THREE REFORMULATIONS OF SACRED HISTORY BY THE
LITURGY OF THE CHURCH

The Liturgy, which was the form of the sacrifice and prayer and sacraments of the medieval Church, is more than a symbolic form of worship. It is the reformation, reformulation and reconsecration of all things in Christ. It extends from Him as the center to all time and action. Articulating for the Church the events of sacred history until the end of time, it is the present interpreting the past; and at the same time this present is the means to and a foreshadowing of the beatific vision.

The center of the liturgy is the Mass, or the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Mass is the perpetual re-enactment of the sacrifice of the New Testament in which the sacrifice of the cross is made present through Christ. Christ is the sacrificing priest and also the sacrificial victim, and the priest at the altar is His visible representative and His living instrument. Through him Christ offers Himself to the Father in sacrifice and gives Himself to the faithful as food. (See Figure 2 and descriptive note.) The central part, or Canon, of the Mass has three sections: (1) the oblation of the gifts; (2) the sacrifice itself, consisting of the consecration of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and the offering of Christ to the Father, which extends to the Pater Noster; and (3) the communion in which the Body and Blood of Christ are consumed.

Fig. 2.—The Mass, Elevation of the Host. Illuminated “T” of the first words of the Canon “Teigitur . . . ,” New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M. 107, fol. 142. The illumination shows the Mass as the perpetuation in present time of the redemptive death of Christ on the cross. For more extended discussion, refer to the Notes to Illustrations.
The Mass is the perpetual objective focus around which the rest of the liturgy of the Church is centered, uniting the sacrifice of Christ to each soul. Deep from within this center radiate the other sacraments, which are the unchanging rituals that mark the stages of the individual's worldly life with the stages of the coming of grace into the soul: baptism at birth, the cleansing of the soul from the original sin inherited at conception from Adam; penance, the cleansing of the soul from individual sins; confirmation, the strengthening in maturity by the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit; extreme unction at death, the anointing of the senses and the viaticum; and the sacraments of the state of life—marriage and holy orders. Every aspect of the individual's life is brought by the liturgy into direct relationship with the life of Christ, and the Mass and the other sacraments—the act of redemption and its application to individual souls—are the perpetual powers by which man is reformed into the likeness of Christ.

Besides the central sacrifice and communion of the Mass which never vary, the liturgy of the Church is composed of parts which vary, yet which bear a fixed relationship to each other and to the Canon. The liturgy reformulates sacred history according to three main proportions. Around the sacrifice and communion of the Mass gather the parts of the Mass called the Proper which vary according to the time and the occasion of the year. This is the seasonal cycle, in which the liturgy adapts the seasons of the year to the stages in the history of the redemption of man by God, so that through each year the Christian soul relives Christ's coming, His passion and death, His resurrection, and the founding of the Church.

Through the Divine Office the liturgy reformulates sacred history in a second way. The Office organizes the psalms and lessons of Holy Scripture, the homilies and prayers of the Church into a series of eight "hours" which correspond to the stages of the rising and the setting of the sun, so that the Christian soul can unite his prayer with the Church throughout each day. The Hours are made up of an unvarying sequence of readings, but also a variable proper part which, in relation to the Proper of the Mass, is adapted to the liturgical cycle of the seasons.

The third way in which the liturgy reformulates sacred history is by the fact that the parts into which it arranges these other varying forms are themselves ordered in a fixed relationship to each other. This order has levels of value, a scale of being, with Christ present in the sacrifice of the Mass as its focus and as the meaning of all the other parts. This third proportioning
INTRODUCTION

is the composition of meaning itself within the liturgy and, as we shall see below, within the individual lyrics.

The Seasonal Cycle

First of all, the Proper of the Mass and the Office re-enact sacred history as it is related in Scripture and formulated in the present by the Church, by fitting it to the natural or temporal cycle of birth and death in the year. The seasons of the year are divided by the Church according to the stages of the redemption: in autumn, Advent, the season preparing for the coming of Christ, His birth in the world and also for His second coming at the end of time; in late winter and early spring, Lent, the long season of penance preparing for the passion and death of Christ, which culminates in the spring in Easter, the glorious season of Christ's resurrection, His forty days on earth before His ascension to the Father, and the nine days of waiting for the Holy Spirit; and finally, in summer, the season of Pentecost, which celebrates the mysteries of the Church, such as the Holy Trinity (the First Sunday after Pentecost) and Corpus Christi (Thursday after Trinity Sunday), and which foreshadows in its liturgy the heavenly Jerusalem.

