

ELS ROSE

Fasting flocks. Lenten season in the liturgical communities of early medieval Gaul

1 INTRODUCTION: LITURGICAL FAST AS AN IDENTITY-MARKER

In his *Vita Martini*, Sulpicius Severus describes how Martin of Tours travelled through fourth-century Gaul in order to convert its inhabitants to Christianity.* Martinus, so Sulpicius tells us, struck down many a pagan shrine and replaced it by a Christian chapel or church, a place where the public celebration of the Christian community in the making found shelter.¹ Ever since these early days, public worship, or liturgy, has been a powerful instrument in the hands of both ecclesiastical and secular rulers who wanted to shape or reshape a Christian community.²

When bishops tried to build a Christian community in early medieval Gaul, the daily, weekly and annual celebration of the liturgy was an important tool to reach the faithful. In sermons and prescriptive documents such as the canons of Church Councils, the endeavours to create a liturgical community are amply reflected. Periods of feast and fast particularly are used as opportunities to gather the faithful around altar and admonition. In the past decades, historians of culture and religion have paid ample attention to the importance of feasts for the (religious) community and the forming of its identity. Feasts not only create community, but also contribute to the identity of this community. The celebration of a feast is a community event, and, by its specific character given by the subject of celebration, contributes to the forming of the identity of the community: in the feasts that are celebrated by the group, the identity of the group can be recognised.³ As opposed to religious (Christian) feast, depicted as a community event, religious fast is considered an individual undertak-

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¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita sancti Martini* XIII, 9 (ed. Jacques Fontaine, Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de Saint Martin*, SC 133, Paris 1967–1969) 282: *Nam ubi fana destruxerat, statim ibi aut ecclesias aut monasteria construebat.*

² Famous examples are the stational liturgy in Rome, introduced by the fifth- and sixth-century popes Leo and Gregory to create unity between the *tituli* and the episcopal church in this city; see Marcel Metzger, *Évolution de la liturgie à Rome autour des V^e et VI^e siècles*, in: *Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes 1: Biblische Modelle und Liturgiereformen von der Frühzeit bis zur Aufklärung*, ed. Martin Klöckener/Benedikt Kranemann (Münster 2002) 187–208, at 205; and the efforts of the Frankish rulers to reform the liturgy after the Roman model in order to create unity in the Frankish realm; see Arnold Angenendt, *Liturgiereform im frühen Mittelalter*, in: *Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes 1: Biblische Modelle und Liturgiereformen von der Frühzeit bis zur Aufklärung*, ed. Martin Klöckener/Benedikt Kranemann (Münster 2002) 225–238, at 225. Equally relevant to the subject is Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul* (London 2001). Hen, *Patronage* 28 and 34, treats both episcopal creativity in the field of liturgy: “to promote Christian observances and belief among their parishioners”; and the involvement from secular rulers who saw liturgy as “an instrument by which heavenly protection could be sought for the benefit of the kingdom and its ruler”.

³ Francisco Taborda, *Sakramente: Praxis und Fest* (Düsseldorf 1988) 91: “Das Fest schafft die Gemeinschaft”. Taborda stresses the importance of the celebration of events with a communal significance. By remembering such events and marking them with a feast, the group finds and strengthens its identity; *ibid.* 91f.: “Beim Fest findet die feiernde Gruppe ihre *Identität*”. The importance of feast for the community and its identity is likewise stressed by, among others, Jan Assmann, *Der zweidimensionale Mensch: das Fest als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses*, in: *Das Fest und das Heilige. Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt*, ed. Jan Assmann (Gütersloh 1991) 13–30; Arno Schilson, *Fest und Feier in anthropologischer und theologischer Sicht. Ein Literaturbericht*, in: *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 44 (1994) 3–32; Benedikt Kranemann, “Feiertags kommt das Vergessene”. *Zu Deutung und Bedeutung des christlichen Festes in moderner Gesellschaft*, in: *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 46 (1996) 3–22, esp. at 8f. and 16f.; Gerard Rouwhorst/Louis van Tongeren, *Historical research on Christian feasts*, in: *Christian Feast and Festival. The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and*

ing, much more oriented towards the solitary believer than towards the community. Fasting, according to Derek Brewer, normally leads the believer into loneliness and abstaining from the community instead of contributing to the community.⁴

Although such a strong opposition between feast as an event building a community and shaping its identity on the one hand, and fast as an individual affair on the other might be useful with respect to the later medieval period (Brewer writes about fourteenth century English literature), it does not seem to apply to the earlier period.⁵ Early medieval texts on religious fasting clearly reflect a community where fasting, like feasts, is of central importance to the shape and strengthening of the communal identity. In the following, the period of fasting preceding the celebration of Easter as the heart of the liturgical year (the Lenten period or, in brief, Lent) will be taken as the point of departure in an attempt to discover if and how the act of liturgical fasting and abstaining is considered to contribute to the construction of a Christian community.

I will try to answer this question by exploring both prescriptive and practical liturgical texts. Prescriptions on liturgical life and practice of the Christian communities in early medieval Gaul can be found in the collections of canons, the results of the Merovingian Church councils.⁶ Texts for the liturgy, such as prayers and biblical readings, are found in liturgical books: sacramentaries and lectionaries. These liturgical sources of early medieval Gaul are fragmentary and scattered. Liturgical traditions of this region and period are transmitted in only a handful of sources dating from the late seventh or early eighth century. In many cases it is difficult to form a clear picture of the communities in which these liturgical sources were used: we often do not know whether they were communities of monks under an abbot, or rather of cathedral and episcopal character, whether they were male or female communities, in or outside the city, and so on. However, by a close examination of the liturgical texts against the background of contextual sources, it might be possible to delineate the contours of the assumed communities that are behind these liturgical texts.

2 *TEMPUS IEIUNII* IN MEROVINGIAN CHURCH COUNCILS

The importance of a generally shared observance of liturgical uses by all the faithful and all communities is reflected clearly by various prescriptions collected as the canons of the Merovingian Church Councils. The second council of Mâcon, where Merovingian bishops gathered in the year 585, is a good example of this.⁷ Dealing with diverse aspects of ecclesiastical discipline and customs, such as observation of the sabbath and baptismal practice, the council's canons stress the importance of the participation of all the faithful in the liturgical observances.

Concerning the day of the Lord, canon 1 admonishes the entire *populus christianus* to observe the sabbath, on pain of punishment by the authorities with a divinely inspired sanction. The appeal 'Observe the day of the Lord' (*Custodite diem dominicam*) is meant for all Christians, if, at least, they

Culture, ed. Paul Post/Gerard Rouwhorst/Louis van Tongeren/Ton Scheer (Liturgia condenda 12, Leuven 2001) 207–221, at 219–221.

