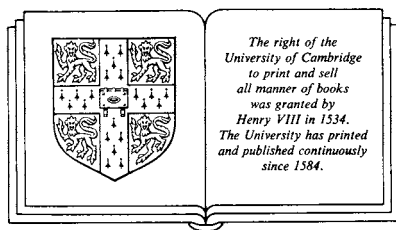


*The sanctus
in the
eucharistic prayer*



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

NEW YORK PORT CHESTER MELBOURNE SYDNEY

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 1991
First paperback edition 2002

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Spinks, Bryan D.

The Sanctus in the Eucharistic prayer / Bryan D. Spinks.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 39307 8

1. Sanctus. 2. Eucharistic prayers. I. Title.

BV194.S25S65 1991

264'.36-dc20

ISBN 0 521 39307 8 hardback

ISBN 0 521 52662 0 paperback



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INTRODUCTION



The enigma of the sanctus

FOR Christians of many traditions, the sanctus, *trisagion* or *qeduššah*,¹ is a familiar feature in the eucharistic prayer. It finds a place in almost every classical anaphora, and it has generally been regarded in modern liturgical revision as a necessary constituent of the eucharistic prayer. Its ultimate written source is not a mystery. It is adapted from the song of the seraphim of Isaiah 6:3 which, in different form and on the lips of four living creatures (from Ezekiel), recurs in Revelation 4:8. However, from the viewpoint of the history and theology of Christian liturgy, its occurrence within the eucharistic prayer remains something of a mystery. Why did this biblical song come to be inserted within a prayer in which the church follows the example and command of Jesus at the Last Supper? There is no suggestion in the Gospels that Jesus uttered the sanctus at this meal and enjoined its recitation, nor does there appear to be any evidence to suggest that it was ever a recognised constituent of Jewish meal prayers.

Although in practically all post-fourth-century classical anaphoras, East and West, the sanctus occurs at some point in the first part of the prayer, it is noticeably absent from some significant early texts, namely the *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to Hippolytus, *Testamentum Domini*, from the anaphora of Epiphanius and, according to M. A. Smith, an anaphora alluded to in Narsai's Homily XVII.² It is absent from the *Didache* which, in some recent studies, has been regarded as vital for understanding the transition from the Jewish meal benedictions or *berakot* to the Christian eucharistic prayer.³ It is found in Addai and Mari and Maronite *Sharar*, but although the majority of scholars agree on an early dating for the underlying anaphora, a formidable number have regarded the sanctus here as a later insertion.⁴ Justin Martyr, an early witness to the eucharistic liturgy, makes no mention of it; and, although it does occur in Revelation and 1 Clement 34, there is no

cogent proof that the context is eucharistic worship.⁵ The liturgist is thus left with a number of questions: when, where and why was this biblical song included within the eucharistic prayer?

Inevitably, liturgical scholars have put forward a variety of theories to answer these questions. Two theories have been especially influential in the English-speaking world, and at the very beginning of this study it is necessary to give them some consideration and to state why they cannot be accepted.

THE EGYPTIAN THEORY

Referring to this hypothesis, Geoffrey Cuming rightly observed that whoever first proposed this theory, it certainly owes its authority in England to the writings of Gregory Dix.⁶ It has also been espoused by Georg Kretschmar.⁷

In *The Shape of the Liturgy*, while discussing the anaphora in Serapion's euchology, Dix explained that with regard to the preface, the use of the sanctus at Alexandria can be traced in the writings of Origen c. 230 CE. Pointing to verbal similarities between the preface of Serapion and that of the Greek eucharistic prayer of St Mark, Dix concluded:

The simplest explanation of these various facts is that the use of the preface and sanctus in the eucharistic prayer began in the Alexandrian church at some time before AD 230, and from there spread first to other Egyptian churches, and ultimately all over christendom.⁸

