—reading and preaching, prayer and prophecy—were arranged."[9]

II.2. Two Related Elements

Second, there are at least two elements of early Christian gatherings that do not form part of liturgy proper, but that are so closely related to it that they ought to be mentioned briefly. The first element is the gathering days, times, locations, and size. As for the days, Sunday gatherings were common (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-4; Rev 1:10),[10] but there is evidence that Christians gathered on other days of the week as well (Acts 2:46; 20:31).[11] As for the times of day that they met, there does not appear to be any dominant pattern: there is evidence that they gathered at mid-morning (Acts 2:15; 19:9[12]), in the afternoon (Acts 3:1), and in the late evening (Acts 20:7). This evidence coheres with the testimony that Paul had admonished the church in Ephesus νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν (*nukta kai hemeran*; "night and day"; Acts 20:31). As for the locations, since meals provided the setting and framework in and around which Christian gatherings took place, it is of no surprise that there is extensive evidence that Christians gathered in houses (Acts 1:13; 2:2, 46; 5:42; 8:3; 12:12; 16:40; 17:4-6; 20:8, 20-21; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; 1 Tim 3:4-5, 15; Phlm 2 [cf. 22]; 2 Jn 10).[13] Perhaps one of the reasons why it was imperative for bishops to be hospitable (1 Tim 3:2) was because they hosted the gatherings. This should be balanced, however, with evidence that other Christians hosted gatherings as well (Acts 5:42; 8:3; 20:20;

8. Smith, *From Symposium*, 28-29; Alikin, *Earliest History*, 17-39; Bradshaw and Johnson, *Eucharistic Liturgies*, 3.

9. *Ancient*, 19-20; cf. 30. For meals in a Greco-Roman context, cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11:24 (initiation banquet); for an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:130, 132.

10. *Barnabas* 15:8-9 is the first undisputed reference to Sunday gatherings for worship; cf. Justin Martyr, *Apol*. 1:67. Other probable references to Sunday gatherings are *Did*. 14:1; Ignatius, *Magn*. 9:1. For discussion, cf. S. R. Llewelyn, "The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament," *NT* 43 (2001): 205-223; Alikin, *Earliest History*, 40-49.

11. This appears to be the case with the Christians under Pliny's jurisdiction in Pontus-Bithynia (cf. *Letter* 96:7) and may be the case in *Did*. 4:2; 16:2.

12. That is, if the Western reading of "from the fifth hour to the tenth" is historically reliable.

13. There is evidence, however, that early Christians gathered in other settings as well; cf. Acts 2:46 (temple courts); 5:12 (Solomon's Colonnade); 19:9 (Tyrannus' lecture hall).

Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 5:10; 2 Tim 3:6-7[?]).[14] If Revelation 3:20 is to be understood as a reference to early Christian gatherings, then it would be significant testimony to early Christian belief in the (spiritual) presence of Christ at said gatherings (cf. Mt 18:20).[15] Nevertheless, some texts suggest that unbelievers were not unwelcomed at early Christian gatherings, thus making uncertain the "purity" of these gatherings.[16] As for the size, archaeological excavations of homes belonging to the wealthy in Roman cities reveal that dining rooms could accommodate around nine people for the purposes of dining (taking into consideration the tables and reclining couches), or perhaps twice as many if the attendants were seated as opposed to reclined (as appears to have been the case; cf. 1 Cor 14:30; Jas 2:2-3);[17] otherwise, the atrium area of Roman villas could accommodate around forty or fifty people.[18]

The second element included here is baptism. While it does appear that baptism had its own (simple) liturgy from very early times (ex., Mt 28:19; Acts 8:36-37; cf. *Did*. 7), it seems best to include baptism as one of the final elements of missionary preaching (ex., Acts 2:37-41) and thus functioned as a gateway through which one must pass before participating in a Christian gathering proper (ex., Acts 2:41-42; cf. *Did*. 7-10).[19] It is possible that baptism was accompanied by a formula pronounced by the baptizer (Mt 28:19; Rom 10:9-10[?]; 1 Cor 1:13; cf. *Did*. 7:1) and/or a confession

14. In the case of the early Jerusalem church with at least 5,000 of Christians (Acts 4:4; 6:7), hundreds of host homes would have been necessary (cf. Acts 5:42). Nevertheless, even with the presence of so many homes, divided perhaps based on issues such as language (Acts 6:1), it is important to note that early Christians still saw themselves as part of *one* church; cf. Acts 6:2; 8:1; 1 Cor 14:23(?).

15. For discussion and argumentation tending in this direction, cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 308-309.

16. For New Testament texts that may suggest the presence of unbelievers in early Christian gatherings, cf. Acts 27:35-36; 1 Cor 5:9-13; 14:16, 23-25; Rev 3:9. Perhaps the Christians continued this practice based on Jesus' example, ex., Mk 2:15-17. How this practice may be harmonized with other evidence that unbelievers and/or false brethren were to be excluded from the meal (Heb 13:10; 2 Pet 2:13; Jd 12; cf. Did 4:14; 14:1-3) is uncertain; one possible solution is that it was left to the discretion of each church.

