

The Proleptic Offertory in the Various Liturgical Traditions

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Introduction

When considering the prayers of the Offertory in the tradition of the Roman Rite, what first catches the eye is what liturgists refer to as proleptics (πρόληψις), that is to say, ‘anticipation’: the presentation, as though already accomplished, of that which belongs temporally or logically to the future – not as a mere prediction, but as an anticipated actualisation. In the specific case of the Mass, this consists in treating the bread and wine, at the moment they are offered, as if they were already the Body and Blood of Christ and, consequently, in offering them for the living and the dead in a propitiatory sense.

This aspect has struck some as inappropriate, and not only the more or less rationalist liturgists of the twentieth century engaged in dialogue with Protestantism; indeed, it was also included in the list of abuses — submitted for the Council Fathers to examine and evaluate — by the members of the commission specifically appointed *ad hoc* by the Council of Trent, although it was subsequently not deemed a priority to address this point in the conciliar debates.

Those who view this anticipation in the Offertory with suspicion generally tend to attribute it to a later intrusion, dating from the medieval period and linked to a Franco-Germanic conception of the liturgy, within a structure of the Mass that did not originally provide for it. It is, however, a fact that language clearly foreshadowing the sacrifice is found not only in other rites, both Western and Eastern, but even in other, more ancient and unquestionably Roman parts of the Roman Rite.

We therefore propose to undertake a comprehensive review of the formulas and rites of the Offertory across the various Eastern and Western traditions, with a view to understanding the scope of this anticipation and the various nuances that characterise its use. In this exposition, we do not intend to enter into the debate on the theological and doctrinal implications, nor on the different liturgical conceptions that it entails; rather, starting from as broad a historical overview as possible, we wish to map out the presence of this anticipation in the various traditions of the Church.

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The Apologies

First of all, we shall seek to situate these prayers within the context of the genre to which they belong. The offertory prayers are in some way linked to an element that is consistently found across the various liturgical families: the attitude of the priest who, whilst acknowledging himself unworthy to stand before the altar of God because of his own sins, nevertheless dares to approach it, full of trust in divine mercy, to celebrate the holy mysteries and offer the sacrifice in atonement for the sins of the people. Recognising his own unworthiness in this way, he asks God to make him worthy of this ministry.

In the West, this attitude is represented in particular in the so-called ‘apologies’, examples of which began to appear around the 8th century in the Gelasian sacramentaries copied in Gaul; they became widespread in the 10th and 11th centuries, before disappearing almost entirely, with only a few examples remaining in use.

This type of prayer is found above all at the culminating moments of the liturgy, when the celebrant prepares to present himself in a special way before the divinity; that is to say: at the beginning of Mass, through a penitential rite performed, in some rites, outside the sanctuary and, in others, at the foot of the altar. Closely linked to this is the rite of the celebrant and his assistants entering the sanctuary, which is present, in one form or another, in all rites. Prayers of this nature are also found at the proclamation of the Gospel, the Offertory and Communion, and, in several cases, even during the dismissal from the altar at the end of Mass.

Prayers and Gestures of the Offertory in the Various Traditions

a. The West

1. The Offertory in *the Missale Romanum* and other contemporary Missals

When we speak of *the Missale Romanum*, we are not referring exclusively to the edition promulgated by St Pius V and preserved without alteration, as regards the Offertory, until 1970. It is very often claimed — sometimes even in works that are not merely popular in nature — that St Pius V, in his edition, decided to ‘establish a selection of prayers’ drawn from a collection which, until then, had been found in one missal one day and another the next; it is thus claimed that he ‘standardised the rite, eliminated ambiguous local variations

and strictly incorporated the Offertory into the sequence: Offertory → Canon → Consecration’.

A glance at the various ‘Curia’ missals and those of the Franciscan ‘Rule’ that have come down to us — from the earliest identifiable as such (13th century) up to the edition printed by Giunta in Venice in 1567, three years before that of St Pius V — shows, however, that this collection of prayers has remained unchanged since the earliest manuscripts, that is to say, three centuries before St Pius V, constituting a continuity of eight hundred years right up to the present day.

This confusion undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is often forgotten that St Pius V did not produce a Missal as a synthesis of the various missals then in use in the West, but confined himself to what we would today call a ‘critical edition’ of the Missal handed down by tradition, known until then as **Missale secundum usum romanae curiae** — or by a similar name — and which from that moment onwards would be permanently known as *the *Missale Romanum**.

The Latin variants of the prayers and rites of the Offertory (as well as, for that matter, the sequences) found in manuscripts or in early printed editions belonged to diocesan missals or those of religious orders, and not to the practice of the Roman Curia; therefore, if they were more than two hundred years old, they were not affected by the provisions of St Pius V; if not, they were simply replaced by the missal he promulgated. There was therefore no ‘standardisation’ work in an area that had already been stable for three centuries.

The structure of the formula for the Offertory of the Bread in the Roman Missal is as follows.

Receive, Holy Father, this spotless sacrifice, which I (...) offer to you, for my innumerable sins (...) and also for all the faithful, both living and departed: that it may (...) contribute to salvation in eternal life.