In support of such a conclusion, Dix cited two references to an article he had written in *Theology* in 1938.⁹ On examination of this article, the case rests entirely upon two references in Origen's *De Principiis*, both of which are concerned with an interpretation of the two seraphim of Isaiah which Origen had learnt from his Hebrew teacher. The same interpretation is also given in his Homily on Isaiah.¹⁰ In the first passage, *De Principiis* i. 3,4, Origen links the two seraphim with the two living creatures of Habakkuk (LXX) 3:2. Dix suggested that the exegesis which Origen had learnt from his Hebrew teacher, namely that the two seraphim are the Son and the Holy Spirit, is echoed in Serapion's sanctus where the celestial creatures are described as *timiōtata*, 'honourable', and he noted that in the anaphora of St Mark they are described as *timiōtata zōa*, 'honourable living creatures', echoing Habakkuk. He inferred from this that Origen was alluding to the sanctus in the Egyptian eucharistic prayer.

Kretschmar approached the evidence from a study of trinitarian origins, finding an Egyptian view which can be traced to Origen and Methodius whereby Christ and the Holy Spirit were conceived of as two supreme heavenly powers standing before God's throne (= seraphim), and a Syrian view whereby God, Christ and the Holy Spirit were ranged side by side as heavenly witnesses. In the middle of the third century, the *sanctus* was taken up in the Alexandrine eucharistic prayer as a reference to Christ and the Holy Spirit as intermediaries who open up free access to God for the congregation.¹¹ The immediate context was to counter Sabellianism which regarded the Son and the Spirit simply as modes of the Godhead and not separate persons. However, with the rise of Arianism which taught the inferiority of the Son to the Father, Origen's exegesis was abandoned. Syria received the anaphoral *sanctus* from Egypt in the fourth century, and here it was addressed to Christ and only later to God the creator. Towards the end of the fourth century the Antiochene school of Diodore adopted the trinitarian interpretation of Alexandria. Kretschmar, in seeking the roots of trinitarian doctrine, traces the view of Origen back to the Ascension of Isaiah and to the writings of Philo. However, for the link between Origen and the Egyptian eucharistic prayer, his authority is Gregory Dix.

However interesting and suggestive these observations might appear, there is in fact little justification for drawing the conclusion which Dix and Kretschmar wished to draw, namely that Origen is our earliest witness to the anaphoral *sanctus*, and that in the prayer, the seraphim were understood to be Christ and the Holy Spirit. The first passage in *De Principiis* i. 3,4, does not actually quote the *sanctus*, and in the second, iv. 3,14, the *sanctus* which is quoted is that of the biblical text of Isaiah 6:3 and not its adapted anaphoral form. Origen links Isaiah 6:3 with Colossians 1:16, and these are also found together in Serapion and the Coptic fragment in the Coptic Ostrica. However, in the other fragments of the Alexandrine anaphora, and in St Mark itself, it is Ephesians 1:21 which is linked with the *sanctus*, and *not* Colossians 1:16. Since in Serapion, Colossians 1:16 comes as a clumsy repetition of Ephesians 1:21, it may have been inserted into the anaphora by Serapion himself or by whoever was responsible for that prayer.¹² Contrary to Dix's conclusion, it would seem that the evidence he presented should be assessed as follows. Origen was concerned with the exegesis of *biblical* texts, and his exegesis led him to link Isaiah 6:3, Habakkuk 3:2 and Colossians 1:16. He was *not* expounding a liturgical text. The *sanctus* in Serapion and in St Mark both show some slight

acquaintance with an exegesis linking these passages but it is by no means the same. *Zōa*, for example, does not occur in Serapion and, with due respect to Dix, in St Mark the *zōa* are *not* identified with the seraphim.¹³ If Origen was acquainted with an anaphoral tradition which included the sanctus, this is not demonstrated by the passages from *De Principiis*.