17. Acts 15:5, 7 also implies that Christians were seated during gatherings, but the context of this particular gathering is unclear. Although somewhat later, Irenaeus states that he remembered where Polycarp was accustomed to sit and discourse (Eusebius, *HE* 5:20), thus implying that at times even the speaker(s) was (were) seated while teaching (cf. Mt 5:1).

18. Smith, *From Symposium*, 14-17, 25-27. For gathering days, times, locations and size in a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:12; *On Dreams* 2:127; Lk 4:16-20; Acts 13:14-16; 16:13-16(?); Josephus, *Apion* 1:209; 2:175; *Life* 279, 280; *Antiq*. 14:258, 261, 263-264; 16:43; Theodotos' synagogue dedicatory inscription; *m*. Meg. 3:6-4:1; for an Essene context, cf. Philo, *Every Good Man*, 81; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life*, 30, 32.

19. For evidence that baptism had a shaping influence on Christian theology and self-understanding, cf. Rom 6:1-11; 1 Cor 1:13-16; Gal 3:27; Tit 3:5.

pronounced by the baptized (Acts 8:37), and that it included a change of clothing of some sort (Gal 3:27; Col 3:5-14 [esp. 9-10]).[20] Later Christian sources connect baptism with other liturgical elements such as fasting, prayer(s), exchange of the kiss (of peace), the Eucharist, and a prayer of thanksgiving, but it is unknown to what extent they reflect the practice of Christians from the first decades of the movement.[21]

III. Early Christian Liturgical Components

Whereas the Greco-Roman banquet setting is becoming a more established theory amongst liturgiologists, a comprehensive discussion of the known liturgical components as well as their relative order are less well-established. These less well-established aspects of early Christian liturgy form the focus of this section.[22] Regarding the issue of relative order, while it is true that some texts imply freedom and spontaneity during early Christian gatherings (1 Cor 14:26; Jas 5:13-16), nevertheless the Greco-Roman banquet itself offers a broad macro-structure for the relative ordering of at least some of the liturgical components,[23] and other texts and logical inference can be used to deduce the relative ordering of others (see below). Finally, the evidence suggests that some components were more regularly celebrated than others due to the fact that the former were essential components to (weekly) early Christian gatherings whereas the latter were more sporadic and depended on external factors to necessitate their celebration. This aspect, too, is treated briefly in the ensuing discussion.

III.1. Liturgical Components During the Meal

The meal was the first part of the Greco-Roman banquet, and therefore was the first part of the early Christian gathering. Being that this part of the banquet was centered

20. Regarding the issue of nude baptism, Andrew McGowan refers to the "common expectation that candidates strip" before baptism. He later writes, "As a form of bathing, baptism of course required the removal of clothing and then subsequent reclothing.…So the Pauline metaphor of new clothing belongs to that context, and to custom" (*Ancient*, 152, 173). For other (possible) references to baptism in general, cf. Acts 16:15; 1 Cor 15:29; Tit 3:5(?); Heb 6:4(?); 10:22(?).

21. Cf. Acts 9:3-9, 17-19; *Did.* 7-10; Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1:61, 65-67. For baptism in a Greco-Roman context, cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11:23; for an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:129, 137.

22. It should be noted that the listing and ordering of all the known liturgical components is not meant to imply their presence in all churches at all times. For example, the fact that some churches were rebuked for eating with false brethren (2 Pet 2:13; Jd 12) implies that they had not been carrying out church discipline. Nevertheless, this was an expected liturgical component.

23. Thus Alikin, *Earliest History*, 31. The evidence of Acts 20:7-11, in which (part of) the speaking element preceded the meal, diverges from the Greco-Roman banquet order.

around food and dining, liturgical components that have to do with table fellowship and the Eucharist meal are included here. The various liturgical components that were celebrated during this part of the banquet are discussed below.

As Christians entered the home, the evidence strongly suggests that they greeted one another with a kiss. Paul and Peter commanded the members of the respective churches to ἀσπάζομαι (*aspazomai*; "greet") one another with a φίλημα ἅγιον (*philema hagion*; "holy kiss"; Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Th 5:26) or φίλημα ἀγάπης (*philema agapes*; "kiss of love" 1 Pet 5:14).[24] The verb ἀσπάζομαι is frequently translated as "greet" and thus is included at the first liturgical component, but it should be noted that in other contexts it clearly carries the meaning of "dismiss" (ex., Acts 20:1; 21:6).[25] Thus it is not surprising that there is evidence that Christians also dismissed themselves with a kiss (Acts 20:36-38).[26] Given the inherent necessity of greeting (and dismissing) one another at early Christian gatherings, the holy/love kiss should be regarded as a regular liturgical component.[27]

Next, church discipline was carried out if necessary. In 1 Corinthians 5:3-8, 11 Paul states that the Eucharist meal was to be shared only among Christians who were not living in (certain kinds of) sin, and other texts speak negatively about non-faithful Christians and/or false brethren participating in the Eucharist meal (Heb 13:10; 2 Pet 2:13; Jd 12; cf. Did 4:14; 14:1-3), thereby implying that they should have been excluded beforehand. It is true that some aspects of church discipline appear to have taken place outside of the gathering (Mt 18:15-16), but the church's eventual involvement in the process (Mt 18:17; 3 Jn 10), or at least their being informed of the results (2 Th 3:6; 1 Tim 1:19-20; Tit 3:10-11), makes it clear that church discipline was a component of early Christian liturgy. It may have been at this point that elders were

24. It is uncertain whether the kiss was accompanied by a verbal component, such as a formalized greeting and/or blessing.

