CHAPTER 23

PRAYER

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JEWS, Christians, and Muslims perform public liturgies. The study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam must conceive liturgy and prayer in very broad terms in order not to exclude evidence that elucidates the subject. It is thus convenient to take general presuppositions about communal rituals and prayer among Muslims, Christians, and Jews as a point of departure and to organize the presentation of evidence along those lines.

1. Liturgy and Prayer as Performance: Typical Gestures and Postures

Prayers and liturgies are bodily performances: liturgies must be done, they cannot be only thought or imagined. They require a community of worshippers. While it is possible to assess some of their social functions and to map the changes they underwent throughout their history, their supernatural purposes and effects can only be analysed and presented as a description of the network of instructions, explanatory texts, and other evidence of the respective believers' opinions about them. Thus, they can be observed, documented, and interpreted but not understood. Although one can observe and describe some of their social functions and assess the participants' reaction to their experiences, the performance of liturgies cannot be fully grasped let alone replaced by textual information (Bell 1992).

The performance of Jewish statutory prayers is governed by an elaborate system of rules for the correct posture and gestures (Ehrlich 2004). Some of these continue or re-enact in a stylized way gestures and postures that were used in the Temple of Jerusalem, in other temples of the ancient world, and in contexts that highlighted social hierarchies. Some rather derive from behaviour at houses of study and schools

or from general social customs. The most important part of the prayer, the *Amidah* (scientific translation and discussion: Langer 2003) indicates by its name—'standing (prayer)'—that one must stand during its performance. The worshippers bow at certain passages of this prayer (which is whispered in a low voice). During the rest of the service, the congregations mostly sit, rising just for certain moments, e.g. when the Torah scroll is lifted up in front of them. Some congregations practise a series of prostrations on the Day of Atonement. Some gestures in daily prayers require a certain status in the community. One of the most conspicuous of these may be performed only by members of the community who are of priestly descent (*kohanim*, Elbogen 1993: § 9b). The shape of the hands lifted up under the cover of the prayer shawl during this specific gesture was even adopted as an indication of the priestly status of certain persons on their tombstones. During the recitation of *Shma Israel* (comprising the biblical passages Deut. 6: 4–9; 11: 13–21; Num. 15: 37–41), worshippers cover their eyes with their hands and when saying *taḥanun*, a penitentiary prayer recited at the end of certain weekday prayers, each one covers his eyes leaning on one of his arms (Elbogen 1993: § 10). Any member of the congregation can theoretically lead the common prayer service. Dependent upon the Jewish movement and the style of the prayer as accepted by the congregation, a professional cantor (*ḥazan*) may assume that function.

As Christianity opposed the offering of animal sacrifices from its beginning, its earliest members avoided behaviours that were customary at temples or even the consumption of food that was regarded as typical for the cuisine of sacrifices (McGowan 1999). They preferred to adopt and adapt gestures and postures of its Graeco-Roman neighbours that were typical of club banquets, or symposia (Klinghardt 1996, Harland 2003). Furthermore, standing with uncovered head and outstretched arms was regarded as a typical posture for Christian prayer, as attested by the early third-century North African writer Tertullian (*Apology* 30.4), and was characterized in opposition to the respective pagan customs. In the course of the first centuries, the setting of the symposium was given up as focal point of inner congregational communication and worship. Thus, Christianity increasingly appropriated postures of devotion to worldly superiors such as the emperor or other forms of court behaviour (prostration, stylized prostration, and later kneeling; cf. for the historical context, Baldovin 2006). While Christian prayer or the participation in the Divine Liturgy of many Orthodox churches is typically performed in a standing posture, the introduction of pews in the churches of the Reformation and the Catholic church made sitting the most widespread posture for worshippers (for a concise survey, cf. Vereecke 1990). In eastern Christian churches, many gestures and movements of the clergy are concealed by a wall of icons. In reformed or Catholic services, the congregations tend to sit in front of the altar or pulpit in order to watch the precentor's actions and to listen to his or her words (Post 2003).

In Islam, the obligatory daily prayer (called *ṣalāt*) is described as a sequence of several *rakʿāt*, which originally meant 'bowings' but is used to designate prayer units which consist of a fixed set of movements. Each *rakʿa* starts with a Quran recitation which is performed standing, followed by a bow, a prostration, sitting on the knees, and

a second prostration. At each prayer, this sequence is performed several times, framed by a standing opening and a final sitting. Kneelers or pews are not needed, only a clean space on the floor. Thus, mosques are usually furnished only with a carpeted floor. There is always one prayer leader (imam), but his liturgical role does not depend upon any kind of priestly status. He prays in the same direction and by the same set of movements as the other worshippers (*ma'mūmūn*). Friday prayers are exceptional as the preacher (*ḫāṭib*) stands on the pulpit for his sermons and sits down for the break between the two sermons (al-Muslim, Ǧum'a, Bāb 156 (861–2)). All these movements are already described in the Quran as prayer gestures, enjoined by the prophet himself: standing (Q. 73: 2), bowing (Q. 77: 48), and prostration (Q. 53: 62). It is here where prayer became ritualized. The sequence of movements is supposed to be observed strictly, and exceptions are granted only to old or disabled people.