Receive, Holy Father, this immaculate host, which I (...) offer to you for my innumerable sins (...) and also for all the faithful, both living and departed, so that (...) it may contribute to salvation in eternal life.

As we have said, this formula was already established in the 13th century; as for the other Latin formulas, *for the sake of brevity* we shall confine ourselves to mentioning those rites that remained in use until the 20th century; for a broader perspective on earlier medieval

practices and on other diocesan and religious order missals, see Paul Tirot, **Histoire des prières d'offertoire dans la liturgie romaine du VIIe au XVIe siècle**. CLV Edizioni liturgiche – Rome, 1985.

In the Carmelite rite, the following formula is found:

May this offering, which we present to you for our sins and transgressions, and for the stability of the Holy Catholic Church, as well as for the souls of all the faithful departed, be acceptable to your majesty, almighty God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May this offering, which we present to you for our sins and transgressions, and for the stability of the Holy Catholic Church, as well as for the souls of all the faithful departed, be pleasing to your majesty, almighty God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer is also used, with some variations, in the Mozarabic Rite (Cisneros Missal); the priest then recites this other prayer, which is also found (almost identically) in the Lyon Missal:

We beseech You, O Lord, to accept this offering with favour, and to forgive the sins of all those who offer it and of those for whom it is offered to You.

We beseech you, Lord, to graciously accept this offering, and to forgive the sins of all those who offer it and of those for whom it is offered to you.

The Offertory prayers in the Ambrosian Rite, for both the bread and the wine, do not anticipate the consecration, but ask for the transformation of the bread and wine offered into the Body and Blood of Christ respectively; nevertheless, the bread is called ‘sanctus’, an adjective which can only be used in the context of this transformation.

Suscipe clementissime Pater hunc panem sanctum, ut fiat Unigeniti tui Corpus, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

Receive, most merciful Father, this holy bread, that it may become the Body of your only-begotten Son.

However, this defence—which may be regarded as prophetic—goes on to add:

Almighty, eternal God, may this offering be pleasing and acceptable to You, which I, unworthy as I am, offer on behalf of myself, a wretched sinner, and for my innumerable sins, I offer to Your mercy, that You may grant me forgiveness and

remission of all my sins, and that You may not despise my iniquities, but that Your mercy alone may avail me, unworthy as I am.

Almighty and eternal God, may this offering be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, which I, unworthy as I am, offer to your mercy on behalf of myself, a wretched sinner, and for my innumerable offences, so that you may grant me forgiveness and remission of all my sins, and may you not despise my iniquities, but may your mercy alone be of benefit to me, unworthy as I am.

And towards the end of the Offertory, the priest recites an epiclesis blessing, the second part of which is anticipatory in nature:

May the abundant blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, descend from heaven upon this our offering; and may this offering be acceptable to You, Holy Lord, Almighty Father, Eternal God, most merciful Creator of all things.

May the abundant blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, descend from heaven upon this offering of ours; and may this offering be accepted by You, Holy Lord, Almighty Father, Eternal God, most merciful Creator of all things.

Finally, the Dominican rite, addressing not the Father but the Most Holy Trinity, expresses itself thus:

Receive, Holy Trinity, this offering which I present to you (...) and grant that it may ascend before your presence, pleasing to you; and may it bring about my salvation and that of all the faithful for ever.

Receive, Most Holy Trinity, this offering which I present to you (...), and grant that it may rise before your presence as an offering pleasing to you; and may it bring about my salvation and that of all the faithful for eternal life.

At the moment of the offering of the chalice, the tradition of the Roman Missal refers to it as the '*Calix salutáris*' and offers it in a propitiatory sense:

We offer to you, Lord, the cup of salvation, imploring your mercy: that, in the presence of your divine majesty, for our salvation and that of the whole world, it may rise as a sweet-smelling fragrance.

We offer you, Lord, the cup of salvation, imploring your mercy, so that it may rise before your divine majesty as a sweet-smelling fragrance, for our salvation and that of the whole world.

This formula is also used in the rite of the Church of Braga. Among the other rites, only the Mozarabic rite includes a formula for the offering of the chalice, which, however, is merely a variant of that used in the Roman rite.

We offer you, Lord, this chalice to bless the Blood of Christ, your Son; and we implore your mercy, that it may rise before the sight of your divine Majesty with a sweet fragrance. Through the same Christ our Lord.

We offer you, Lord, this chalice so that it may be blessed as the Blood of Christ, your Son; and we implore your mercy so that, in the presence of your divine Majesty, it may rise with a sweet fragrance. Through the same Christ our Lord.

For its part, the Ambrosian Rite repeats the formula already mentioned for the offering of the bread, with the corresponding changes.

Receive, most merciful Father, this chalice, wine mixed with water, that it may become the Blood of your Only-Begotten Son. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Receive, most merciful Father, this chalice, wine mixed with water, that it may become the Blood of your only-begotten Son. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The other rites do not have a special formula to accompany the offering of the chalice.

