Pater Nosters as Liturgical Daily Prayer in the Middle Ages

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Introduction

This study describes a distinct form of liturgical daily prayer that was used primarily by members of religious orders (including tertiaries) who did not read Latin. In the parlance of the middle ages, they were considered to be "illiterate". It was also used by literate – Latin-reading – members who on particular occasions and for some good reason, did not have access to their Latin liturgical books.

This form of liturgical daily prayer consisted of series of Pater Nosters prayed in Latin, and sometimes other short memorized prayers as well. There were no psalms, canticles, antiphons, hymns, readings, responsories, etc. as found in what I here call the canonical office. Thus while some medieval religious were praying the hours of matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers and compline using psalters, antiphonals, breviaries and related liturgical books, others were praying using Pater Nosters. (Pater Noster is used here as the title of a type of prayer as well as title and incipit of an individual prayer and both the P and the N are consistently capitalized.)

The Pater Noster form of liturgical daily prayer was not included in the liturgical books of the period but instead is described – and prescribed – in foundational and legislative documents of the religious communities: rules, constitutions, statutes, customaries and the like.

Here I identify sources that provide information regarding this form of prayer, describe its content and use, and name the persons who prayed in this way.

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Sources

Information regarding the Pater Noster form of liturgical daily prayer has been found in excerpts from thirty-one rules, constitutions. customaries and statutes of medieval religious communities. Here these documents have been grouped according to the type or "family" of religious community in which they were used: monastic, eremetical, hospital and military, franciscan and clarissan, "augustinian" (for which the Rule of Augustine was claimed to be foundational), and "other". (Even some hermits had some kind of community and followed religious rules.) Within each type, individual texts are in rough chronological order. Each document is numbered and is often referred to by this number. They are listed as follows.

Monastic communities
1 Cistercians: customary
2 Grandmont: customary
3. Benedictines: statutes
Eremetical communities
4. Rule of the Hermits of Cambridge
5. Rule of English lay recluses
Hospital and Military communities
6 St John of Jerusalem: rule
7 Holy Spirit in Saxia: rule
8 Templars: rule
9 Teutonic Order: statutes
10 Order of Santiago: rule
11 Order of St James: rule
Franciscan and Clarissan communities
12 First Rule of St Francis
13 Second Rule of St Francis
14 Rule for Franciscan Tertiaries
15 Rule of Hugolino for St Clare
16 Rule of Innocent IV for St Clare
17 Rule of St Clare
18 Rule of Urban IV for Clarisses
19 Rule for Minoresses
20 Rule of St Francis of Paola for Men
21 Rule of St Francis of Paola for Women
22 Rule of St Francis of Paola for Tertiaries
Augustinian communities
23 Dominicans: constitutions for men
24 Dominicans: constitutions for women
25 Dominicans: rule for tertiaries
26 Mercedarians: constitutions

Complete excerpts studied and relevant bibliographic information are given in the separate document, *Pater Nosters as Liturgical Daily Prayer: Documentation*. Paragraphing and line divisions are my own; to facilitate examination, new sentences often begin on a new line.

It is apparent that the number of religious rules, constitutions and the like that refer to the Pater Noster form of prayer is considerable. Most of these documents date from ca 1200 to 1534. It is highly likely that additional relevant documents still exist to be found or examined. One later text (dated 1632) has been included because it was known to me and because I think it possible that it may reflect earlier practices. Setting this text aside does not significantly affect analyses and conclusions. No other attempt has been made to trace post-reformation developments with respect to the Pater Noster form of prayer.

The exact status of text 1 is not certain. It may be an early example of the Pater Noster form of prayer, not yet fully developed; it was included for this reason. However it may not be relevant at all. Disregarding it does not affect the overall results of this study.

Latin is the original language of most of the documents studied here. Some are in Middle English and early modern English, however, and one in Spanish. Others are available to me only in modern English or modern French translations. In a few cases, published modern English translations are given here together with the original Latin text.