25. Whatever the case may have been, there does not appear to have been any confusion amongst Paul's and Peter's original recipients, since they feel no need to explain or justify the practice (McGowan, *Ancient*, 55). McGowan suggests that the practice may already have been established among the followers of Jesus based on texts such as Mk 14:44-45; Lk 7:45 (*ibid*).

26. Additional evidence for a dismissal kiss may be extrapolated from the fact that the letter-reading component of the liturgy took place during the symposium (see below), at which time the Christian communities would have heard Paul's and Peter's commands to greet/dismiss one another with kisses. Nevertheless, this is not a necessary conclusion to be drawn.

27. An argument could be made to include here the component of foot washing (cf. Alikin, *Earliest History*, 266-268). The only potential evidence from the New Testament that this was practiced in early Christian gatherings is 1 Tim 5:9-10 (but cf. Lk 7:44-46; Jn 13:12-15), which is not necessarily a reference to liturgy proper (although neither does it exclude its possibility). The same problem is encountered with oil anointing (cf. Lk 7:44-46). For an interesting comparison to physical interaction in an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:150.

rebuked as well (1 Tim 5:19-20), although this is not certain.[28] Additionally, it may have been at this point that repentant Christians were restored to fellowship, such as the forgiveness and restoration described in 2 Corinthians 2:10.[29] Since church discipline depended on external factors such as the exposure of sin to those of the community, it should be regarded as an occasional liturgical component.[30]

It seems best to include here, also before the Eucharist meal, introductory matters such as public greetings, introductions, and the reception of visitors. Second John 10-11 assumes the practice of greeting and receiving fellow (travelling) Christians, something that should not be extended to heretics (cf. v. 9). Similarly, Acts 9:26-28 states that Saul was unable to participate in Christian gatherings because the community was afraid and did not believe that he was truly a Christian, and that it was only after the mediation of Barnabas that he was able to have fellowship with them. The many other texts that speak of public greetings, introductions, and the reception of visitors reinforce its presence as a liturgical component (Acts 15:4; 18:22; 21:7, 17; 1 Cor 16:10; Col 4:10). Since this component depended on the travel of fellow Christians, it should be regarded as an occasional liturgical component.[31]

With these components of the gathering completed, the Eucharist meal itself was initiated. First Timothy 4:3-5 implies that meals were preceded by thanksgiving and/or prayer, and there seems to be no reason to exclude this pattern from the Eucharist meal. The phrase "Eucharist meal" is intentional in that the evidence suggests that the Eucharist considerably overlapped with, or perhaps was even identical to, the banquet meal. As Andrew McGowan has summarized the relationship, "At the earliest point, the structural relationship between Eucharist and banquet is one more of identity than of mere homology; the Eucharist is not *like* a banquet, it is a banquet."[32] Thus according to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the Eucharist meal consisted of two major parts:

28. Acts 11:1-3 may be an example of rebuking elders similar to the situation described in 1 Tim 5:9-10. If it is within this context that Gal 2:11ff. should be interpreted (as appears probable), then it underscores the seriousness of the situation, both of Peter's act (not participating in Eucharist meals with other Christians) as well as Paul's (publicly rebuking an elder).

29. Phil 4:2-3; Ignatius *Phld*. 3:2 may hint at restoration acts, but this is uncertain, as are their relative placements in the liturgy.

30. For another text that may speak of church discipline, cf. 1 Cor 4:21; for another early Christian text, cf. *Did*. 15:3; for a Temple context, cf. Josephus, *Apion* 2:194(?); for a synagogue context, cf. Josephus, *Life* 284(?); for an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:143-144.

31. For public greetings, introductions, and the reception of visitors in a Christian context, cf. *Did*. 11:4-6; 12:1-5; for a Temple context, cf. 2 Mac 3:9; 4:22; for a synagogue context, cf. Theodotos' synagogue dedicatory inscription.

32. "Rethinking Eucharistic Origins," *Pacifica* 23 (2010): 173-191, here 186. Similarly Alikin, "Originally the Lord's Supper was celebrated as a full meal within the framework of the Sunday evening gathering" (*Earliest History*, 103) and Bradshaw and Johnson, "the meal was the Eucharist" (*Eucharistic Liturgies*, 10).