The last of the offertory prayers, '*Suscipe Sancta Trinitas...*', is the oldest documented one (indeed, its basic structure already appears in the most ancient sacramentaries and missals; it is also found in the Lyonese and Ambrosian rites, and exists in the Carmelite rite, in a rather modified form, as the sole offertory formula). Although at first glance it appears to be nothing more than a simple repetition of *the* '*Suscipe Sancte Pater*', in reality it complements it. The Dominican Offertory (cf. *supra*), although it begins with the same words, is more akin to *the* '*Suscipe Sancte Pater*' in terms of structure and content.

The most complete form is as follows: the priest asks the Triune God to accept the offering presented in memory of Christ's death; the Roman and Ambrosian rites add the Resurrection and the Ascension; the Lyonese rite adds a reference to the Incarnation and the

Nativity, and a mention in honour of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Then an offering is made in honour of the saints: first and foremost the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist, the holy apostles Peter and Paul, ‘all the saints who have been pleasing to God since the beginning of the world’, those whose feast day is celebrated on that day, those whose names are inscribed in the ‘dyptychs’ and those whose relics are on the altar upon which the Mass is celebrated; and “for our salvation, that all those we honour may intercede for us”.

The Ambrosian Rite also includes two prayers which begin in the same way: one for the priest and another which lists in detail the intentions for which the sacrifice is offered.

And accept, Holy Trinity, this offering which we present to you for the governance, protection and unity of the Catholic faith; and also for the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and of all your saints together: and for the salvation and safety of your servants, both men and women, and of all those for whom we have promised to implore your mercy, and from whom we have received alms, and of all faithful Christians, both the living and the departed, that, through Your mercy, they may be deemed worthy to receive the remission of all sins and the rewards of eternal bliss, whilst faithfully persevering in Your praise, to the glory and honour of Your name, O most merciful God, Creator of all things.

And accept, Most Holy Trinity, this offering which we present to you for the governance, preservation and unity of the Catholic faith; and also in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and of all your saints; and for the salvation and protection of your servants, both men and women, and of all those for whom we have undertaken to implore your mercy, and of those from whom we have received alms, and of all the Christian faithful, both living and departed, so that, through your mercy, they may merit the remission of all their sins and the rewards of eternal bliss, persevering faithfully in your praise, to the glory and honour of your name, O most merciful God, Creator of all things.

This is followed by the prayer taken from Daniel 3:39–40:

In a spirit of humility and with a contrite heart, may we be received by you, O Lord; and may our sacrifice today be offered in your sight in such a way that it may be pleasing to you, O Lord God.

With a humble spirit and a contrite heart, may we be received by you, Lord; and so may our sacrifice be offered today in your presence in a way that is pleasing to you, Lord God.

It is found, with minor variations, in all the Latin rites mentioned. Here the term ‘sacrifice’ is clearly used, but this prayer does not necessarily imply a sacrifice that is already present; rather, it could be read as a request to obtain the proper disposition to offer, in due form, the sacrificial act that is to take place shortly afterwards during the consecration.

In the Carthusian rite, whilst saying: *‘In spiritu humilitatis...’*, the priest raises the chalice. This was also the only private prayer of the Offertory in the monastic rites of Cluny and Cîteaux.

Finally, in the Roman rite, the priest says, addressing the faithful:

Pray, brothers, that this sacrifice of mine and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father.

Pray, brothers, that this sacrifice of mine and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.

The response in the Roman Rite is:

May the Lord accept this sacrifice from your hands, to the praise and glory of his name, and for our benefit and that of his whole holy Church.

May the Lord receive this sacrifice from your hands to the praise and glory of his name, for our good and for that of his whole holy Church.

Whereas in the Lyonese rite the response is:

May the Lord God Almighty accept this sacrifice from your mouth and from your hands, for the good of his holy Church, for the salvation of the whole Christian people, and for the relief of all the faithful departed.

May the Lord God Almighty accept this sacrifice from your lips and from your hands, for the good of his holy Church, for the salvation of the whole Christian people, and for the relief of all the faithful departed.

In the Carmelite rite, the following is said:

May the Lord remember all your sacrifice: and may your burnt offering be rich; may He grant you according to your heart’s desire and confirm all your plans.

May the Lord remember every sacrifice of yours, and may your burnt offering be abundant; may He grant you according to your heart and confirm all your plans.

In the Dominican rite, the '*Orate fratres*' remains unanswered.

In the Carthusian rite, the priest makes no mention of the sacrifice, but merely asks:

Pray, brothers, for me, a sinner, to the Lord our God.

Pray, brothers, for me, a sinner, to the Lord our God.

Nor is any response given in this instance.

Although the **Orate, fratres** refers to 'sacrifice', in this instance the sense of anticipation is not unambiguous, as it could be interpreted as a request to pray for the sacrifice that is about to begin (we are already nearing the end of the Offertory). The same can be said of the corresponding response, in which the purposes of the sacrifice are clearly stated, without this necessarily implying an anticipation of the sacrifice itself.

2. The presence of prolepsis in the ancient Roman sacramentaries

Twentieth-century liturgists agree that, in the Roman rite, the prayer proper to the Offertory was originally the *Secreta*. Among these prayers, there are many which do not present the sacrifice as already present, but rather arrange or prepare the sacrifice that is to be offered later; others do not even mention it at all.