2. Texts

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim rituals use texts, which may be read, sung, murmured, or, in a few cases, only thought. As part of the performance of the ritual, texts function in a similar way to gestures. They may lose their semantic functions, or function as expressions of meaning which goes beyond what could be regarded as their plain sense (regarding the recitation of passages of the Book of Psalms for instance, Bradshaw 1995; Rappaport 1999: e.g. 151f.). Thus, the plain sense of their words need not reflect the interpretation of the ritual in the eyes of well-informed performers or ritual specialists. This can be exemplified from the rituals of the three traditions.

The widespread core unit of Jewish table prayers said before consumption of food is the *brakha* (blessing): 'Blessed are you, *Adonai* (a term that replaces the utterance of God's ineffable name), our God, king of the universe, who is bringing forth bread from the soil.' The blessing highlights bread as representing all food that is subsequently served during the meal. A similar blessing would be said over a cup of wine in formal meals. Ancient sources explain this *brakha* as allowing human use of what is actually God's property (*t. Brakhot* 4.1; Leonhard 2007). Neither the text of the *brakha* nor the gestures that accompany it allude to this special function. The form of the *brakha*—a standardized address of God followed by a relative clause—is ubiquitous in Jewish prayers (cf. Elbogen 1993: § 3 and Langer 1998a: 24–31 for its general structure). Unlike the frequently performed blessings over bread (and wine), the relative clause of many standard blessings indicates the praying persons' intention (especially in cases of prayers of intercession and requests addressed to God).

In the meditative Christian prayer of the rosary (two short prayer texts, repeated in a circular sequence and accompanied by the contemplation of biblical scenes; Duval 1988), in the rapid reading of sections of the Book of Psalms in Jewish and Christian daily prayers, and in the recitation of a sequence of epithets for God's name in the Muslim *ḏikr*, the words and sentences as well as narrative content recede into the

background. These texts need not, moreover, fulfil a function in legal thinking about liturgies as in the case of the *brakha* mentioned above. Their performance attracts various explanations that may or may not refer to the reason why people started to recite them in the first place. Furthermore, certain texts may remain in use simply because nobody abolished them or because the shape of the liturgy is regarded as immutable. Thus, the Lord's Prayer was never abolished as part of the Eucharistic liturgies although it is not any more regarded as being necessary as a means of spiritual cleansing before the reception of the consecrated bread for which purpose it was inserted into the liturgy (Taft 1997).

All three traditions recite lines or pages from their canonical texts together with other, more recent compositions. Canonical texts are not always accentuated or treated with more reverence than others. An observer of the first liturgy of the Day of Atonement in Judaism might feel that the singing of a medieval poem, *Kol nidre* (Elbogen 1993: § 24.7), is performed with no less awe than the reading of the Torah on Sabbath mornings (Elbogen 1993: § 25–30). Traditional Catholic theology regards the recitation of the central prayer of the Eucharist as the only performance of the service that has an actual sacramental effect and this prayer remains the only piece of the liturgy of the Mass that requires a priest for its performance (see section 3 and cf. Power 1999 and Krosnicki 1998). The veneration of the faithful for it is much higher than for the reading of the Gospel. In Islam, the obligatory prayer texts and the positions for free private prayer (*du'ā'*) are strictly distinguished. The obligatory texts must be performed in properly pronounced Arabic (although the law schools differ with regard to the details of this rule). Furthermore, one has to make up for mistakes by extra prostrations at the end of the prayer. Free prayers, however, can be performed in the worshipper's native language. Over the centuries, the hierarchy of texts used in the rituals came to differ from the theoretical and extra-liturgical appreciation of canonical texts.

Nevertheless, the manifestation of the canonical status of a text can become one of the purposes of a ritual. In that case, the special text stands out from its context. It may be presented on a special carrier and performed in a unique way by an eminent person. Jews and Christians celebrate the solemn reading of biblical texts in their rituals. Due to the type of cantillation, the use of scrolls (vs. books), and the *brakhot* that encompass each reading of the weekly portion of the Torah in Jewish liturgies, it is perceived as more important than the ensuing reading of passages from the so-called 'Prophets' (*Neviim*), while the 'Writings' (*Ketuvim*) are not read at these occasions at all (Elbogen 1993: § 25–30). Since the Middle Ages, one of the five *Megillot* (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther) is read on each of the major festivals. The reading of the scroll of Esther should be accompanied by vivid reactions of the congregation in response to the course of the narrative. In many Christian traditions, the reading of a passage of the Gospel is performed in greater solemnity than the reading from other portions of the Bible during the celebration of a liturgy of the word (with or without Eucharist following), and the Gospel concludes the sequence of biblical readings (De Zan 1997; Jungmann 2003: 501–633). Jews were engaged in the public reading of biblical

literature in their congregations from very early times. Outside the Land of Israel, this practice is known to pre-date the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). The ritualization of these reading services emerged, however, from customs encoded by the rabbis long after the destruction of the Second Temple (Langer 1998b). Thus, the typical shape of Christian and Jewish reading services developed independently of each other.

The readings are included in a normative network of gestures and postures. They must be read aloud and be heard by the members of the congregation, leading to the widespread use of electronic amplification devices in many Christian traditions. Conversely, the ubiquitous availability of microphones and loudspeakers considerably influenced the choice as well as the ways of production of liturgical texts, because the prayer leaders must now consider their congregations as an implicit audience to each word that they speak (taking the Catholic church in the Netherlands as an example: Post 2003).