1) the bread part, which consisted of taking of bread (perhaps just one loaf; cf. 1 Cor 10:17), blessing (or giving thanks for) the bread, breaking the bread, distributing the bread, and interpreting the bread[33] and 2) the cup part, which consisted of taking the cup, giving thanks for the cup (cf. 1 Cor 10:16: εὐλογέω; *eulogeo*; "bless"),[34] distributing the cup, and interpreting the cup.[35] Bread in this context would not have been something foreign to the banquet meal, but rather formed an integral part of the meal itself. As Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson explain:

> As we have said, among the poor—and the Christian community in Jerusalem is constantly described as having been impoverished—bread would have constituted the main, if not the sole, ingredient of most meals. A Christian meal that consisted principally of bread might well therefore be adequately described by its opening ritual: in this case the breaking of bread really *was* the meal.[36]

Thus other references to the breaking of bread may be seen as references to the Eucharist meal as well (Acts 2:42, 26; 20:7, 11). Based on Paul's use of the verb καταγγέλλω (*katangello*; "proclaim") in 1 Corinthians 11:26, there may have been a verbal component to the Eucharist meal which focused on the Lord's death, but this is still uncertain.[37] Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 further relate that after Jesus' meal with His disciples a hymn was sung,[38] but again it is uncertain if this pattern was

33. For similar patterns, cf. Lk 9:16; 22:19; 24:30; Acts 27:34-36.

34. For an early example of Eucharist prayer, cf. *Did*. 9:2-4.

35. Lk 24:14-23; 1 Cor 10:16-17, 21; *Did*. 9:1-3 contain the order cup-bread instead of bread-cup. The order does not appear to be significant as it relates to meaning, and at any rate the components remain the same. The order of bread-cup found in Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-25; 1 Cor 11:17-34 (esp. v. 25) is followed here.

36. *Eucharistic Liturgies*, 13.

37. Dennis Smith argues that "when the community eats with unity and equality, that is when they proclaim the death of the Lord" (*From Symposium*, 199), and *BDAG* agrees with this assessment: "τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε *you proclaim* (by celebrating the sacrament rather than w. words) *the Lord's death* 1 Cor 11:26" (Fredrick William Danker [ed.], *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* [3rd ed.; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. καταγγέλλω; *katangello*). However this seems odd given the overwhelming propensity for the word group associated with *αγγελ (*angel*) to refer to oral communication. The verbal components of blessing, giving thanks, and interpretation of the bread and cup referred to in 1 Cor 11:23-26 might explain this "proclaiming."

38. Being that this was during the time of Passover, it is plausible that one of the Hallel Psalms (Ps 113-118) was sung; cf. Martin Hengel, "Das Christuslied im frühesten Gottesdienst," in *Weisheit Gottes—Geisheit der Welt: Festschrift für Kardinal Ratzinger zum 60. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Baier *et al* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1987), 357-404, here 364; McGowan, *Ancient*, 115.

carried over into early Christian liturgy. The foregoing evidence makes it clear that the Eucharist meal was a regular liturgical component.[39]

III.2. Liturgical Components During the Symposium

The symposium was the second part of the Greco-Roman banquet, and therefore was the second part of the early Christian gathering. Being that this part of the banquet was centered around discussion and entertainment, liturgical components that have to do with oral communication are included here. The various liturgical components that were celebrated during this part of the banquet are discussed below.

Near the beginning of the second part of early Christian gatherings seems to be the public reading of texts. The evidence from 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2 imply that the reading component preceded the preaching component.[40] Evidence for the public reading of texts is found in numerous writings, and the following references provide evidence or give commands that texts were to be read (with the texts in question placed in parentheses): Matthew 24:15 (Mt); Mark 13:14 (Mk); Acts 15:30 (council's letter); 16:4 (council's letter); 18:27 (letter from Ephesus to Achaia; cf. 19:1); 2 Corinthians 7:8 ("sorrowful letter"); 10:9-10 (Paul's letters to the Corinthians); Ephesians 3:4 (Eph); Colossians 4:16 (Col and Laodicean letter); 1 Thessalonians 5:27 (1 Th); 2 Thessalonians 2:15 (1-2 Th?); 3:14 (2 Th); 1 Timothy 4:13 (Old Testament?); Philemon 1-2 (Phlm); Hebrews 13:22 (Heb); 2 Peter 3:1 (1 and 2 Pet);[41] 1 John 5:13 (1 Jn); 2 John 1 (2 Jn); 3 John 9 (3 Jn); Revelation 1:3; 13:18; 17:9-10; 22:18-19 (all Rev).[42] Strangely absent from this list is any reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, but based on the well-established fact that the Hebrew Scriptures played

39. However, it should be noted that at least occasionally Christians gathered while fasting (ex., Acts 13:1-3), thus removing the Eucharist meal as a liturgical component on these occasions. For probable New Testament references to the Eucharist meal, cf. Heb 13:10; 2 Pet 2:13; Jd 12. For possible New Testament allusions to (or echoes of) the Eucharist meal, cf. Lk 24:30; Acts 27:34-36. For probable and possible references to the Eucharist meal outside of the New Testament, cf. Ignatius, *Eph*. 20:2; *Magn*. 7:2(?); *Trall*. 2:3(?); *Phld*. 4; *Smyrn*. 6:2; 8:1-2; *Did*. 9-10; 14:1; for communal meals in a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 37, 65, 73.

40. Evidence from various Jewish liturgies demonstrates that this was the normal order for their contexts. For a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:12-13; *On Dreams* 2:127; Lk 4:16-28; Acts 13:14-48; Josephus, *Apion* 2:175; *Antiq* 16:43(?); Theodotos' synagogue dedicatory inscription; for an Essene context, cf. Philo, *Every Good Man* 82; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 31(?), 75-78. Moreover, logic and historical awareness tend to lead to this conclusion: Upon what else would early Christians routinely base their preaching?