⁴ Derek Brewer, Feasts in England and English literature in the fourteenth century, in: Feste und Feiern im Mittelalter, ed. Detlef Altenburg/Jörg Jarnut/Hans-Hugo Steinhoff (Paderborner Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes, Sigmaringen 1991) 13–26, at 26.

⁵ Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1987) 31–69, esp. 32, who stresses that the religious approach to fast (and feast) "changed greatly between the days of the early church and the later Middle Ages".

⁶ For a recent study of the importance of the Merovingian Church councils to the development of liturgical traditions in Gaul see Arnaud Join-Lambert, Peut-on parler de 'réforme liturgique' en Gaule du IV au VII siècle? Une première approche par le biais des canons conciliaires gaulois et mérovingiens, in: Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes 1: Biblische Modelle und Liturgiereformen von der Frühzeit bis zur Aufklärung, ed. Martin Klöckener/Benedikt Kranemann (Münster 2002) 169–186. A general study of the Merovingian Councils is provided in the series Konziliengeschichte by Odette Pontal, Die Synoden im Merowingereich (Konziliengeschichte. Reihe A: Darstellungen 6, Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich 1986) with bibliography on xiii–xxi.

⁷ Council of Mâcon II (ed. Jean Gaudemet/Brigitte Basdevant, Les canons des conciles mérovingiens VI^e–VII^e siècles, SC 354, Paris 1989) 454–485.

want to avoid being Christians in name only (*omnes itaque christiani, qui non incassum hoc nomine fruimini*). The exhortation must not be neglected by anyone:

“Let none of you concern himself with the heat of quarrels, let no one occupy himself with juridical cases, let no one exhibit such necessities which urge him to put his oxen to the yoke. Let all be directed towards God with soul and body in hymns and praises.”⁸

The same goes for the celebration of Easter: this feast must be observed by all.⁹ Again, the importance of a collective celebration is stressed in order to form, as it were, a united and clearly visible Christian front:

“Let no one, during these most holy six days [i.e. Easter week], do any slavish work, but let us all, united as one body, commit ourselves to the Easter hymns and show ourselves constantly present at the daily sacrifices, and let us praise our creator and redeemer in the evening, in the morning and at noon.”¹⁰

The Christian community is supposed to create a distinct profile for itself by abandoning daily matters in favour of the communal celebration of the liturgy.

A similar pattern is found in the conciliary prescriptions for the observance of fasting. The fourth council of Orléans, taking place in the year 541, is the first of the early Merovingian councils in which prescriptions for the observance of fast are found. Canon 2 stresses the importance of a general and uniform observance of a Lenten period of forty days (*quadragesima*), not fifty (*quingagesima*) or sixty (*sexagesima*):

“We decree also that a period of forty days is similarly observed by all churches and that no bishop ventures to appoint a period of fifty or sixty days before Easter.”¹¹

Equally important is the observance of this Lenten period *by all* (apart from those who are prevented from abstaining from food by illness), also on Saturday. Only on Sunday, the day of the Lord, are the faithful allowed to break their fast.¹²

The *patres* of the Orléans council appeal to earlier prescriptions concerning this matter (*patrum statuta*). Thus the council forms a link in the chain of regulations with regard to fasting, both by referring to older prescriptions and by being a point of reference for later councils. The canons on fasting of the council of Orléans conclude by stating that he or she who breaks these regulations, will be regarded by the bishops as *transgressor disciplinae*, a transgressor of the law. This remark suggests that sanctions were applied to sinning against the rules of fasting, but the council of Orléans does not mention any particular forms of punishment.

⁸ Council of Mâcon II, 1, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 456: *Nullus uestrum litium fomitibus uacet, nullus ex uobis causarum actiones exerceat, nemo sibi talem necessitatem exhibeat, quae iugum ceruicibus iuuencorum imponere cogat. Estote omnes in himnis et laudibus Dei animo corporeque intenti.*

⁹ Council of Mâcon II, 2, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 458: *Pascha itaque nostrum ... debemus omnes festissime colere et sedulae obseruationis sinceritate in omnibus uenerari.*

¹⁰ Council of Mâcon II, 2, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 460: *... ut illis sanctissimis sex diebus nullus seruire opus audeat facere, sed omnes simul quoadunati himnis paschalibus indulgentes perseuerationis nostrae praesentiam cotidianis sacrificiis ostendamus, laudantes creatorem ac regeneratorem nostrum uespere, mane et meridie.*

¹¹ Council of Orléans IV, 2, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 267f.: *Id etiam decernimus obseruandum, ut quadragesimam ab omnibus ecclesiis aequaliter teneatur neque quingagesimum aut sexagesimum ante pascha quilibet sacerdos praesumat indicere.* See on the Gallic Easter dispute Pontal, Synoden 85f.

¹² Council of Orléans IV, 2, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 268: *Sed neque per sabbata absque infirmitate quisquis absoluat quadragesimale ieiunium, nisi tantum die dominico prandeat.* These prescriptions react to the use of excluding both Saturdays and Sundays from fasting, a custom that reached Gaul from Jerusalem via the monastic community of Lérins as early as the days of John Cassian. In order to compensate for these lost days, the period of fasting was lengthened by extra fasting days before the official beginning of Lent, up to one or two weeks. The totals of 49 or 56 days were rounded up to *quingagesima* and *sexagesima* respectively, analogous to the term *quadragesima*. Later in the Middle Ages, this development grew out to the institution of *septuagesima*, an extension of Lent with a pre-Lenten period of three weeks. Augustinus Hollaardt, Voorvasten, in: *Liturgisch Woordenboek 2*, ed. Lucas Brinkhoff (Roermond 1965–1968) 2856–2861; Stephen Borgehammar, A monastic conception of the liturgical year, in: *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan/Edith Ann Matter (Kalamazoo 2001) 13–44, at 15f.; Hansjörg Auf der Maur, Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit I: Herrenfeste in Woche und Jahr (Gottesdienst der Kirche. Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft 5, Regensburg 1983) 145–147.

The second council of Tours, where the bishops gathered in 567, gives further prescriptions for other periods of fasting in the liturgical year in canon 18 (17). In the canons of this council, prescriptions for the entire Christian community and those for monks must be distinguished.