A few additional sources are noted in secondary literature, but have not been examined personally. These include the following:

[T]he constitutions of the Servites mention explicitly that 'clerics who do not know the Canonical Hours are to say Our Fathers in the same way as is laid down for laics'.
A similar rule was observed not only by unlettered clerics among the Austin Friars but also by those who were old and infirm.
   S. J. P. Van Dijk and J. Hazelden Walker, *The Origins of the Modern Roman Liturgy.* Westminster: Newman Press; and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969, pp 39-40. He quotes primary sources.

Repetitions of Our Fathers were used, for example, by lay brothers of the Carthusians and Cisterican orders as a replacement for the prayers of the Divine Office.
   Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages.* University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 1997, p 14-15
   She quotes secondary sources.

Content and Use

In what ways were Pater Nosters used as liturgical daily prayer? In fact, several related patterns of use can be discerned. That set out in the Second Rule of St Francis is simple and straightforward and is given here as an example; both Latin text and modern English translation are provided.

> Laici vero dicant viginti quatuor Pater noster pro Matutino; pro Laude quinque; pro Prima, Tertia, Sexta, Nona, pro qualibet istarum, septem; pro Vesperis autem duodecim; pro Completorio septem. 13

> The lay brothers are to say twenty four Our Fathers for Matins and five for Lauds; for Prime, Terce, Sext and None, for each of these, they are to say seven; for Vespers twelve and for Compline seven. 13

This general pattern is followed by most of the other documents, though the number of Pater Nosters prescribed for each canonical hour varies from one source to another, as will be considered below.

In addition, Pater Nosters were said not only for the canonical office ("hours of the day") but also for the Office of the Blessed Virgin, and sometimes for the Office of the Dead and other offices. The following example is from the rule of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem:

> [E]ach brother ... should say every day one hundred and fifty paternosters:
> ... for Matins of the day, thirteen;
> for Matins of Our Lady, thirteen... 6

Another development was the inclusion of other basic prayers, particularly the Ave Maria and Credo in Deum. Thus a hermit's rule specifies:

> And he schall say for Mateyns of the day XL pater noster, XL Avez and III Credes, and for laudes XV pater noster, XV Avez and I crede.... 5

Another variant pattern carries over what I call "liturgical elements" from the canonical office to the Pater Noster form of prayer. One of these is the Gloria Patri, used following psalms and canticles, but now used after each Pater Noster. Verses with which canonical hours began were sometimes also used in the Pater Noster form of prayer. Such additions are referred to in the following passage from the rule of Order of St James:

> But at the beginning of all the hours one paternoster should be said on one's knees, as we have said, and then they will begin with Deus in adiutorium meum intende and the Gloria Patri all the way to the end; a complete Gloria Patri will also be said after each
> paternoster..... 11

Sources that include these variants are identified as follows:

Pater Noster (alone)
    1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29

Pater Noster + Ave Maria
    3, 27, 30, 31

Pater Noster + Ave Maria + Credo
    5, 28

Pater Noster + Gloria Patri
    12, 14

Pater Noster + Ave Maria + Gloria Patri
    4, 20, 21, 22

"Liturgical elements" other than Gloria Patri
    1, 10, 11, 14, 23, 24

Two source documents give more than one set of directives for the Pater Noster form of prayer. These rules of St Francis of Paola accommodate two different groups of persons who do not read Latin. One is for Fratres / Sorores laici seu Conversi, the other for Fratres / Sorores autem Oblati.