Besides celebrating the events of the redemption according to the seasons of the year, there is a second yearly cycle within the Mass and Office. The Proper of the Saints, organized according to a fixed calendar of the individual days and months of the year rather than the seasons, commemorates the lives of individuals as they have revealed or imitated Christ throughout the history of the Church and thus incorporates into the liturgical year the events coming after the death of Christ and after Pentecost. The liturgy chosen to commemorate the saints was categorized into several common forms which reflected the traditional distinctions made between individual states of life within the Church. The Common of the Saints in the thirteenth century Sarum Missal contains a Common for apostles, martyrs, bishops, confessors, doctors, abbots, and virgins. Individual Propers were also composed for special saints, as for the Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury. Individual events in a saint's life were occasionally commemorated, as, for example, on January 25, the Conversion of St. Paul. Of the saints, Mary alone was venerated on each of the most important occasions of her life.

As well as the commemoration of the saints throughout the year, there
were also Votive Masses, Masses said so that the needs and desires of the people coming at any time or occasion of the year could be articulated within the Church. There were special Masses for the pope, for the whole Church, for the bishop and other clergy, for the king; Masses for oneself, for a friend, for penitents, against the temptations of the flesh and evil thoughts; Masses for invoking the graces of the Holy Spirit, for the gift of tears, a Mass "pro quacunque tribulacione," Masses for calm winds, against invaders and plagues, for sailors, for those in chains, for the infirm, and a Mass even for the mortality of man. By means of these Masses every moment and desire of a man's life, or of a congregation's life, was articulated and consecrated by the liturgy of the Church.

The Hours of the Day

The second way sacred history was formed to the life of the soul by the medieval liturgy was by the singing of the hours of the day:

The prophet saith: Seven times a day have I given praise to thee. We shall observe this sacred number of seven, if we fulfill the duties of our service in the Hours of Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline; for it was of these Day Hours that he said: Seven times a day have I given praise to thee. But of the Night Office the same prophet saith: At midnight I rose to give praise to thee. At these times, therefore, let us render praise to our Creator for the judgements of his justice: that is, at Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline; and let us rise in the night to praise him.

These are the words of St. Benedict in Chapter XVI of the Holy Rule he composed for his monks, in the section where he tells “How the Work of God Is to Be Performed in the Day-Time.” Although St. Benedict (d. 543) did not institute any of these Offices, through his order of monks they were diffused throughout Christendom. The Divine Office was said by both the secular and the religious clergy, and it reached the lay people through the public recitation of Matins, Vespers and Compline in the great cathedral churches and also in manuals of devotion, such as the Horae, or Prymers, by means of which the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin was said.

The eight Hours of the Divine Office enclose the course of the natural day
in prayer and they reformulate sacred history through using Scripture in such a way as to relate each day to the seasonal cycle of the year and to interpret the passage of a day in the life of the individual soul. According to the length and complexity of their contents, the Hours can be grouped into three main types. Matins, said early in the morning, is the longest and most central Hour. Lauds, said at dawn, and Vespers, said late in the afternoon, form a second shorter type, and Prime, Terce, Sext, None and Compline which do not vary as much as the other three Hours make up the third, simpler type of Office. At Matins the readings from Scripture, the homilies, antiphons, and responses develop most profoundly the theme of the day in the cycle of the year.

The norm established by St. Benedict was for the readings of Matins to cover the whole of Scripture during the year, together with commentaries from the Fathers on the selections read. The order in which the Old Testament readings were arranged was adapted to correspond with the cycle of the Church year which followed the history of the coming of Christ, and these readings maintained the allegorical relationship between the events and figures of the Old Testament and the incarnation of Christ. In Advent Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah was read. The story of creation was read on Septuagesima Sunday, and Genesis and Exodus read from then until Passion Sunday to prepare for the new creation accomplished by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Jeremiah was read in Passiontide; then in the midsummer season of the Holy Spirit, the Book of Kings, followed by Ecclesiasticus, Job, Tobias, Judith, Machabees and Ezechiel. On Sundays and feast days the last lesson at Matins was the selection from the Gospel which was to be read at the Mass of that day, and it was preceded by a reading of one of the Fathers' commentaries on it.