In Islam, the recitation of the Quran is performed in cantillation and standardized pronunciation; the reciter must know when to pause and when to resume the recitation and at certain points of the text, the reciter is obliged to kneel (*sujūd at-tilāwa*). As texts of prayer, there are—besides the first sura—only a few verses to be recited, usually taken from the short suras 78 to 114 (*Juzʾ ʿamma*). The choice of the suras to be read is entirely at the cantor's discretion and there is no official cycle of readings or ordered lectionary. Besides prayer, Quran recitation plays an important role in everyday life, e.g. the complete Quran is read within the thirty days of the month of Ramadan. Some suras are recited on special occasions such as births, marriages, or funerals.

The course of study in Greek schools comprised the explanation and actualization of traditional texts. Similarly, Jews and Christians expounded biblical texts at the occasion of their groups' meetings. The scholarly methods for using and interpreting those traditional texts underwent considerable changes when they left the environment of the schools and were incorporated into more widespread rituals. Apart from the oral rhetoric performances that are obviously lost, large corpora of literary sermons were transmitted in both Judaism and Christianity (Heinemann and Jacobs 2007; Herr 2007; Dan and Carlebach 2007; Grégoire 1969; Moreno 1986), whereas in Islam sermons are only given at Friday prayers and on special occasions, e.g. eclipses and droughts, and are usually not written down and thus made part of the literary heritage of Islam. In Islam, sermons consist of prayer, exhortation, instruction, and at least one verse from the Quran. They are seen as religious duty because one should preach in Arabic even if the congregation is not capable of understanding it. Therefore in the Friday prayers of non-Arabic congregations, the same sermon is held once in Arabic and again in the respective language of the congregation.

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theoreticians debate the role of the individual's *intention* during prayer. As soon as the recitation of texts becomes standardized and is performed unchanged over many generations, these texts become perceived as requiring bits of interpretation. Especially in cases where different interpretations of words, phrases, and ritual behaviour are possible or known, intention becomes

perceived as an additional element of prayer besides words and actions. If intention and not just the visible, bodily performance of certain rites is regarded as crucial for the achievement of its effects, all three prayer traditions attempt to ensure the proper functioning of prayer by standardizing the thoughts of the prayer leader or the congregation (Langer 1998a: 23 for rabbinic sources on intentionality; Lacey 1940). In these cases, it is normative or at least recommended to think certain thoughts during the liturgies in order to abide by the ideal that outward performance should be consistent with intention. In many Christian churches, the individual participant is required to endorse certain theological tenets in order to be allowed to participate in certain liturgies. Thus, only a Catholic (*Codex Iuris Canonici* (*CIC*) can. 912 and 915; for exceptions see can. 844 § 4) is allowed to receive consecrated bread and wine. While this church would readily invite guests to other communal liturgies, in the case of the consumption of consecrated bread and wine, church membership, intention, and belief play a highly excluding role. In Islam, all Muslims who are capable of doing so in terms of age and mental ability are obliged to perform the prayer at least five times daily. Prayers of members of other religions or non-believers are considered to be invalid. Usually, non-Muslims are not allowed to enter a mosque at prayer time or to participate in Muslim worship.

3. Communal and Solitary Prayer

In spite of the highly privatized and mental acts mentioned above, communal liturgical activity is the primary way to perform prayers. Individuals learn how to pray by participating in the prayers of their communities, and they continue to use texts and motifs of communal prayers in their private ones (cf. Taft 1986: 367–73). Solitary prayer is therefore often interpreted as a substitute for—or at least as derived from—communal performances.

Thus, the Babylonian Talmud discusses the wording of solitary performances of the statutory prayers in dangerous situations or on journeys. The sages conclude with the abstract observation about prayer in these situations, stating that individuals should always associate themselves with the people of Israel (*b. Brakhot* 29b–30a; Langer 1998a: 20). In such special situations, one may dispense with the correct orientation of the body. Apart from emergency situations, some prayers may in general be carried out as private, mental acts of individuals that cannot be observed by others. Moreover, in Judaism and Christianity, silent prayer that is performed as continuously as possible is regarded as virtuous behaviour (cf. Leonhard 2014: 180–5). Such prayers need not be standardized. In Islam, one is only allowed to perform the daily prayer as a mental act (i.e. without the obligatory gestures and postures) in two types of special circumstances. First, ill and disabled persons who are not capable of performing the prescribed movements are allowed to combine prayers and to perform them standing with a sole movement of the head instead of bowings or prostrations or even in a sitting or

lying position when they are not able to stand. Second, praying in the battlefield in times of war (Q. 4: 102) is discussed in the different Muslim schools. Some rule that warriors are allowed to shorten their prayer, to neglect the direction of prayer, and to reduce the movements to little hints, e.g. a movement of the eyes only.

