

The Papal System – XXXV. Hymns, And Those Who Composed Them



Continued from [The Papal System – XXXIV. The Sincerity of Catholic Priests.](#)

In the ancient churches psalmody (singing of psalms in worship) was quite as prominent as it is in the worship of Christ now; the praises and gratitude of the devout worshiper reached heaven in holy melodies sung with fervor and rapture.

Sometimes the psalm was sung by one person alone, the others only giving their attention; and sometimes by the whole assembly together; sometimes the congregation was divided into two choirs, one half singing one verse, and the other the next; sometimes one person sung the first part of the verse, and all the people united their voices at its close. The ancient and general practice of the churches was for the whole people, men, women, and children, as if with one mouth and one mind, to sing the praises of God. Christ and his apostles united in singing the hymn at the last supper; and, according to Chrysostom, the first churches followed this example: "Women and men," says he, "old men and children, differ in sex and age, but they differ not in the harmony of singing hymns, for the spirit tempers all their voices together, making one melody of them all."

The voice in singing was employed in two distinct styles; in the first it received a gentle inflection, an agreeable turn with a proper accent, not differing much from reading, like the musical way of reading psalms in cathedral churches. This was the Alexandrian mode in the time of Athanasius, and the prevailing custom in Africa in the days of Augustine; the other system conformed to art, had a variety of notes for greater sweetness, gave forth the richest melody, and melted into tears, or elevated to heaven, those who shared in the enjoyment of this delightful service.

Singing was extensively used in worship. When the church of St. Ambrose was beset with Arian soldiers, the people inside sung psalms the whole night and day. Psalmody was the exercise of the congregation at all times when no other service occupied them; no occasion was regarded as unseasonable to sing holy psalms and hymns in the church, except during Scripture reading, preaching, or praying. Monks in their devotions, plowmen in the fields, and the Church in all her services gloried in the abounding use of hymns, Even at funerals this custom was prominent. Jerome, speaking of such an occasion, says that "the people made the gilded roof of the temple shake and echo again with their psalms and hallelujahs."

Singers did not in early times make religion the chief end of their melodies. Sometimes the men who conducted church music took their modes of singing from the practice of the theater, introducing the corruptions and effeminacy of profane music into the solemn devotions of the sanctuary.

In condemnation of this custom Jerome says: "Let young men who sing in the church, sing, not with their voice but with their heart to the Lord; not like tragedians physically preparing their throat and mouth, that they may sing after the fashion of the theater in the Church." Chrysostom, Augustine, and other fathers urge the same objection against the theatrical music of some religious assemblies and singers in their day.

Hymns.

In the latter end of the second century a defender of the Saviour's divinity, quoted by Eusebius, attacked Artemon's heresy, and among other things urged by him to prove its falsehood, he says, "Whatever psalms and hymns were written by the brethren from the beginning celebrate Christ the word of God, by asserting his divinity." From the first age of the Gospel the brethren had human compositions in praise of Jesus as God.

In A.D. 270 the Council of Antioch complained of Paul of Samosata, the heterodox Bishop of Antioch, that he stopped "the psalms that were sung in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ as the late compositions of modern men, but in honor of himself he had prepared women to sing at the great festival in the midst of the church." From this statement it is again affirmed that uninspired hymns and psalms in honor of Jesus were in use in the churches at a very early day.

In the beginning of the second century, the celebrated Pliny, in giving the Emperor Trajan an account of the Christians, says: "They were accustomed to meet on a certain day before it was light and sing a hymn alternately to Christ as God." This hymn could not be one of David's Psalms, as they are not addressed to "Christ as God." It is undeniable that in the infancy of the Church, as Cave says: "It was usual for any persons to compose divine songs in honor of Christ, and to sing them in the public assemblies." These compositions were commonly fragments of Scripture, with slight additions.

The Doxology was the first Hymn.

In its most ancient form it read: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, world without end. Amen." The words, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be," were added somewhat later than the first use of the song. The followers of Arius would only sing the doxology thus: "Glory be to the Father, by the Son, and by the Holy Spirit." It was used at the end of nearly every portion of public worship. Another change in its words occurred not long after the first enlargement, then it read: "To Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all glory, worship, thanksgiving, honor, and adoration, now and forever, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Another very ancient hymn is called "The Angelical Hymn, or Great Doxology." It was based on the words of the angels at the Saviour's birth: "Glory be to

God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will;" the reading often accepted in early times. This was a very popular hymn.

The Trisagion (thrice holy), or cherubical hymn, is among the earliest songs of the Church. Its first form was: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory, who art blessed forever. Amen." It, too, had many changes, and continued for centuries to hold a leading place in the worship of the early Christians.