Praeterea Fratres Laici seu Conversi (Sorores), pro Matutinis trigesies, pro Laudibus decies, pro Vesperis duodecies & pro qualibet reliquarum horarum septies orationem Dominican, & totiens salutationem Angelicam dicant, versiculis Gloria Patri & sicut erat, singulis cujuslibet horae salutationibus additis. 20, 21

Fratres autem Oblati (Sorores autem Oblatae), pro Matutinis viginti, pro Laudibus septem, pro Vesperis decem, pro singulis caeterarum horarum quinque Pater noster & totidem Ave Maria depromant... 20, 21

As already mentioned, the number of Pater Nosters used varies from one source to another. Some indication of this is follows. The smallest number used for Matins is 12; the highest number is 40; a typical number is 24. Similarly, the range of Pater Nosters used for Vespers is 5 to 40; typically 10 to 15. The range used for the day hours plus compline is from 3 to 28; typically 7.

The way in which the Pater Noster form of prayer is to be used is stated using relatively consistent, formulaic, language. Word order may of course vary. Elements of this "formula" include the following:

(a) The preposition "pro" or its equivalent. In fact, "pro" or its literal translation (for, ffor, pour, por) is used in almost all cases.

In a few cases, however, "pro" is used together with another preposition, as follows:

> Pro plus in stead of 3
> pro plus in 23
> pro plus loco 24, 25
> for plus at 26
> for plus in stede of 28

(b) the name of the canonical hour under consideration;

(c) the verb "dicant" (say) or its equivalent;

(d) the name of the principle prayer: Pater Noster or orationem dominicam;
(Plus other prayers, as applicable)

(e) the number of times the Pater Noster is to be said.

No source says anything about using beads or rosary to help in the saying of the Pater Noster form of prayer.

Options

Three souce documents provide for options in the praying of the daily office for those who do not read Latin. Relevant excerpts are given here.

Following a description of the Pater Noster form of prayer, the Benedictine statutes read:

> But they that are able, and can finde leisure may say the Office of our blessed Lady, or of the dead, or the seuen penitential Psalmes, with the Litanies, insteod of those pater nosters and Ave Marias prescribed. 3

The rule of the Templars offers the option of just hearing the literate folk sing the office (or a least Matins); saying Pater Nosters as an individual choice.

> When the brothers are in the chapel and matins are sung, each one should keep silent and hear the office quietly and in silence,
> and he should say the paternoster thirteen times for the matins of Our Lady, and thirteen times for those of the day if he wishes.
> But if he wishes, he may refrain from saying them since he hears them,
> but it is better that he says them than that he does not.
> And each brother should know that, if he is not in a place where he may hear the hours,

each one should say for each of those hours named below the paternoster as many times
as is given below . . . 8

Finally, other options are given in the additions to the Bridgettine constitutions:

Neuertheles, suche as kan say our Lady matens after seculer use, they by the
assygnement of the abbes and general confessour, in stede of the seyd Pater nosters, aues
and credes,
schal say our Lady seruyse, seuen psalmes and letany, dirige,
and such other prayers that they kan say.
And if they kan not say Dauyd psalter,
they schal say the seuen psalmes and letany ten tymes in stede ther of,
or else the seyd Pater nosters and aues. 27

Users

Who prayed the Pater Noster form of liturgical daily prayer? It was used, in the first
place, by members of religious communities (including tertiaries) who did not read Latin and
hence could not read the Latin canonical hours. A range of language, both explicit and implicit,
was applied to these persons, as shown in the following lists.

Explicit references to persons who did not read Latin

illiterati, illiteratae 14, 18
fratrum illiteratarum 26
sustres unlettered 28
laici ... nescientibus litteras 12
quae litteras nesciant 17
ceaux qui ne le savent pas 29
autres qui ne savant lire 30
those who cannot read 16
susters that be not lettred 28
those who do not know how to read 31

Implicit references to persons who did not read Latin (the context in which these terms is used
indicates that they refer to the unlettered)

Conversi fratres 2
conversi 23
converse sisters 3
fratres laici seu conversi 20
sorores conversae 13, 24
laici / lay brothers 9, 13, 26

the brothers 8
fratres et sorores 25
fratres autem oblati 20
sorores autem oblati 21
fratres, qui ordinari non sunt 7
each brother, who is not a priest 6
those who do not know the psalms 15
aliae utriusque sexus 22
aliae 14

Still other texts had no noun as subject: 4, 5, 10, 11

The second group of persons who used the Pater Noster form of liturgical daily prayer consists of those who did read Latin but for some good reason could not be in church when the canonical office was being said. The rule of St Clare states this situation clearly.