41. 2 Pet 3:15-16 may also be a reference to the public reading of some of Paul's letters.

42. The space limitations of homes suggests that the same work was read multiple times in the same geographical area (ex., 1 Th 5:27[?]). For other early references to public readings, cf. *1 Clem*. *Salut*; 47:1; *2 Clem*. 17:3; 19:1; Ignatius, *Eph*. *Salut*; 20:1; *Magn*. *Salut*; *Trall*. *Salut*; *Rom*. *Salut*; *Phld*. *Salut*; *Smyrn*. *Salut*; *Mart*. *Pol*. *Salut*; 20:1; *Barn*. 1:5.

a central role in early Christian teaching and preaching, and based on the numerous quotations of and allusions to various passages from the Hebrew Scriptures in early Christian writings that suggest the recipients' familiarity with said passages, this corpus may also be assumed to have been read.[43] At least on certain occasions public readings were followed by an oral report that would complement the reading (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7-8). With so many known references to public reading, as well as its close relationship to preaching and teaching (see below), it should be considered as a regular liturgical component.[44]

Following the public reading, it seems that some type of preaching and teaching, conceived of in their broadest terms possible, took place (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 11:23-26; 18:11; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2; Heb 2:3[?]; 13:7). As noted above, 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2 connect reading and preaching, and thus it seems likely that the reading formed the basis (or starting point) of preaching and teaching at least occasionally.[45] Other preaching and teaching, however, may have been independent of any text (1 Cor 14:26?; Col 3:16?).[46] As far as the form of preaching and teaching, the tendency was towards dialogue and open discussion as opposed to monologue. Acts 20:11 says that Paul ὁμιλήσας ἄχρι αὐγῆς (*homilesas achri auges*; "conversed until dawn"). Such a lengthy gathering suggests that the teaching time was not restricted to a monologue but rather was more opened to dialogue and discussion,[47] and other Jewish texts from

43. For discussion, cf. Philip Towner, "The Function of the Public Reading of Scripture in 1 Timothy 4:13 and in the Biblical Tradition," *SBJT* 7 no 3 (2003): 44-55, here 48. Alikin's claim that "there is no indication until the third century that Christians in their gatherings read the Law of Moses" and that therefore they read the Prophets, is extremely unlikely in my opinion (*Earliest History*, 156-157).

44. For references to public reading of texts in a Temple context, cf. 1 Mac 10:7, 14:16-23(?); 15:1-9(?), 24; *m*. Tamid 5:1; for a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:12; *On Dreams* 2:127; Lk 4:16-19; Acts 13:15; 15:21 (cf. 2 Cor 3:14-15); Josephus, *Apion* 2:175; *Life* 285; *Antiq*. 16:43(?); Theodotos' synagogue dedicatory inscription; *m*. Meg. 3:6-4:1; 4:4-6; for an Essene context, cf. Philo, *Every Good Man* 82; Josephus, *War* 2:136, 159; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life*, 31(?), 65, 75.

45. Alikin contests the idea that early Christian preaching was based on the public reading of texts (*Earliest History*, 189-191), but the texts cited above combined with evidence from various Jewish liturgies makes it likely that it was based on the public reading of texts. For a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:11-13; *On Dreams* 2:127; Lk 4:16-30; Acts 13:13-48(?); Josephus, *Apion* 2:175-178; *Antiq*. 16:43(?); Theodotos' synagogue dedicatory inscription; for an Essene context, cf. Philo, *Every Good Man is Free* 81-82; for a Therapeutae context, cf. *Contemplative Life* 30-90.

46. There are other examples of speaking, such as discussing community issues, giving updates, and bringing news, that do not appear connected to any reading at all (Acts 1:15-22; 4:23-31; 15:4; 16:4; 3 Jn 5-6).

47. *BDAG* provides general glosses that are broad enough to include both types of communication (s.v. ὁμιλέω; *homileo*). For other examples of lengthy gatherings, cf. Acts 3:1 and 4:3 (evangelistic context); 5:7 (text suggests no break in the meeting).

the time period[48] combined with the indirect evidence of Acts 15:1-2 and 1 Cor 14:35,[49] support this thesis. In fact, it appears that the gathering's "primary" speaker was not the only speaker, since 1 Corinthians 14:26 says that ἕκαστος (*hekastos*; "each one") had a διδαχή (*didache*; "lesson"), and Colossians 3:16 similarly testifies to reciprocal teaching and admonition (διδάσκοντες καὶ νουθετοῦντες ἑαυτούς; *didaskontes kai nouthetountes heautous*; cf. Rom 15:14; Heb 5:12[?]).[50] Due to the centrality of preaching and teaching in early Christian gatherings, it should be seen as a regular liturgical component.[51]

After reading and preaching, it becomes practically impossible to establish a relative order of the remaining liturgical components. The freedom and spontaneity attested to in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and James 5:13-16 appears to apply especially to this part of the gathering. Thus while pneumatic experiences and spontaneous outbursts, healing, singing, prayer, appointments, and the collection and distribution of goods and monies are discussed in this order in what follows, it does not reflect any known relative order.[52]