The Christian churches did not develop models for minimal and irreducible forms of liturgies for emergency situations, in the case of the larger, communal celebrations, such as the Mass or the solemn performance of liturgies of the hours. Their performance was not regarded as necessary for the salvation of persons as individuals (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 3.73.3 regarding the Eucharist). However, especially the Latin churches created systems of short forms for emergency situations with regard to baptism (Johnson 2007: ch. 6). Paradoxically, this led scholars to base their construction of the meaning of any sacramental performance on such reduced minimal forms which they came to regard as the essential core of the more elaborate performances. Thus, Thomas Aquinas regards the Institution Narrative (the priest's repetition of Jesus' words from the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper; 1 Cor, 11: 23–6; Mark 14: 22–5; Matt. 26: 26–9; Luke 22: 14–21) as the only effective piece of the whole Mass. Theoretically (because he would thus break the law of the church), the priest could omit the rest of the service that Thomas regards as mere 'decoration' (*Summa theologica* 3.78.1–4). Minimal forms of originally larger rituals and the claim that they are essentially the same as their much more elaborate cognates are important for ritual theory and practice, because Jews, Christians, and Muslims regard their performance—in an abbreviated way or in their full forms—as obligatory.

The obligation to pray is gendered in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, while especially Christian churches (much less so Jews) added a complex web of status-related obligations, rights, and privileges with regard to communally performed rituals (Berger 2006, Synek 2006). In Islam, women at certain stages of the menstrual cycle and in the context of childbirth, children, and the elderly and frail are exempted from the obligation to perform the daily prayers. Women are also not obliged to take part in communal Friday worship in order to prevent the distraction of the male worshippers. As mosques may be equipped with balconies or separate rooms for women and men, both sexes may, however, participate in communal prayer. The rabbinic principle that time-bound commandments only concern people who dispose of the power to organize their time freely excludes women, slaves, and minors from the obligation to perform most liturgical duties (cf. *m. Qiddušin* 1.7). Nevertheless, women soon began to participate in communal worship in various degrees of architectural proximity to—and exclusion from—the men. Prayerbooks for women are among the early manuscripts of this genre. Today, such gender differences have been levelled out in some branches of Judaism (cf. Reif 1993: 223–5, 270, 313–14).

Christian churches differ in their degree of formulation of explicit laws obliging their members to participate in certain communal rituals. In the medieval Latin West the complexity of the performance of daily prayers increased to such an extent that only the more specialized clergy and the better-educated monks and nuns could fulfil this duty at all. Until today, lay members of the Catholic church are not obliged to perform

the official ecclesiastical daily prayers. In the wake of this development, the churches created less demanding but also much less standardized and compulsory replacements for the canonical daily prayers (Taft 1986: 297–306). In contradistinction to Judaism and Islam, the Catholic and Orthodox churches emphasized the notion of vicarious prayer of religious specialists on behalf of laymen and developed strong status-related roles within the performance of certain rituals. While a Jewish or Muslim congregation may invite a prayer leader to organize and embellish the communal act of prayer, the members are themselves responsible for the fulfilment of their personal, obligatory prayer. In many Christian liturgies, the clergy play irreplaceable roles while the congregation functions much more as an audience, despite the individuals' duty to participate in the ritual.

Theoretically, the obligation to perform certain rituals could not only lead to the creation of abbreviated emergency forms but also to that of real substitutes. This phenomenon is hardly developed in Islam and Christianity. Yet, the rabbis solve the problem that the Torah commands them to perform rituals only at the Temple of Jerusalem, which was destroyed long ago. They suggest that the study of the Torah and/or prayer should be regarded as an effective replacement for the sacrificial liturgy at the Temple (cf. Langer 1998a: ch. 1). Thus they instruct their followers to pray the *Amidah* within the time-spans that were allotted to the performance of the twice daily sacrifice, including a third time on the Sabbath, because the priests had offered a third animal on that day. The Babylonian Talmud makes the implicit principle explicit: 'they arranged them (i.e. the daily prayers) according to the everlasting (i.e. the twice daily sacrifice)' (*b. Brakhot* 26b). Later texts expand and explain this principle (cf. *Pesiq. Rav Kah.* 6.3). The notion that prayer replaces the performance of sacrifices heavily influenced the creation of liturgical texts. Thus, many of the most common liturgical texts including elaborate liturgical poetry pertain to topics of the mandatory sacrifices of the Bible, the personnel at the Second Temple, or other aspects of rituals that cannot be performed any more after the destruction of the Temple, but that are commanded by the Torah. The reference to the Temple cult continues thus to function as a source of legitimization for—and interpretation of—many forms of later liturgical practice. Although rabbinic liturgies are designed to replace the Temple cult, their texts continue to deplore its loss and express hope for its future restoration. They are replacements of a cult that they emphasize to be irreplaceable drawing inspiration from this tension (cf. Stroumsa 2009: esp. ch. 3; Leonhard 2005).

The minimal requirements for the performance of communal rituals differ markedly between the three religions. In Islam, every obligatory prayer should be performed in a group—so at least two people are needed; solitary prayer is despised (al-Buḫārī, Ṣalāt, Bāb 87 (477)). One of them acts as prayer leader (imam). The Friday prayer and the two festive prayers are obligatory for all male believers who should gather at one place in order to symbolize the egalitarian fraternal community of believers. Unless there is not enough space available in the largest mosque of a town, several Friday prayers in different mosques of the same town are considered unrighteous and thus invalid. Validity of the Friday prayer requires—depending on the law school—a minimum of three to forty worshippers.

The more solemn parts of Jewish liturgies require the presence of ten adult Jewish men (called *minyan*) or ten men and women in certain denominations (recently even ten men and ten women in a few congregations). The *minyan* is regarded as a worthy representative of the people of Israel as a collective that can pray as such in God's presence.

