

# Psalms and Hymns ?

## An examination of claims for Extra-Biblical Non-inspired Hymnody as having Apostolic Sanction

Without doubt, no Christian will deny that Christians are required to worship God, and as part of that worship, to praise Him in song. From the very beginning of Apostolic practice we find that the early Christians “continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2: 42). From those ancient times the Church of Christ has continued to reflect, sometimes clearly, sometimes dismally, those pristine ideals, in which the protocols for approaching the Divine Majesty were all rooted and grounded in the Word of God *alone*. Approaching the King of Kings demanded the right protocols, most assuredly more so even than in approaching a Caesar, or any other dignitary invested with the majesty of human government.

As one would never dare presume to come into the presence of an earthly potentate according to protocols of one’s own ingenuity, so the Word of God lays it down clearly that the Most High Sovereign God has laid down **His** protocols for His people, that in approaching Him in worship “what thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deut. 12: 32), that we should “come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms” (Psalm 95 : 2), and that “all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Cor. 14:40).<sup>1</sup>

The actual **content** and **style** of Christian worship must therefore be under the control of the Word of God *alone*. The only possible alternative to this is to say that Christian worship is either wholly, or partly, left to the ingenuity, if not the whims, of man. Leaving aside the matters known to theologians as “adiaphora”, that is: “things indifferent” such as the place and time of worship, the length of the service, the frequencies of services, etc., if the actual content of worship is not governed entirely by protocols laid down by the Most High, then the door is open for varying degrees of human innovation and expression. Such a situation could not regulate

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<sup>1</sup> The “regulative principle” of worship is herewith encapsulated. For a thorough exposition of this principle, see : **Michael S. Bushell**: *The Songs of Zion* (Publ. Crown and Covenant, USA 1980 )Ch. 1 pages 10 - 47.

human behaviour in worship. Under such circumstances all manner of practices from the modern "Toronto" phenomena to the Roman Mass could be justified. Indeed, by such human-centred principles even the sacrificial slaughter of a lamb on "easter" Sunday, as still practiced by the Armenian Orthodox Churches can be justified. Ugly it might seem to us, but who is to say it is wrong, and unacceptable to God if Divine worship is a matter left open to the multi-variant ideas of all and sundry in the Churches? And indeed, as one looks across the manifold phalanx of Christian denominations and groupings today, one finds that across this vast spectrum, literally "anything goes."

The ancient Churches of the Apostolic era knew nothing of such diverse nonsense. A beautiful and majestic uniformity of worship arose in those far-off days, a uniformity rooted in the authority of the Word of God *alone*. This pristine and pure worship was uniformly regulated by the Divine Word such that in its sung praise only Divine-inspired lyrics received sanction. In its sung praise to the Most High God, the ancient and Apostolic Churches reflected back to Jehovah the very words inspired by His Holy Spirit, and no other words. They sang the Psalms of the Old Testament and no other songs. In such an exercise of praise the image of Christ was embedded in their lyrics, for the Apostle had instructed them that the words of the Psalms were indeed "the Word of Jesus Christ". "Let", said he, "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;" and by way of explaining this, he adds: "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (Col. 3 : 16). And in so singing those Biblical lyrics, they reflected to one another, and above all toward God, the very image of the Christ whose Holy Spirit had inspired those words.

That exclusive Biblical Psalmody was the sole vehicle of sung praise right from the Apostolic beginnings we have super-abundant testimony from Church history.<sup>2</sup> Such practice remained the norm in all orthodox Churches of East and West for the first four centuries. By the fifth century, the Psalter had attained such prominence that candidates for ordination to the ministry had to demonstrate complete knowledge of it by heart.<sup>3</sup> The composing and introduction of extra-biblical lyrics, commonly called "hymns", was essentially the preserve of the heretical sects during this period.<sup>4</sup>

It happens that an unfortunate linguistic slip occurs in theological vocabulary at this juncture. The noun "hymn" has come to be applied universally to extra-biblical spiritual lyrics, and "hymns" are seen by the modern mind to be distinct from

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: **Bushell**, *Op. Cit.* Chapter 5 pages 121 to 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 122, referring to **A.F. Kirkpatrick**, *The Book of Psalms* (Publ. Cambridge Univ. Press 1903) and page cii.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. **Bushell**: *op cit.* pp123 - 4.

the Psalms of the Old Testament. This linguistic error has been the trigger for a great deal of misapprehension and misinterpretation of the biblical doctrine of sung praise, as we shall forthwith see. As an attempt to clarify the confusion that has sprung up here, henceforth we will refer to hymns composed by non-Divine-inspired poets as “extra-biblical”.

