

The interesting genesis of the Liturgy of the Hours:

1. The earliest centuries (NT times to 200's):

- Jewish practice of prayer 3 times daily (Shema, or simply 'prayers' as in Dan 6:10)
- Christian practice of praying the Our Father 3 times daily (Didache 8:3), and of having established times for prayer, like the Jews
- Clement of Alexandria († 215) mentions morning prayer, and three moments of prayer during the day (Tercia at 9:00; Sexta at 12:00 and Nona at 15:00 – Latin names parallel the Kiswahili method of reckoning time)
- Tertullian († 220) speaks of 'established' hours at the beginning of the day and of the night, recommends the keeping of the three hours during the day (in relation to different Scriptural episodes from Acts of the Apostles), and nocturnal vigils.
- St. Hippolytus of Rome († 235) speaks of the same 6 'hours' (morning, three daytime 'hours', evening, and vigils) in relation to the life and passion of Christ in his *Apostolic Tradition*.
- St. Cyprian of Carthage († 258) relates morning and evening prayer to the resurrection of Christ, light of the world and sun that never sets.

2. The Desert Fathers and the Cathedral traditions (300's – 400's):

Desert fathers and early cenobitic communities (lauras):

- Lectio continua of the Psalter and of the entire Bible more or less throughout the day. The entire psalter was usually recited every 2 weeks or even every week (Rule of St. Benedict)
- Nocturnal vigils with lengthy continuous readings from Scripture
- Less distinction of roles, as all were basically equal (monks)

Cathedral tradition (mentioned, described by Sts. Ambrose, Augustine, Hilary and the I Council of Toledo):

- More structured, nuanced Morning and Evening Prayer with greeting, hymn, selected psalms, short reading, (homily), intercessions, Our Father, blessing and dismissal by the bishop.
- Presence of the laity (local church) in the morning and evening prayers, led by the bishop (and/or clergy); cantors...
- Composition of hymns and other non-biblical texts flourished in certain areas; in others it was highly controversial.

3. The monastic Office, confluence of the Desert Fathers and Cathedral traditions (500's to 800's):

- Morning and Evening Prayer, taken over with their particular structure from the Cathedral tradition
- The three mid-day hours (Terce, Sext, None) taken from early Christian tradition (simple structure, mainly of psalms and readings)
- The monks added two 'household' hours: Prime (first hour of the morning, associated with the distribution of work), and Compline (an intimate hour at the end of the day, before retiring).
- Nocturnal vigil (Matins), taken from the Desert Fathers' tradition

Thus, the monastic office consisted in a well organized daily schedule of 7 diurnal 'hours' (cf. Ps. 119:164) and one nocturnal office at midnight (cf. Ps. 119:62) [both verses quoted in the Rule of St. Benedict, XVI]. The Liturgy of the Hours was seen as the "Office" (principle duty, service) of the monastic communities, but the local Churches (dioceses) also celebrated it as the principle daily prayer of Christians, since the Eucharist was still not celebrated every day. Ecclesial chant was developed as a particular musical form to accompany the irregular texts of the psalms; hymns were composed to enrich Christian prayer, meditating on the mysteries of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

4. Diverse tendencies of development of the Liturgy of the Hours (900's – 1400's):

- **Diversification and amplification of the monastic Office:** the sober Roman Office was increasingly embellished by Germanic and Gallican influences, eventually requiring the use of 7 different books by various ministers, and considerable training for its realization. The monastic community of Cluny is the culmination (and excess!) of this tendency, where almost the entire monastic life consisted in celebrating the Liturgy, the manual labor of the field being contracted out to peasants dependent on the monastery.
- **Abbreviation and privatization of the Franciscan and diocesan Office:** these exaggerations of the time and effort needed to 'perform' the Divine Office led to the opposite tendency to reduce, simplify and privatize its celebration. The Franciscans (among others), in the interest of having a single handy volume, simplicity and unity of celebration in their highly mobile life, invented the "breviary", which proved well adapted for diocesan life as well. This, however, opened the way to the privatization of its recitation, the loss of the community and choral dimensions, and upon the heels of the privatization of the Office followed the legalism of seeing it essentially as an obligation to be fulfilled by clerics and religious instead of the joy and reason of their existence. The laity were less and less involved in its celebration.

5. Various reforms (from the 1500's until our times)

- The Liturgy of the Hours was **continually enriched** by new elements: hymns, antiphons, new feasts, octaves, hagiographical readings, etc., requiring as well a continual series of reforms to simplify it and preserve its fundamental elements and distinguish them from other secondary items.
- **The most notable reforms** were those of Trent (in the 1560's), that of Pius X (in 1911), and that of Vatican II (in the 1970's). This latter reform was the most fundamental and far-reaching since the development of the Liturgy of the Hours. **Vatican II's principal contributions** (changes) in the Liturgy of the Hours were
 - The approval of the Liturgy of the Hours in the vernacular languages, with the incorporation of modern hymns alongside the traditional latin chants.
 - Returning the 'hours' to their proper place in the natural day (except Matins, renamed "Office of Readings", which may be celebrated at any time of day or night).
 - Distinguishing between norms for the monastic, contemplative religious communities on the one hand, and diocesan priests, active religious communities and laity on the other: these latter have to mould their time schedule for the Office around other schedules of the modern world (e.g. condensation of the three day-time hours into "Mid-day prayer").
 - The highlighting of Morning and Evening Prayer (former "Lauds" and "Vespers") as the 'hinges' of the Divine Office.
 - It lightened the burden of reciting numerous psalms by spreading out the reading of the whole Psalter to 4 weeks instead of 1 week, and suppressed a few ("cursing") psalms because of the pastoral difficulty of praying them in a Christian spirit.
 - Greater variety and increased length in the readings used in the Office of Readings; more critical and some newer (e.g. conciliar) readings for the "2nd reading" at the same
 - A pedagogical and spiritual introduction to the Liturgy of the Hours (the "General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours") and the insistence that the laity be invited and involved in the Church's daily prayer.