For example, in the following instance, reference is made, on the one hand, to the Body and Blood of Christ as nourishment in Communion (*saginandi*), not to the sacrifice, and, on the other hand, to adoration and the fruit thereof: there is no anticipation, but rather, on the contrary, a clear orientation towards the future:

By the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom the banner of the Cross was sanctified: we beseech You, Lord our God, that, just as we have merited to worship it, so may we forever partake of the saving effect of His glory. Through the same Lord.

We who are to be nourished by the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the banner of the Cross was sanctified, beseech you, Lord our God, that, just as we have been deemed worthy to adore it, so may we also partake unceasingly in the saving effect of his glory. Through the same Lord.

Here the host is offered, but it is the host 'of our devotion' (*hostia devotionis nostrae*):

May the host of our devotion, we pray, O Lord, be offered to you continually: that it may fulfil the requirements of the sacred mystery and work your salvation marvellously within us. Through the Lord.

We pray to you, Lord: may the host of our devotion be offered up to you continually; may it fulfil the requirements of the sacred mystery and work your salvation marvellously within us. Through the Lord.

In this other prayer, the gifts for which acceptance is sought are our fasts: may they serve as atonement and lead us to the eternal promises:

May our gifts of fasting be acceptable to you, O Lord, we pray: that, by atoning for us, they may, through your grace, make us worthy and lead us to the eternal promises. Through the Lord.

May the gifts of our fasting be pleasing to you, Lord, we pray: that, by atoning for us, your grace may make us worthy and lead us to the eternal promises. Through the Lord.

In other instances, the focus is more specifically on *the* 'munera' and 'dona' offered, but the sacrificial terms 'hostia' and 'sacrificium' are not used. Here, 'haec munera' are mentioned very precisely, and grace is sought to be able to offer them worthily:

We beseech you, O Lord, to work through these mysteries: that we may offer these gifts to you with worthy hearts. Through the Lord.

Work, we pray, O Lord, through your mysteries, so that we may offer these gifts to you with a worthy spirit. Through the Lord.

This formula asks not only for the acceptance of the gifts, but also for their salvific efficacy:

O Lord, graciously accept the gifts we bring before you, that they may lead us to salvation.

Graciously accept, O Lord, the gifts we present to you, that they may be for our salvation.

Here we ask not only for the acceptance of the gifts, but expressly for their sanctification; and, once the offering of the spiritual host has been accepted, that God may make us ourselves an eternal gift.

Propitius, Domine, quaesumus, haec dona sanctifica: et hostiae spiritualis oblatione suscepta, nosmetipsos tibi perfice munus aeternum. Per Dominum.

We beseech you, O Lord, in your favour, to sanctify these gifts; and, having received the offering of the spiritual host, make us ourselves an eternal gift to you. Through the Lord.

The following is an epiclesis: it too speaks not of sacrifice, but of the sanctification of the gifts and the effect upon those who receive them:

May your Holy Spirit, O Lord our God, descend upon this altar: that he may sanctify the gifts of your people and worthily purify the hearts of those who receive them. Through the Lord in his unity.

May Your Holy Spirit, we pray, O Lord our God, descend upon this altar: that He may sanctify the gifts of Your people and worthily purify the hearts of those who receive them. Through the Lord, in the unity of the same.

Here the request is clear: that the gifts offered may become (in the future) the Body and Blood, and that they may benefit the king in his mission:

O Lord, we beseech thee, sanctify these offerings: that they may also become for us the Body and Blood of thy Only-Begotten Son; and that they may be of every benefit to our king, with thy help, in attaining the salvation of soul and body, and in fulfilling the office entrusted to him. Through the same Lord.

Sanctify, O Lord, we pray, the gifts offered: that they may also become for us the Body and Blood of your Only-Begotten Son; and that they may be of benefit to our king in every way, with your help, to obtain the salvation of soul and body and to fulfil the office entrusted to him. Through the same Lord.

Here too, the future tense, marked by the gerundive, is clear.

May this sacrifice, we beseech thee, O Lord, be a pleasing and sacred offering, made precious by the celebration of martyrdom: that it may purify our sins and reconcile to thee the vows of thy servants. Through the Lord.

May the host to be consecrated, in the precious celebration of martyrdom, be pleasing to you, we pray, O Lord; and may it purify our sins and bring before you the vows of your servants. Through the Lord.

On the other hand, those prayers which refer to the gifts—which have not yet been consecrated—as ‘*sacrificium*’, ‘*hostia*’ or ‘*immolatio*’ may properly be regarded as proleptic, particularly when they are accompanied by demonstratives (*hic*, *haec*, *hoc*) and when they speak of an expiatory efficacy already attributed to the oblation; that is, using language that presupposes a present, rather than merely future, sacrificial nature. We find a good number of these in the Missal, but we shall focus above all on the oldest ones, attested in the Sacramentaries, particularly the Veronese Sacramentary.