The initial development of extra-biblical lyrics in the orthodox churches came only gradually, and after many centuries. Schaff, the famous Church historian can tell us that outside of the Psalms:

“So far as we are able to gather from our sources, nothing, except the Psalms and New Testament hymns (such as the ‘Gloria in Excelsis,’ the ‘Magnificat,’ the ‘Nunc Dimittis,’ etc.), was as a rule sung in public worship before the fourth century (the practice which had sprung up in the church of Antioch seems to have been exceptional; see Kraus, p. 673). Before the end of that century, however, the practice of singing other hymns in the service of the church had become common, both in the East and West.”<sup>5</sup>

Again, Schaff informs us:

“We have no complete religious song remaining from the period of persecution (i.e. from the first three centuries) except the song of Clement of Alexandria to the divine Logos (which however, cannot be called a hymn and was probably never intended for public use); the Morning Song and the Evening Song in the Apostolic Constitutions, especially the former; and the so-called *Gloria in Excelsis*, which’ as an expansion of the hymn of the heavenly hosts, still rings in all parts of the Christian world. Next in order comes *Te Deum* in its original eastern form. The *Ter Sanctus* and several ancient liturgical prayers may also be regarded as poems. Excepting these hymns in rhythmic prose, the Greek church of the first six centuries produced nothing in this field which has had permanent value or general use. It long adhered almost exclusively to the Psalms of David who, as Chrysostom says, was first, middle and last in the assemblies of the Christians; and it had, in opposition to heretical predilections, **even a decided aversion to the public use of uninspired songs.**”<sup>6</sup> (Emph. mine; *Ed.*)

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<sup>5</sup> **Ibid.** page 122 quoting **Schaff:** *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers;* second series Vol. 1 p. 247, note 14.

<sup>6</sup> **Schaff:** article: *The Greek and Latin Hymnology* in: *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 1866 page 680. Cited in **Bushell, op cit.** page 123.

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In the Western, or Latin churches, extra-biblical lyrics evidently began to make some, if unofficial headway in the Fourth century, after the Edict of Milan (AD 313) and the “establishment” of Christianity as the “state religion” of the Roman Empire. At first the Churches resisted what was an incoming tide of extra-biblical lyrics composed by orthodox writers, which lyrics were seemingly a late reaction to the spread of heretical “hymnody”. We find the Council of Laodicaea in about A.D. 381 prohibiting the ecclesiastical use of these uninspired or “private psalms”, as they called them. In A.D. 451 the Council of Chalcedon confirmed this decree. With the ensuing rise of Roman Catholicism in the following centuries, a plethora of extra-biblical lyrics was introduced, yet the Council of Braga in A.D. 561 renewed the prohibitions against their ecclesiastical usage, a decision that was further taken up and ratified by the Fourth Synod of Toledo in the Seventh Century.<sup>7</sup> But we have now reached the age of massive apostasy, and the perversion of the Christian liturgy by the evolving papacy. On through the centuries of the Dark Ages and into the Medieval times, extra-biblical lyrics came to assume a canonical authority and usage which paralleled that attributed to the Psalms.

The testimony of Scripture, and of early Church history is unequivocal. The ancient Christians worshipped God via Biblical Psalmody exclusively, a position that did not begin to erode until some 300 years after the Apostles, and the erosion of which took some 500 further years. And at the end of this, let it be said, Psalmody was not ousted completely, but in the Medieval churches it remained at least on a par with extra-biblical hymnody.

This testimony, from Biblical texts and from Church history, is indubitable. The Ancient Christians from the Apostles on were exclusive singers of the Old Testament Psalms, and they put up a long and stern resistance to the introduction of extra-biblical lyrics.

Now it happens that there are those who make an objection to the above conclusion, an objection based on the Apostle’s statement in Col. 3 : 16. They are wont to assert that in that text, besides “psalms”, the apostle mentions also “hymns” and “spiritual songs”. At this point, the linguistic slip occurs. These “hymns” and “spiritual songs”, they aver, refer to spiritual lyrics outside those enclosed in the Canon of Holy Writ. When appraised that the titles “psalms”, “hymns”, and “spiritual songs” all refer to the variant titles of the lyrics in the Old Testament book of Psalms,<sup>8</sup> they ridicule the idea, claiming that such an interpretation reduces the apostle’s words to the trite level of effectively meaning : “psalms and psalms and psalms.....” Such objectors usually go on in their worship to utterly abandon

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bushell: *op cit.* page 125.

