

WAS THERE EVER A LITURGICAL TRIDUUM IN ANTIQUITY? THEOLOGICAL IDEA AND LITURGICAL REALITY

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In twentieth-century liturgical reform and reflection, not many ideas were as influential as the “most sacred Triduum of the crucified, buried and resuscitated (sc. Christ)”: it was both a guiding principle of liturgical reform and an axiom of historical research as well as of theological reflection. The present paper offers a critical reassessment of this important concept: starting from a résumé of its modern use (1), an historical investigation traces its history, trying to elucidate its character and impact in antiquity (2); and as a conclusion, some consequences are outlined (3).

1 The Triduum: Principle of Liturgical Reform and Reflection

The restoration of the “Easter Triduum” was a key to the reform of the liturgical year after the Second Vatican Council: in the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* of 1969, not only was it called the “culmination of the liturgical year” but the document also made the following unequivocal statement: “The Easter Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday.”¹ And accord-

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¹ *Calendarium romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Œumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum*, Editio typica, Typis polyglottis vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1969, 13f: «Normae universales de anno liturgico et de calendario» § 18f; English text: *Roman Missal or The Roman Calendar: Text and Commentary*, United States Catholic Conference, Washington DC 1976. For an affirmation of this principle and more detailed consequences, see, for example, the Circular Letter of the CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS,

ingly, in the *Roman Missal* of 1970, the *Missa vespertina in Cena Domini* is separated from the *Feria V Hebdomadæ Sanctæ* by the major rubric *Sacrum Triduum Paschale*.² The same is true for the *Liturgy of the Hours* of 1971;³ consequently, the only remnant of the many peculiarities characterizing the office of the last days of Holy Week, the replacement of the responsory with the chant *Christus factus est*, commences only with the vespers of Maundy Thursday (which, of course, are not to be celebrated by those participating in the Mass of the Lord's Supper ...). Thus, the rubrics make an effort to stylize Maundy Thursday as just a simple day of Holy Week until the Mass of the Last Supper, which is apparently understood as a kind of eve not only of Good Friday, but of the whole Triduum of death, burial and resurrection of Christ.⁴

In fact, the liturgical reform was guided by the conviction that the historical development of the celebration of Easter in the early Church first brought forth the Triduum of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday before resulting in a fully fledged Holy Week;⁵ the "rediscovery that the single Pascha-Triduum ... had not only been seen together in the apostolic proclamation, but also celebrated together in the liturgy in this ... single Triduum" was hailed as "perhaps the most dear

«*Paschalis sollemnitatis*: Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts», *Notitiae* 24 (1988) 81–107, esp. chapters II–IV, § 27; 38–40; 44.

² *Missale romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum*, Editio typica, Typis polyglottis vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1970, 243; in the *Editio typica tertia*, 2002, Reimpressio emendata, Typis polyglottis vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 2008, the heading even occupies an own whole page (297).

³ *Liturgia horarum iuxta ritum romanum. II: Tempus quadragesimæ, Sacrum triduum paschale, Tempus paschale*, Editio typica, Typis polyglottis vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1971, 354.

⁴ For a good overview of the *status quo*, see, for example, *Celebrare l'unità del Triduo Pasquale I: Il Triduo oggi e il Prologo del Giovedì santo*, ed. A. Catella-G. Remondi (Quaderni di Rivista Liturgica 9/1), Elle di Ci, Leumann 1994. The theological problems of the decision were addressed as soon as the reform was to be foreseen; cf. SALVATORE MARSILI, «Il "Triduo sacro" e il "Giovedì santo"», *Rivista Liturgica* 55 (1968) 21–37.

⁵ Representative of the classical opinion is the authoritative manual of HANSJÖRG AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit 1: Herrenfeste in Woche und Jahr* (Gottesdienst der Kirche 5), Pustet, Regensburg 1983, 76–77 (emphases original): «Von der einen Osternachtfeier zum Triduum Sacrum und zur Heiligen Woche: Gegen Ende des 4. Jh. beginnt sich die Feier der einen Osternacht auszuweiten zur Feier des Triduums und der Heiligen Woche. ... a) Zunächst treten der Freitag, Samstag und Sonntag als *Triduum Sacrum* ... ins Bewußtsein. b) *Die Heilige Woche* ... beginnt sich ungefähr gleichzeitig als besondere Woche abzuzeichnen».

of the new- and rediscoveries” of liturgical research.⁶ Maundy Thursday would thus originally have been only the final day of the Quadragesima, on which one was preparing oneself for the celebration of the sacred Triduum by the reconciliation of penitents and the consecration of oils.⁷

The quasi-axiomatic use of the idea in the 20th century is evident; however, in the present context, neither can its significant impact on liturgical reform in other Churches than the Roman Catholic be traced, nor does the employment of the notion as governing matrix of research on the celebration of Easter, both in view of its historical evolution and its theological exposition, need to be documented for the purpose of this investigation.