Just as the readings of Matins originally were intended to comprehend all of Holy Scripture during the liturgical year, so, St. Benedict explains, the Hours were composed to provide for the saying of the one hundred and fifty psalms of the Psalter once a week. The psalms said were not varied according to the season, although on Sundays and special feast days, the Office contained the more joyful psalms. But within the Hours of the Office, the hymns, the antiphons, the invitatory and responses, and the readings, all varied, reflecting the aspect of sacred history commemorated in that particular season of the year.

It is the shorter Hours said throughout the day which relate the stages of life of the individual soul to the rhythm of the day. The hymns with which
each Hour opens reflect the leading thought of the hour, expressing a correspondence between the time of day, the needs of the soul and the coming of Christ into the world. At Prime, the sun dawns, the Church rises to meet Christ the spiritual sun. The “Jam lucis orto sidere”\textsuperscript{31} asks that God may keep our acts from harm, that we guard our tongues, hearts, and carnal desires, and that finally when daylight has gone we may sing His glory. The hymn for Terce invokes the Holy Spirit to take possession of our hearts and enkindle them with the fire of divine love. Sext, said in the heat of the day, compares the heat of the sun to the passions and asks that noxious heat be extinguished. None, addressing God Who remains immovable through the gradation of the light of the day, asks for a death in the light of eternal glory. Finally, Compline, said at the ending of the day, asks for protection from nightly fantasies, from the devil, and from bodily pollution.

Just as the Mass had a Proper for the individual saints’ feasts, so individual Offices were composed for the celebration of saints’ feasts. The Sarum Breviary provides for a Common of the Saints which corresponds to that of the Mass, a Common for apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, and virgins. Some of the Offices of the saints were composed in poetical form, using rhyme and meter. The Franciscans adopted this practice and set out whole Offices in the same rhythmical and metrical pattern. The composition of Offices in poetical form occurred in England as well as on the Continent. Around the beginning of the thirteenth century, for example, Julian Spires (d. 1250) wrote Offices of St. Francis and St. Anthony. The Archbishop of Canterbury, John of Peckham (ca. 1297), composed an Office of the Holy Trinity imitating Julian’s Office of St. Francis.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus the Hours of the Divine Office unite the progress of the activities of the day and the passage of the Christian soul through life to sacred history which the liturgy orders in the great seasonal cycle of the year. We shall see that this seasonal cycle itself is formulated by another movement of hierarchical relationship effected by the fixed order of the liturgy as it culminates in the present prayer of the Church when the Church offers Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass.

\textit{Mary}

Because of Mary’s unique relationship to Christ as His mother and therefore the doorway through which Christ came to earth and the gate
through which man will reach heaven, the liturgy of the Church formulated Mary's part in sacred history, honoring and invoking her beside her Son as the means of reaching Him. The important stages in her life were commemorated as they related to the life of Christ. Honoring Mary's own birth as the preparation of Christ's coming, on December eighth the liturgy celebrated the Feast of Mary's Conception and on September eighth the Feast of her Nativity. Commemorating her central role as the virgin mother of Christ, on March twenty-fifth the Church celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation, and through the Christmas season the liturgy referred often to her motherhood. On February second, also, came the Feast of the Purification, when the candles were blessed for the year and the readings commemorated the presentation of Christ in the Temple. It is the account of the presentation by Luke which foreshadows Mary's suffering at her Son's crucifixion and death, for Luke tells how Simeon prophesied that Mary's heart would be pierced by a sword (Luke 2:34-35), a prophecy that we shall see in the lyrics is fundamental to the definition of Mary's sorrow. And finally, on August fifteenth, the liturgy celebrated Mary's assumption into heaven, the event which came as the consequence of her being the mother of God. In the Middle English Marian lyrics the themes and content of the liturgy of Mary's feasts are used by the poet to name and define her beauty as he seeks her intercession, and it is Mary's position in the present as Queen of Heaven and Mother of Mercy that establishes the fundamental proportion and context of the poems.