<sup>8</sup> For the technical details establishing this fact see the article following in this journal page 15 entitled *The Biblical Doctrine of Psalmody* by R.J. George.

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Biblical Psalmody and settle for a liturgical diet of “hymns and hymns and hymns.....” thereby hoisting themselves on their own petard. But their interpretation fails to conform to Biblical standards on these counts:

1.) It is necessary, in exegeting the meaning of a text to determine how the writer, and the readers, at the time of writing would have understood it, and to apply *that* as the true interpretation. It is entirely fatuous to proceed from the modern situation, in which “hymns” are seen as being something different to “psalms”, and to interpret the text from the modern standpoint accordingly. I may not inject my own presuppositions into the Biblical text. To do so is eisegesis, not exegesis, and if eisegesis is anywhere legitimate, then it opens the door to Gnosticism, and to interpreting the Bible in any way you like. Now the vital question here is: What would the Christians of the Apostolic age have understood by the terms “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”? It is their answer to such a question which will determine what my answer today ought to be! In order to discover the answer to this question, we must take note of the following:

2.) In the Old Testament, there is, believe it or not, no book that carries the name: “The Book of Psalms” ! No! Such a title may be evident in English translation, but in the original Hebrew, the book is “Sepher Tehillim”, literally the “Book of Praises”. Now in that “Book of Praises”, there are some pieces that are denominated with the Hebrew word equivalent to our “psalm”, others denominated with the Hebrew word equivalent to our “hymn”, and others denominated with the Hebrew word for our “song”. And some of these pieces are denominated “psalm” *and* “song”. These three distinctions were reflected in the LXX (Greek translation of the Old Testament made BC 260-160 approx.) by means of the same three Greek words which the Apostle uses for “psalm”, “hymn”, and “song” in Col 3 : 16.

3) On the grounds of the above factors, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” can only refer to the Hebrew “Sepher Tehillim”, the Book of Praises, known to us, in English translation, as the “Book of Psalms”. As such the early readers of the Apostle’s letters would have understood it. As such, they would have been “allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture”, rather than turning aside to allow extraneous sources or considerations to control their exegesis.

4) What other sources, or books of lyrics could the apostle have possibly been referring to? There are no references to any such books in the New Testament. Nor are there any such references in extra-canonical early Christian literature. (Except to “hymnbooks” produced by heretics). Plenty of evidence for pseudo-gospels, like the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (so-called), for various epistles falsely carrying the name of an apostle, or for various other literature from orthodox sources, but no evidence of any orthodox “hymn-books”. Strange, this, that so much extra-canonical litera-

ture has been preserved from apostolic and sub-apostolic times, but no examples of **orthodox** "hymn-books", and no references in the Canonical literature either to any such "hymn-books". One would have thought that in the Apostolic period, if the modern evangelical hymn-lobby argument is right, then there would have been "hymn-writers" galore, churning out lyrics en masse.

In the 18th Century Evangelical revivals, so many hymnwriters came to the fore, and literally thousands of "hymns" were penned. Surely then, if those 18th Century revivals were a true reflection of Biblical and Apostolic Christianity, then the Apostolic period of the 1st Century AD should have manifested a plethora of Wesleys, Watts's, and Williams's, etc.? And if so, then where is the manuscript evidence of their poetic production? Where is the archaeological evidence of 1st Century AD orthodox hymns and hymn-books?

Again, if such "hymn-writers" and their products existed in the time of the Apostles, why no mention of them in the New Testament? Why no inclusion of a book of their "hymns" in the New Testament, as the Old Testament carried "Sepher Tehillim"?

And why no mention of any such orthodox "hymn-writers" and their products in early extra-Canonical Biblical literature? Plenty of such literature has been preserved from those times right down to today, one only has to peruse Vol. 1 in the Ante-Nicene Fathers to see just a selection from the orthodox alone. No mention in any of it of orthodox "hymnwriters" and "hymns", but plenty of references to passages in the "Sepher Tehillim"!