2 The Triduum: Exegetical Idea or Liturgical Reality?

2.1 *The origins of the concept*

Augustine of Hippo († 430)

The classical formulation of the “most sacred Triduum of the crucified, buried and resuscitated (sc. Christ)” comes from Augustine.⁸ It is absolutely clear that in Hippo at his time Holy Week was celebrated in a quite developed way:⁹ Augustine testifies both to a celebration of the

⁶ BALTHASAR FISCHER, «Vom einen Pascha-Triduum zum Doppel-Triduum der heutigen Rubriken», in *Paschatis Sollemnia. Studien zu Osterfeier und Osterfrömmigkeit*, ed. B. Fischer- J. Wagner, Herder, Freiburg etc. 1959, 146: «Unter den vielen kostbaren Neu- und Wiederentdeckungen, die uns Schülern Jos. A. Jungmanns ... geschenkt wurden, war vielleicht keine so kostbar wie die Wiederentdeckung des einen Pascha-Triduums im Herzen des Kirchenjahres: *sacratissimum triduum crucifixi, sepulti, suscitati*. Auf einmal wußten wir wieder, daß Tod, Begräbnis und Auferstehung Christi nicht nur von der apostolischen Verkündigung zusammen gesehen, sondern auch von der Liturgie in diesem einen (wenn auch seit Jahrhunderten schmerzlich gestörten) Triduum zusammen gefeiert werden».

⁷ FISCHER, «Von einem Pascha-Triduum zum Doppel-Triduum», 154-155.

⁸ AUGUSTINE, *Epistula* 55, 14, 24, ed. A. Goldbacher (Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum [CSEL] 34), Tempsky-Freitag, Praha-Wien 1896, 195, 13-14: «*Adtende igitur sacratissimum triduum crucifixi, sepulti, suscitati*».

⁹ See MICHAEL MARGONI-KÖGLER, *Die Perikopen im Gottesdienst bei Augustinus. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der liturgischen Schrifilesung in der frühen Kirche* (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission zur Herausgabe des Corpus der Lateinischen Kirchenväter 29. Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 810), Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 2010, 95-118, with references to previous studies. It is noteworthy that not only

passion on Good Friday¹⁰ and to a commemoration of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday;¹¹ Easter Sunday had its own Mass beyond the Paschal Vigil.¹²

Nevertheless, the aim of introducing the notion of the Triduum does not seem to have been mystagogy: the literary context of the quotation is a reflection on the connection of the passion and resurrection of Christ the head of the church and his body, in the light of earlier patristic traditions on the typological meaning of the Passover and the symbolism of the date of the passion and the resurrection.¹³ "But this does not have to do with the external observance of the Triduum. He was instead interested in the spiritual meaning of the cross, the repose in the grave, and the resurrection."¹⁴ Furthermore, the Triduum has no impact on Augustine's calculation of the forty days of the pre-paschal Quadragesima, which seems to have ended with the Paschal Vigil and not with Maundy Thursday (and thus before Good Friday and the alleged Triduum).¹⁵

Ambrose of Milan († 397)

It may well be that Augustine had learned the idea of the Triduum from his teacher Ambrose: a letter most likely written in the year 387 to

(Good) Friday, but also Wednesday of what was to become Holy Week had a celebration in which Ps 21 (22) played an important role; regarding AUGUSTINE, *In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus 2, 2*, ed. P. Agaësse (Sources chrétiennes [SCh] 75), Cerf, Paris 41994, 154, see MARGONI-KÖGLER, *Perikopen* 97-98.

¹⁰ On AUGUSTINE, *Sermo 218*, ed. trans. H.R. Drobner, *Augustinus von Hippo. Predigten zum österlichen Triduum* (Sermones 218–229/D) [Patrologia 16], Lang, Frankfurt 2006, 115–188, and the connected problems, see MARGONI-KÖGLER, *Perikopen*, 99-100.

¹¹ AUGUSTINE, *Epistula 54, 7, 9*, ed. Goldbacher (CSEL 34), 168, 1–4: «*uno certo die per annum, quo ipsam cenam dominus dedit, tamquam ad insigniorem commemorationem post cibos offerri et accipi liceat corpus et sanguinem domini*».

¹² On the various sermons for Easter Sunday, see MARGONI-KÖGLER, *Perikopen*, 114–118.

¹³ AUGUSTINE, *Epistula 54, 13, 23*, ed. Goldbacher (CSEL 34), 194-195.

¹⁴ BASIL STUDER, «Zum Triduum Sacrum bei Augustinus von Hippo», in *La celebrazione del Triduo Pasquale: Anamnesis e mimesis. Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Liturgia. Roma, Pontificio Istituto Liturgico, 9–13 Maggio 1988*, ed. I. Scicolone (Studia anselmiana 102. Analecta liturgica 14), Benedictina, Roma 1990, 277: «Er geht dabei nicht auf den äusseren Vollzug des Triduums ein. Ihn interessiert vielmehr die geistige Bedeutung des Kreuzes, der Grabesruhe und der Auferstehung».