As well as being honored in these individual feasts, Mary was especially commemorated on Saturdays. In the Lady Chapel, a side chapel built in cathedral and collegiate churches in Mary's honor, her Mass would be said if there were no major feast taking precedence. Reflecting the changing focus of the liturgy throughout the seasons of the year, the Proper of these Saturday Masses changed three times: for the season of Advent, for the season from Christmas to the Purification, for the season from the Purification to Advent again (with changes in this season in the Gospel reading of Eastertide). The principle of variation was, as in the Matins readings, to make a correspondence between the season and the stages in the redemption of man by Christ. That from Advent to Christmas, the season which prepares for Christ's coming, used the Mass of the Annunciation; that from Christmas to the Purification, the season which celebrates the appearance of the Messiah, used the themes of Christmas; and that from the Purification to Advent, the spring and summer seasons which celebrate the founding of the
Church, used the theme of Mary as mother in heaven, where, analogous to the Church, she draws men to Christ.

Just as the form of the seasonal cycle of the Mass celebrated Mary, so the Church consecrated the hours of the day to her. In the tenth century the custom grew up of saying a daily Office devoted solely to the Blessed Virgin, which along with the Office of the Dead began to be said in addition to the Divine Office. The order of this Office, referred to as the Horae, or Hours of the Virgin, and later in English as the Prymer, was the same as for the Divine Office, but there was no variation by day or season. Since the Horae did not vary with the cycle of the Church year and did not change with the days of the week, they offered a fixed form of perpetual praise of Mary, defining her virgin birth, celebrating her union in heaven with Christ. A form of poetry used for devotion attached itself to these Hours which reflected the sequence of the canonical Hours of the day in the Divine Office. The sequence of the Hours of the day was ordered to correspond with the events of the life of Christ, and more frequently in a series of metrical meditations called Hours of the Cross or of the Passion, they were made to correspond with the stages of His passion. Corresponding to the Hours of the Passion, the Horae sometimes included the Hours of Mary’s Compassion.

The devotion in the Horae of the Hours of the Passion and the Hours of Mary’s Compassion produced many Middle English versions. The method by which the devotion was organized illustrates for us a fundamental principle of form behind the lyrics we shall study which springs from the ratio Christ establishes between events, that there is a symmetrical correspondence between events and inner experiences as they are defined by the stages of sacred history. Always the governing focus of the correspondence to which the others point and by which they are defined is Christ.

The principle is clearly illustrated by the Hours of the Cross and the Compassion as they are composed in the Sarum Horae. At Prime, Christ is accused before Pilate and bound (Mary sees Him flagellated and spat upon, and twists her hands). At Terce, the Jews condemn Him, crown Him with thorns and lead Him to Golgotha (Mary sorrows about His crowning, His shoulders suffering under the cross). At Sext, Christ is nailed to the cross, hung between the two thieves, and is given gall to drink (Mary, seeing her Child lifted on the cross, between thieves, and given gall to drink, cries out). At None, Christ dies, the soldier pierces His side, the earth trembles, the sun is hidden (Mary, weeping, sees Him expire, give His spirit to the Father crying out Eloi, and, seeing His side pierced, she falls transfixed by sorrow).
At Vespers, Christ is taken down from the cross (Mary holds and kisses Him). At Compline, Christ, anointed with spices, is placed in the sepulchre. In Him, the poet says, is the hope of the future life (Mary mourns in confusion, not desiring to leave but to die with Him there, until at last by His resurrection her Son is exalted). The Hours correspond to the stages in the passion. Mary is the counterpart of Christ's suffering, expressing, as well as her own, the inner sorrow of those who love Him.

In the Sarum Horae there is yet another poetic meditation appended to the Passion of Christ and the Compassion of Mary which illustrates through Mary the double potentiality each hour of the day has for sorrow and for joy. Added at a date possibly later than Hours of the Passion and Compassion, before each Hour, beginning with Matins, there is a woodcut with a quatrain of verse under it depicting the sources of Mary's joy and sorrow as mother of Christ. The woodcut pictures an event in her life; the quatrain of English verse explains its meaning. These are, at Lauds, the visitation; at Prime, Christ's nativity; at Terce, the angel's annunciation to the shepherds; at Sext, the epiphany of Christ to the Three Kings; at None, Christ's circumcision; at Vespers, the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt; and, finally, at Compline, the assumption, reception, and coronation of Mary in heaven.

The liturgy of Mary is the reflection of the life of Christ and points to Christ as its source and end and its center. Her place closest to Christ, and her life in the most perfect image of His, is praised, meditated on and invoked. Her life is celebrated through the course of the year, in the seasonal cycle, and the hours of each day are consecrated to her in the Horae, in which the life of Christ is seen through the present joy of Mary, who by her assumption is the promise of man's final joy.