The Gelasian Sacramentary preserves a *Secreta* containing an offering formula that is particularly explicit in its penitential and personal ‘apologetic’ language, in which the celebrant presents himself before God, aware of his own unworthiness, and implores the remission of sins in direct relation to the offering presented. The similarity with *the *Suscipe Sancte Pater** is striking (we have highlighted in bold the words common to both):

*Suscipe clementissime **pater** has oblationes, quas **ego indignus famulus tuus offero pro peccatis atque offensionibus meis**, et praecor clementissime pater, ut peccata mea iubeas demittere et **uitam** sempiternam tribuere.*

Receive, O most merciful Father, these offerings which I, your unworthy servant, offer for my sins and offences, and I beseech you, O most merciful Father, to command that my sins be forgiven and to grant me eternal life.

A little further on, the same sacramentary proposes a similar formula in which the offering for the dead is explicitly introduced, thus extending the scope of the sacrifice to the communion of the living and the dead:

*Accept, most merciful Father, **this offering which I, your unworthy servant, offer to you for the repose of the souls** of those your **servants**, both men and women; I beseech you, most merciful Father, that they may await the day of resurrection with the comfort of your kindness.*

Receive, O most merciful Father, this offering which I, your unworthy servant, offer to you for the repose of the souls of those your servants, both men and women; I beseech you, O most merciful Father, that they may await the day of the Resurrection with the refreshment of your kindness.

In the Verona Sacramentary, the same terms are also used as in *the ‘Suscipe, sancte Pater’*:

*Lord, **holy Father, almighty and eternal God**, look favourably upon the offerings of your household, so that these acts of pious devotion may sanctify both those who govern and those who are to be governed.*

Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, look favourably upon the offerings of your family, so that these acts of pious devotion may sanctify both those who govern and those who are to be governed.

The same words addressed to the Father reappear in a prayer by Gelasian of Angoulême:

*We beseech you, O Lord, **Holy Father, almighty and eternal God**, that He may make our sacrifice acceptable to you, He who, by His command today, showed His disciples that this should be done in remembrance of Him.*

May he himself, we pray, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, make our sacrifice acceptable to you—he who today showed his disciples, through his instruction, that this was to be done in his memory.

In this context, the fragment known as the ‘Kiev Missal’ or ‘Sacramentary’ is particularly significant; this Old Slavonic text may be derived from a lost Roman prototype, on which the Padua Sacramentary is also thought to be based, and which is believed to reflect a very ancient, purely Roman pre-Hadrianic tradition dating from the 6th–7th centuries. In this fragment, the offering is explicitly designated as *haec hostia* (Ѡбѣщѣнѣ ѡбѣ) sacrificed for the redemption of mankind; the proposed Latin retroversion reads:

*Suscipe, domine, quaesumus te, **hostiam hanc tibi oblatam pro redemptione hominum** et sanitatem nobis da et animas nostras atque corpora emunda precesque nostras suscipe.*

Receive, O Lord, we beseech thee, this host offered to thee for the redemption of mankind; grant us salvation, purify our souls and bodies, and accept our prayers.

A very similar prayer is found in the aforementioned Padua Sacramentary, where the propitiatory effect of the sacrifice is clearly evident:

*We beseech You, O Lord, to accept **this sacrifice of human redemption and, in Your mercy, to bring about our salvation of mind and body.***

We pray, O Lord, that you may accept the sacrifice of human redemption and, in your mercy, grant us salvation of soul and body.

In the Verona Sacramentary, the oblation is explicitly called *the 'hostia spiritalis'* and it is stated that it is sacrificed and offered:

*Having cast aside the shadows of carnal sacrifices, we humbly present to you, O Most High Father, **a spiritual sacrifice**, which, **by a wondrous and ineffable mystery, is ever sacrificed and ever offered**, and is both the gift of the faithful and the reward of the Rewarder.*

Having removed the shadows of the carnal sacrifices, we offer to you, O Most High Father, with suppliant devotion, a spiritual host, which, by a marvellous and ineffable mystery, is always sacrificed and always offered whilst remaining the same, and is at once the gift of the devout and the reward of the One who rewards.

The Gelasian and the Angoulême tradition add another formula which emphasises the liberating and reconciling effect of the host:

***May this host**, O Lord, we pray, both **loose** the bonds of our iniquity and secure for us the gifts of your mercy,*

May this host, O Lord, we pray, loose the bonds of our iniquity and obtain for us the gifts of your mercy.

Various prayers in the Gelasian and Gregorian liturgical books also state that the Host is *salutaris*:

*Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that **this salvific Host** may be **the purification of our sins and the propitiation** of your power.*

Grant us, Lord, we pray, that this salvific host may become the purification of our sins and the propitiation of your power.

Another prayer from the Gelasian Prayer Book concludes with the expression that would later be taken up by *the 'Suscipe, sanctus Pater'*:

*O God, who in the perfection of a single sacrifice established the distinctions between the various lawful offerings, accept this sacrifice from your devout servants, and sanctify it with the same blessing as the offerings of Abel, so that what each has offered in honour of your majesty **may bring salvation to all**.*

O God, who hast established the differences between the legally prescribed victims in the perfection of a single sacrifice, accept the sacrifice of thy devoted servants and sanctify it with the same blessing with which thou sanctifiedst the offerings of Abel,

so that what each has offered in honour of thy majesty may be for the salvation of all.