In 1938 Dix had cautiously written:

It begins to look as though *Serapion* represents, for all its anti-Arian editing, a traditional Egyptian arrangement of the introduction to the Sanctus, which was also in the mind of Origen when he wrote this passage about the Sanctus before AD 225.¹⁴

What this statement actually means is that it had begun to look like this to Dix, and he admitted that the evidence was 'delicate'.¹⁵ Yet, by the time he came to write *The Shape of the Liturgy*, his 1938 suggestions came to be assured facts of scholarship. Dix had created a false trail which Kretschmar followed – not unlike Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet in the hunt for the woozle.¹⁶

THE CLIMAX THEORY

Strangely enough, the first signs of this theory can also be traced to Gregory Dix. In *The Shape of the Liturgy* he suggested that the Egyptian anaphora might have originally consisted of a preface (thanksgiving) terminating with the sanctus.¹⁷ However, the development of this idea into the theory that nearly all early orthodox eucharistic prayers may have terminated with the sanctus is associated with the name of Edward Ratcliff.

Ratcliff's theory was set out in a paper entitled 'The Sanctus and the Pattern of the Early Anaphora'¹⁸ which was concerned with the Verona text of *Apostolic Tradition*. Comparing the Verona text with the evidence of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus on the eucharistic prayer, Ratcliff believed that several things pointed to a later rearrangement of the anaphora. By omitting the epiklesis, Ratcliff joined two paragraphs, both of which were concerned with the idea of divine worship. But,

there is a want of climax, touching bathos, in the use of the common doxology as the ending of the solemn eucharistic prayer which, alone of all prayers, is introduced by 'Sursum corda', 'habemus ad Dominum'.¹⁹

On the basis of the Old Latin and Vulgate usage, Ratcliff propounded that the Verona's *adstare coram te et tibi ministrare* ('to stand before

you and minister to you') was a translation not of *estanaï enōpion sou kai ierateuein soi*, but of *parestanai enōpion sou kai leitourgein soi*. In Theodotion's version of Daniel 7:10 these verbs are found to be juxtaposed in connection with worship from the heavenly host. Ratcliff submitted that the transposed clauses of Daniel 7:10 were combined with Isaiah 6:3, and that the sanctus constituted the conclusion, not merely of the paragraph itself, but of the whole anaphora. Privately he expressed an opinion of what the missing ending might have been.²⁰ This erudite study of the anaphora of *Apostolic Tradition* ended:

Here this article reaches its limit. If its contention be sound, it raises a number of questions, most of them depending upon the primary question, Why, if the pattern of the ancient anaphora ever conformed with the reconstruction proposed here, was the pattern abandoned? The surviving literature, and not least the historic liturgies, either supply the answers or offer evidence which suggests them. A consideration of the questions and answers, however, must be reserved for a future article.²¹

The argument was taken a little further in 'A Note on the Anaphoras described in the Liturgical Homilies of Narsai'.²² Here Ratcliff argued that the anaphora outlined by Narsai in Homily XXXII bore witness to an earlier pattern of the anaphora which concluded with the sanctus, while at the same time implying that the sanctus may have had a consecratory function. Although he never wrote the promised article considering the questions and answers, it was his private opinion that all the early anaphoras had ended with the sanctus.²³

Support for this theory was forthcoming from A. H. Couratin, G. A. Michell and W. Pitt.²⁴ Couratin asked whether there was any evidence to indicate that the terminating sanctus was sung by the celebrant alone and that the people simply responded with 'Amen'? He appealed to tone XVIII for ferial use in the *Graduale Romanum*; this is the only sanctus chant which continues the melody of the preface. Couratin noted that the first hosanna of the benedictus repeats the notes of *Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth*, and the benedictus repeats the notes of *Pleni sunt caeli*. He suggested that the notes of the second hosanna recalled the *ekphonesis* and the response which concluded the canon missae. Couratin reasoned that, given Ratcliff's argument, the canon missae may originally have ended:

sine fine dicentes Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua per omnia saecula saeculorum.

R. Amen.²⁵

He cited a passage from Tertullian which he interpreted as referring to the sanctus and doxology; from *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, and from Egypt. For the latter he suggested that the concluding doxology echoed Rev. 4:8, to which it was originally attached in the anaphora.

