

First I am very glad to be with you here again. Thank you to Fr. Mark Rowe for the invitation, and to our bishops for their blessing. Some of what I have to say today will already be very familiar to many of you, but I hope that there will be something helpful for everyone as many of you begin to use [The English Office Noted](#) in your parishes.

Part I: Introduction and the History of the Office

As Orthodox Christians, we know that our relationship with God is the most important thing in our lives. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and others have pointed out that we are created to give God praise and glory, thanksgiving and worship - to be doxological and eucharistic. Without this relationship with God our lives are empty, devoid of meaning and purpose. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. To do so means that we will love the things that God loves. To do so means that we will strive to walk in his ways. To do so means that we will desire to spend time with God, to spend time in his house, to spend time talking with God and listening to God, to spend time in prayer.



We know many different types of prayer. We know the prayers which flow from our hearts towards God, prayers of adoration and thanksgiving, of confession and supplication. We also know the prayers given to us, taught to us by the Church. Our Lord's own disciples sensed that there was a right way to pray (which implies that there are also less helpful ways of praying), hence they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray," and we have the "Our Father" or Lord's Prayer as the model prayer for all time. Through the centuries the Church has continued this process of seeking the best way to pray. We know the Eucharist or Divine Liturgy as our most perfect offering of prayer, giving us a foretaste of life in the Kingdom, feeding and healing our souls. From earliest times, however, the

Church has also offered other services consisting of readings from the Psalms and other Scripture, interpretations and prayers.

In the West these services have gone by many names. St. Benedict spoke of the “canonical hours,” referring to prayers at set times of the day. In the time of St. Gregory the Great they were called the “cursus”, meaning “the course” or “the path,” in the sense of a course of action which would lead one towards a desired goal. By the 9th century it was more common to speak of “the Office” both because these offerings are the official services of the Church, and because we have a sense of fulfilling a duty to God as we offer these prayers. In the year 528, the Emperor Justinian decreed that, “all the clergy themselves in every church, sing the night, and the morning and evening prayers.” We speak of both the Divine Office and of the Daily Office, even though few of our parishes are able to maintain that ideal of daily public services. In later centuries it became common to speak of the “Breviary” and the “Liturgy of the Hours.”



How did the pattern of our prayers develop? First we go back to Scripture. In the Book Exodus, chapter 29, God commanded the Jews to offer sacrifice in the morning and in the evening. In time, in addition to the sacrifices offered in the Temple, there were also *sacrifices of praise* offered in the synagogues. These services consisted of psalms and prayers, scripture readings and interpretation, and these also were held at set times in the day. In the Roman world of the first century bells would be rung in the forum at the first hour, at the third hour, at the sixth hour, at the ninth hour and at the close of the business day. These became hours for prayer for both Jews and Christians. In Acts chapter 3 we read “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (or three in the afternoon).

What did these early non-eucharistic services consist of? We have a hint in Colossians 3 where St. Paul speaks of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs;” psalms and hymns normally refer to the Old Testament psalms, but spiritual songs refers to newly composed hymns, and the canticles of the Revelation of John may be examples of these

new hymns composed by the Church. For example in chapter 5 we find: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” We also know that the Church has repeated the songs of St. Mary, the Mother of God (the *Magnificat*), of St. Simeon the Righteous “receiver of God” (the *Nunc dimittis*) and the Holy Prophet Zechariah (the *Benedictus*) from earliest times, joining voices with theirs in praise. The *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, written in Syria, perhaps in the 1st century, declares that the Lord’s Prayer should be prayed three times every day. So from the very beginning we can see a pattern of daily Christian worship services at set times, involving psalms, scripture readings, hymns or canticles, and prayer, including the Lord’s Prayer.



Some of the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries mention a pattern of Morning and Evening Prayers, with the addition of prayer at the third, sixth and ninth hours. In the 6th century, St. Benedict set forth the norm for monastic prayer. The Psalmist had declared “Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments” (*Ps. 119:164*) and, in time, the monastic pattern of *Prime* (at the first hour), *Lauds*, *Terce* (at the third hour), *Sext* (at the sixth hour), *None* (at the ninth hour), *Vespers* (at the close of the day) and *Compline* (before retiring for the night) fulfilled this pattern. The eighth office, *Matins*, is considered a night office. St. Benedict arranged many of the details of the Office, declared it to be the *Opus Dei* (the “work of God”), and established it as the foundation of monastic life.

Gradually the sung office became the exclusive property of the monastic communities and large churches, due to the complexity of the services and the rules governing them (and in the West due to the fact that the offices were sung in Latin rather than in the vernacular). A number of books were required to compile the office, and these tended to be large books so that several monks could stand around and chant from the

same text. A list of books needed for the office from the 12th century includes: the *Antiphonarium* (for the texts and tunes for the antiphons), the Old and New Testaments, the *Passionarius* and the *Legendarius* (dealing respectively with lives of the martyrs and saints), the *Homiliarius* (for homilies on the Gospels), the *Sermologus* (collection of sermons) and the works of the Fathers, besides, of course, the *Psalterium* (for the Psalter, though the monks were encouraged to memorize the entire psalter) and the *Collectarium* (for the prayers). Rubrics were often passed on by oral tradition; in later centuries the *Ordo* was developed to guide communities through the complicated makeup of the Mass and Office for each day.