In the same way:

*Be propitious, O Lord, to our supplications, and graciously accept these offerings from your servants and handmaids, so that what each has offered in honour of your name **may bring salvation to all**.*

Be gracious, Lord, to our supplications and graciously accept these offerings from your servants and handmaids, so that what each has offered in honour of your name may be for the salvation of all.

The formula for the offering of the chalice in the Roman Offertory also has precedents in the sacramentaries, for example in the Veronese one:

***We offer** to you, **Lord**, the gifts of your saints, which are pleasing to you on these solemn occasions, **beseeking your mercy**, that what is for their glory may be for our forgiveness.*

We offer you, Lord, gifts pleasing to you on the feast days of your saints, imploring your mercy so that what is offered for their glory may bring us forgiveness.

The term **salutaris**, which the Roman Offertory uses for the chalice, is found (albeit in reference to the host) in this further prayer, attested several times in the Gelasian and Gregorian Sacramentaries:

*Grant us, O Lord, we beseech thee, that this **salvific** host may serve both as a purification from our sins and as a propitiation of thy power. Through the Lord.*

Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that this salvific host may be the purification of our sins and the propitiation of your power. Through the Lord.

A similar prayer from the Gelasian Sacramentary also uses this term:

*May this **saving** sacrifice protect us, we pray, O Lord, and may that which is offered in honour of your name be of benefit to us for forgiveness,*

May the saving host protect us, we pray, O Lord, and may that which is offered in honour of your name be for our forgiveness:

We pray, O Lord, that You may be appeased by these present sacrifices, so that they may be of benefit both to our devotion and to our salvation.

We pray, O Lord, that you may look favourably upon these present sacrifices, so that they may be of benefit both to our devotion and to our salvation.

As regards the '*Suscipe, sancta Trinitas*' of the Offertory, we have already seen examples of the use of the term '*oblatio*'. We also find parallels, concerning the offering in honour of the saints and their intercession on our behalf, in *the* following '*super oblata*' from the aforementioned Kiev fragment:

*May **this** offering, Lord, **presented** to you by all the holy heavenly virtues and **all your saints and righteous ones**, be to your praise, and **may it bring us salvation through their prayers.***

May this gift, Lord, offered to you by all the holy heavenly virtues and by all your saints and the righteous, be to your praise, and, through their prayers, may it become our salvation.

And in the Fulda Sacramentary:

*We offer to you, Lord, the fruits of our devotion; may they be pleasing to you, **for the honour of all your saints**, and, through your mercy, **bring us salvation.***

We offer to you, Lord, the gifts of our devotion; grant that, for the honour of all your saints, they may be pleasing to you and, through your mercy towards us, may become a source of salvation for us.

A Gelasian secret prayer expresses the same idea:

*Grant us, we beseech thee, almighty God, that the offering of our humility **may be pleasing to thee in honour of thy saints**, and that **it may purify us both in body and mind,***

Grant us, we pray, O almighty God, that the offering of our humility may be pleasing to you in honour of your saints and may purify us both in body and mind.

A similar pattern is found in this Gregorian prayer.

*We offer you, Lord, a sacrifice of praise in commemoration of your saints: grant, we pray, that what **brought them glory may serve our salvation.***

We offer you, Lord, a sacrifice of praise in the commemoration of your saints; grant, we pray, that what brought them glory may serve our salvation.

On the feast of the Annunciation, the offering is explicitly presented in relation to the Incarnation and the Passion:

*May this offering of your people, which we present to you today in honour of both the Incarnation and **the Passion** of our Saviour Jesus Christ, be acceptable to you, O Lord; we humbly beseech you to receive it with favour. Through the Lord.*

May this offering of your people, which we present together today in honour of the Incarnation and Passion of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, be accepted by you, O Lord; we humbly beseech you to accept it with favour. Through the Lord.

Finally, various prayers from the Gelasian and Gregorian liturgical books highlight the efficacy of the sacrifice:

*Receive, O Lord, **this sacrifice**, by whose worthy **immolation** you chose to be appeased; grant, we beseech you, that, purified by this act, we may offer to you the affection of our minds.*

Receive, O Lord, the sacrifice by whose worthy immolation you have chosen to be appeased; grant, we pray, that, purified by its action, we may offer you the affection of our minds, pleasing to you.

*By the power **of this sacrifice**, O Lord, we pray that it may wipe away our old nature, increase in us the newness of life, and grant us **salvation**.*

We pray to you, Lord, that the power of this sacrifice may wipe away our old condition, increase in us the newness of life, and grant us salvation.

This clearly recognisable presence of the anticipation of the offering of the sacrifice—which is spoken of as already present—in the Secreta of the oldest sacramentaries compels us to reconsider the attribution of prolexis to a post-Carolingian medieval liturgical conception.

Furthermore, this ‘anticipation’ is also present in the Roman Canon itself, in its first part, that is, before the consecration.