Now it happens that in those ancient days, there were heretics, like the Gnostics, who early on entered Christian churches and began to corrupt them with the kind of heresies St. Paul combats in his epistle to the Colossians. Such heretics *did* produce "hymns", and left their hymns on record! We do have therefore evidence of "hymns" after all, but *not* of "orthodox" hymns. This very fact shouts loud. If heretical hymns have been preserved through all these last two millenia, how come no orthodox hymns have been preserved? This is a specially important factor, because orthodoxy was a phenomenon spread all over the ancient world of the Roman Empire, whereas heretical sects tended to be localised, and relatively restricted to different districts and periods. Such considerations make it much more likely that orthodox "hymnbooks" would have been preserved than those of heretics. That is, *if* the orthodox had "hymnbooks". This evidence is therefore much more than simply "negative" evidence, i.e., an argument from the absence of evidence that favours "hymns". For the circumstances shout loud that *if* the Ancient Churches utilised extra-Biblical songs or "hymns" in worship, then there *should* be evidence. After all, the very fact that the "hymnody" lobby scrounge around through the Scriptures looking for "hymn quotations" would be entirely

unnecessary if collections of extra-Biblical lyrics had been handed down from the Ancient churches, and the fact that the Hymn-lobby has to do the Scripture scrounging is testimony to the absence of evidence that will support them.

The heretics did produce extra-Biblical “hymns” then, and the evidence testifies to it. But most interesting in this respect is the motive the various heretics had for producing these non-Canonical human lyrics. It was to wean the Christians away from the Psalms, because this was the only way to tear Christians away from the orthodox understanding of the doctrines and person of Jesus Christ! Strikingly significant is the widespread refusal amongst the heretical sects to sing Psalms, substituting instead their own man-made “hymns”. This trend started as early as the late 2nd Century A.D., when the Gnostic heretic Bardesanes (born A.D. 154) composed, with the aid of his son, a rival Gnostic “psalter” containing 150 hymns in direct challenge to the 150 Biblical Psalms. The Church “Father” Ephraemi Syrus aptly summed up this Gnostic subversion of Biblical Psalmody when he described it as “deserting David’s truth and preserving David’s numbers”.<sup>9</sup> Extra-biblical hymnody was a major mode of propagation of the Gnostic Heresy, with Valentinian and Marcion also famous for their heretical hymns. Such hymn-writing was also deployed by Arius in the propagation of anti-Trinitarianism.

The learned Eric Werner summed it up thus:

“Usually heretics composed new hymns, spurning the traditional Psalter. Hence heresy was often eager to replace the Psalms by new hymns. The Marcionites and some of the Syrian poets were especially notorious for their heretic hymns. Thus the chronicle observes, ‘the heretics have replaced St. Peter by Marcion as prince of the Apostles; and instead of Psalms they wrote their own hymns’”.<sup>10</sup>

So why *are* there records of heretical hymns, and *no* records of Apostolic Christian “hymns”? The conclusion is obvious, the ancient Christians had no extra-Biblical “hymns”, exclusively the Old Testament Psalter was their “hymnal”.

But some will want to insist that the Greek New Testament is replete with quotes from “hymns” written by the un-catalogued and completely hypothetical “Wesley’s and Watts’s” of the apostolic times. Various New Testament passages are adduced as proof of such. Their arguments are at best ethereal and at worst positively

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. **Bushell op cit.** pages 123 - 124 where he cites the ancient Church historian **Sozomen** :*Historia Ecclesiasticae* 3: 16 , and **Ephraemi Syrus**: *53rd Homily on Heretics*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. **Eric Werner**: *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Columbia University Press 1959) page 320, cited in **Bushell, Op Cit.** page 197(note).

neurotic. In University Departments of Biblical Studies all over the world, this matter has been debated for generations. Some actually claim to see a Gnostic hymn in the structure of the Greek in John Ch. 1 verses 1 to 18, a “hymn to the divine logos” as they call it. And many can see “hymnic” structures elsewhere, the principal ones being: Romans 11: 33-36; Philippians 2 : 5-11; Colossians 1: 15-20; and 1 Timothy 3: 16. True to form, modern evangelical scholarship has mounted this “bandwagon”, though they eschew any “gnostic” link-up.<sup>11</sup> However, unlike the top-level Biblical critics, the evangelicals do not seem to appreciate the sheer tenuousness of the arguments adduced. The presence of such “poetry” or “lyricisms” in the Greek New Testament is in fact hotly disputed at top levels of Biblical Criticism. Himself an eminent form-critic and scholar, Professor Charles F. D. Moule of Cambridge University was wont to give out a caution to his fellows here:

“These passages may or may not be strophic....i.e., symmetrical and balanced in their lines or their rhythms: nobody has conclusively demonstrated that they are. Even if they are not.....they might have been sung (!) .....but who is to prove that they were hymns? Prose and Poetry, adoration and statement, quotations from recognized liturgical forms and free, original compositions, mingle and follow one another so easily in the mind of the Christian thinker that .....one can never be certain how much or how little of ‘common prayer’ one is over-hearing.”<sup>12</sup>

Still others, sensibly, call attention to the fact that as the Greek language carries with it case endings and verbal flexions, there is a tendency in the language to slip into *apparent* poetry-like cadences without the writer intending to do so.