While the large, solemn performances of grand public Christian rituals (like the consecration of a bishop or the dedication of a church building in the Catholic church; Calabuig 2000) typically require a considerable number of clergy and a large group of lay persons, the daily prayers and even the celebration of the Mass does not presuppose a quorum of participants. In the Catholic church, solitary performances of Masses by single priests continue to be debated since the late Middle Ages (cf. *CIC* can. 906). Jewish prayer may also be performed in large synagogues. Yet, Christian services and especially Catholic Masses may be performed together with hundreds of thousands of participants.

4. Space and Time

Prayer is oriented in space and organized in time. Due to its multifarious aspects, it oscillates between its functions of creating structures in space and time and of expressing structures that are claimed to be older than their manifestation by human beings or part of the basic organization of the cosmos.

4.1 Prayer and Space

All three religions celebrate and emphasize space and orientation. Yet, they also restrict the role of holy space in religious practice. Ever since Old Testament times, the canonical sources and many treatises of all three religions debate the tension between the claim of God's ubiquity or independence from spatial categories and the need of the congregation to dedicate rooms or buildings for their assemblies. Judaism (especially after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem), Graeco-Roman philosophers, Christianity, and Islam participated in the creation of a broad consensus that rejected the performance of sacrifices and thus the cult at the ancient temples. As all three religions started characteristically as movements in cities, they tended to build special structures for their meetings as soon as their social status allowed them to do so. Landscapes, whether untouched or changed by human beings in any way, do not play significant roles.

While Jewish prayer may be performed at any clean place (excluding, for example, latrines), it is typically and communally performed in synagogues, which are not regarded as sacred space. Yet, they are perceived as a special category of space which

is derived from the presence of the Torah scrolls that are kept in a chest, typically on one of its walls that faces into the direction of Jerusalem (Fine 1998). Members of the congregation conduct themselves in this space with a heightened awareness of commandments and customs that should be kept also outside that building. Synagogue buildings are not consecrated.

In many Christian traditions, the dedication or consecration of church buildings occasion the lengthiest and most elaborate liturgies. They comprise above all acts that are interpreted as a cleansing of the building. Some are understood as expression of a transfer of possession to the church or as its inauguration by its first proper use. The Catholic church regards the placement of relics and the keeping of consecrated bread in a small container mostly in the east of the building as main factors (apart from the exclusion of demonic powers, especially in the Middle Ages) of the ongoing sacredness of the church building. The elaborate form of the central ritual of Orthodox and Catholic churches, the Divine Liturgy or the Mass, should be celebrated in a church building. Its performance outside of it is only envisaged for special occasions and in situations of need and distress. If a congregation disposes of a church building, it will perform most of its religious ritual acts within that building.

The obligatory daily prayer in Islam may be performed on any clean ground after defining a prayer space by spreading a prayer rug or a garment on the ground, which no one is allowed to cross (e.g. al-Buḫārī, Ṣalāt, Bāb 100 (509) or Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnād, iv, 2). The prayers of the festivals of the Breaking of the Fast (*ʿīd al-fiṭr*) and of the Sacrifice (*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*) are performed in a city square and not within a building. Only the Friday prayer is supposed to be performed in the mosque as the place of gathering. But even there, the individual prayer space (*as-sutra*) should be defined by means of special border-markers or a carpet. Throughout the ages, mosques were not regarded as space for sacrifices but as space for the gathering of the congregation and communal prayer. Originally non-Muslims were allowed to enter the building, but in the wake of the expansion of the cult of the saints and martyrs in Islam, many mosques came to be regarded as sacred space.

Thus, neither Judaism nor Islam perform prayers in order to consecrate a building; the Christian traditions mentioned are the only ones in which not only the performance of prayer as such but special liturgies create sacred space.

Despite modern Christian tendencies for the faithful to assemble in circular or elliptic form, in most church buildings, synagogues, and mosques the congregants face towards the east, towards Jerusalem, and towards Mecca respectively. In Judaism and Islam, this orientation remains the decisive spatial element that must be kept in the organization of prayer, even if no properly dedicated community building is available. The performance of the liturgy of hours by Catholic clergy does not require gestures, postures, or an orientation of the body whereas the orientation of the priest with regard to the congregation during the celebration of the Mass was and is debated until today.

4.2 Structures of Time

Individual prayer times and liturgies are framed by a perceptible beginning and a perceptible end. The elements of the frame and the very inception or ending of prayers can only vaguely be derived from the performance of the prayers themselves. Therefore, they continue to require social negotiation. Prayer times are expanded or reduced according to the needs of the respective communities. Therefore, different temporal boundaries may be applicable to different classes or participants' roles within the liturgies. In spite of negotiable or doubtful cases, participants in liturgies know when they are within the performance of the ritual and when they are not. The ritualization of certain acts of preparation for the liturgies is one of the means to extend the frames of prayer.