The spreading of periods of fasting over the liturgical year starts with the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost, in which only a few days are dedicated to fasting: the three days preceding Ascension, called *Rogationes* in the Gallican tradition. The custom of breaking the festive Eastertide with a period of fast has its origin in Gaul in the fifth century. Traditionally the institution of the Rogation-days as a period of three days of fast and penitence is ascribed to Mamertus, bishop of Vienne around 470. Mamertus seems to have founded this liturgical use as a form of penitence, impressed and terrified as he was by the disasters, such as earthquakes, that marked the period. Sidonius Apollinaris, for that matter, states that his friend Mamertus did not invent the Rogation-days but only stressed their importance and added to their solemnity. However this may be, the three days of fasting preceding the celebration of the Lord's ascension – general custom in Gaul at the time of Caesarius of Arles (bishop between 503–542) – were celebrated as days of intense penitence and dedicated to fasting, solemn processions and the singing of psalms.¹³

All the faithful were supposed to observe the rules of fasting, penitence and participation in the liturgy during Rogation-days. This notion of general participation is expressed more clearly by canon 6 of the Second council of Lyon (567–570), held shortly after that of Tours. In Lyon a new period of fasting was introduced before the first Sunday of November, similar to the *litaniae* of the Rogation-days. The council makes clear that liturgical fasting is a matter that concerns everyone by demanding that these fasting days are celebrated by all churches and parishes (*ab omnibus ecclesiis seu parochiis celebrentur*).¹⁴

To return to the second council of Tours, more specific regulations for the monks (*fratribus*) are given for the period from Pentecost until the beginning of August, in which fasting is confined to three days a week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday.¹⁵ The month of August is filled with saints' days, which leaves no space for fasting. September, October and November have the same rhythm of fasting and eating as the weeks after Pentecost, but the period between the beginning of December and Christmas is a period of fasting every day.

During the week between Christmas and Epiphany, according to canon 18 (17) of the same council, saints are celebrated every day. Fasting in this period is prescribed only during the three days around 1 January. This day, traditionally dedicated to the celebration of the New Year, was known in early medieval Gaul as a day during which the danger of lapsing into old pagan customs was lurking. In pre-Christian times, the beginning of the New Year was celebrated with the feasts of the *Kalendae* of January, lavish parties in honour of the double-faced god Janus, who gave the name *Januarius* to the first month of the year.¹⁶ In order to keep control over the behaviour of Christians during these days, the council of Tours imposed a fast of three days and summoned the faithful to come to church, on the first day of January, for the services of penitence, called *letaniae*, and for the celebration of Our Lord's Circumcision. The circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day after his birth according to Jewish law and in harmony with the Gospel (Luc. 2, 21), was celebrated eight days after Christmas on the first day of January. The liturgical celebration of Our Lord's Circumcision, presumably of Gallican origin,¹⁷ was, in the later liturgical books, accompanied by a mass *Ad prohibendum*

¹³ Rombaut van Doren, *Litaniae minores*, in: *Liturgisch Woordenboek 2*, ed. Lucas Brinkhoff (Roermond 1965–1968) 1553–1556, at 1553; Archdale A. King, *Liturgies of the Past* (London 1959) 138–139; Auf der Maur, *Feiern* 121f.

¹⁴ Council of Lyon II, 6, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 406: *Placuit enim uniuersis fratribus, ut in prima hebdomada noni mensis, hoc est ante diem dominicam, quae prima in ipso mense illuxerit, litaniae, sicut ante ascensionem Domini sancti patres fieri decreuerunt, deinceps ab omnibus ecclesiis seu parochiis celebrentur*. Cf. Pontal, *Synoden* 31f.

¹⁵ Cf. Pontal, *Synoden* 132.

¹⁶ See Michel Meslin, *La fête des Kalendes de janvier dans l'empire romain. Étude d'un rituel de nouvel an* (Bruxelles 1970), esp. 95–129, where the Christianisation of the *Kalendae* is discussed.

¹⁷ *Missale Gothicum e codice Vaticano Reginensi latino 317 editum* (ed. Els Rose, CC SL 159D, Turnhout 2005) 216–222.

ab idolis, a celebration ‘to keep the faithful away from the pagan gods’.¹⁸ The founding of this celebration underlines the importance of the observance of modesty, fasting and abstinence during the days around 1 January. It is also a clear example of the way liturgical fasting is used as a means to strengthen the identity of the Christian community, and to sharpen the borders with the area that does not belong to it.

Various conciliary regulations concerning liturgical fast mirror the efforts of early medieval bishops to shape and create a Christian community with a clearly recognisable face. To the Christian community belong those who bear their name *christianus* rightfully, who are willing to take on a Christian identity with all its rights and duties. The scrupulous observance of fasting in various periods of the liturgical year is an example of examining the purity of this identity: those who obey the liturgical prescriptions are ‘real’ Christians and contribute to the strength of the community. This communal Christian identity is opposed to the identity (or non-identity?) of those who are Christian ‘only in name’,¹⁹ as they do not observe the liturgical prescriptions.

3 *NULLUS SE A SANCTO CONUENTU SUBDUCAT*: LITURGICAL FASTING IN THE SERMONS OF CAESARIUS OF ARLES (503–542)

In turning from the conciliar canons to sermons, we are confronted with a complex genre. The written transmission of a medieval sermon text is not likely to be identical to the sermon as it was performed orally during the liturgy. In many cases, it is not entirely clear whether the creator of the sermon and the author or redactor of the written version are one and the same person. To this rule – a matter which is so complicated and far-reaching that this article cannot do justice to it²⁰ – the sermons of Caesarius, bishop of Arles in the first half of the sixth century, seem to form an exception. Caesarius worked hard to edit his own sermons, and looked after the proper distribution of the texts.²¹ Caesarius even freely added material from other preachers, as long as his audience were fed with sufficient appropriate spiritual food.²² Among the sermons for Lent, for instance, two of the four rendered texts are transmitted as *homilia sancti Faustii*.²³ Moreover, Caesarius did rework sermon material he borrowed from others. Different from preachers like Sidonius Apollinaris or Avitus of Vienne, Caesarius preferred for his sermons an easily accessible vocabulary and style, so that even simple peasants could understand his message. For Caesarius did not only preach in the Arlesian cathedral for a learned urban public, but also in rural parishes in his diocese.²⁴

The concern of the preacher to make his sermon understandable for the farmers in his audience is clearly reflected by the sermon transmitted in Caesarius’ collection for the Sunday preceding the beginning of Lent. In this sermon, which Caesarius borrowed from Faustus, the preacher links the liturgical year with the familiar rhythm of the agrarian year.²⁵ The alternation of sowing and harvesting by which the agrarian year is determined, is mirrored in the liturgical year, which is charac-

¹⁸ For example in the *Sacramentarium Gelasianum Vetus*, as well as in most of the so-called eighth century Gelasians: *Sacramentarium Gellonense*, *Augustodunense*, *Engolismense* and *Sangallense*.

¹⁹ This opposition is proclaimed several times in the second council of Mâcon, for example in canon 1, ed. Gaudemet/Basdevant 458: *qui nomine tenuis christiani esse noscuntur*.

