

#### IV. Christianity

The Hebrew word Amen is the most widespread acclamation in Christian liturgies. As an element of Christian liturgy it survived from apostolic times as an expression of the congregation's assent to the presider's prayer. After its appropriation in Christianity it was used in very different contexts.

**1. Origins.** Sources of Antiquity attest to several ways to voice a group's assent to a decree or a proposal or to express their approval of a public performance by means of acclamation. The use of Amen is, however, restricted to Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism. It was also adopted by Islam as a response to the first Sura of the Qur'an.

Amen as an acclamation in the context of liturgies in Christian congregations continues Jewish customs of Second Temple times. This assumption can be specified on the basis of the following observations.

Rabbinic texts claim that Amen was not used in the temple (*tBer* 6:22). This tradition could just be based on later biblical exegesis. It may also reflect the denial that a custom which was already widespread in contemporary Christianity should be rooted in the cult at the sanctuary. It shows that Amen was at least not regarded as typical for the temple cult.

In contexts where the Amidah is recited by a representative of the congregation, the latter respond, "Amen" (*tBer* 3:26; *tSuk* 4:6). Amen is thus not used often in Jewish synagogue services outside of biblical quotations (Psalms) today. This is due to the fact that the important pieces of the liturgy do not require the congregation's acknowledgement, because they are not only recited by a representative, but by each member for himself (except for the priestly benediction, the precentor's recitation of the Amidah in certain contexts, and a few responsorial pieces). 1st century CE Christian liturgies cannot have taken over this use of Amen from the rabbinic liturgy of the synagogue, because both developed at the same time. The Qaddiṣ, whose strophes end in Amen, emerges in the Middle Ages as a doxology to mark the end of liturgical segments (Lehnardt).

Acclamations were widely used in the context of votes and other instances of standardized public communication in Antiquity. Associations and clubs, which tend to imitate the larger and more formal political assemblies, used similar acclamations in the same function. Thus Tertullian compares the ecclesiastical Amen that concludes the Eucharistic Prayer (Stuiber: 156) with the cheers for the gladiators in the arena (*Spect.* 25). The ubiquity of acclamations does not answer the question why Greek and Latin speaking Christian congregations adopted a Hebrew word in this function.

The rules of the Yaḥad found near the site of Khirbet Qumran, which closely resemble the statutes of Hellenistic associations, make candidates for admission into the association say Amen as a formula of assent to blessings and curses (against apostates). Although of high religious importance these procedures of admission are not addressed to God (e.g., the *Rule of the Community*: 1Q5 I, 16, 20; II, 10, 18; cf. also 4Q286 7 II, 1, 5, 10 par. 4Q287 6). Amen is also attested as a response to a blessing in "Words of the Luminaries" – a text that is neither typical for priestly circles nor for the temple service (Falk: 84–94; several times in 4Q504 [e.g., V, 14–15]; cf. also 4Q507 3, 2; 4Q509 4, 5; 4Q511 63–64 IV, 3).

The occurrence of Amen is not astonishing in Hebrew contexts. It functions in the same way as in early Greek and Latin Christian texts. Christianity thus preserved Amen as a custom from the procedures of congregational communication in Jewish associations in Palestine. As primitive Christian

liturgy emerged from such communal activities on the level of houses and associations, not from rituals on the level of the city (like sacrificial cults), only customs that were useful and typical for those contexts can be traced back to apostolic times. The public character of these liturgies is restricted. Yet, this does not vitiate the high importance of these performances for the maintenance of the identity of their participants. Amen was thus transferred into the Christian Roman world as part of its congregational context.

**2. Functions.** Amen is attested in other early post-biblical documents from similar social situations. It enforces the preceding "Maranatha" that follows a call to repentance in *Did.* 10:6. In the middle of the 2nd century CE, Justin Martyr explains Amen as a technical term of liturgical language. He must translate it and describe its function to his pagan Roman readers (*1 Apol.* 65:3–4, 67:5). There, the congregation affirms its assent to the improvised eucharistic prayer.

Later in the 2nd century CE Polycarp is said to have himself concluded his last prayer with Amen (*Mart. Pol.* 14–15; cf. *Mart. Pionii* 21:8–9). This may be due to the fact that there is just nobody to respond to Polycarp's prayer which he recites at the stake. According to later usage this instance of Amen could be understood as a conclusion of the doxology at the end of the prayer and not as a response. Nevertheless this text may also reflect a less documented strand within the multifarious repertoire of acceptable prayer in the Ante-Nicene Church (Krause: 393).