*...we pray and beseech you to accept and bless **these ✠ gifts, these ✠ offerings, these ✠ holy and spotless sacrifices**, first and foremost those which **we offer** to you for your holy Catholic Church...*

...we pray and beseech you to accept and bless these ✠ gifts, these ✠ offerings, these ✠ holy, unblemished sacrifices, which we offer to you first and foremost for your holy Catholic Church...

And then:

*Remember, Lord, your servants and handmaids N. and N., and all those present (...) for whom **we offer this** to you: or who offer **this sacrifice** of praise to you, for themselves and all their loved ones: for the redemption of their souls...*

Remember, Lord, your servants N. and N., and all those present here (...), for whom we offer to you—or they themselves offer to you—this sacrifice of praise, for themselves and for all their loved ones, for the redemption of their souls...

*We therefore beseech You, Lord, to **graciously accept this offering** of our service, and indeed that of Your entire household; to order our days in Your peace, to deliver us from eternal damnation, and to command that we be numbered among the flock of Your elect.*

We therefore beseech you, Lord, to accept with favour this offering of our service and of your whole household; to order our days in your peace, to deliver us from eternal damnation, and to command that we be numbered among the flock of your elect.

These prayers, which describe the ‘as yet unconsecrated’ bread and wine as a victim / offering / sacrifice—to which they refer explicitly through the demonstratives *hic / haec / hoc*—anticipate their sacrificial nature in the same way as the ritual section celebrated immediately beforehand: the Offertory.

b. Prolepsis in the East

In Eastern rites we likewise encounter frequent ‘anticipations’ of the Real Presence and of the sacrifice which, in keeping with the style characteristic of these liturgical traditions, are not limited to words but are often expressed through accompanying gestures and rites.

In the Byzantine rite, the preparation of the gifts and the Offertory are situated from the outset within a clearly sacrificial context: before beginning the *proskomidia*—that is, the preparation of the bread and wine at the start of the liturgy—the priest recites the troparion of Good Friday, a short hymn composed from a combination of biblical texts relating to redemption (Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 1:19; John 19:34).

‘You have redeemed us from the curse of the Law with your most precious Blood. Nailed to the Cross and pierced by the spear, you bring forth for mankind a fountain of immortality. O our Saviour, glory to you.’

This sense of sacrifice is immediately and powerfully reinforced and brought to life when, during the intricate preparation of the bread (highly evocatively called ‘the Lamb’), the words of the prophet announcing the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant are used.

‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter; and like a lamb without blemish, silent before those who shear him, he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation his judgement was exalted. Who can recount his generation? For his life was cut off from the earth’ (Isaiah 53:7–8).

This same text is also used at the Offertory by Armenians, Syrians and Maronites; unlike in these rites, however, whilst reciting it, the Byzantine priest cuts the side pieces of the ‘Lamb’ with the ‘spear’ — a liturgical implement specific to the Byzantine rite, consisting of a small spear-shaped knife reminiscent of that used in the Passion —, and then adds:

‘The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, is sacrificed for the life and salvation of the world’ (cf. Jn 1:29).

He then pierces the left side of the ‘Lamb’ with the lance, saying these words:

‘One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water flowed out. The one who saw this bears witness, and his testimony is true’ (John 19:34);

a phrase which, in this context, takes on particular significance because it is accompanied by the act of pouring wine and water into the chalice.”

These same terms are also used, albeit without the ceremony that dramatises them, in the Syriac, Chaldean, Malabar and Armenian rites, and in the West in the Lyonese, Carthusian, Mozarabic, Ambrosian and Braga rites.

The Malabar Syriac Catholics (as well as the Nestorians) prepare the chalice using an even stronger expression, which emphasises the prolepsis even further: *‘The precious blood is poured into the Chalice of our Lord Jesus Christ...’*, and subsequently they also pour the water, saying: *‘One of the soldiers... etc.’*. When the bread is placed on the paten, the following is said

‘May this paten be marked with the holy body of our Lord Jesus Christ...’.

We note that in the West, the pouring of water into the chalice does not carry a similar anticipatory sacrificial meaning.

In the Roman Rite, through the adaptation of an ancient prayer from the feast of Christmas, the symbolism of the union of water and wine is emphasised to highlight the exaltation of human nature accomplished by Christ, through whom we are called to become partners with the divinity.

The Carmelite rite, like the Dominican rite, does not have a special prayer for the preparation of the chalice; in the latter, the words *'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'* are simply recited.

The Dominican and Lyonese rites (as well as the Syriac rite in the East) include the recitation of certain verses from Psalm 116 during the Offertory of the chalice: *'Quid retribuam... calicem salutaris accipiam...'* ('What shall I render unto the Lord... I will take the cup of salvation...?')

Returning to the Offertory in the East, in the Coptic rite the priest, holding the host in his hands, recites the prayer of the Offertory. During this, after an act of humility in which he acknowledges himself unworthy of such a high ministry, he implores:

'Grant us, O Lord, that our sacrifice may be acceptable before you for my sins and for the ignorance of your people'.