²⁰ As is the case with many other questions with which the student of the medieval sermon is confronted. For a recent and elaborate introduction to the genre with bibliographical surveys see *The sermon*, ed. Beverly M. Kienzle (Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental 81/83, Turnhout 2000), where Thomas N. Hall, *The early medieval sermon*, in: *ibid.* 203–269, at 228–232, discusses some problems of interpretation with the help of Caesarius’ preaching practice.

²¹ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* (ed. Marie-José Delage, Césaire d’Arles. Sermons au peuple 1, SC 175, Paris 1971) 65.

²² Cf. William Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles. The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge 1994) 148; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* 1, ed. Delage 65–70. Caesarius even promoted this practice to unskilled priests; cf. Hall, *Early medieval sermon* 229.

²³ Referring to Faustus of Riez († ca. 495), monk and later abbot of Lérins, the monastery where Caesarius lived as a monk before he received the Arlesian *cathedra*. Cf. *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, ed. Siegmund Döpp/Wilhelm Geerlings (Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1998) 233.

²⁴ Thus Klingshirn, *Caesarius* 147f.

²⁵ Caesarius frequently used agrarian images, cf. Hall, *Early medieval sermon* 231.

terised by the alternation of periods set for eating and drinking and periods of abstaining from food and drink:

“Just as there is a time to collect during harvest and vintage, brothers, from which we can support our flesh, thus there is a time to gather during the days of Lent, like a time of spiritual harvesting or vintaging, from which our soul can live in eternity. For just as someone who fails to collect during the time of harvest and vintage shall be tormented by hunger the entire year, thus he who fails to prepare and collect, during this time, spiritual wheat and heavenly wine for the storehouses of his soul by fasting, reading, and praying shall endure severe thirst and cruel want in eternity.”²⁶

Although the period of Lent is presented as a period of penitence and purification, it is not only the salvation of the individual soul that counts for Caesarius. In the sermon for Lent that is transmitted under his own name (the two sermons for the beginning of *Quadragesima* are both ascribed to Faustus), Caesarius stresses the importance of combining personal abstinence from food with looking after the poor.²⁷ For healthy people, it is a sin to neglect the abstinence from food, but if someone is not able to fast because of illness, it is possible to compensate for this inability and find forgiveness from sins by giving alms (Sermo 199.1). Caesarius even explicitly states that it is better to give alms than to abstain from food only:

“It is good to fast, brothers, but it is even better to give alms. If someone can do both, both are good; if someone, however, cannot, it is better to give alms. If there is no possibility to observe the rule of fasting, almsgiving will suffice for this person; fasting without almsgiving, however, will not suffice. Therefore, if someone is not able to fast, almsgiving without fasting is good... Fasting without almsgiving, however, is by no means good.”²⁸

Referring to Is. 58, 6–7 (‘deal thy bread with the hungry’) Caesarius urges his congregation to share their food with the poor, and referring to Matth. 25, 35 (‘I was a stranger and ye took me in’) he encourages even the poor, who suffer from a lack of food, to give a corner of their house to the roofless stranger. By stressing the significance of the biblical passages in Is. 58 and Matth. 25, Caesarius indicates that it is more important for the salvation of the individual believer’s soul to take care of the poor and needy in the community, than to concentrate only on the spiritual act of fasting. He who is fasting punishes and purifies his own flesh, but does no good to another. The faithful are, therefore, urged not to hoard the food they have abstained from in their own storehouses, but to give it to the poor, ‘for the hand of the poor is Christ’s own treasure-chest’.²⁹

Caesarius’ message about the significance of liturgical fasting during Lent is clear: the real benefit of the act of fasting does not lie in the (eternal) well-being of the individual soul, but in the healthiness of the entire community. Abstaining from food contributes to the salvation of the individual soul only if the person who is fasting is simultaneously taking care of the weak and needy in the congregation: those without food or shelter.

²⁶ Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 198, 2 (ed. Germain Morin, Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Sermones, CC SL 103, Turnhout 1953) 799f.: *Sicut enim tempore messium vel vindemiarum, fratres, unde caro nostra possit sustentari collegitur, ita in diebus quadragesimae quasi spiritalium vindemiarum vel messium tempore unde anima nostra in aeternum possit vivere congregetur: quia, sicut neglegens quisque, si tempore vindemiarum vel messium nihil collegerit, per totum anni spatium fame torquetur, ita qui in hoc tempore spiritale triticum et caeleste mustum ieiunando, legendo, orando, in horreis animae suae providere et congregare neglexerit, in aeternum durissimam sitim et crudelem inopiam sustinebit.*

²⁷ For a thought-provoking study of the ‘rhetoric of Christian *caritas*’ see Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (The Menahem Stern Jerusalem lectures, Hanover-NH 2002). Brown illustrates how bishops outlined their and the Church’s position in the late antique world by claiming, through deployment of their rhetorical skills, the care of the poor as a typically Christian novelty in this period.

²⁸ Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 199, 2, ed. Morin 804: *Bonum est ieiunare, fratres, sed melius est elemosinam dare. Si aliquis utrumque potest, duo sunt bona: si vero non potest, melius est elemosinam dare. Si possibilitas non fuerit ieiunandi, elemosina sufficit sibi sine ieiunio; ieiunium sine elemosina omnino non sufficit. Ergo si aliquis non potest ieiunare, elemosina sine ieiunio bonum est... Ieiunium vero sine elemosina nullum bonum est.*

²⁹ Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 199, 6, ed. Morin 806: *Quia manus pauperis gazophylacium Christi est.* Caesarius is not the only one who, in the early centuries, stresses the connection between fasting and almsgiving; cf. Leo, Augustine, Gregory the Great and others, dealt with in Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast* 35f.

The importance of the liturgical act of fasting to the community as a whole is reflected in Caesarius' appeal to the congregation to be present at the services during fasting periods. Although this aspect is not dominant in Caesarius' Lenten sermons, it appears all the more frequently and explicitly in his sermons for the Rogation-days.³⁰ Through various images Caesarius expresses his admonition that 'no one should withdraw from the holy assembly' (*nullus se a sancto conventu subducat*)³¹: the Church is compared to an army where every kind of desertion is forbidden and severely punished, and is described as 'the school of the heavenly doctor' (*caelestis medici scola*).³² Here again, Caesarius uses agrarian images to make clear his point, for instance in the passage where he compares the Church to a bee-hive, where all the faithful are assumed to contribute to the production of good spiritual honey (*spiritalia mella*).³³ Those who refuse to give their time to the celebration of the *divina mysteria* should not be reckoned among Christ's crowd.³⁴ In another sermon for the Rogation-days, Caesarius imagines the Church as the threshing-floor from the Gospel of Matthew (3, 12). This threshing-floor, according to Caesarius' warning, contains solely Catholic Christians (*catholici christiani*), who faithfully attend Church and combine their praying and watching with good works (cf. James 2, 14–26; Matth. 3, 10).