¹⁵ MARGONI-KÖGLER, *Perikopen*, 95-96, with reference to the seminal study of HIERONYMUS FRANK, «Die Paschavigil als Ende der Quadragesima und ihr Festinhalt bei Augustinus», *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 9 (1965) 1–27.

clarify the date of Easter speaks of the “sacred Triduum ... within which He suffered, and rested and rose again.”¹⁶ Whether Ambrose knew any developed celebration of what was to become Holy Week is a matter of discussion; while there is no clear proof, indications do exist to suggest that this was not the case.¹⁷

Origen of Alexandria/Caesarea († ca. 253)

It seems, however, that Ambrose, too, did not invent the concept himself. Although Origen’s homilies on Exodus, which were preached in Caesarea in Palestine some time in the 230s or 240s, were translated into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia only after the death of Ambrose in 397, it is more than possible that Ambrose, who used the exegetical works of Origen quite extensively, knew the text, most likely in its Greek original.¹⁸

¹⁶ AMBROSE, *Epistula extra collectionem* 13 (23) 13, ed. M. Zelzer (CSEL 82/3), Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, Wien 1982, 227, 132–134. For a refutation of previous doubts about the authenticity of the text, see MICHAELA ZELZER, «Zum Osterfestbrief des heiligen Ambrosius und zur römischen Osterfestberechnung des 4. Jahrhunderts», *Wiener Studien* 91, n.s. 12 (1978) 187–204; for an English translation, see AMBROSE OF MILAN, *Political Letters and Speeches*, trans. J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz (Translated Texts for Historians 43), Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2005, esp. 286. The affinity between the letters of Augustine and Ambrose is close enough to consider a literary dependence of the two texts, though their aim is quite different.

¹⁷ AMBROSE, *Epistula extra collectionem* 13 (23) 11–12 and 19–20, ed. Zelzer (CSEL 82/3), 226–227; 232–233 distinguishes the *dies passionis* from the *dies resurrectionis*, but relates only to fasting as opposed to feasting, not to a liturgical celebration; cf. the careful analysis by ALEXANDER ZERFASS, *Mysterium mirabile. Poesie, Theologie und Liturgie in den Hymnen des Ambrosius von Mailand zu den Christusfesten des Kirchenjahres* (Pietas liturgica 19), Francke, Tübingen 2008, 247–248: «Im Unterschied zum späteren und heutigen Verständnis des *triduum sacrum* verbirgt sich hinter diesem Ausdruck jedoch keine liturgische Gestalt. Zumal für eine eigentliche Karfreitagsliturgie nach Jerusalemer Vorbild gibt es keine Anzeichen. ... Ambrosius unterscheidet ... ein historisches Gedächtnis des Leidens und Sterbens Jesu, dem die Kirche durch ihre Fastenpraxis entspricht, von dem einen liturgischen Gedächtnis des Todes und der Auferstehung Jesu, in dem – zentral in der Osternacht – der Tod Jesu nicht mehr als Anlaß der Trauer, sondern als Heilsereignis in den Blick kommt». The pericope notes collected by JOSEF SCHMITZ, *Gottesdienst im alchristlichen Mailand. Eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Initiation und Messfeier während des Jahres zur Zeit des Bischofs Ambrosius († 397)* (Theophaneia 25), Hanstein, Köln-Bonn 1975, 323–341, for the weeks before Easter speak more against than for the existence of a celebration of Holy Week developed according to a passion-chronology.

¹⁸ The preserved sources are far too scarce to reveal a complete picture, but in any case Ambrose was a mediator of Greek ideas into the West, which is especially true of his *Epistula extra collectionem* 13 (23); see *Political Letters*, trans. Liebeschuetz, 280: «in

In his homily on the departure of the Israelites from Egypt and the crossing of the sea (Exod. 12:37–14:30), Origen refers back to the “way of three days” of Exod. 5:3, and gives an exposition in the light of Hos. 6:2:

Hear what the prophet says: ‘God will revive us after two days, and on the third day we will arise and live in his sight.’ The first day is the passion of the Saviour for us. The second is the day on which he descended into hell. The third day is the day of resurrection.¹⁹

Admittedly, this text is transmitted only in Latin translation, but the argument is so constitutive for the train of thought that it must be considered original in its substance. Although Origen continues his explanation with a baptismal actualization of the Christological motif,²⁰ there is no connection to the Easter liturgy.²¹ Furthermore, and more importantly for the present question, it is all but certain that the celebration of Easter in 3rd century Caesarea consisted only of “pascha” (the Paschal Vigil) and its Pentecost;²² the development of Holy Week

Ep. ex. 13 Ambrose is doing what he has done in many other letters: he is communicating something that he has learnt by reading Greek authors».

¹⁹ ORIGEN, *Homilia in Exodum* 5, 2, ed. W.A. Baehrens (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte [GCS] 29. Origenes Werke 6), J.C. Hinrichs, Leipzig 1920, 186, 11–12: «... *Prima dies nobis passio Salvatoris est et secunda, qua descendit in infernum, tertia autem resurrectionis est dies*», English translation by R.E. Heine (Fathers of the Church 71), The Catholic University of America, Washington DC 1982, 278. For an analysis of the context, see HARALD BUCHINGER, *Pascha bei Origenes*, 2 vol. (Innsbrucker theologische Studien 64.2), Tyrolia, Innsbruck 2005, 2, 790–796.

²⁰ ORIGEN, *Homilia in Exodum* 5, 2, ed. Baehrens (GCS 29), 186, 14–21: «... according to what we said above, the Apostle teaches us rightly that the mysteries of baptism are contained in these words, it is necessary that “those who are baptized in Christ are baptized in his death and are buried with him” (cf. Rom. 6:3) also arise from the dead with him on the third day whom also, according to what the apostle says, “He raised up together with him and at the same time made them sit in the heavenly places” (Ephes. 2:6). When, therefore, you shall have undertaken the mystery of the third day, God will begin to lead you and will himself show you the way of salvation.” English translation by Heine (Fathers of the Church 71), 278–279.