G. A. Michell, inspired by Ratcliff's hypothesis, turned his attention to the report given by Firmilian of Caesarea in Cappadocia to Cyprian regarding a certain prophetess who apparently celebrated the eucharist, and in particular, to the meaning of *invocatione* and *sacramento solitae praedicationis*. On the basis of trinitarian references in Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ephraem, and the invocation of names in Gnostic prayers, he urged that *invocatione* should be understood as invoking the divine names, and that *sacramento solitae praedicationis* referred to the sanctus. Appealing also to Origen and Ambrose, he wrote:

This cumulative evidence leads to the conclusion that, in Firmilian's view, the second constituent of an orthodox anaphora ought to be the Sanctus, regarded as a proclamation of the holiness and omnipotence of God.²⁶

Michell also suggested that in the Byzantine anaphora of Basil, the section as far as the sanctus with its invocation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, represented the ancient eucharistic prayer of Caesarea. From this conclusion W. E. Pitt argued that the present Byzantine anaphora of Basil had been extended from its original form by adding material (from St James) after the sanctus; the preface and sanctus represent the earliest stratum.

Ratcliff's study of the anaphora of *Apostolic Tradition* raised some important points about the prayer, particularly regarding the reliability of the Verona text. However, his argument relating to the sanctus rested upon far too many conjectures. We do not know what the underlying Greek was, but the reading of *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII seems preferable to that suggested by Ratcliff. The Old Latin rendering of the LXX and the New Testament is not necessarily a reliable guide for reconstructing the Greek of a liturgical text.²⁷ But even if Ratcliff's conjectures about the Greek were correct, and even if it echoes the vocabulary found in Theodotion's rendering of Daniel 7:10, there is, logically, no compelling reason for concluding that it led into the sanctus. The fact remains that there is *no* sanctus in Hippolytus, and it is unlikely that a fourth-century reviser would have entirely omitted an existing sanctus at a time when it was becoming a universal feature in anaphoral composition.

I have already questioned the legitimacy of Ratcliff's interpretation of Narsai's Homily XXXII.²⁸ Ratcliff misused the homiletic material, and

his interpretation was based upon four unwarranted assumptions. It is quite possible to interpret the anaphora outlined in the homily in a manner which is consistent with the other two anaphoras described by Narsai.

Similar flaws can be found in the articles by Couratin, Michell and Pitt – though they lose their rationale if Ratcliff's hypothesis falls. Couratin's argument regarding the melody could be reversed; there would be more likelihood of a congregation joining in a sanctus which continued the familiar melody of the preface than in a sanctus with a different melody. Few scholars would agree that Couratin's interpretation of Tertullian is correct, and his interpretation of *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII and the Egyptian doxology are simply speculations. E. Dekkers's interpretation of *invocatio* and *praedicatio* as being synonyms for the eucharistic prayer as a whole is preferable to Michell's;²⁹ and since recent scholarship has demonstrated that the trinitarian preface of the Byzantine version of St Basil represents a sophisticated reworking of an earlier text, Michell's and Pitt's arguments have been rendered obsolete.³⁰ Neither the Egyptian theory nor the more elaborate Climax theory provide convincing explanations to the puzzles surrounding the anaphoral sanctus.

This study of the sanctus in the eucharistic prayer is concerned with presenting a developmental argument, and theories of origin are only discussed in the light of a consideration of the texts and contexts. This method seems essential also if the findings are not to be predetermined by *a priori* theories of the origin of the eucharistic prayer itself. Part I is concerned with the background and context of the biblical trisagion and an examination of its quasi-liturgical and liturgical usage in Judaism. Some early Christian references to the sanctus are examined in order to test continuity with Jewish contexts, and for innovation. Part II considers the early anaphoral evidence up to the seventh century, and is particularly concerned with the context and function of the sanctus. The historical and theological background of the liturgical texts is regarded as fundamental to the arguments. In the light of this survey, possible origins of the anaphoral sanctus are discussed. Part III surveys more briefly subsequent development of the sanctus in the eucharistic prayer up to the present, and concludes with a theological reflection on its form and function in future anaphoral composition.