The Ladder

We have mentioned that the Mass is the focal point of the liturgy, the central re-enactment of sacred history offered perpetually by Christ through the priest and the body of worshippers, to be done until the end of time. The third reformulation of sacred history is by order of the fixed parts of the liturgy as they relate to Christ. Whereas through the changing seasonal cycle and the movement of the Hours, the focus of the liturgy on sacred history varies, through the fixed sequence of parts, these variations move in a fixed order of value, much as in early polyphony the variation in melody moved
from point to point of a stable harmony.\textsuperscript{42} The parts of the Mass are ordered as they relate more or less closely to Christ, or to use the inverse image, as they radiate out from the center which is Christ. This fixed hierarchical relationship establishes the second dynamic relationship between the soul and Christ, that of closer and closer union.

To illustrate this third reformulation of sacred history by the medieval Church, and to show how it is the foundation of meaning in sacred history, I will describe, using the Sarum Missal, how the hierarchical order in which the variable parts of the Proper of the Mass of the Annunciation are arranged affects the way these parts are interpreted. These variable parts are of three kinds: readings—the Gospel and the Lesson; shorter passages from Scripture and tradition—the Gradual, Tract, Offertory and Communion Verses; and three prayers, the Collect, Secret and Postcommunion. Having defined the principle of the ladder of value, we can then begin the study of the poems themselves as theology shaped them.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{The Gospel}

The Proper of the Mass, the texts of the Mass varying according to the feast of the day, focuses on a short reading from one of the four Gospels which states the event or the theme of the event in sacred history being commemorated. The reading for the Feast of the Annunciation is Luke 1:26-38:

And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Who having heard, was troubled at his saying and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of
his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said to the angel:
How shall this be done, because I know not man? And the angel
answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee
and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And
therefore also the Holy [one] which shall be born of thee shall be
called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also
hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month
with her that is called barren. Because no word shall be impossi­
ble with God. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord:
be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed
from her.  

This passage from Luke as it is selected by the liturgy is the unit chosen for
the commentary by the homilists and on which the Middle English poets
base their account of the annunciation. Generally the sermon of the Mass,
which in the Sarum Missal comes after the Credo, would be based upon the
passage in the Gospel reading, and several of the lessons read at Matins
would be homilies of the Fathers on this same text. It is through the
incorporation of the commentary on Scripture of the early Fathers into the
Office that the Church preserved her traditional interpretation of Scripture
and from which the Church formulated new commentary. And it is these
sermons and homilies which develop the Gospel reading in its context of
sacred history.

The Lesson

Preceding the Gospel and preparing for it is the Epistle or Lesson which is
taken from a part of Scripture other than the Gospels, sometimes a selection
from the Old Testament, or from the Acts of the Apostles, or an Epistle of
Paul, James, Peter or John. By coming before the Gospel reading and being
used as a preparation for it, the Lesson is given direct application to the event
or words related in the Gospel. It is set in an allegorical relationship to the
Gospel, in terms of which its full meaning is made clear. The Lesson for the
Feast of the Annunciation is Isaiah 7:10-15:

And the Lord spoke again to Achaz, saying: Ask thee a sign of
the Lord thy God, either unto the depth of hell, or unto the
height above. And Achaz said: I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord. And he said: Hear ye therefore, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to be grievous to men, that you are grievous to my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son: and his name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to refuse the evil, and to choose the good.

The method of the liturgy and the method of Scripture and scriptural commentators is the same in applying this prophecy to the words of the angel and the event of the annunciation. Already in his wording of the Vulgate translation of the passage from Isaiah, “ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium, et vocabitur nomen ejus Emmanuel,” St. Jerome made the relationship between the two explicit, “ecce concipies in utero et paries filium, et vocabis nomen ejus Jesum.”