²¹ Cf. BUCHINGER, *Pascha* 2, 807–809, and IDEM, «Towards the Origins of Paschal Baptism: The Contribution of Origen», *Studia Liturgica* 35 (2005) 12–31.

²² ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum* 8, 22, ed. M. Borret (Sch 150), Cerf, Paris 1969, 222, 1–3 gives an obviously complete list of weekly and annual celebrations: «If anyone makes a rejoinder to this by talking of our observances on certain days, the Lord’s Day which we keep, or the Preparation (i. e., Friday), or the Passover, or Pentecost (τὰ περὶ τῶν παρ’ ἡμῖν κυριακῶν ἢ παρασκευῶν ἢ τοῦ Πάσχα ἢ τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς δι’

celebrations was to take place only more than one hundred years later in the second half of the 4th century.

To sum up: Augustine does not seem to have had liturgy in mind when he spoke of the Triduum, though the liturgical reality of his community would have allowed to correlate the idea with the various services of Holy Week in 5th century Hippo; before him, Ambrose used the idea in a liturgical context that is very unlikely to have known these celebrations at all. The ultimate proof that the theologoumenon of the Triduum was first developed independently from liturgy in the purely literary context of exegesis comes from Origen, in whose times the liturgical development of Holy Week was still quite unconceivable.

2.2 Was there ever a liturgical Triduum in antiquity?

Although the concept of the Triduum obviously originated as a theological idea in mere exegesis, it still may have shaped liturgical reality later on. However, such an influence cannot be proven; on the contrary, there is no hard evidence that within the celebration of Holy Week and Easter according to a harmonized chronology of the evangelical Passion narratives, a Triduum consisting of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday was ever conceived as a distinct liturgical entity.²³ The case seems absolutely clear for the Christian East, which never produced a paschal Triduum as such.²⁴ In the West, the situation appears to

ἡμερῶν γινόμενα), we would reply to this ...», English translation by Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1965, 468.

²³ Of course, Augustine's formulation was not without influence on later authors: it was not only handed down in collections such as the *Excerpta ex operibus S. Augustini* 118, ed. P. Knöll (CSEL 9.1), apud C. Geroldi filium, Wien 1885, 439, 15-16 of EUGIPIUS († after 533); it was also taken up in catechetical, polemical or homiletical literature, however always without a direct link to liturgy: Clearly dependent on Augustine's letter are AMULO OF LYONS († 852), *Epistola seu liber contra Iudaeos ad Carolum regem* 30, ed. J. Sirmond (Patrologia latina 116), Garnier frères, Paris 1879, 161C, and an anonymous *Explanatio symboli apostolici* (12th century), ed. A. Mai (Patrologia latina 213), J.P. Migne, Paris 1855, 734 A; HERMANNUS DE RUNA (Rein in Styria, † 1189) speaks of the «*triduum passionis suae* (sc. Christi) *et dormitionis et euigilationis*» in his *Sermo* 27, 3 for Easter, ed. E. Mikkers (Corpus christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis [CCM] 64), Brepols, Turnhout 1986, 109, 81-83, since the context alludes to a *transitus* (*Ibid.*, 27, 1, ed. Mikkers [CCM 64], 109, 78), one might think that he had Augustinian ideas in mind.

²⁴ AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern*, 77: «Eine besondere Ausprägung nur des Triduum Sacrum ist im Osten nicht bekannt». That within Holy Week there is no distinct Triduum, becomes clear also from the various solutions for the counting of the Forty Days of Lent which either overlap with or are added to Holy Week after the development of the latter

be somewhat more complicated, because it is not always evident when exactly the various Holy Week celebrations, which are most likely to have originated in Jerusalem, reached the various regions.²⁵

in the various liturgical traditions; cf. HARALD BUCHINGER, «On the Early History of Quadragesima. A New Look at an Old Problem and Some Proposed Solutions», in *Liturgies in East and West. Ecumenical Relevance of Early Liturgical Development? First International Symposium Vindobonense, Vienna, November 17-20, 2007*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Feulner (Österreichische Studien zur Liturgiewissenschaft und Sakramententheologie), LIT, Wien [in print].

Two Easter homilies that discuss «three days» merit attention in this context: (1) GREGORY OF NYSSA dedicates a whole homily to the «three days' time of (sc. before) the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ» (after A. D. 386?), *De triduo spatio*, ed. E. Gebhardt (Gregorii Nysseni Opera 9), Brill, Leiden 1967, 273–306, but this is a purely exegetical question, which at his time already had a long tradition in patristic literature; cf. HUBERTUS R. DROBNER, «Three Days and Three Nights in the Heart of the Earth. The Calculation of the *Triduum Mortis* according to Gregory of Nyssa (*De Tridui Spatio*)», in *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa. Translation and Commentary. Proceedings of the Fourth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, Cambridge, England, 11–15 September, 1978*, ed. A. Spira-C. Klock (Patristic Monograph Series 9), Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Cambridge MA 1981, 263–278; IDEM (trans.), *Gregor von Nyssa, Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus* (Philosophia Patrum 5), Brill, Leiden 1982, 103–114, and the texts quoted by G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Clarendon, Oxford-New York 1969, 1408 s. v. τριήμερος etc. Nothing in this homily points to any liturgical celebration other than the Paschal Vigil.