The sermons for *Rogationes* as well as those for Lent discussed above make abundantly clear that Caesarius seizes every opportunity during the various periods of liturgical fasting to express his view on the character and significance of the Christian community, in order to strengthen his congregation and accentuate its identity.

4 *NON SOLUM A CYBIS, SED A PECCATIS OMNIBUS ABSTINENTES:* LITURGICAL TEXTS FOR DAYS OF FASTING

In Caesarius' Lenten sermon, biblical passages like Matth. 25 and Is. 58 are referred to explicitly. Let us, therefore, now turn to the extant early medieval lectionaries used in the Gallican tradition. For this purpose, there is little to examine. Only a few lectionaries have been transmitted to us, of which the Luxeuil Lectionary and the biblical readings in the Bobbio Missal are the most important.

Lenten season in the Luxeuil Lectionary

The Luxeuil Lectionary, found in the monastery of Luxeuil by the seventeenth-century liturgist Jean Mabillon, is dated to the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century.³⁵ It is not entirely clear where this book, written, as is generally assumed, in the scriptorium of Luxeuil, was in use. Some (Salmon) opt for the cathedral church of Langres,³⁶ others (Duchesne, Morin) suggest Paris, an assumption that is based on the presence of a mass for Saint Geneviève in the book and the analogy between pericopes in the Luxeuil Lectionary and those in a seventh century Gospel book of St-Denis.³⁷ Whatever the precise destination of the manuscript, it is clear that it is one of the most important documents of the Gallican liturgy.

With respect to the Lenten period, the manuscript is a disappointing source, as just halfway through the second reading for the mass *In initium Quadragesimae* four quires (sixteen folia) of the book are missing.³⁸ The manuscript is, however, revealing in the sense that it corresponds to Caesarius' sermon for *quadragesima*, analysed above, with regard to the reading from the Prophets: Is. 58. This

³⁰ Caesarius of Arles, Sermones 207–209, ed. Morin 828–837.

³¹ Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 207, 2, ed. Morin 829.

³² Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 207, 2, ed. Morin 829.

³³ Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 207, 4, ed. Morin 831.

³⁴ Caesarius of Arles, Sermo 207, 4, ed. Morin 831: *Qui vero et tarde veniunt, et cito discedunt, nec contenti sunt expectare donec divina mysteria compleantur, non sunt inter Christi examina reputandi.*

³⁵ Le lectionnaire de Luxeuil (ed. Pierre Salmon, Rome 1944).

³⁶ Lectionnaire, ed. Salmon xcvi–xcviii.

³⁷ Thus King, Liturgies 130f.

³⁸ Lectionnaire, ed. Salmon 77f., note 2.

chapter describes the way of fasting that pleases God, namely the laying down of the yoke of sin and doing justice by freeing the oppressed (*confracti* – vs. 6). Then follows the verse quoted by Caesarius and forming the core of a description of the kind of fast agreeable to God:

“[Is this not the fast that I have chosen?] Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bringest the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”³⁹

This way of observing the commandment of fasting leads to salvation of the soul: ‘and thine health (*sanitas*) shall spring forth speedily’ (vs. 8).⁴⁰ The notion of (spiritual) healing as the intended effect of the act of fasting in combination with charitable care for the weak and feeble in the community will recur in the analysis of the liturgical prayers below.

The Bobbio Missal: biblical readings for the period of Lent

Contrary to the Luxeuil Lectionary, the Bobbio Missal gives a large amount of information with regard to the celebration of the Lenten period in the Gallican tradition.⁴¹ In this manuscript, dating from the late seventh or early eighth century and found by Mabillon in the north Italian monastery of Bobbio,⁴² biblical readings and prayers as well as ritual and penitential prescriptions are transmitted. For the period of *quadagesima*, the book offers pericopes and prayers for a mass at the beginning of Lent (*iniciium quadagesimae*) followed by four *missae ieiunii*. The last of these four Lenten masses is followed by three separate *contestationes* (the changing part of the eucharistic prayer), along with three pericopes from the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John respectively. Thus, apart from the neatly organised pericopes and prayers for the singular masses, a collection of prayers and pericopes is added for the beginning of Lent and two other Lenten Sundays (Bo 168–173). Within the context of this article, it is not possible to treat all biblical pericopes exhaustively. A quick look at the pericopes must suffice to make us familiar with the main themes for the period of Lent extracted from Scripture.

The beginning of Lent is marked by Old and New Testament accounts of fasting, prefiguring the forty-day period of Lent. Thus, the ordo at the beginning of Lent opens with the Old Testament story of the prophet Elijah who, tired and disappointed, spent forty days of fasting before he met God at Mount Horeb to receive his mission anew (III Reg. 19 = Bo 134). This pericope is mirrored by the Gospel passage describing Jesus’ temptation in the desert during a period of forty days preceding his public appearance in the world, found in the collection of additional pericopes (Matth. 4, 1–11 = Bo 171). Biblical exegesis in the early and medieval church regarded Elijah’s wandering in the wilderness as one of the typological forerunners of Jesus’ sojourn in the desert. These and similar biblical depictions of a period of preparation spent in isolation and dedicated to abstinence play an important role in the liturgical prayers for Lent, as will be shown in the next paragraph.

Given the biblical foundation on which the liturgical *quadagesima* is based, the readings from the Gospel elaborate further on the purpose and meaning of these forty days of fasting. It is significant that the Gospel pericopes do not focus on fasting only. Giving alms (Matth. 6, 1–8 = Bo 136) as well as praying continuously and with the right intention (Luc. 18, 1–14 = Bo 157) are equally important themes. Also various parables play an important role in the biblical readings for the Sundays during Lent, such as the parable of the prodigal son (Luc. 15, 11–24 = Bo 172), the parable of the unjust judge and the widow, and that of the Pharisee and the publican (Luc. 18, 1–14 = Bo 157).

³⁹ Lectionnaire vs. 7, ed. Salmon 76: *Frangere esurienti panem tuum et egenus vagosque induc in domum tuam; cum videris nudum operi eum et carnem tuam ne dispexeris.*

⁴⁰ Lectionnaire, ed. Salmon 76: ... *et sanitas tua citius orietur.*

⁴¹ *Missale Bobbiense* (ed. Elias A. Lowe, *The Bobbio Missal: a Gallican Mass-book*, Henry Bradshaw Society 58, London 1920).