Pneumatic experiences and spontaneous outbursts appear at various places throughout the book of Acts (ex., 2:4, 43; 11:27-30; 21:4, 8-14), and the evidence from other texts implies that such experiences were frequent (Gal 3:5; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:26, 29; Heb 2:4). As regarding the specific pneumatic experience of prophecy, it tended toward a two-part process, namely, the prophecy proper (always containing an audible component, although at times accompanied by a visual component) followed by its evaluation by others.[53] The evaluation component could be what 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21;[54] 1 John 4:1-3; and Revelation 2:2 are referring to by δοκιμάζω and πειράζω (*dokimazo* and *peirazo*; "testing") the prophets and apostles that speak to the community. Although the meaning of texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:13-16 are still debated, it appears that some acts such as speaking in tongues, praying,

48. For a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:13; *On Dreams* 2:127; Lk 4:21-28.

49. That is, although women were not allowed to ask questions during the gathering, the same prohibition was not given to men, thereby implying their permission to ask questions.

50. Cf. Rom 12:6-8 for another text that implies that multiple people had speaking gifts, thereby implying multiple speakers during the gathering.

51. For references to preaching and teaching in a Christian context, cf. *Did*. 4:1; for a Temple context, cf. Lk 19:47; 20:1; 21:37-38; Acts 5:42; for a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:13; *On Dreams* 2:127; Lk 4:21-28; Acts 13:16-48(?); Josephus, *Apion* 2:175; *Antiq*. 16:43(?); Theodotos' synagogue dedicatory inscription; for an Essene context, cf. Philo, *Every Good Man* 82; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life*, 31, 75-78.

52. This is essentially the view stated by Alikin, *Earliest History*, 65. There also may be an echo of spontaneity in early Christian gatherings in 1 Th 5:16-22.

53. A similar two-step process may be found in Ignatius, *Phld*. 7. On certain occasions, however, a prophet is not to be tested or evaluated (cf. *Did*. 11:7). *Shep.* 43:9 refers to prophesying but does not mention the evaluation component.

54. Note prophecy's connection with the Spirit via v. 19.

and singing were closely related to the S/spirit, and therefore may have manifested themselves spontaneously (although not uncontrollably; cf. 1 Cor 14:30-33). Whatever the case may have been, it was assumed that at least some would respond to these acts with τὸ ἀμὴν (*to amen*; "the Amen"; 1 Cor 14:16). A similar phenomenon may be found in 1 Corinthians 12:3 with reference to the confessions Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς[55] and Κύριος Ἰησοῦς (*Anathema Iesous* and *Kurios Iesous*; "Jesus is accursed" and "Jesus is Lord"), but not enough is known to draw any conclusion. Due to their pervasive presence in various New Testament works, pneumatic experiences and spontaneous outbursts should be considered as a regular liturgical component.[56]

Healing appears as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30, and it is set within the context of a Christian gathering in James 5:13-16. In the James text, the process is structured, with the sick person calling for the elders of the church, followed by the elders anointing the sick person and praying over him or her, followed by the sick person being healed and forgiven of his or her sins.[57] As 2 Timothy 4:20 demonstrates, this component either was not always evoked or did not always work. Since healing depended on the infirmities of the members of the community, it should be seen as an occasional liturgical component.[58]

Singing appears as a communal activity at various places in the New Testament writings. The example of Jesus and His disciples places singing at the end of their gathering (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26), but other texts more directly related to Christian liturgy testify that singing was carried out more spontaneously and was performed either individually (ex., 1 Cor 14:26; Jas 5:13) or in groups (Rom 15:5-6;[59] Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Heb 13:15[?]). It is almost certain that the Psalms were sung by Christians (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; cf. Lk 24:44) and Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; and Revelation 5:9-10 may reflect they type of original compositions that were sung in contexts such as the one described in 1 Corinthians 14:26 (the Christological focus of these original compositions should not be overlooked).[60] Of the taxonomy "psalms,

55. A similarly terse and apparently blasphemous declaration attributed to pneumatically inspired speech may be found in *Did*. 11:12 which says that a prophet who says in the S/spirit δός μοι ἀργύρια (*dos moi arguria*; "Give me money!") is not to be listened to.

56. For references to pneumatic experiences and spontaneous outbursts in a synagogue context, cf. Philo, *Hypothetica* 7:13; for an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:159; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 31, 77.

57. Note the parallels with Acts 8:18-24, where Peter confronts Simon (Magnus) over his sin, upon which he asks Peter to pray for him that he may be forgiven and not punished.

58. It is unclear if texts such as Acts 4:15-16 took place during Christian gatherings or not. There are no known references to healing in Greco-Roman or Jewish sources (that is, within liturgical contexts).

59. Martin Hengel considers Rom 15:5-6 the oldest Christian reference to "hymnischen Gotteslobs" ("Das Christuslied," 386).