(2) The *Anatolian Pseudo-chrysostomic Homily* of A. D. 387, ed. F. Floëri – P. Nautin (SCh 48), Cerf, Paris 1957, vindicates the Church's calculation of Easter with reference to its three determining factors – i. e. spring equinox, fourteenth day of the moon, and weekday (Sunday) – against the Quartodeciman practice and the dominical date of the Montanists. The exposition of the «triduum, which is Friday, Saturday, Lord's Day» (*Ibid.*, § 4, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 115, 4); further references *Ibid.* 180, Index s. v. τριήμερος relates the passion to Friday, the rest to Saturday and the resurrection to the Lord's day (*Ibid.*, § 35f, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 145–147), but this refers in the first instance to the historical Christ-event (*Ibid.*, § 18 [SCh 48, 127–129]). Whereas all three factors, to which the homilist gives high theological relevance, coincided in the passion of Christ, this is obviously not the case every year (*Ibid.*, § 38, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 149), wherefore the Church can respect them only «as far as possible» (ὡς ἂν δύναμις; *Ibid.*, § 38-39; 48, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 149–151, 161–163). Ultimately, she does so «in order to show forth the hidden meaning of the sheep which the Law called Pascha» (*Ibid.*, § 41, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 151–153) which in turn was substituted by the Eucharist (*Ibid.*, § 39-40, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 149–151). The Church's annual paschal celebration as such, which is clearly related to the passion (*Ibid.*, § 11 [SCh 48], 121, 4: «the date of the passion»; § 48, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 163), is held on Sunday, and the whole argument only goes about which Sunday that be – generally, in the given year, and whenever the fourteenth day of the moon coincides with the Lord's day (*Ibid.*, § 51, ed. Floëri-Nautin [SCh 48], 165–167).

²⁵ In any case, the various celebrations spread at different pace: as is well known, Palm Sunday did not reach the Roman liturgy before the middle ages by way of the detour via the non-Roman western liturgies; see HARALD BUCHINGER, «Hosanna dem

In any case, it is significant that Innocent I of Rome in his famous letter of 416 to bishop Decentius of Gubbio speaks of the “two days (*biduum*)” between death and resurrection of Christ during which “the apostles were in mourning and were hiding out of fear of the Jews. Let there be no doubt, then, about commemorating by fasting during these two days, because the tradition of the Church maintains that the sacraments are strictly not to be celebrated in this two-day span (*isto biduo*).”²⁶ Of course his insistence on the absence of sacramental liturgy does not categorically preclude the possibility that there were other kinds of (non-sacramental) celebrations in Rome at the time of Innocent,²⁷

Sohne Davids!” Zur Liturgie des Palmsonntags», *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift* 38 (2009) 35–43, with reference especially to AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern*, 98–101, and the classical study of HERMANN J. GRÄF, *Palmenweihe und Palmenprozession in der lateinischen Liturgie* (Veröffentlichungen des Missionspriesterseminars St. Augustin bei Bonn 5), Steyler, Kaldenkirchen 1959. It also appears that Good Friday liturgy was received in Rome earlier than the commemoration of the Last Supper; see below, n. 27.

²⁶ MARTIN F. CONNELL, *Church and Worship in Fifth-Century Rome: The Letter of Innocent I to Decentius of Gubbio* (Joint Liturgical Study 52), Grove Books, Cambridge 2002, 34; critical text, ed. Robert Cabié, *La lettre du pape Innocent I^{er} à Décentius de Gabbio (19 Mars 416)* (Bibliothèque de la Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique 58), Publications Universitaires-Bureau de la RHE, Louvain 1973, 24, 72–77. The same stress on fasting, not on liturgy, was found in Ambrose as quoted in n. 17.

²⁷ On Thursday before Easter the reconciliation of penitents took place in Rome at the time of Innocent I (cf. CONNELL, *Church and Worship*, 44; *Lettre du pape Innocent I^{er}*, ed. Cabié, 28, 114–115), but a commemoration of the Last Supper is not mentioned in Rome before the end of the 5th century, when Pope GELASIUS (492–496) reports the circumstances of the death of papa Proterius of Alexandria († 457), who was murdered in the baptistery of a church to which he had fled «three days before the Pasch, when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated «*ante triduum Paschae, quo coena Domini celebratur*» in his *Tractatus I seu Gesta de nomine Acacii vel Breviculus historiae Eutychieanistarum* 4, ed. A. Thiel, in *Epistulae Romanorum pontificum genuinae et quae ad eos scriptae sunt a S. Hilario usque ad Pelagium II*, Peter, Braunsberg 1867 [repr. Olms, Hildesheim 1974], 1, 514–515; the chronological notice is missing in the version of the *Codex Vallicellianus* 18, (*Ibid.*, 520). The attribution of the document to Gelasius – instead of his predecessor FELIX III (*Breviculus historiae Eutychieanistarum*, ed. J. Sirmund [Patrologia latina 58], J.P. Migne, Paris 1862, 931 A) – seems to be settled by Thiel, (*Epistulae romanorum pontificum*, 519, n. 42 and 44). The text appears to be the first reference to a celebration of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday by a Roman author (which makes it likely that such a celebration existed in Rome by the later 5th century, although the reported story goes about Alexandria); «*ante triduum Paschae*» means nothing more than the simple chronological indication «three days before Easter» and is not to be misunderstood as if it mentioned a *Triduum Paschae* (my thanks are due to Martin Kaiser, doctoral student at the University of Regensburg, for drawing my attention away from liturgical speculations to the obvious simplicity of this text). The report is reproduced in the second half of the 6th century by LIBERATUS, Deacon of Carthage, *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychieanorum* 15, ed. E.