The standard Jewish prayerbooks invite their users into a multi-layered access to communal prayer on Sabbath mornings, beginning with solitary prayers upon waking up and performing basic acts of morning toilette, including the donning of *tfillin*, and later upon entering the synagogue. A further step of communality is achieved when the precentor summons the community to the recitation of Psalms. The service commences in its official form as soon as the first time *qaddish* is said, which requires a *minyan*. Similarly, many congregations mark the ending of the prayer with a song (like *Adon Olam*). Yet, even after this and while many of the members are leaving the room, further communal but less important prayers may be recited. Some communities reassemble inside or outside of the central room of the synagogue for the initial prayers of meals. In spite of the fact that the members of the congregation know quite well that the central service has ended, they will consider their participation in an ensuing meal as related to the communal meeting.

The structures of Christian meetings differ widely because of a great variety of customs and religious laws. More traditional churches tend to differentiate acts of preparation for the services between the laity and certain functionaries. The intensity of such preparatory acts shifts the perception of the beginning of the liturgies deeply into the time that precedes the actual inception of communal prayers. In some eastern churches, monks prepare the bread for the Divine Liturgy in an elaborate process—e.g. accompanied by the singing of Psalms. In many churches, clergy and laity observed strict fasting before their participation in the Mass. Today, such rules remain valid, although they may be alleviated in practice (as in the Catholic church; *CIC* can. 919). While churches mark the beginning of services by means of acoustic signals, the presiders already begin to say prayers while donning their ritual dress for the liturgies. Likewise, lavishly decorated combs made of precious materials remind the visitors to museums of the inception of the ritual long before the entry of the presiders into the main hall of the medieval church building. Similar to Jewish congregations, Christians may add meetings of less official status after the performance of what is regarded and framed as the core of the liturgy. The liturgical books and the general behaviour of the faithful indicate that they are aware of the beginning and end of this core service although its manifestation changed during the liturgical development of these rites.

While washing one's hands was part of the presiders' preparation for Mass as well as part of the ritual (as a preparation for the recitation of the central prayer of the Eucharist, *Apos. Con.* 8.11.2; [Pseudo-] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis* 5.2), it never attained to the same form as the ritual washing in Islam. However, in the Latin church of the Middle Ages, the cleansing of the community was performed in a stylized washing by means of sprinkling with consecrated water at the beginning of the service. Catholic churches still tend to set up small containers of consecrated water at the entrance of churches as a reduced and stylized lustration. The ritual washing in Islam instead is defined as a sequence of acts and texts to be uttered although there are different opinions about the necessity or composition of individual elements. Depending on the level of impurity, people are obliged to perform a partial ablution (*wuḍū'*)—i.e. a washing of the head, the arms, and the legs—or a full ablution (*ġusl*). Water is usually provided at the entry to a mosque. If no water is available, worshippers may perform a dry ablution by the use of sand or stones. Because of the phrases uttered, the ablution is not only an external but also an internal preparation for prayer. Although the washing is framed by the first and the second call for prayer, the effective prayer starts with the call '*Allāhu akbar*' (*takbīratu l-iḥrām*). After this, only words and acts of the prayer are permitted till the final call for peace (*taslīmatu l-iḥlāl*). Worshippers arriving too late for communal prayer are obliged first to say the *takbīratu l-iḥrām* before continuing prayer and are only allowed to say the *taslīmatu l-iḥlāl* after having prayed all the parts that they missed. Thus the elements marking the beginning and the end of prayer are clearly defined.

Prayer is organized in temporal circles, especially in Judaism and Christianity, less so in Islam. The texts used during its performance, its liturgical implements, as well as its special customs may explicitly or by way of establishing an otherwise meaningless difference refer to the time of the day, the lunar month (in Judaism), the lunar year (in Islam), or the solar year (in Judaism and Christianity). Larger divisions above the level of the year are much less important. Thus, the declaration of a holy year by the Catholic pope or the *Shmittah* (the seventh year in a cycle of seven years) are almost entirely irrelevant for daily prayer throughout the world.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the rabbis re-established the most important festivals that had been celebrated there. Jewish congregations in the Diaspora may have marked some festivals by the performance of typical customs or rather by convening a congregational symposium. Apparently, most Diaspora communities kept the awareness that the celebration of the three major biblical pilgrim festivals was restricted to the Temple in Jerusalem. These are *Pesach* (commemorating the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt in spring), the festival of Weeks (*Shavuot*) fifty days after *Pesach*, and the festival of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*, in autumn; Elbogen 1993, § 23). In the perception of many Jews, the celebration of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*, four days before *Sukkot*) is the most solemn feast in the year, which is preceded by the celebration of New Year (*Rosh Hashana*). Both the Day of Atonement and the New Year festival are performed in a mood of awe, repentance, and fasting (Day of Atonement; Elbogen 1993: § 24). *Pesach* and *Sukkot* are accompanied

by two festivals that elaborate aspects of these two; *Purim* (one month before *Pesach*) and *Chanukka* (about two months after *Sukkot*; Elbogen 1993: § 22). *Purim* is celebrated with customs of carnival centred on the narrative of the Book of Esther about the Jews' survival and victory in a dangerous court intrigue against them. Several narratives were created in order to weaken the association of *Chanukka* with the inauguration of the Temple and to create a loose connection with its season of the year, by means of symbolisms of light and darkness. Since the Middle Ages, the *Haggadah of Pesach*—a complex text consisting of biblical, rabbinic, medieval texts and poems, as well as additional material inspired by folk poetry in early modern Europe—is recited during the celebration of *Pesach* in families (or congregations; cf. for its origins Leonhard 2006: 73–118).