In the readings of Matins for the Feast of the Annunciation in the York Breviary, in his homily on the Gospel, St. Ambrose uses this same method of juxtaposing events of the Old to the New Testament to describe the significance of the annunciation. Using Genesis 3:13-16, which describes the penalty given to the serpent and to woman for her disobedience, and by developing the correspondences and symmetries in sacred history, the Matins lesson formulates the doctrine of Mary’s virginal conception and parturition. First of all, St. Ambrose conceives of Mary as the second Eve, expressing the traditional interpretation of God’s curse to the serpent as a prophecy applying to the Virgin Mary: “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.” And he contrasts Mary to Eve whom God punished by the curse: “I will multiply thy sorrows, and thy conceptions. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.” Mary is the second Eve, but where Eve disobeyed, Mary is obedient to God’s word, and where Eve brought sorrow and will bear children in sorrow, Mary brings joy and bears her Child in joy. She bears Christ, but remains a virgin:

Using this same method of juxtaposition of the Old Testament to the New, the medieval theologian saw Mary not only as the second Eve, but as the fulfillment of many other events and figures: the valiant woman (Prov. 31:10–31), the burning bush of Moses (Exod. 3:2–3), the flowering of the rod of Aaron (Num. 17:8), the rod of the root of Jesse (Isa. 11:1–2, Rom. 15:12), the fleece of Gideon (Judg. 6:36–40); he saw her as Judith, as Rachel, as the sling of David, as the closed gate (Ezek. 44:2). Many of these relationships were made by the liturgy on the feasts of Mary as it applied passages to Mary from Ecclesiasticus, the Psalms, the Canticles. This method of conceiving events and people and phrases of the Old Testament as figures of Mary is fundamental to the poetry evolving from the liturgy, and it is fundamental to the Middle English religious lyrics. We shall see that even when actual biblical figures are not used, the poet will develop his definition of different aspects of Mary in each poem by juxtaposing one event or concept to another in a way analogous to the methods of the liturgy and the homilists. And as in the liturgy, the juxtaposition will be made always in relation to Christ as the center of value.

Passages from Scripture and Tradition

Leading up to the Lesson, joining the Lesson to the Gospel reading, introducing the offering of the bread and the wine in the Mass, and occurring at the time of communion are shorter passages taken from Scripture and tradition, the Introit, the Gradual and Tract, the Offertory and the Communion Verses. These were taken from the psalms, the prophets, the Gospel, homilies and poetic tradition. By their position in the Mass, they, like the Lesson, were interpreted in relation to the central events celebrated by the feast and recounted in the Gospel. On the Feast of the Annunciation, the Introit of the Mass, which is said after the preparatory psalm and the confession, consists of another prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 45:8).

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and bring forth a saviour.
Ps. And let righteousness spring up together: I the Lord have created it.\textsuperscript{53}

By the Introit those present are prepared for the theme of the Lesson and the Gospel, and at the same time invoke God to fulfill the prophecy contained in it.

Between the reading of the Lesson and the Gospel, the Gradual is sung by the choir and said privately by the priest as the subdeacon prepares the bread and wine. The Gradual for the Annunciation again illustrates the way in which the liturgy selects and rearranges Scripture giving it new meaning as the passage is set in relationship to the event being celebrated. Here the Gradual (and the Tract which follows) focuses on the holiness of Mary as the medium through whom Christ came. The Gradual applies to the theme several verses of Psalm 44, and it introduces the salutation of the angel (Luke 1:28), anticipating the account in the reading of the Gospel that will follow:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors: and the king of glory shall come in.

V. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall rise up in his holy place? even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart.

Alleluia. V. Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

In the context of Mary's feast the verses of Psalm 44 are applied so that they refer to the special purity and grace of Mary which made her a fitting place for the Lord to dwell. The order of verses is changed from that in the psalm, so that the theme of the entry of the Lord comes before the description of the holiness of Mary, revealing by its position that the Lord is the source of her holiness. The description of Mary's holiness in the first verse provides the transition to the Alleluia and New Testament verse, where Mary is named and honored by the salutation given to her by the angel at the annunciation.\textsuperscript{54}

In the Sarum liturgy a sequence usually follows the Gradual on feast days. It is through the sequences that poetry is directly incorporated into the texture of the Mass. The sequence is a rhythmic or metrical structure of words and music which evolved from the practice of troping or farsing ("filling") the long melisma of the Alleluia sung in the Eastern season.\textsuperscript{55} As
with liturgical drama, its early forms can be traced back to the ninth century and the monastery of St. Gall.\textsuperscript{56} By the twelfth century sequences had become very popular throughout Europe. The \textit{Laetebundus} melody, for example, had at least a hundred imitations. Adam of St. Victor (d. 1192), who used metrical rhyming verse pairs with a changed melody for each pair, gave the sequence its highest development.\textsuperscript{57} Many Middle English lyrics developed from liturgical sequences, and we shall see examples of this in four of the poems to be discussed below.