but even if they existed, they did not form (or were conceived as) a Triduum. It seems much more likely that the passage in Innocent's letter still relates to the old concept of the Paschal Fast comprising at least Friday and Saturday in the context of a dominical paschal celebration.²⁸ Liturgical sources of Merovingian Gaul still reflect this tradition when they address Good Friday and Holy Saturday, which by then clearly have their own liturgies, as a single period *in biduana*.²⁹

For a liturgical distinction of a Triduum within the larger concept of Holy Week, only two rather faint arguments can be adduced from

Schwartz (*Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2/5), de Gruyter, Berlin-Leipzig 1936, 124, 8). A clearer picture of the liturgical shape of Maundy Thursday in Rome – apart from the reconciliation of penitents mentioned by Innocent I (see above) – emerges only from the liturgical sources of the Carolingian period from which usages of the 7th century may be inferred; cf. AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern*, 103.

Good Friday was celebrated by the time of Leo I (440–461) by a liturgy centred around the reading of the passion, but the latter was also done on Sunday and Wednesday before Easter and in the Paschal Vigil; cf. LEO I, *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* 22, ed. Antoine Chavasse (*Corpus christianorum. Series latina* [CCL] 138 A), Brepols, Turnhout 1973, 303–306; AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern*, 101. *Tractatus* 72, 3, ed. Chavasse (CCL 138 A), 443, 56–60 reached on Good Friday, sounds like a late echo of Origen's homily 5, 2 on Exodus: «We too are crucified in Christ, we too die, we too are buried, we too are raised with him on the third day. As the Apostle says: "If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above"» (Col. 3:1–4), English translation by J.P. Freeland – A.P. Conway (*Fathers of the Church* 93), 317. It is to be noted, however, that Leo does not speak of a *Triduum*, but rather relates to the biblical and creedal formula of the resurrection *die tertio*.

²⁸ Cf. TERTULLIAN, *De ieiunio* 2, 2, and 13, 1, ed. A. Reifferscheid-G. Wissowa (CCL 2), Brepols, Turnhout 1954, 1258, 17–20 and 1271, 26–27; DIONYSIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Epistula ad Basiliden* 1, ed. C.L. Feltoe in *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 1904, 101–102; *Didascalia apostolorum* 21, ed. A. Vööbus (*Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium* 407. *Scriptores syri* 179), Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, Louvain 1979, 205, 18–23, English translation (CSCO 408. *Scriptores syri* 180), 188, 11–17 etc. A clear distinction between commemoration by fasting and by liturgical celebrations is crucial for a correct understanding of the various pre-paschal periods and their underlying concepts, all the more since they can overlap or even be confused, cf. BUCHINGER, «On the Early History of Quadragesima».

²⁹ *Missale Gothicum* (*Vat. Reg. lat.* 317), ed. L.C. Mohlberg (*Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta. Fontes* 5), Herder, Roma 1961, 57–58 no. XXVIII; *Missale Gallicanum Vetus* (*Cod. Vat. Palat. lat.* 493), ed. L.C. Mohlberg (*Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta. Fontes* 3), Herder, Roma 1958, 29–30, no. 21–22. List of pericopes in *Vat. lat.* 5755 from Bobbio, page 308: ALBAN DOLD, *Zwei Bobbienser Palimpseste mit frühestem Vulgatatext aus Cod. Vat. lat. 5763 u. Cod. Carolin. Guelferbytanus. [...] Anhang: Geschäbte Paulustexte der 1. Hälfte des 7. Jahrh. mit einer gleichzeitigen unbekanntenen Liste paulinischer Leseabschnitte in einer Bobbienser Handschrift* (*Cod. Vat. lat.* 5755) [*Texte und Arbeiten* 1, 19–20], Kunstschule der Erzabtei, Beuron 1931, 66, N° 23 and 25.

liturgical orders as such. Firstly, from the homilies of Leo I (440–461) on Lent it becomes clear that he counted a Quadragesima of 40 days, beginning with the 6th Sunday before Easter,³⁰ with the period accordingly ending on Maundy Thursday. However, this does not necessarily mean that the reason for this calculation was a concept of a liturgical Triduum (which is significantly absent in Leo's works³¹); the Quadragesima as period of fasting may, rather, have been attached to the old Paschal Fast – which was an ascetical and not a liturgical entity.

Secondly, in the medieval office note has long been taken of an interesting difference between Maundy Thursday and the two following days: whereas the psalms of the Good Friday and Holy Saturday vigils are selectively chosen for these days and do not follow the usual weekly cycle, on Maundy Thursday the vigil psalms are those used on other Thursdays, though they are sung with special antiphons.³² But is this little anomaly in the distribution of psalms a hook strong enough to bear the burden of proof of the Triduum being a liturgical reality and not only a theological concept? This seems quite doubtful not only because in the very structure of its vigil psalmody, Maundy Thursday is matched up with the two following days,³³ but also, and most especially, because all other peculiarities of the office include Maundy Thursday in the same rules that apply to Good Friday and Holy Saturday,³⁴ thus

³⁰ LEO I, *Tractatus* 39, ed. Chavasse (CCL 138 A), 211–222, esp. c. 3 (*Ibid.*, 214, 60–62); further sources as quoted by WINFRIED BÖHNE, «Beginn und Dauer der römischen Fastenzeit im sechsten Jahrhundert», *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 77 (1966) 224–237 (especially 226–227).