Those who, for some reasonable cause, occasionally are not able to recite their hours by reading them, may like the other sisters, say the Our Fathers. 17

Several other sources also speak of this situation. Relevant excerpts are given below.

Oportet autem discerni quotiens pro singulis horis conuersi fratres aliqua necessitate absentes orationem dicant dominicam. 2

Fratres cum ad Matutinas surrexerint, & in Ecclesia fuerint ....
Fratres, qui ordinari non sunt, & in Ecclesia non fuerint ... Pro Matutinis... Pater noster 12.   7

And each brother should know that, if he is not in a place where he may hear the hours 8

Cum vero ad ecclesiam non accedent, pro Matutino Psalmos dicere studeant quos dicant Clerici, vel Ecclesia cathedralis, vel saltem, ut illiterati alii, pro Matutino ... Pater noster 14

Quae vero occasione rationabili non possent aliquando legendo dicere Horas suas, liceat eis sicut illiteratis dicere Pater Noster 18

Conclusions

1. The thirty-one documents studied here describe a form of liturgical daily prayer that consists of series of short, memorized prayers. Chief among these is the Pater Noster, though some variants also include the Ave Maria, Credo in Deum and Gloria Patri. Some variation occurs in the number of Pater Nosters in each series.

2. Though the sources are diverse with respect to date and religious community of origin, the language used to describe this prayer is fairly consistent; it has a distinct shape but also includes variation in detail.

3. The documents that describe the Pater Noster form of prayer -- rules and constitutions and the like – are official documents of these religious communities and as well, have been approved by higher ecclesiastical authority. The Pater Noster form of prayer therefore had official status in the medieval church; it received the approbation of numerous popes.

4. The types of source documents at issue, and their individual texts, also indicate that in most cases the Pater Noster form of prayer is prescribed and not optional; it is not private devotion. It was valued by the religious communities and by the church as a whole.

5. The Pater Noster form of prayer was not only prescribed, official, and daily prayer, it was also liturgical. It is described in chapters and sections of the source documents that have to do with liturgical prayer; in many cases it is clearly associated textually with the praying of the canonical office. In addition, descriptions of this form of prayer always name some or all of the canonical hours as the sole occasion on which this form of prayer is used.

6. The nature of the source documents studied here indicates that the Pater Noster form of prayer was used over the course of at least three centuries and by a considerable number of persons. It was not a peripheral or ephemeral matter.

7. The Pater Noster form of liturgical daily prayer was not intrinsically gendered. It was used by men and women, and the principles governing its use applied to both women and men. This form of prayer also was not intrinsically hierarchical. It was used by non ordained persons as well as those who were ordained. Principles governing its use applied to both. However, inasmuch as its use was based on lack of education and on lack of access to Latin liturgical books, it might in practice be both gendered and hierarchical.

8. This study may shed some light on the evolution of the rosary, by which is meant first the saying of series of Ave Marias and secondly these prayers plus appropriate meditations (the mysteries). First, as the Pater Noster form of liturgical daily prayer developed, Ave Marias were added to the series of prayers used. The relative number of each prayer in the sources studied here never exceeded 50 percent Ave Marias. Though this form of prayer was of course to be said

reverently, there is no mention of anything like the later mysteries of the rosary. Finally, in the two source documents that mention the Marian rosary by itself, it is an extra element. There is no suggestion that it is as liturgically connected to the canonical hours as is the Pater Noster form.

9. This study also suggests that the rules and constitutions of religious communities and similar documents may provide valuable information regarding medieval liturgy.