“....prayer, praise, and preaching are all set forth (in the Greek New Testament) in stately, rhythmical prose. There is simply no attempt-

<sup>11</sup> For a technical-theological refutation of the Evangelical position on these so-called “hymnic” passages, see the excellent analysis found in: *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship* (Publ. 1974 by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.) Hereinafter abbreviated as **BD of W**.

<sup>12</sup> **C.F.D.Moule**, *The Birth of the New Testament*, (Publ. Harper & Row, New York 1962) pp.25 - 26. Cited in **BD of W** page 163. Notable is Moule’s observation here that even non-strophic sentences “might have been sung”! What he means of course is that in the Ancient Churches the singing was a species of “chant”, similar to Anglican chant today. And as everyone who has experienced the Anglican worship knows, Cranmer’s prayer-book has the whole book of Psalms in the prose form of Miles Coverdale’s translation. Anglicans today can teach us how to chant such prose very effectively. A good Anglican choir chanting the Psalms creates a majestic sound indeed. Now Moule is really pointing out here, that the kind of mentality that scours the Greek New Testament looking for “hymnic” structures is really blatantly reading the modern European musical ethos back in to the ancient world. They did not need lines in “common metre” or whatever for singing in those days, as the pointed plainsong and chant were the fashion of those times, and such musical form does not need the production of lyrics in strophic, or versified form.



ed distinction in the New Testament between praise and prose, between confession and hymn (sic).”<sup>13</sup>

And again, it is usually people of high intelligence and fertile imaginations who are cursed with the tendency to see pattern, to see poetry, to see art, where none such actually exists. If you don't understand this, try staring at the floral patterns on the wall paper, and see how many human faces you can find staring back at you, mysteriously synthesizing out of jumbled masses of decorative lines! And so one finds that there are those who can read the Greek New Testament and see poetry, see lyrics, in all sorts of places, where none was intended. One might add, that in similar vein, the same groups of scholars that can see such lyrical patterns in the New Testament inevitably fall into the orbit of those who can “see” the Documentary Hypothesis patterns of ‘J’, ‘E’, ‘D’, and ‘P’ in the Old Testament, thereby reducing the Writings of Moses to a conglomerated stitch-up in an attempt to make nonsense of the Divine Inspiration of Scripture.

But a further set of considerations must needs assail those who find “hymnic” patterns in the Greek New Testament. *Suppose* that, well, yes, the claims are correct, that there are actually quotations of what appear to be ancient Christian poetic pieces, suggestive of early Christian “hymns”(extra-Biblical lyrics) in the New Testament. First of all, the texts adduced can at most, only be demonstrated as poetic, and not hymnic.<sup>14</sup> Now by what logic may one move from the poetic to the hymnic? For example, in the 19th Century the Evangelical Anglican poetess Christina Rossetti (1830 - 1894) wrote a beautiful **poem** about Christ's birth. Just a poem. A classic..... “In the bleak mid-winter, Frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, .....” etc. Now as a poem, it has metre and rhyme. As such it can easily be set to music by a competent musician, and after Miss Rossetti's death in 1894, along came Gustav Holst and he set the whole thing to music. Thus you will find it in most modern “hymn-books”, set to the tune “Cranham”, by Holst. But there is a giant leap of logic here, if one now characterises Miss Rossetti as a “hymnist”, and that “she wrote the hymn, ‘In the bleak mid-winter’...” For manifestly she wrote it as a poem, **not** as a hymn.<sup>15</sup> Now how therefore may one argue from the presence of strophic, poetry-like lines in the New Testament to hymns? The most you can deduce from such a premise, (even if it is true) is that you have evidence there for poetry. By what logic may one honestly proceed on to deduce the presence of a “hymn”? This is an important consideration, bearing in mind that in all ages people have been want to reduce certain truths to easily rememberable little lines with

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lee P. Bittner III, in *An Exposition of Philippians 2 : 5-11* in **BD of W**, page163.