³¹ Cf. n. 27 on LEO I, *Tractatus* 72, 3.

³² AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern*, 103; cf. *Corpus Antiphonalium Officii*, 5 vol., ed. R.J. Hesbert (Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta. Fontes 7–12), Herder, Roma 1963–1979, 1, 166–169; 2, 302–305, N° 72a.

³³ JOAN HALMO, *Antiphons for Paschal Triduum-Easter in the Medieval Office* (Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen - Musicological Studies 64), Institute of Mediaeval Music, Ottawa 1995, 32–33, 132–135.

³⁴ See, for example, *Ordo Romanus* 23, ed. M. Andrieu in *Les Ordines romani du haut moyen âge* 3 (Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense [=SSL] 24), Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense, Louvain 1961, 269: suppression of opening versicle, invitatory, doxology, versicles, litany (and the Lord's Prayer); cf. also *Ordines Romani* 26 (*Ibid.* 325; 328–329); 27 (*Ibid.*, 347–348.); 28 (*Ibid.*, 391, 393–394); 29 (*Ibid.*, 437–438; 442–443); 30A (*Ibid.*, 455–456); 30B (*Ibid.*, 467; 470–471); 31 (*Ibid.*, 492–493). Though the sources come only from the early middle ages, these features are signs of great antiquity; cf. ANTON BAUMSTARK, «Das Gesetz der Erhaltung des Alten in liturgisch hochwertiger Zeit», *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 7 (1927) 1–23, esp. 1.

There do exist, admittedly, sporadic sources in which some peculiarities are limited to Good Friday and Holy Saturday, such as *Ordo Romanus* 17, 93 (*Ibid.*, 188: absence

giving the three days before (rather than including) Easter Sunday a distinctive shape, forming what much later was called – and very rightly criticized for theological reasons³⁵ – a “passion Triduum”.³⁶

of doxology and litany); but since *Ordo Romanus* 17 is a secondary source – to be exact: a compilation of *Ordines Romani* 15 and 16 (*Ibid.*, 161) – one should be cautious with interpreting it as a testimony of very primitive usages. In any case, none of these customs is apt to betray the concept of a Triduum in the sense of Augustine and the post-Vatican reform, since all of them give the days *before* Easter a characteristic shape, thus distinguishing them from Easter Sunday rather than uniting them with what would be the third day of a Triduum. For a detailed account of the manifold rites around the light, see ALISTAIR J. MACGREGOR, *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum: Their Use at Tenebrae and at the Paschal Vigil* (Alcuin Club Collections 71), Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 1992, esp. 10–30, whose bibliography has to be completed by VINCENZO RAFFA, «Afnia ed epifania della luce nel Triduo sacro», in *Miscellanea Liturgica in onore di [...] Giacomo Lercaro*, 2 vol., Desclée, Roma 1966, 1, 559–595.

³⁵ Cf. FISCHER, *Pascha-Triduum*.

³⁶ The early medieval liturgical sources do not call Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week a *Triduum*; the title given *Ordo Romanus* 23, ed. Andrieu (SSL 24), 269 comes from the editor. In the present context it cannot and need not be investigated, when these days were labelled a *Triduum* in later medieval *Ordines* (it is not yet the case in the 10th century *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum*) and liturgical commentaries. A rationale why the three days of Christ's being buried (*triduana sepultura*) are celebrated on the three days of Thursday (!), Friday, and Saturday, is first given by AMALARIUS, *Liber officialis* 1, 12, 33, ed. J.M. Hanssens (Studi e Testi 139), Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1948, 78-79, but he does not call these liturgical days a *Triduum* (though he is searching for the *triduum et tres noctes* of Mt 12,40 in the context, § 32, *Ibid.*, 78, 33-34). When PRAEPOSITINUS OF CREMONA († 1210), *Tractatus de officiis* 219, ed. J.A. Corbett (Publications in Medieval Studies 21), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame IN-London 1969, 118, reproduces the same argument, he speaks of a *Triduum*; his exposition is repeated verbatim by GUILLELMUS DURANDUS OF MENDE († 1296), *Rationale divinorum officiorum* 6, 72, 1, ed. A. Davril-T.M. Thibodeau (CCM 140 A), Brepols, Turnhout 1998, 336. When RUPERT OF DEUTZ († 1129) discusses the *biduum* of Matt. 26:2 in a different context in his *De gloria et honore filii hominis super Mattheum* 10, ed. R. Haacke (CCM 29), Brepols, Turnhout 1979, 301, 108–111, he links the *triduana sepultura* with the *triduana passio*: «... sicut *triduana sepultura, ita et triduana fuit eius passio*». Among medieval authors who speak of a *triduum passionis*, one finds HENRY OF MARCY († 1189), *Tractatus de peregrinante civitate Dei* 12, ed. B. Tissier (PL 204), J.P. Migne, Paris 1855, 345 B. One testimony can perhaps be dismissed: According to ILDEFONSUS OF TOLEDO († 667), *Liber de cognitione baptismi* 107, ed. V. Yarza Urquida (CCL 114 A), Brepols, Turnhout 2007, 408-409, a *triduum* precedes the Easter Vigil, but it is not unlikely that he just wants to speak of «three days», not «the Three Days», when he reports among the miracles of the baptismal font: «*Habet itaque similitudinem prophetiae virtutis, quia quinta feria Paschae odorem denuntiat, quod post triduum paschali Sabbato visione praesentat*». So it appears that the terminology (not the reality) of a liturgical *Triduum* (in this case, of course, one of the passion) was not developed before the second millennium, perhaps not even before the 12th century.