60. For another example of Christian song during the gathering, again with a Christological focus, cf. Pliny, *Letter* 96:7. A. N. Sherwin-White states that the Latin phrase "carmen…dicere" used by Pliny is "the ordinary Latin for singing a poem or song" and

hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), Andrew McGowan writes, "That familiar phrase 'psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs' is less likely to refer to three specific kinds of song than to be three words or phrases combined to convey one complex idea. The songs of the earliest Christian assemblies could nevertheless have included scriptural texts, traditional hymns, and original compositions."[61] It is possible that musical instruments were used to aid the singing (ex., 1 Cor 14:7-8; Rev 5:8), but they do not receive much attention in early Christian literature, thereby suggesting their limited importance.[62] Whatever the nature of singing may have been, singing itself appears to have been a regular liturgical component.[63]

Prayer is frequently cited in the context of Christian gatherings. It is one of the activities that goes back to the very beginning of the Church (Acts 1:14, 24-25; 4:24-30; 12:5, 12),[64] and Paul places it πρῶτον πάντων (*proton panton*; "first of all") of the practices that he παρακαλῶ (*parakalo*; "urge") Timothy and the Ephesian church to do (1 Tim 2:1, 8). The evidence suggests that various people prayed for various reasons: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 assumes that men and women regularly pray, 1 Corinthians 14:14-16 understands prayer to be more of a pneumatic experience, James 5:13 says that those who suffer should pray, and James 5:15 places prayer on the lips of elders praying over the sick. The evidence from Romans 8:15 assumes that Christians addressed God as αββα (*abba*; "father"), which itself may have been the "shorthand" form of evoking the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9; Lk 11:2). As for bodily postures, kneeling (Acts 9:40; cf. Eph 3:14) and the raising of hands (1 Timothy 2:8)[65] is attested, and other postures such as standing and laying prostrate may be implied

thus "hymns with responses (*uicem*) are probably meant" (*Fifty Letters of Pliny* [2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], 177). For an explanation of various views as well as an argumentation similar to Sherwin-White's proposal, cf. Ralph Martin, "A Footnote to Pliny's Account of Christian Worship," *VE* 3 (1964): 51-57. Acts 16:25 may carry an echo of Christian liturgical practice. For other examples of early Christian songs, cf. *Odes of Solomon* and *Phos Hilaron*, the former probably from the turn of the first century and the latter probably from the middle of the second.

61. *Ancient*, 114.

62. Other early references to instruments in early Christian gatherings are *Odes Sol*. 14:8; 26:3.

63. For references to singing in a Greco-Roman context, cf. Manilius, *Astronomy* 1:22(?); for a Temple context, cf. Sir 50:18; 1 Mac 4:54-55; 2 Mac 1:30; 10:7; *m*. Tamid 7:4; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life*, 83-89.

64. Note that there are several texts that testify of Christians praying at set times of the day: Acts 2:15; 2:42; 3:1; 10:3, 9; *Did*. 8:3. The repeated mention of praying at the 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours suggests that these were Jewish prayers times, and not prayers recited during the evening Christian banquets, which is the focus of this study.

65. For other references to outstretched hands, cf. *1 Clem*. 2:3; Philo, *Contemplative Life* 66, 89; Josephus, *Apion* 1:209. McGowan states that standing with extended arms and raised eyes was "the typical posture for prayer" in the second and third centuries, thus suggesting its antiquity (*Ancient*, 193). For evidence that orientation was towards the east, cf. *ibid*, 193-194.

from other texts.[66] Given the diversity of contexts in which prayer was utilized, it can safely be concluded that prayer was a regular liturgical component.[67]

Appointments, in the sense of dedicating certain individuals for specific roles and responsibilities, appear in various contexts throughout the New Testament writings, such as the ordaining of men to church leadership and diaconal work, the sending of messengers and/or representatives from one church to another, and the sending out of missionaries (Acts 1:23-26; 6:1-6; 11:33; 13:1-3; 14:23; 15:2-3, 22-23, 30; 2 Cor 8:19).[68] In the case of Timothy's ordination to church leadership, the appointment was accompanied by the laying on of hands and prophecy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; cf. 1 Tim 5:22).[69] While many of the appointment texts differ from one another, three repeated elements include prayer, fasting, and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 14:23; 1 Tim 4:14). Since this component depended on external factors such as the need(s) of (a) church(es), it should be considered as an occasional liturgical component.[70]

Finally, the collection and distribution of goods and monies appears in various texts, especially in the book of Acts (2:45; 4:32-37; 5:1-11; 6:1-6; 11:27-30). Other texts such as Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 speak of the collection of funds to be sent to the Christians in Jerusalem, and the financial remuneration of at least some of church leadership implies some form of collection

66. For standing, cf. Lk 18:11, 13. For Jewish references to prayer while standing, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 66, 89; *m*. Ber 5:1. Although not specifically mentioning prayer, 1 Cor 14:25 may be interpreted to imply that some also fell prostrate in prayer; for other references to prostration, cf. Sir 50:17, 21; *1 Clem*. 48:1.