<sup>14</sup> As Moule (Cf. quote note 12 above) points out, even if these passages are strophic and therefore extracts of Christian poetry, “who is to prove that they were hymns”?

<sup>15</sup> Cf.: **Article:** *In The Bleak Mid-Winter* in series “English hymns of world renown” in **THIS ENGLAND** magazine Winter 1998 pp. 26 - 27.

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strophic structure. Consult a good reference library, the English language is full of such catchy little sayings, "A stitch in time, saves nine", or, and here's a good Calvinistic one concerning Salvation and the Atonement,

"God **thought** it,  
Jesus Christ **bought** it,  
The Holy Spirit **wrought** it,  
In my heart and soul."

Some good orthodox dogma there, perfectly outlining the full Trinitarian eternal/objective/subjective elements concerning justification! Been around for generations, that little saying. But I've never known it to be sung in Church! When I incorporate this saying herewith into this article, I in no way indicate that such is more than a handy quasi-poetic device for conveying truth, (my old Sunday School teacher in South Wales used to impress this particular saying on me when I was a lad) and in *no way* should I be understood to be (i) advocating that this should be set to music and sung in worship, and (ii) manifesting evidence that the aforesaid saying was actually used in song in worship!

Now apply this truth to the so-called "hymnic" quotes in the New Testament. Are they hymns? Or just strophic, and easily rememberable sayings encapsulating some profound Scripture truth in a few words? Were not such linguistic devices commonplace in the ancient world when the bulk of the population was illiterate and could only rely on the memory, not on any notebooks? When they lived before the age of mass-produced cheap bibles? <sup>16</sup>

Does it therefore logically follow *necessarily* that such alleged "poetic" or "hymnic" portions constitute evidence for, and a sanction for, the composing of, and usage in worship of, extra-Biblical lyrics as a legitimate vehicle of praising God?

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<sup>16</sup> It is a well-known fact in Biblical Critical circles that the memories of those of the Ancient Oriental world were far more acutely developed than is the case with ourselves today. Huge tracts of material were memorised, in Judaism, Rabbis memorised the whole of the Hebrew Old Testament, and in the Ancient Churches right down to the time of the Waldenses of the 12th to the 16th Centuries it was required of a candidate for the ministry that he demonstrate memorization of the whole of the Psalter. He would later be required to demonstrate similar faculty with respect to the Gospels. In order to facilitate memorising in an age before plentiful supplies of pen and paper, and before widespread literacy, material for the memory was often arranged with "catch" words every so often, in order to act as "catalysts" to trigger continuity in the memory. Some critical analyses of St. Mark's Gospel by modern scholars have drawn attention to alleged "catch-word" phenomena in that Gospel, whereby it was fitted for memorization. But further beyond this, and more indubitably, we have the example of the Old Testament, where we find such phenomena as "acrostics" whereby a number of succeeding verses each begin with succeeding letters of the Hebrew alphabet. A notable example of this is Psalm 119, but the feature is also found in Psalms 9: 34; and 37. Other examples are found in Proverbs 31:10ff., and Lamentations Chapters 1-4. Such a literary device was evidently designed with a purpose to effectuate assistance to the memorization process.

To anyone schooled in the basics of formal logic the answer can only be **no**.

The position we have reached is this:

**If**, (and it is *if*) certain passages in the Greek New Testament are indeed poetic, then:

i) They are poetic. **FULL STOP.**

ii) An illegitimate logical jump is necessary now if one wishes to move from the “poetic” to the “hymnic”. (A poem is not necessarily a hymn).

iii) There are other, equally as plausible, if not more plausible explanations for the presence of these allegedly poetic passages than that of averring them to be “hymn quotes”. (Details given above, and see also footnote 16.)

Even more overwhelming are the following considerations too. *Let us suppose* again that the five passages generally argued over as providing the principal, if not the only justification for averring the presence of “hymn-quotes” in the Greek New Testament, do, for the sake of argument provide just that evidence. Where in all the canons of honest logical thinking can one find a logically just procedure for deducing from *this* that *this* warrants the composing of, and use of, extra-biblical hymns for worship? For the evidence would merely allow one to say that :

“Somebody or other, in Apostolic times, wrote Christian hymns. In possibly 5 places in the Greek New Testament the inspired writers quote from such hymns.”

And that is all the evidence can provide. Nothing else. Nothing else at all!