⁴² Elias A. Lowe, *The palaeography of the Bobbio Missal*, in: *The Bobbio Missal* (Ms Paris. Lat. 13246). Notes and studies, ed. André Wilmart/Elias A. Lowe/Henry A. Wilson (Henry Bradshaw Society 61, London 1924) 98f. For a collection of recent studies on this source see *The Bobbio Missal. Liturgy and religious culture in Merovingian Gaul*, ed. Yitzhak Hen/Rob Meens (Cambridge Studies in Palaeography and Codicology 11, Cambridge 2004).

Pericopes from the Epistles are more distant reflections on 'the Christian life'. Rom. 12, 9–16 (Bo 156) describes what is needed to form a Christian community: a call to love each other heartily, to be humble, forbearing and unanimous. Rom. 14, 11–18 (Bo 149) contains a warning not to judge each other because of individual dealing with (abstaining from) food and purity or uncleanness of food: 'For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Ghost' (vs. 17).⁴³ This passage reflects the discussions in the young Christian community about the necessity or desirability of a strict observance of the Jewish law.

Both the Luxeuil Lectionary and the Bobbio Missal make clear, by the biblical readings for Lent, that the preparatory fasting preceding Easter is not only an individual undertaking of seclusion and loneliness (Elijah and Jesus in the desert), but is strongly focused on the formation of community. Is. 58 admonishes one to feed the hungry and house the stranger; Matth. 6 combines fasting with praying and almsgiving, and Rom. 12 describes the elements that identify the Christian community. Let us now turn to liturgical prayers in order to examine how these texts reflect the identity of the fasting congregation.

Liturgical prayers for Lent: the Missale Gothicum

In considering the liturgical prayer texts for the masses of *quadagesima* in early medieval Gaul, I have to be selective again. There is too much material to treat it comprehensively. In this section I will concentrate mainly on the Missale Gothicum as the most elaborate of the Gallican sacramentaries.⁴⁴ This book, written in a Burgundian scriptorium around 700 and probably in use in the church of Autun,⁴⁵ contains only prayers for the Eucharistic liturgy of Sundays and feast-days, and is therefore a sacramentarium *stricto sensu*. For the period of Lent, the sacramentary contains a mass ordo for the beginning of *quadagesima* followed by five *missae ieiunii*. Before we turn to the prayer texts in these masses in order to examine whether it is possible to obtain a sharper view of the liturgical community behind them, here follows a short description of the prayers which occur in the Lenten masses in the Missale Gothicum.

The *missae ieiunii* in the Missale Gothicum contain five prayers. The first one is nameless (1) and is followed by a *collectio* (2). Both prayers deal with the specific character of the Sunday, in this case fasting and related matters. The third text is the *collectio post nomina* (3), a prayer pronounced after the recitation of the names of the members of the community present at or, when already deceased, commemorated during, the Eucharist. Then follows the *collectio ad pacem* (4), accompanying the exchange of the kiss of peace (*pax*), the act of reconciliation preceding the sharing of bread and wine. After the completion of these preparatory acts and prayers, the actual Eucharistic prayer starts with an opening dialogue between celebrant and faithful, followed by the *immolatio missae* (5). This text, the heart of the Eucharistic prayer in the Gallican tradition, is usually an elaborate text of narrative character, dwelling freely on the theme and character of the given Sunday or feast. Whereas this part of the Lenten masses in the Missale Gothicum is called *immolatio missae*, the synonym *contestatio missae* occurs, as is shown above, in the collection of additional prayers and pericopes in the Bobbio Missal (Bo 168–170). Next to these five prayers, the ordo for the beginning of Lent in the Missale Gothicum contains seven additional prayers. The *immolatio* is followed by the sung acclamation *Sanctus*, after which the *collectio post sanctus* (6) is said. The eucharistic prayer continues with the recitation of the 'words of institution' (1 Cor. 11, 23–26), a reference to Christ's words as given in Luk. 22, which he pronounced at the Pascha meal the night before his passion. This fixed text, considered as the most holy part of the Eucharist, which only the initiate, i.e. baptised Christians, were allowed to attend and therefore called *secreta* or *mysterium*, is followed, in the Gallican mass ordo, by the *collectio post mysterium* (or *post secreta*) (7). Then follows the Lord's prayer, introduced and concluded by the *collectio ante* and *post orationem dominicam* (8 and 9) respectively. The sharing

⁴³ Lowe, Bobbio Missal 46: *Non est rignum dei isca et potus, sed iustitia et pax et gaudium in spiritu sancto.*

⁴⁴ Missale Gothicum, ed. Rose.

⁴⁵ Elias A. Lowe, Codices Latini antiquiores 1: the Vatican City (Oxford 1935) 32; Leo C. Mohlberg, Das gallikanische Sakramentar (Cod. Vatican. Regin. Lat. 317) des VII.–VIII. Jahrhunderts. Textband (Augsburg 1929) 101–108.

of bread and wine (*communio*) is followed by the prayer *post eucharistiam* (10) after which the mass is closed by a prayer called *consummatio missae* (11). The faithful are sent away with the *benedictio populi* (12), an elaborate blessing.⁴⁶

Panis vivus et verus

The main theme of the prayers for the masses of *quadragesima* in the Missale Gothicum is the act of fasting as a means to obtain forgiveness of sins and to reach a state of purity of body and soul. Thus the prayers for Lent in the Missale Gothicum stress, in the first place, the importance of fasting for the individual believer. The abstinence from sin (*continentiam a vitiis* Go 159) leads to a renewed state of being: *restauratio* (Go 158). This word, a synonym for *recreatio* and *redemptio*, refers to the restoration of the human state after the fall.⁴⁷ Fasting, abstaining from food, and from committing sins work as medicines that restore the faithful to their former purity:

“Grant us, omnipotent God, that, as our mortality is subject to vices and quarrels, your medicine may purify us by means of the present fast through a sincere love.”⁴⁸

In the same way, the first prayer of the second Lenten mass refers to the act of fasting as a remedy for sin (*remedia peccatorum*). Likewise, many prayers of the mass ordines for *quadragesima* in the Missale Gothicum refer to the purification that is procured by sincere and dedicated fasting (cf. also Go 158, 159, 161, 171, 172, 174, 184, 185, 188).

Whereas the congregation abstain from physical food, in their prayers they fervently pray for the spiritual food that is the *panis vivus et verus*, found in the Word incarnate. The two principal prayers of the *missa in initium quadragesima*, the *immolatio* and *collectio post Sanctus*, are interesting for their ample references to John 6. In this pericope, given by the Bobbio Missal to be read during the first part of the mass of the third Sunday of Lent (Bo 173), Jesus presents himself as the ‘bread of life’ (*ego sum panis vivus et verus*). Both the *immolatio missae* and the prayer *post Sanctus* go into the importance of this spiritual food to the faithful in their fast.