The first Christian congregations apparently rejected the customs of celebrating many of the appointed times that were regarded as essential markers of social and religious cohesion by other pagan or Jewish Greeks or Romans (cf. for Pesach, Leonhard 2006). They began to convene their groups at the first day of the week probably not before the early second century. In opposition to the restoration of Jewish celebrations of Pesach, Christians began to celebrate Easter which was, however, soon reformulated as the central commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection. Much of its initial meaning as an anti-Jewish festival was thus transformed and vanished from its explicit messages. Once established, Easter became the climax of an elaborate festival season. Its celebration transformed biblical narratives into liturgical performances along ritually structured time. In addition, a long period of preparation was added before the festival. Its former anti-Jewish thrust has been overcome today. Yet, Easter was a time of incentives to pogroms in medieval Europe. Towards the end of the second century, Christian communities began to regard the fifty days following Easter as a special season, calling it *Pentecost*, the Greek name for the biblical festival of the fiftieth day after the biblical *Pesach*. The historical relationship between the two festivals is unclear (Rouwhorst 2001a; Bradshaw and Johnson 2011: 69–74).

In the fourth century and most probably as a reconceptualization of the pagan interpretation of the season around the winter solstice, Christians created Christmas and Epiphany (Bradshaw and Johnson 2011: 123–68). Besides the Easter season, Christmas and Epiphany gave rise to a second cycle of festivals establishing a network of mimetic performances that restructured the whole year as a commemoration of the events told in the infancy narratives of Christ in the Gospels. Independent of the elaboration of Christian liturgies on the basis of biblical narratives, an ever increasing number of days of the year became marked as commemoration of saints in the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

Early Islam refused to adopt Jewish or Christian as well as pagan feasts. Besides the obligatory five prayers daily and the Friday prayer with preceding sermon there are only two annual feasts demanding special prayers: the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast (*ʿīd al-fiṭr*) at the end of the Ramadan fasting period and the Festival of the Sacrifice (*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*) on the tenth day of the month of pilgrimage. On both days, there is an additional special prayer time to be performed in the morning between

sunrise and noon which is supposed to be celebrated in an assembly in the open space of a field (*muṣalla*) with a sermon following the prayer. It is considered a pious custom to stay awake the night before the festival day, praying, meditating, and reading the Quran. Before *ʿīd al-fiṭr*, it is customary to read the whole Quran within one month. Both feasts are celebrated in a festive ambience and it is common to exchange gifts and visit cemeteries. The original meaning of the pre-Islamic feast of *ʿĀšūrāʾ* was rejected in early Islam. Sunni Islam does not celebrate it to this day, whereas in Shiite Islam *ʿĀšūrāʾ* marks the end of a mourning period, and is celebrated as commemoration of the death of Ḥusayn by a procession with self-flagellation. There are also feasts carrying a certain religious character but not requiring special prayers: the feast of Muhammad's Night Journey (*Miʿrāj*) and Muhammad's birth (*Mawlīd an-Nabī*) emerged only after the initial formative period of Islam and have both been regarded as unlawful invention (*bidʿa*) by some legal authorities. Some Muslim denominations reject the feast of Muhammad's birth because they consider it as an imitation of the Christian feast of Christmas. They regard it as a counter-monotheistic adoration of Muhammad. The Muslim festivals depend on a strictly lunar calendar.

From the fourth century on, Judaism and Christianity began to assign certain biblical readings to each festival. Furthermore, Christian and Jewish clergy and poets began to align the topics of liturgical prayers and songs with the respective theme of the day (Rouwhorst 2002, cf. Rand 2014 regarding *piyyut*). This led to the creation of voluminous books that provided guidance and texts for the performance of an increasingly sophisticated system of public liturgies. Liturgical reforms sometimes reduced the complexity and abundance of rubrics and texts. Yet the space opened up by such movements was filled again in subsequent generations. In Islamic worship, there are no prescriptions regarding the selection of Quran readings.

5. Establishing and Crossing Borderlines

Individuals and groups use prayer as a token to express their belonging to communities and social strata. Thus, the public performance of rituals also legitimizes the division and internal organization of a society. Certain prayers are regarded as typical for the groups who perform them. Nevertheless, elements of ritual practice migrate between groups, changing their shapes or only the meanings that are attributed to them. These movements guarantee that even generally acknowledged borderlines between the groups include grey zones; it is the task of historical studies of liturgy and prayer to reconstruct the paths of these movements. Members of the three religions frequently shared geographical areas in the past, and their emergence and development can only be described as a cluster of closely related processes.

The contacts of Jews and Christians in medieval and modern Europe gave rise to customs that crossed the borders between the two religions. Yet, the meanings of *Chanukka* had already been shaped at the same time as—and possibly also in an implicit dialogue with—Christmas in late antique Christianity. The modern alignment of the two festival seasons even led to the expression of 'Chrismukka/Weihnukka' as a (partly humoristic) designation for this season (Kugelmann 2005). In spite of Jewish opposition, some Christian groups adopted the celebration of Pesach in the late twentieth century (Senn 1999). Conversely, denominations that regard themselves as crossing the borders between Christianity and Judaism combine elements of the Eucharistic prayer (especially its reformulation of the institution narratives) with the *Haggadah of Pesach*. Since the most recent Catholic revision of the instructions for the celebration of the Eucharist (1970), two short prayers based on the basic mealtime *brakhot* are recited by the priest in each celebration of the Catholic Mass (Lamberts 1997, Rouwhorst 2001b).