To aver that the evidence sanctions extra-Biblical hymnody is an unwarranted logical jump. No lawyer worth his salt would let such an argument pass in a court of law.

For there is, within the argument claimed by the pro-hymn lobby, a hidden piece of logic, smuggled in as a catalyst to precipitate the required logical jump.... and that piece of logic, opened and unravelled, is encoded like this:

“If an apostle quotes it, it must have Divine sanction for use in worship.”

Well! And so the Inspired penmen of the Greek New Testament quoted the Apocrypha on 116 occasions,<sup>17</sup> so that means that they sanction the Apocrypha as inspired Scripture for use in Worship and Study?

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. index of quotations, pp. 918-920 in THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (Publ. United Bible Societies (UBS) 1966. In spite of the fact that the UBS Greek Text is a critical edition based on the foundations of Westcott and Hort, its extensive indexing is an excellent aid to analysis and study. One could only wish for a Textus Receptus edition carrying the same facilities.

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Saint Paul quoted the Greek philosophers on 3 occasions,<sup>18</sup> with approval too! Does that mean that he thereby provides Divine sanction for the use of the Greek Philosophers on a par with Scripture, and usage in Christian Worship?

Obviously not!

Then, with equal ultimacy, how can quotations from extra-Biblical Christian lyrics (if true) provide a legitimate premise for usage of such in Christian worship? How can such quotations indicate Apostolic approval for "hymn-singing"? Truly, they cannot. And that is all that can be deduced *even if one grants* that there actually are quotations from extra-Biblical lyrics in the New Testament, a premise, let it be remembered, that is hotly disputed even in those modernist critical circles which generated such theories galore in the first place.

But another massive consideration presents itself here. The evangelicals and others who argue for "hymnic" quotes in the Greek New Testament can only find five passages that can by any stretch of imagination achieve some sort of highly disputable possibility as supports for their case. Just five measly, and disputable quotes, only two more than the number of cast-iron, indisputable, Greek philosophic quotes in the New Testament.

In Majestic contrast, the Greek New Testament carries 413 quotations from 104 of the Old Testament Psalms.<sup>19</sup> Wherewith our "hymn-quotes" now? Five against 413! Now if the presence of mere quotations were to be allowed to indicate approval of usage, and yield indication of apostolic practice, what does this evidence indicate to us about the sung worship in Apostolic churches? Why, a ratio of 413 to 5 (roughly 83 to 1) leaves the extra-Biblical "hymns" out of sight. But what do those 413 Psalm quotations tell us? And tell us in contrast to hymns? They indubitably tell us that the "Sepher Tehillim" was the Book of Praises which the Apostolic writers most readily found on their lips, or in their hearts when composing their epistles or gospels. They tell us that it was the lyrics of Biblical Psalmody that was dominant in their consciousness, not any man-made "hymns". It was to the Psalter that these men turned, "moved" or "borne along" by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, when they were guided, by the Heavenly Paraclete, to infuse their writings with the forceful verve of spiritual lyricism. The Psalter, the Psalter, the Psalter, they quoted, 413 times, *more times than they quoted any other book of the*

<sup>18</sup> This feature is again listed in the indices of the UBS Greek New Testament, page 920 thus:  
In Acts 17: 28 St. Paul quotes **ARATUS** *Phaenomena* 5 "we also are His offspring..." (This quote also found in **PSEUDO-EPIMENIDES**.

In Titus 1 : 12 St. Paul quotes **EPIMENIDES** *De Oraculis* "all Cretans are liars....."

In 1 Cor. 15: 33 St. Paul quotes **MENANDER** *Thais* 218. "evil communications corrupt good manners....."

<sup>19</sup> Cf. index of quotations in THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (Publ. United Bible Societies 1966) pages 906 - 909.

*Old Testament*.. <sup>20</sup> If this tells us anything, it tells us that the Apostolic Church was infused through and through with Biblical Psalmody. And let this also be said, the source of all their lyrical quotations has been preserved through the ages, and is available for our examination today, the Book of Psalms in everyone's Bible! Where, by contrast are the preserved "Christian hymnals" from the Apostolic era? Why, there is no sign of them at all save ethereal fragments in the fevered imaginations of certain high-toned scholars, to whom hypotheses all too frequently assume the air of reality.

Finally, let us come back to the "archaeological" question. Why are there no remains of ancient Christian hymnals from the Apostolic era? Why no references to such, in the New Testament, or in other literature from the Apostolic period?