He then proceeds in procession around the altar with the offerings, giving glory to God, asking for peace and the edification of the Church and of those making the offerings, whilst at the same time saying:

'Remember, Lord, those who have brought these gifts before you and those for whom they have been brought. Grant us all the heavenly reward.'

During the Great Entrance, which is marked by particular solemnity in the Byzantine rite, the gifts are treated as if Christ himself were present: the Greeks carry them in procession down the central aisle (in some places, the congregation prostrates themselves as the procession passes); the priest 'blesses' the congregation with them, and then the choir sings, concluding the Cherubic Hymn:

'to welcome the King of heaven and earth, invisibly accompanied by the hosts of angels'.

In the Armenian rite, although the ceremony is not as elaborate (since the procession takes place inside the sanctuary, passing behind the altar), it nevertheless has a prophetic character: at the beginning of the Entrance ceremony, the following hymn is always sung

(also used in the Chaldean and Malabar rites, but only on Sundays), which likewise has a strongly anticipatory meaning:

‘The Body of the Lord and the Blood of the Saviour are set before us: the heavenly hosts sing unseen and say without ceasing: Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts’.

When the deacon comes before the priest, he recites the words of Psalm 23 (vv. 7–10): *‘Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!’*; and to the priest’s question: *‘Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts’*, he replies: *‘He is the King of glory!’* He then hands the chalice and paten to the celebrant, who blesses the congregation with them, saying: *‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’*.

In the Ethiopian rite, the priest leads the procession carrying the hosts in a special basket placed upon his head, whilst the choir sings: *‘You are the ark of purest gold in which lies the manna, the hidden bread that came down from heaven and gives life to the whole universe’*.

The Syriac rite, during the so-called ‘Service of Aaron’—that is, the Offertory celebrated at the beginning of Mass—includes a prayer comparable to the **Suscipe Sancta Trinitas** of the Latin rites mentioned above; which contains the remembrance of the work of redemption, the commemoration of all the saints pleasing to God ‘since the creation of the world’, the commemoration of the faithful departed and, in particular, that of the offertory donors:

‘Let us remember our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the whole work of redemption which he has accomplished for us: his Annunciation by an angel, his Nativity according to the flesh, his Baptism in the Jordan, his redemptive Passion, his Elevation on the Cross, his life-giving Death, his venerable Burial, his glorious Resurrection, his Ascension into heaven and his Seating at the right hand of God the Father.

We commemorate, in this Eucharist set before us (note here the very marked prolepsis), first and foremost our father Adam and our mother Eve, the holy Mother of God Mary, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Preachers, the Evangelists, the Martyrs, the Confessors, the Righteous, the priests, the holy Fathers, the true Shepherds, the orthodox Doctors, the hermits and the monks, those who pray with

us, and all those who, from the very beginning of creation, have been pleasing to You, Lord, from Adam and Eve until the present day.

Let us also remember our fathers, our brothers, the teachers who have taught us the doctrine of truth, our departed loved ones and all the faithful departed, in particular and by name those of our own kin, those who have contributed or are contributing to the upkeep of this place, and all those who are in communion with us, whether in word or deed, in small or great ways; and in a most special way N... [Here the celebrant recalls the names of all those for whom he wishes to pray], for whom this sacrifice is offered today.’.

Similarly, in the Maronite rite it is said:

‘Sanctify this offering and, through it, grant forgiveness of offences and remission of sins to all those for whom it is offered: to me, to my relatives, to all the faithful who have worked and co-operated with me, whether living or already deceased...’.

In the Byzantine Rite, this commemoration is carried out by placing host particles next to the ‘Lamb’ with which these commemorations are made: first that of the Virgin, whose particle is placed to the right of the ‘Lamb’ (with the words of Psalm 44:10 ‘The Queen is at your right hand...’), then those of the saints, arranged in nine categories to the left of the ‘Lamb’; subsequently, the hostlets are placed ‘beneath’ the ‘Lamb’: there the *remembrance* of the living takes place, beginning with the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, then those of the departed, and finally that of the priest himself.

Conclusions

From the examples given, it is clear that the proleptic Offertory is not an anomaly specific to the medieval conception, nor is it exclusive to the Western world; indeed, this phenomenon is already present in some of the oldest Roman euchological elements and is found extensively developed in the Eastern rites, complete with gestures that illustrate its meaning; this is also found amongst those who had already broken communion with the rest of the Church in the fifth century.

We do not here assess the theological or sacramental implications of this fact, nor its significance, but merely list what we observe in the various rites examined. However, it must be noted that the considerable extent of this phenomenon leads us to rule out an undue

anticipation of the sacrifice due to a lack of attention, or a distortion resulting from the importation of elements belonging to a specific region and culture; rather, it appears to be a coherent liturgical-theological logic, shared by both the East and the West throughout the centuries, according to which the Eucharistic sacrifice is understood as a unified act structured into preparatory, oblation and consummative phases. From this perspective, the sacrificial language used before the Anaphora does not denote a chronological moment confined within the celebration, but evokes the sacrifice in its intentional totality as part of the liturgical action.