The sequence used on the Feast of the Annunciation, “Ave mundi spes Maria,” develops from the verse of the Gradual, “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women,” and it is a series of modifications, much like farsings, of the angel’s greeting (see Appendix I).\textsuperscript{58} It uses many of the modes of formulation in the liturgy which we shall see are used in the English lyrics: the traditional figures for Mary—the burning bush, the rose, the rod of Jesse, the lily of chastity; the application of the liturgy to the individual soul; and the three focuses of liturgical time.

Because the Annunciation falls during Lent, it has a Tract, which is said privately by the celebrant and ministers while the sequence is being sung: \textsuperscript{59}

\begin{quote}
Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
\textit{V.} Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
\textit{V.} The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.
\textit{V.} Therefore, also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
\end{quote}

The emphasis of the Tract is that Mary will bear God. The verses, taken again from the Gospel to follow, repeat the last verse of the Gradual and combine it with a second salutation, Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary inspired by the Holy Spirit at Mary’s visit to her (Luke 1:42). Preceding the angel’s words of prophecy that Mary shall bear God, they remind those present of the prophecy’s fulfillment. The two verses which follow are the angel’s reply to Mary’s question, “How shall this be done, because I know not man?” They explain how the prophecy of Isaiah is to be brought about; the Father is to be God, the Son is to be God. Thus prepared for both by prophecy and a description of the holiness of the mother and the nature of the Child, the Gospel is read.
INTRODUCTION

After the Gospel reading comes the Credo. Following the Credo and the sermon comes the Offertory as the priest offers the bread and wine which are to be consecrated. The Offertory Verse repeats the combined salutation of the angel and Elizabeth, here as the expression of praise. After the consecration, oblation and communion, the Communion Verse is said. The Communion Verse repeats the essential element of the Lesson, the sign given in Isaiah's prophecy: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son: and shall call his name Emmanuel."

Prayers

A third type of formulation in the Proper remains to be mentioned that is also a structural principle of the Middle English lyric. At three moments the liturgy formulates special prayers for the feast and the intention of the Mass, channelling the prayers of the present congregation. These are the Collect, the Secret, and the Postcommunion prayers. The Collect follows the Gloria and precedes the Lesson. As Jungmann points out, the Collect is based on the Roman oration, which in its simplest type is the barest petition, a request. While the Secret and Postcommunion are close to this simple form, for the Feast of the Annunciation, as for the other major feast days, the Collect is an amplified petition:

O God, who wast pleased that thy Word should take flesh in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary, through the message of an angel; grant unto us thy suppliants, that as we believe her to be truly the mother of God, so we may be aided by her intercession before thee. Through [our Lord Jesus Christ thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end].

The Collect makes visible the outlines of the universe in which the prayer of the Church is conceived: "It arises in the communion of holy Church and ascends through Christ to God on high." In all Collects of the Roman liturgy the address is to God the Father rather than to Christ, Who generally is not mentioned except in the closing formula. This focus on God the Father reflects the end and object of the Church's prayer in the Mass. The fact that Christ is mentioned in the concluding formula reflects the Church's
conception of the universe in terms of sacred history, as the congregation asks for the gifts through Christ. The Church offers the petition to God “through the mediation of Christ, who (as St. Paul says) ‘lives on still to make intercession on our behalf’ (Heb. 7:25).”

Besides being the address to God the Father through the mediation of Christ, there is another aspect of the Collect which is also, as we shall see, central to the lyrics. The prayer is worded in the plural, “we.” In this “we” it is the Church that prays, the petitioners and recipients of God’s gifts. Jungmann explains:

The Church is included here not only conceptually, but actually. In liturgical prayer there is—there must be—in fullest reality a communion in which all those participate who join with the priest as he performs the service, all those who are represented expressly by the greeting and its answer and by the comprehensive Oremus. Even in a small group of faithful, with the priest standing at the altar at their head, not only is there present a number of Christians, but the Church itself is there in its hierarchic structure—God’s people of the New Covenant in the order and arrangement given them by Christ.

This is the identity of the “us” which so often forms the point of view in the Middle English lyric.