Elements of rituals and prayer can be interpreted as metaphors ('symbols'). They are said to refer to hidden meanings and imperceptible effects. For the learned insider, rites convey doctrinal meanings and have spiritual effects beyond what can be observed as their social functions. In fact, teaching the alleged meaning of rituals helps to uncover as well as to blur the visibility of their social effects.

As mentioned above, theories relate instances of prayer to sacrifice, claiming either to represent it or to replace it. Except for entirely marginal rituals, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim liturgies do not include the offering of sacrifices in the sense that animals or other goods at the disposal of humanity are dedicated to God, (partly) destroyed, or permanently withdrawn from human use. Nevertheless, liturgical texts and explanations are replete with sacrificial imagery.

Prayer is a means to create or invoke a special form of God's presence, beyond the general assumption of God's ubiquity, beginning with the Christian veneration of Christ's special presence in the bread and wine as consecrated during the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, or the Protestant *Abendmahl* and leading towards a heightened awareness of God's care for human beings during the public reading of the Bible or even simple communal prayer. Learned theories (like the theory of transsubstantiation in scholastic Catholic thinking) hold that this presence always remains a matter of belief and thus beyond experience and empirical proof. In Judaism, the cantillation of the Torah has been interpreted since late antiquity in similar terms as creating God's presence. Furthermore, the instructions for the gestures that should be performed during the prayer of the *Amidah* are also interpreted as a pious response to God's presence. Similarly, a special form of God's presence in *ṣalāt* is presupposed in Islam. Thus ritual purity is a basic requirement for the worshippers during the prayer towards Mecca, for the proper and exclusive enunciation of the Arabic wording of the prayer rite, as well as for the correct performance of the prescribed gestures and postures. Prayer is seen as the believer's submission to God's sovereignty and as the proper response to the revealed obligation to perform the different motions of the prayer rite as enjoined by the prophet.

6. Changes of Liturgies and Customs

Religious specialists as well as anthropologists may describe functions for groups and individuals that the liturgies fulfil. As long as these functions are mainly culled from the liturgies themselves, one could assume that the shape of liturgies should remain stable throughout the ages. However, it can be observed that especially Jewish and Christian (e.g. Yuval 2006), much less so Muslim, prayers, liturgies, and their interpretation changed significantly and frequently during the last two millennia of their coexistence. Even in cases of centuries of stability of one of their elements (as in the preservation of the ritual texts of the Catholic Mass between 1570 and 1970), other aspects of ritual performance and social functions may change drastically (e.g. Mitchell 2006 and Haquin 2006). As mentioned above, the mutual perception of the Abrahamic religions is one cause for such changes. In the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism rewrote several ancient prayers (for example *birkat haminim*, a prayer against heretics or evildoers which generations of Christian critics read as a curse against Christianity) that they regarded as potentially offensive towards their Christian neighbours (Langer 2012). More than a century later, the Catholic church reworded an intercession that used to ask for the conversion of all Jews to Christianity into a prayer for the Jews' steadfast adherence to the Torah: 'Let us pray also for the Jewish people, to whom the Lord our God spoke first, that he may grant them to advance in love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant' (*The Roman Missal* 2011: 323).

The Muslim prayer rite is considered to have been fully developed within the first century after the prophet's emigration to Medina. The term 'the prayer' (*aṣ-ṣalāt*), in singular form and with definite article, is mentioned sixty-five times in the Quran, obviously in regard to a fixed prayer rite that seems to be quite stable from this time on because developments are normally rejected as unlawful inventions. Diverging opinions of the law schools on certain elements of the prayer rite and the oral tradition entail little differences in the shape of the prayer in different Muslim groups. In the formative period of early Islam, Christians and Jews were seen as belonging to the same community of faith and as being able to attain to salvation. Some parts of the newly introduced Muslim rites were obviously adopted from the Jewish and the Christian liturgies. The fact that Islamic liturgy and prayer remained more stable than Christian and Jewish liturgies does not imply that Muslim societies and groups changed less than Christian or Jewish ones.

7. Concluding Observations

Prayer and the performance of rituals help to establish and maintain borderlines between the Abrahamic religions as well as between groups within these religions.

Individual Jews, Christians, and Muslims may or may not regard one-time conversion ceremonies or rituals that are understood as carrying expressions of group adherence as a fundamental event in their lives. Yet, prayer offers to those who devote considerable periods of their time at tending to their religious affiliation a means to shape their identity in religious terms. Inclusion and exclusion are, therefore, important social functions of liturgy and prayer in these religions. The performance of liturgy and prayer rather divides than unites the Abrahamic religions.

As the Abrahamic religions emerged in roughly the same geographical area and expanded from there, not only religious ideas but also the practice and interpretation of rituals developed under mutual scrutiny. In many areas, this led to the migration of ritual elements between the Abrahamic religions, notably between Judaism and Christianity, much less so between these two and Islam. From a historical point of view, the three religions may have adopted and adapted features of the respective others among them. Yet, they are heavily indebted—directly as well as by way of opposition and supersession—to the religion(s) of ancient Greece and Rome regarding rituals and texts recited in prayers and liturgies.

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