“For [Christ] is the living and true bread, who descended from heaven and lives in heaven always, who is of eternal being and the food of virtue. For your word, by which all things are made, is not only bread for human souls, but also for the angels themselves ... Vouchsafe, o Lord, to give us this bread during these forty days that we go into today by commencing the forty-day mortification of abstinence.”⁴⁹

In the same way, the *post Sanctus* praises Jesus as the living and true bread, that feeds the poor and helps the faithful to accomplish their fast:

“For he is the living and true bread, who descended from heaven to feed the hungry, yea even to be bread for the living. Let in this [eucharistic] bread [the living and true bread exist] by which the hearts are fortified, so that we, through the strength of this bread, may fast these forty days without the hindrance of flesh and blood.”⁵⁰

In these prayers, the period of Lent is typified by biblical periods of fasting and abstaining: Jesus’ forty-day sojourn in the desert, where he was tempted by the devil as recounted in Matth. 4, 1–11

⁴⁶ For a more elaborate description of the Gallican mass ordo see Élie Griffe, *Aux origines de la liturgie gallicane*, in: *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 52 (1951) 17–43, at 24–42; King, *Liturgies* 150–183; William Stevens Porter, *The Gallican Rite* (London 1958) 19–46.

⁴⁷ Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout 1954) s.v. *restauratio*; cf. Rose, *Missale Gothicum* 129.

⁴⁸ *Missale Gothicum* 183, ed. Rose 422: *Collectio ad pacem: Praesta nobis, omnipotens deus, ut quia vitiis et litibus subiicit nostra mortalitas, tua per praesencia ieiunia nos medicina purificet per caritatem sincerem.*

⁴⁹ *Missale Gothicum* 162, ed. Rose 415: *Immolatio missae: Ipse est enim panis vivus et verus, qui de caelo descendit et habitat semper in caelo, qui est substantia aeternitatis et esca virtutis. Verbum enim tuum, per quod facta sunt omnia, non solum humanarum mentium, sed ipsorum quoque panis est angelorum... Hunc panem, domine, nobis per hos quadraginta dies, in quibus hodie quadragintimale macerationem abstinentiae inchoantes ingredimur, ministrare digneris.*

⁵⁰ *Missale Gothicum* 163, ed. Rose 416: *Post Sanctus: Hic panis vivus et verus qui de caelo descendit, ut daret escas esurientium, immo et ipse esset esca viventium, fiat nobis in pane quo corda firmantur, ut in virtute panis huius per hos quadraginta dies sine impedimento carnis et sanguinis ieiunare valeamus.*

(read on the first Sunday of Lent according to the Bobbio Missal, Bo 171), and the Old Testament passages that were read as prefigurations of the temptation of Jesus: the forty days and nights Moses (Ex. 24, 18) spent on Mount Sinai before he received the law written on tables of stone, and the above-mentioned period of forty days and nights the prophet Elijah spent in the desert (III Rg. 19, 8). Both the *immolatio* and the *post Sanctus* refer to Moses and Elijah:

“Let us try to be imitators, we who possess this Bread [i.e. Christ], who nourishes the poor with bread, who consecrated his forty days of fasting to Moses and Elijah, who fasted for forty days...”⁵¹

And:

“With the food of this bread [i.e. the Word of God] your servant Moses abstained from physical bread, so that he became more susceptible to your sweetness, living on your word.”⁵²

Moses is set as an example for the faithful. Just as Moses ‘became susceptible’ to the law of God through his forty days of fasting on Mount Sinai, the faithful become, when they accomplish their fasting, susceptible to heavenly matters. This fast, however, is not confined to a mere abstinence from food. This becomes particularly clear from the *collectio post nomina* of the second *missa ieiunii* (Go 172). Sincere fasting comprises abstaining from both physical food and mental vices:

“God, you admonish us to abstain not only from fleshly food, but from the delights that are harmful for the soul itself. Grant us, we beseech you, the help of your forgiveness, so that we, by abstaining from illicit infections, may grow towards heavenly matters.”⁵³

An appropriate way of fasting (*exercere ieiunia congruenter*), as it is called in the second prayer of this second mass of Lent, not only leads to a better understanding of the heavenly mysteries, but also to worthy and pure conduct in life (*digna* or *sincera* or *salubris conuersatio*, cf. Go 173, 158, 190). A closer examination of two prayers in the next section will make clear what this desirable *conuersatio* consists of.

In obseruatione ieiunii et aelymosinarum

Whereas most of the prayers in the Lenten masses of the Missale Gothicum speak of sincere conduct in life in general terms, this effect of the act of fasting is made concrete in a few particular prayers. The first prayer of interest here is the first prayer of the second Lenten mass, where a close connection between abstinence from food and the giving of alms is found:

“Almighty and eternal God, you sowed for us the seed of the observance of fast and almsgiving as a remedy for all our sins. Grant us, we beseech you, to be devoted to you in the work of our soul and body.”⁵⁴

According to this prayer, not only abstinence from food (*ieiunia*), but also the act of almsgiving counts as a remedy for sins. The prayer shows a strong relationship between fast and almsgiving, by which the act of fasting as a means of obtaining forgiveness and eternal salvation for the individual soul is inextricably bound up with care for the needy in the community. Such a close connection between the acts of fasting and almsgiving has been noticed several times already. Caesarius of Arles connects both aspects closely in his sermon for *quadragesima*, just as both topics are tied together (along with praying) in the pericopes from Matth. 6, read in the Lenten masses in the Bobbio Missal (Bo 136 and 143).

⁵¹ Missale Gothicum 163, ed. Rose 416: *Post Sanctus: Ipsum panem habentes, qui pauperes pascit panibus, qui Moysi et Heliae per quadraginta dies ieiunantibus quadraginta dedecavit ... studiamus imitare.*

⁵² Missale Gothicum 162, ed. Rose 415: *Immolatio missae: Huius panis alimento Moyses tuus famulus quadraginta diebus et noctibus legem suscipiens ieiunavit et a carnalibus cybis, ut tuae suavitatis capatior esset, abstenuit de uerbo tuo uiuens.*

⁵³ Missale Gothicum 172, ed. Rose 418f.: *Collectio post nomina: Deus, qui non tantum nos a carnalibus cybis, sed ab ipsius animae noxiis delectationibus praecipis ieiunare, sic nobis quaesumus, indulgentiae tuae praebere subsidium, ut ieiunando ab illicitis contagiis ad superna crescamus.*

⁵⁴ Missale Gothicum 170, ed. Rose 418: *Omnipotens sempiternus deus, qui nobis in obseruatione ieiunii et aelymosinarum sine posuisti, nostrorum remedia concede peccatorum, quaesumus nos opere mentis et corporis semper tibi esse deuotus.*

The same thought is expressed even more sharply in the first prayer of the fifth Lenten mass of the *Missale Gothicum*, which runs as follows:

“Grant us, we beseech you o Lord our God, that we give to the poor the alms, that we take away from ourselves by the mortification of the flesh, in distributing them with a joyful will given us by you. For the observance of our fast will turn out to be fruitful only then, when our heart will be purer than the senses, and when compassion makes fruitful the conscience of our love.”⁵⁵

In this prayer, the faithful are admonished to feed the poor with the food they save by their fasting. The act of fasting, beneficial for the individual believer, is made fruitful only when it is combined with a pure mind that brings about chastity, and with *affectus* (‘love, charity’ a Latin translation of the Greek ἀγαπή⁵⁶) that makes fruitful the ‘conscience of our love’. The thought expressed in this prayer is familiar – the text echoes Caesarius’ sermon for the beginning of Lent presented above. Caesarius incites the faithful to share their wealth, brought about by their fasting, with those who have nothing, instead of storing the leftovers for their own benefit. For ‘almsgiving without fasting is good, but fasting without almsgiving is by no means good.’ The spiritual act of fasting is made fruitful by devotion to the works of mercy: ‘For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat’ (Matth. 25, 35). Caesarius refers not only to this passage from the Gospel of Matthew, but also to the admonition found in the epistle of James (James 5, 1–5). In this pericope, the rich are blamed for letting their riches perish fruitlessly. Caesarius cautions the faithful not to store the saved food in their own pocket, but to give it to the poor:

“All these things with which, beloved brothers, as I told you, Christ threatens us through his apostle – they terrify us greatly, but we must not despair of God’s mercy: there is still time for me and for those who are equally neglectful, to improve ourselves with God’s help, if we want to, so that we distribute abundantly the alms that we saved sparingly hitherto, and that we implore, with sorrow and complaint and hope for restoration, God’s mercy for the sins we have committed.”⁵⁷

Both the liturgical prayer and Caesarius’ sermon encourage the faithful to share their wealth with the poor in order to make their fast fruitful.

5 FASTING FLOCKS

Although a great part of the prayers in the mass orders for the period of Lent in the *Missale Gothicum* pray for a beneficial time of fasting in a spiritual sense (contributing to the mental purification and restoration of the sinner), the connection between this spiritual aspect of fasting and the tangible care for the needy in the community is also expressed clearly in the prayers. Thus the act of fasting, by which the faithful are purified in order to be able to celebrate the holy feast of Easter in a dignified way, is also used to strengthen the community, where the strong take care of the weaker. The act of fasting is, therefore, not only an individual spiritual matter, but also a means to contribute to the formation of the community. The community behind the liturgical prayer texts, however unknown to the eyes of the historian, is presented as a coherent entity, a group of people belonging together and in need of each other’s care. In the liturgical depiction of the identity of the celebrating community, the faithful are brought together in the image of the flock under the guiding care of a shepherd. This thought is expressed poignantly in the blessing of the people included in the mass ordo for the beginning of *quadragesima* (Go 169). Here, the congregation, gathered to enter the period of Lent, are presented as a flock (*grex*), that needs the blessings of the good shepherd

⁵⁵ *Missale Gothicum* 186, ed. Rose 423: *Concede, quaesumus, domine deus noster, ut quod nobis de alimoniis ob macerationem carnis subtrahimus ieiunando, uoluntate a te data iocunda conferamus pauperibus largiendo, quia tunc ieiunii obseruatio probabitur fructuosa, si et corporis sensibus per continentiam castitatis mens nostra sit purior et conscientiam pietatis fecundet affectus.*

⁵⁶ Blaise, *Dictionnaire*, s.v. *adfectus*.

⁵⁷ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 199, 5, ed. Morin 805f.: *Haec omnia, sicut dixi, fratres carissimi, quae per apostolum comminatus est Christus, licet nos nimium terreant, non tamen de dei misericordia desperandum est: adhuc enim et ego et similes mei negligentes cum dei adiutorio possumus nos emendare, si volumus, ut elemosinas, quas huc usque parcius fecimus, largius erogemus, et pro peccatis praeteritis cum dolore et gemitu et cum spe reparationis domini misericordiam deprecemur.*

(*animarum pastor*). This prayer expresses how the shepherd cares for the souls of the faithful, but also for their physical welfare:

“Watch over your flock, o shepherd of souls who never sleeps. Amen.

And sanctify them with your invisible touch, so that they are not vexed by any nightly terror. Amen.

Make strong the weak, lift up the contrite and make firm the feeble. Raise them with love, build them up with charity, cleanse them with chastity, illuminate them with wisdom, maintain them with mercy. Amen.

Let the perseverance of the love for you, the temperance of conduct, the providence of mercy and the discipline of acting help the watchful faith. Amen.

So that you, by the indulgence of your compassion, do not cast off [this flock] from the magnificence of your promise but lead them to forgiveness, since you have adopted them through your grace. Amen.”⁵⁸

The image, used in this blessing, of the shepherd who guides his flock is significant for the depiction of the liturgical community that lies behind the texts on fasting. Both the prescriptive documents found in the canons of the Church councils and the liturgical texts in sermon collections and sacramentaries make clear that fasting in the early Middle Ages was not only an individual undertaking meant to reach the spiritual state of purity and forgiveness that was necessary to celebrate Easter. Liturgical fasting asked for the participation and commitment of the entire community, without exceptions, and was aimed at the benefit of the entire community, without exceptions. Fasting without almsgiving was considered senseless and fruitless, as becomes clear from the choice of scriptural readings, the composition of liturgical prayers and the message expressed by sermons. In the period under consideration and according to the sources examined, fasting was not a solitary act aimed at individual well-being as opposed to the communal act of feasting. Just as feast is an important phenomenon in the formation of a community and its identity, fast, in this period, was an ‘intensely corporate’ activity, to borrow the words of Caroline Walker Bynum,⁵⁹ an activity that contributed importantly to the strength of the community and to the shape of its identity.

⁵⁸ Missale Gothicum 169, ed. Rose 417f.: *Benedictio populi: Ad custodiam gregis tui animarum pastor, qui dormire nescis, inuigila. Amen. Et ne noctornis terroribus fatigetur, inuisibile cum adtactu sanctifica. Amen. Fragilem solida, contritum eleua inualidumque confirma, pietate alleua, caritate aedifica, castitate munda, sapientia inlumina, miseratione conserua. Amen. Proficiat fidei uigilanti amoris tui, perseuerantia morum, temperantia misericordiae, prouidentia actuum disciplina. Amen. Ut per concessa miserationis indulgentia non abicias eum a promissionis tuae magnificentia, sed perducas ad ueniam, quem hic tibi adoptasti per gratiam. Amen.*

⁵⁹ Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast* 35.