In the Collect for the Annunciation, the fact that the Church celebrates Mary’s feast is reflected in the relative clause, which mentions the annunciation, and in the petition, which contains a profession of faith that Mary is truly the mother of God. Most Middle English religious lyrics are ultimately addresses to Christ as man’s redeemer. The lyrics which focus on Mary will all have a double mediation. The address to Christ comes through a prayer to Mary. The ultimate purpose of the poet and his audience is that of the Church, to be united through Christ to God the Father in heaven.

The Secret is the last variable part before the Canon of the Mass, and on the Feast of the Annunciation it anticipates the coming mystery.

Strengthen, we beseech thee, O Lord, our minds in the mysteries of the true faith; that we who stedfastly confess him who was conceived of a virgin to be very God and very man, may by the power of the same saving incarnation be found worthy to attain unto everlasting happiness. Through etc.
The Postcommunion prayer applies the graces of the Mass to the congregation.

We beseech thee, O Lord, to pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection. Through etc.

The prayers of the feast have a three-fold perspective: on the two central events of the Incarnation, the coming and the death and the resurrection of Christ, as these are defined by the third, the particular theme of the feast—the words of the angel to Mary and her role as the virgin mother of Christ. Just as the lessons and verses are related ultimately to the Gospel in which the central event of the feast is told, so in the prayers the Church applies the theme of the whole Mass to the souls of the faithful who petition God, by Mary’s intercession, through Christ.

The position in the movement of the Mass of these variable parts, the Introit, Collect, Lesson, Gradual, Sequence, Tract, Gospel reading, Offertory, Secret, Communion and Postcommunion, never varies. They remain in their position relative to the unchanging parts—the entry psalm, the Kyrie and Gloria, the prayers of preparation which lead to the Credo—like the frame of a ladder through which the succession of feasts moves, each new theme being reformulated as the ladder juxtaposes new units of words.

Besides the fixed hierarchy of the variable parts of the Mass there is also the analogous fixed order of the material in the Hours of the Divine Office and the devotion of the Little Hours in the English Prymer, with the psalms, the readings, the many antiphons, verses and responses, all applying events, images, phrases in Scripture to the themes of Mary’s feasts. In the Prymer, for example, are gathered some of the most beautiful antiphons, which develop the Old Testament types of Mary as they celebrate her virgin motherhood: for Prime, “O þou wondurful chaunge! þe makere of mankynde, takynge a bodi wiþ a soule, of a maide vouchide saaf be bore, & so, forþ goynge man, wiþ-outen seed, saaf to us his god-hede”; for Terce, “Whanne he was born wondurfulliche of a maide, þanne was fulfillid holi writ. þou cam doun as reyn in-to a flees, for to make saaf mankynde: þee we preisen, oure god”; for Sext, “Bi þe buysh þat moises siʒ vnbrent, we knowen þat þi preisable maidenhede is kept. modir of god, preie for us”; for None, “The
rote of iesse haþ burioned; a sterre is risun of iacob; a maide haþ borun oure saueour. þee we preisen, oure god”; for Evensong, or Vespers, “Aftir þi child-berynge, þou leftist maide wiþ-outen wem. modir of god, preie for us”; for Compline, “Hail, quene of heuenes, modir of þe king of angeliþ! O marie, flour of virgines, as þe rose or þe lilie, make preiers to þi sone, for þe helþe of alle cristent men.”

The third reformulation of sacred history by the liturgy, then, is through the fixed hierarchical order of the parts of the Mass and the Office. The form of the liturgy is itself an interpretation of Scripture and sacred history. The form generates a meaning ordered to lead closer and closer to Christ. This form is both a sequence in time and a hierarchy of reality. As sequence and hierarchy it is analogous to the principle of sacred history which it formulates, which recounts the coming of God into history and the drawing of man into God through Christ. It is also, considered in the subjective mode, analogous to the movement through grades of perception of the soul in its ascent into Christ.

By these formulations the materials of Scripture and the meditations of the Church are reordered and juxtaposed with a triple focus. At the center of the Proper is the Gospel reading, the first focus, in the light of which the Lesson, the psalms and verses are defined and expressed, and around which the Office is built. The Gospel itself and its galaxy of reflections in the Proper is defined in relationship to a deeper focus, to the present sacrifice of the Mass to which it points. The feast of the occasion and the desires of the people present are, in a third focus, united to the present sacrifice through the Collects and other prayers. In the medieval liturgy the Mass stands in direct relationship to God, being Christ’s offering to the Father, and the means by which the past, assimilated to the present, points to the future union in the ultimate focus of the beatific vision.