67. On several occasions it is difficult to know if individual or corporate prayer is being referred to: Rom 15:30-31; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 5:20; 6:18-20; Col 4:3; 1 Th 5:17, 25. This difficulty of distinguishing between individual and corporate prayer has been noted also by Ralph Martin (*Worship in the Early Church* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975], 28). For other references to early public prayer, cf. *1 Clem*. 59:3-61:3; Ignatius, *Eph*. 5:2; *Magn*. 7:1; *Trall*. 12:2; Polycarp, *Phil*. 12:3; *Did*. 9-10; *Shep*. 43:14; for a Greco-Roman context, cf. Manilius, *Astronomy* 1:21; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11:25 (initiation ceremony); for a Temple context, cf. Sir 50:16-17, 19, 21 (prostrated vv. 17, 21); 1 Mac 7:36-38; 12:11; 2 Mac 1:23-29; 3:15-21; 10:4; 14:34; 15:12; Mt 21:13; Mk 11:17; Lk 18:9-14; 19:45-46; Acts 3:1; Josephus, *Apion* 2:196-197; *m*. Ta'anit 4:1; for a synagogue context, cf. Acts 16:13-16(?); Josephus, *Life* 277, 295; *Apion* 1:209; *Antiq*. 14:258, 260; *m*. Ber 5:1; for an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:128; for a Therapeutae context, cf. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 66, 89.

68. Other possible texts that speak of appointments are Acts 8:14; 9:38; 11:22, 25(?).

69. First Tim 6:12 may be referring to the same event, in which case Timothy's confession would also have formed part of this appointment service. According to Alikin, there is no known Greco-Roman background to the laying on of hands, and Jewish evidence is contemporaneous with New Testament times. It may be, therefore, that this act "arose simultaneously among Christians and Jews, in one common or two parallel developments" (*Earliest History*, 261).

70. For other early references to appointments, cf. *1 Clem*. 44:3; *Did*. 15:1; Ignatius, *Phil*. 10:1-2; *Smyr*. 11:2-3; *Poly*. 7:2; for a Temple context, cf. 1 Mac 14:25-29; Heb 5:1; 7:20.

and distribution of monies (1 Cor 9:3-14; 1 Tim 5:17-18; cf. *Did*. 11:12; 13:1-7). First Timothy 5:3, 16 speaks of the church's responsibility to provide financial care for its widows, and other texts call on those with financial resources to provide for the poor (Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 6:17-18; Jas 2:15-16; 1 Jn 3:17). The spiritual gifts of giving and repartitioning appear in Romans 12:8.[71] These texts demonstrate that the primary purpose of this act was to help the poor and widows and to compensate church leadership for their labor. Some of the needs were more occasional (ex., poor relief) whereas others were more regular (ex., remuneration of church leadership), which is how this component should be evaluated.[72]

As for the end of the gathering, there is not enough evidence to postulate a closing liturgical component. Perhaps there was a closing song (cf. Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26) or dismissal kiss (cf. Acts 20:36-38; see above), but no firm conclusion can be drawn.

IV. Conclusion

This study has attempted to discuss all known liturgical components of early Christian gatherings and to organize them in their relative order. In total, twelve different liturgical components have been identified,[73] with seven identified as regular components, four as occasional components, and one as a partly regular and partly occasional component. Based on the Greco-Roman banquet setting in which early Christian gatherings took place, four liturgical components took place during the meal part of the banquet (centered around table fellowship and the Eucharist), and eight liturgical components took place during the symposium part of the banquet (centered around oral communication).

In brief, what can be reconstructed reasonably of a banquet-centered, early Christian gathering is as follows: after greeting one another with a kiss, communal issues such as church discipline, public greetings, introductions, and the reception of visitors were carried out if necessary. After this, the Eucharist meal was celebrated,

71. Based on the structure of Rom 12:6-8, it appears that the gifts of prophecy and service in vv. 6-7 function as head terms (cf. 1 Pet 4:11) that are further explicated in their respective turns (*contra* Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 729). Thus, service is further explained in vv. 7-8 as giving, repartition (of said gifts), and acts of mercy. This seems to fit within the diaconal sphere of ministry, and thus it could be that the liturgical component of the collection and distribution of goods and monies was (primarily) entrusted to them.

72. For references to the collection and distribution of goods and monies in the context of early Christian gatherings, cf. Acts 2:44-45; Gal 6:6; Jas 2:15-16; 1 Jn 3:17; *Did*. 4:5-8(?); 13:4; 15:4(?); Ignatius, *Trall*. 2:3(?); *Shep.* 103:2(?); for a Temple context, cf. 2 Mac 3:6, 10; Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:1-4; Heb 7:5, 9; Josephus, *Antiq.* 16:45; for a synagogue context, cf. Josephus, *Life* 284; for an Essene context, cf. Josephus, *War* 2:134.

73. This number could be increased to as high as fourteen if foot washing and oil anointing were included (see above), and as high as fifteen if baptism were included (see above).

with bread and wine playing a central role.[74] After the Eucharist meal, there was a reading from a text followed by preaching and teaching. After this, various items could happen, such as pneumatic experiences and spontaneous outbursts, healing, singing, prayer, appointments, and the collection and distribution of goods and monies. Perhaps the gathering ended with a song or dismissal kiss, but this is conjectural. Whether or not there were other liturgical components of early Christian gatherings, the evidence only allows this much to be reconstructed.

74. However, Acts 15:20, 29; Rom 14:2-3, 14-23; 1 Cor 8; 10:25-26 demonstrate that other foods such as meat and vegetables were also eaten, and Rom 14:21; 1 Tim 5:23 suggest that some Christians were hesitant to drink wine. For discussion, cf. Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).