In the subsequent centuries Amen is attested more frequently and in a more variegated way. As an acclamation Amen could applaud a speaker after his speech or sermon (Klauser: 225ff.). Even as early as Origen's time Amen was pronounced by the preacher instead of – or together with – his audience (Stuiber). "Amen, Alleluia" is part of the heavenly liturgy (said in praise of God in Rev 19:4) which the deceased faithful will join in the future (Augustine).

In Christian worship Amen is often used as a response or as a conclusion that is said or written at the end of a doxology. From Justin's time on, it is attested as the congregation's response after the eucharistic prayer and other prayers that are recited by the priest or bishop (cf. Klöckener's survey in the texts of Augustine for a highly representative late antique corpus of texts). As long as the priests' and bishops' prayers were recited loudly, the acclamation of Amen "resounds like heavenly thunder" in the Christian basilicas (Jerome, *Comm. Gal.* book 2 prologus).

Based on 1 Cor 14:16 Ambrosiaster (CSEL lxxxi.2.153–54) argues in favor of the use of Latin (instead of Greek) as a liturgical language. The use of Amen supports his claim, because the congrega-

tion's Amen presupposes that everybody could hear and understand where the prayer ends and what has been said in it. Where Amen concludes a prayer, the change of the speaker need not always be indicated in the written texts. Thus, the *Apostolic Constitutions* conclude several prayers of the bishop with Amen (viii.6.13, viii.7.8, etc.). The redactor only indicates twice in this series of prayers that Amen is said by the congregation (in addition to the end of the eucharistic prayer viii.12.51, viii.13.10: "[doxology]". After all have said: 'Amen', the deacon should say...").

This situation changes in the Western Middle Ages. The Canon Romanus (the one and only Eucharistic prayer of the Roman Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council) is soon recited silently and the congregation's Amen is said by the ministers in his vicinity and by the priest himself (attested from the 9th century on but generally accepted only from the 12th century). This supports the use of Amen as a conclusion of any – also private – prayers which becomes the norm in Roman Catholicism.

In several Eastern churches Amen is recited by the deacon and/or the choir (unlike the Coptic Church where the members of the congregation retain their liturgical role, Budde: 593–600). In some of these churches the congregation pronounces Amen several times during the priest's recitation of the institution narrative.

Martin Luther's interpretation of Amen as an expression of faith ("O God, Father, I do not doubt that these things that I pronounced in prayer are certainly true...") Exposition of the Lord's Prayer WA 2: 127) avoids the problem that Amen had lost its original function as an acclamation within the performance of the liturgy and makes it acceptable for private as well as communal prayer.

In the wake of the Enlightenment, Amen was translated in some languages (cf. "ainsi soit-il," "così sia") and used in the liturgies in this way. This did not result in many changes of the texts of the official agendas (Krause; Ross).

In the Anglican prayer books of the 17th century Amen is used as a conclusion to prayers. It is printed in italics if it should be said by the whole congregation. In spite of that, the custom to leave its recitation to the clerk was widespread. The puritan movement objected to the use of Amen regarding this as a mere formalism. Amen could however also regain its original function as an affirmative response, e.g., in English nonconformist churches where worshippers interjected Amen after statements in prayers with which they strongly agreed. Thus Amen lent its name to the "Amen-corner" – an area within American Methodist churches that "was occupied by people who assisted the preacher with irregular responses" (Ross). In the liturgical movement in the 19th and 20th centuries the resto-

ration of the acclamatory character of Amen was demanded and led to reforms of liturgical books in Protestant churches (Krause).

Amen was used on other occasions from very early times on. Already at the beginning of the 3rd century CE, Amen seems to have been pronounced by the congregants at the reception of the host (and wine) which can be inferred from Perpetua's vision. There the prospective martyr ascends a ladder into heaven where she receives a piece of cheese from a miraculous shepherd. A heavenly choir says Amen (*Passio Perpetuae* 4:9).

The liturgy and the ensuing literary conventions regarding the use of Amen also influenced the transmission of the biblical text. Thus, Amen was added to the text of the NT, especially at the end of books (Güting).

Ancient Gnostic speculations lead to the identification of Amen with an aeon or an angel (Stuiber). Amen was also used in magical procedures and is hence included in different genres of inscriptions (cf. Cabrol's collection and Pfister). As acclamations played an important role in the context of burials in antiquity, Amen was soon added to the epigraphic repertoire of tombstones. As in *Did.* 10:6, it was used to enforce anathemas (Cabrol 1568; Stuiber 159). The numerical value of the Hebrew letters of Amen was used in cryptography and included in apotropaic and magic inscriptions (cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.16.1 and the computation: 1 + 40 + 8 + 50 = 99, Wisse; Stuiber: 158). The elimination of Amen from a prayer text could be considered to be quite powerful by inverting the expected effect of a prayer (Meißner: 507; Pfister).

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