3 The Triduum: bearing and limits of the concept

The notion of a Christological Triduum of death, burial, and resurrection was first developed in a purely exegetical context, and it remained in the literary realms of theological reasoning even when the opportunity to relate it to liturgical reality had been given.³⁷ Of course one should not underestimate the ingenuity of the concept. The speculative force with which the argumentation of Origen and Augustine, each in their own way, exposes the unity of the salvific Christ-event as well as its meaning for the believers is one of the absolute highlights not only of paschal theology but also of Christian thinking altogether.³⁸ It also remains an important warning against any centrifugal tendencies that may divide the essential unity of the paschal mystery and dissociate the elements of its liturgical celebration.

However, the concept should not be overstressed; one should be aware of its limits. This caveat concerns several levels of liturgical celebration and reflection:

(1) On the liturgy-formative level of liturgical celebration and legislation, the strong division made before the Mass of the Last Supper by recent liturgical books appears somewhat artificial in the light of liturgical history. Maundy Thursday is a liturgical day in its own right and with an identity of its own, not only the “eve of Good Friday”; and contrary to the tendencies of the last reform to focus on the theme of the Eucharist,³⁹ its anamnestic content may not be reduced to the latter. The old-Roman mass texts develop the double *traditio* (“handing over” of Christ to passion and death by Judas and of the Eucharist to the Church by Christ)⁴⁰ and situate it in the whole of the Passion narrative, which is further developed in the liturgy of the hours.⁴¹

Wherever the office of *Tenebrae* is celebrated during the paschal days,

³⁷ After Augustine, cf. LEO I, *Tractatus* 72, 3 and the medieval authors quoted in n. 23.

³⁸ One great accomplishment of Augustine was to synthesize earlier strands of paschal theology at a time at which also the developed celebration of Easter spread over the Christian world.

³⁹ ALCESTE CATELLA - GIORDANO REMONDI, «Alcune valutazioni e proposte sul Giovedì santo», in *Celebrare l'unità*, 127–135 criticize these tendencies, speaking of «una festa del *Corpus Domini* più nobilitata» (129).

⁴⁰ AUF DER MAUR, *Feiern*, 104.

⁴¹ A theological dissertation complementing the observations of the musicological study of HALMO, *Antiphons*, is currently being written at the University of Vienna by Dr. phil. Ingrid Fischer.

there is no reason to limit it to Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and if the immemorial peculiarities of these celebrations are kept,⁴² this should be done for Maundy Thursday as well.

(2) On the liturgy-explicative level of catechetical instruction and mystagogy, the unity of the celebration of the paschal mystery, which of course remains a crucial issue, should not be overstressed or used for ideological ends: as is well known, the lack of introductory or concluding elements in the main celebrations of the Paschal days is no more than a sign of primitive simplicity,⁴³ not a conscious bond of a putative “single celebration” distributed on three days.

(3) On the fundamental-liturgical level, the history and character of the concept of the “most sacred Triduum of the crucified, buried and resuscitated (sc. Christ)” is yet another striking demonstration of the important insight that theological reflection need not always follow liturgical experience, as is widely assumed; on the contrary, several essential instances, including the connection between Easter and Baptism,⁴⁴ show that even at the very core of Christian liturgy (which the celebration of the paschal mystery doubtlessly is), exegetical and theological speculation has sometimes preceded the development of the liturgical celebration⁴⁵ – and in some cases, such as the *Triduum crucifixi, sepulti, suscitati*, did not even shape it until very recently; in fact, the impact of the patristic theologoumenon on the liturgical reform of the 20th century may be interpreted as an outstanding example of an organic development of liturgy.

⁴² Cf. n. 34. The total assimilation of the office of the paschal days to the regular structure in the *Liturgia Horarum* of 1971/1972 may be regretted not only by liturgical historians; that some distinctive features of these days have been maintained in various renewed monastic books (such as the widely used *Benediktinisches Antiphonale*, 3 vol., of Münsterschwarzach, Vier-Türme Verlag, 1996) is not a sign of opposition to liturgical reform.

⁴³ That there is no final benediction on Maundy Thursday, neither opening nor conclusive rites on Good Friday, and of course no *Introit* or other opening elements (apart from the now in any sense displaced illumination, bell-ringing and *Gloria* which have been inserted between the OT lessons of the former reading vigil and the NT lessons of the former liturgy of the word of the vigil Mass) in the Eucharistic celebration of the Paschal Vigil, is yet another famous example of Baumstark’s «Law of the preservation of older usages in the more solemn liturgical seasons».

⁴⁴ Cf. BUCHINGER, *Origins*.

⁴⁵ HARALD BUCHINGER, «On the Origin and Development of the Liturgical Year: Tendencies, Results, and Desiderata of Heortological Research», *Studia Liturgica* 40 (2010) 14–45.