By the eleventh century or so clergy outside of monastic communities were required to *read* the Office privately, hence the Breviary developed to provide the text of the full Office in one portable volume. Every monastic order and many dioceses developed their own forms of the Breviary. Between the complexity of the services and great local variation, the state of the Office was such in the sixteenth century that, as the Roman Catholic scholar Robert Taft notes, “even the monks were fed up.” Among the many reforms of the time, there were a number of efforts to simplify the Office, including the work of Francisco de Quiñones (d. 1540), a Spanish Franciscan who sought and obtained permission to become a missionary in America, but then was elected Commissioner General, then Minister General of the Order, preventing his missionary travels. After being named as a Cardinal of the Catholic Church he worked with Pope Clement VII to substantially revise the Breviary. This work was soon rejected, however, in favor of the breviary of Pope Pius V, issued in 1568, which was adopted as the norm throughout the Catholic West until the changes of Pius X in 1911. While the reforms of the new Roman Breviary did not go as far as Cardinal Quiñones advocated, the ideas put forth by Quiñones took root in another, perhaps unexpected, place - in the work of Thomas Cranmer, the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1556).

As Robert Taft states: “The raw material Cranmer worked with was the Sarum use then current in England, but his principles were largely Quiñonian. *The Preface* of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* is largely a paraphrase of Quiñones’ preface, and Cranmer

also borrowed the basic structure of Quiñones’ offices and the principles of that reform” (Collegetown, MN, Liturgical Press, *Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 1993, p. 323). By far the most positive and helpful contribution that Thomas Cranmer made to the English Reformation was the simplification of the monastic office into the Prayer Book forms of Morning and Evening Prayer. These services were meant to be sung (or read) not only in church each day, but also by individuals at home. There was virtually nothing new added to the Office, rather Morning Prayer was created from elements of Matins and Lauds; Evening Prayer was created from Vespers and Compline. While the normal monastic practice was to recite the whole of the Psalter every week, the Prayer Book forms provided for the whole of the Psalter to be read each month. A lectionary for reading a substantial portion of Scripture over the course of the year was also provided.

While Cranmer made the Office manageable for those not living in monastic communities, he also removed virtually all of the non-scriptural interpretive content. The Office Hymns, Antiphons, and Responsories had provided important teaching, commentary on the Scripture, Season or Feast Day. Without this rich, didactic material the Office reached a “lowest common denominator” where it was easier to maintain the “Anglican compromise” such that Catholic and Protestant could both read the same Scripture and say the same words, but have very different understandings of the faith.

For those of us who are engaged in the work of restoring the Western Rite to its Orthodox home, doctrinal ambiguity is not an option - our faith is expressed in the way we pray, the words of our prayers convey what we believe. St. Tikhon (Bellavin), while serving as bishop here in America in the early days of the 20th century, having befriended a number of Catholic-minded Anglicans, posed a question to the Holy Synod of Moscow: “If an entire parish with its minister should simultaneously leave Anglicanism to join the Orthodox Church in America, then would it be possible to authorize the ‘Common Prayer Book’ for their liturgical use?” In 1904, when a committee created by the Synod to examine this matter issued their report they found nothing that should be omitted from the Daily Office. Rather they noted that “worship which is



so indefinite and colourless... cannot, of course, be accepted as satisfactory for sons of the Orthodox Church, who are not afraid of their confession of Faith, and still less for sons who have only just joined the Orthodox Church..." and furthermore, "while the recourse in prayer to the Holy Mother of God, to the Angel Hosts, and to the illustrious Saints, the glorification and invocation of them, forms an essential part of Orthodox and Catholic worship, these things are entirely foreign to Anglican worship. It is absolutely necessary that there should be introduced into this worship some such prayers (or hymns) in one or another form and degree" (*Russian Observations upon the American Prayer Book*, tr. W.J. Barnes, Alcuin Club Tract, 1917, pp. 1, 34, 30).

While the initial Western Rite parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese used the corrected Roman Rite, in the mid-1970's conversations began with Episcopalians concerned about the collapse of their church and who sought refuge in the Western Rite of Orthodoxy. *The English Office*, an edited form of Matins and Vespers from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer was approved for use, then further refinements were made for the *Saint Andrew's Service Book*, edited by Fr. Michael Keiser. Neither volume, however, provided the additions called for by the report of the Russian Synod, nor the music needed for chanting the office, and clergy had to rely on out-of-print materials for those resources. Some one hundred years after that report was issued, *The English Office Noted* was edited to take the condensation of the historic Western Office provided in the English Book of Common Prayer tradition, and enrich that Office in the manner set forth in the report of the committee of the Synod - restoring the Office Hymns, Antiphons and other material. Subsequently *The Monastic Diurnal* was reprinted by Lancelot Andrewes Press. Thus today our parishes have the choice of praying either the monastic Office or *The English Office*, regardless of which Eucharistic Rite (Roman or English) is offered, and many of our parishes have found *The English Office* more practical, manageable and helpful for parish use.



With this historical background in mind we can clearly see that our Office is neither modern, of the Reformation, nor Protestant, but both Western and Orthodox.

[Click here to go to part 2.](#)