Now *if* the Greek New Testament writers were actually quoting extra-Biblical "hymns", then such hymns **MUST HAVE BEEN WELL-KNOWN** and in **WIDE-SPREAD USE**. Otherwise the quotations would lack authority to the minds of the readers. In short, as quotations, they would fail to function as quotations. Now the whole argument of the "hymn-lobby" goes into a tail-spin here, for if usage of such hymns was as widespread as the "hymn-quotation" hypothesis requires, the chances of their preservation in collections of such hymns would have been extremely high. Higher than that of the chances for preservation of heretical hymns, seeing that the heretical hymns did not have the benefit of such widespread usage. Yet it is the heretical hymns that have survived, not any Christian "hymns". And yet again, if there were any such well-known Christian "hymns", from which the New Testament writers quote, why can no such quotations or references to such hymns be found in any orthodox Christian literature in the early Ante-Nicene Fathers? The answers are obvious.

There are no orthodox extra-Biblical "hymns" preserved because there were none to be preserved.

There are no orthodox extra-Biblical hymns quoted or referred to in the early Ante-Nicene Fathers because there were none to which they could refer.

Thus, weighing up all the evidence, the conclusion *necessarily* follows, that when St. Paul commands Christians to be "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3 : 16), then he must be referring to the Hebrew "Sepher Tehillim", or the "Book of Praises" which was composed of "Psalms, hymns, and Spiritual Songs." Hence the notion: "Psalms and psalms and psalms" is exposed as an heretical slur.

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In maintaining Biblical Psalmody, the ancient Christians ensured that their sung

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.* The only one near to the Psalms is Isaiah, with 412 quotes!

praise was infused with the “word of Christ” (Col. 3: 16). In losing Biblical Psalmody, the modern-day churches have lost the “word of Christ”, and replaced it with poor man-made substitutes commonly called “hymns”. Worse, modern evangelical Calvinism even, has drifted to such an enormous epistemic distance from the Psalter, that it fails to recognise the Biblical Psalms as being “the word of Christ”. An almost total loss of understanding of the Psalter has emerged, such that the modern worshipper sees not how the Psalms can be appropriate and relevant for worshipping Jesus Christ, and to be so par excellence above their man-made hymns. They see not how the Psalter is invested with the presence and Majesty of Christ in a way totally missing from even the very best “hymns” of the Wesley’s, Watts, and whoever.

God forbid that we should herewith sneer at all those devout Christians who, due to ignorance, error, and bad teaching outside their control in their local churches, are singers of man-made hymns. Doubtless the Most High God understands, He who will not quench the smoking flax, or bruise the broken reed.....He who sees them stumbling through the fog of modern ecclesiastical rebellion, ignorance and error, we dare not say that He turns His face away from their efforts to praise Him, especially when in intermittent places the words of their hymns may be coincident with words from the Psalms. But the evidence is indubitable, that the attempt to worship the Most High via the words of mere men is fundamentally insulting to God, indicative of rebellion against His protocols and provisions when done consciously and deliberately, and leads inevitably to severe spiritual impoverishment and corrosion of worship. We do believe that God would have us once again come to Him as per the way He commands, using the provision He has made, in the Divine-inspired “Sepher Tehillim”. We believe that we must break through the darkening clouds that have shrouded the Psalter, break through there to rediscover the glorious light of the Lord Jesus, and to reflect back to Him in His own words our adoration for Him who is the One True God, Our God, and our Redeemer.

To this issue, how the words of the Biblical Psalms are the “word of Christ”, revealing Him in a unique way, we hope (DV) to return in a future issue. The loss of this appreciation in the Churches has been a major factor in the rise of extra-Biblical hymnody and the gradual abandonment of Psalmody. Reinforcing what was already a wholesale apostasy from “the word of Christ” in worship was the impact, in the mid-19th century, of Dispensational theology. In one stroke, the insidious influence of this aberrant system relegated the whole of the Biblical Psalter to the Dispensation concerning the Nation of Israel, and as such it was seen as having no right place in Christian worship. Again, the advent of modernism, with its progressivist “God-is-lovism” ethos drew the line at the manifestations of God’s severity as well as His goodness as celebrated in the Psalms, and thus modernism too added its impetus to the fashionable trends that thoroughly penetrated even the Calvinistic churches of those times. May God grant that in these days His people make a rediscovery of the glorious and Sacred Lyrics of the Holy Ghost.