The "Hallelujah," which was understood to mean, "Praise ye the Lord," was sung with the greatest fervor, publicly and privately. It was the call for monks to come to their assemblies, when one of their number went around singing it.

Paulinus says: "The whole sheepfold of Christ sings Hallelujah."

Another early hymn was called "Benedicete," or the song of the three children in the burning fiery furnace. Chrysostom says of this hymn, "that it was sung in all places throughout the world, and would continue to be sung in future generations."

The Magnificat, or song of Mary: "My soul doth magnify the Lord," etc., was publicly sung in the churches of France, as early as A. D. 506.

Clement of Alexandria, about the end of the second century, or beginning of the third, wrote some beautiful hymns, which are still extant (still in existence), though not used. And Gregory of Nazianzen, who died in the end of the fourth century, was celebrated as an author of hymns.

Hilary of Poitiers, who died A.D. 368, is regarded as one of the first writers who composed hymns for use in public worship in the West. Jerome says, that Hilary composed a book of hymns, and such was the merit of these songs that they were ratified and confirmed by the fourth Council of Toledo. But no one of them is extant except a hymn prefixed to his works and sent with an epistle to his daughter Abra.

Hymns of Ambrose.

Ambrose is better known as an author of hymns than any Christian before his day. He composed thirty, which were used in the churches. He wrote the "Deus Creator omnium," etc.; and one on "The repentance of Peter after the crowing of the Cock," which were greatly prized in public worship. But the Te Deum was his masterpiece (if it was really his). This hymn is usually ascribed to Ambrose, and with good reason; though Stillingfleet says: "It was composed by Nicettus, about one hundred years after the death of Ambrose," and the learned Bingham holds the same view.

For fourteen or fifteen centuries, the Te Deum has borne to the shining heights of Paradise the thanks of grateful millions over an abounding harvest; or the jubilant praises of a triumphant nation whose foes have been put to flight, or destroyed. It was probably the chanting of that very hymn which melted young Augustine to tears, as he sat in the church of the ex-governor, Bishop Ambrose, and listened to the finest music in the whole West.

The following is the common Catholic version and copy of

The Te Deum.

"We praise thee O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee: the Father everlasting.
To thee all angels cry aloud: the heavens and all the powers therein.
To thee cherubim and seraphim: continually do cry:
Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.
Heaven and earth are full: of the majesty of thy glory.
The glorious choir of the apostles: praise thee.
The admirable company of the prophets: praise thee.
The white robed army of the martyrs: praise thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world: doth acknowledge thee.
The Father: of an infinite majesty.
Thy adorable, true: and only Son.
Also the Holy Ghost: the Comforter.
Thou art the King of Glory: O Christ.
Thou art the everlasting son: of the Father.
When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man: thou didst not abhor the
Virgin's womb.
When thou hadst overcome the sting of death: thou didst open the kingdom
of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God: in the glory of the Father.
We believe that thou shalt come: to be our judge.
We pray thee, therefore, to help thy servants: whom thou hast redeemed
with thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with thy saints: in glory everlasting.
O Lord, save thy people: and bless thine inheritance.
Govern them: and lift them up forever.
Day by day: we magnify thee.
And we praise thy name forever: yea, forever and ever.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, this day: to keep us without sin.
O Lord have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy be showed upon us: as we have hoped in thee.
O Lord, in thee have I hoped: let me not be confounded forever."

Bishop Mant translates another hymn of Ambrose; of which the following is a part:

Theirs the firm faith of holy birth,
The hope that looks above,
And, trampling on the powers of earth,
Their Saviour's perfect love.

In them the heavens exulting own
The father's might revealed,
Thy triumph gained, begotten Son,
The Spirit's influence sealed.

Arius, the founder of the ancient sect bearing his name, had a talent for

composing hymns; and from the statements of Socrates and Sozomen, he used it with great success in commending his opinions and confounding his religious adversaries. The Arians on all feast days, and times set apart for worship, gathered in bands and marched through the streets of Constantinople, singing responsive verses with such insulting questions in them as: "Where are they that say: Three things are but one power?" These musical warriors would begin their melodious march early in the morning, and continue it during the greater part of the night.

The great Chrysostom, becoming alarmed at the popularity of these heterodox songs, had others composed to counteract their influence. And he too formed processions with splendid silver crosses and lighted tapers borne in front, in which the Trinitarian hymns were sung. A tumult was the result, which led the Emperor to prohibit the Arian hymn chanting in public: an act which would have been more just and Christian, if both parties had been placed on the same footing before the law.

Ephraim the Syrian had respectable gifts as a religious poet. It is said that he wrote three thousand verses. To controvert the heresies rendered popular by Harmonius among his countrymen, he composed hymns in honor of God, and in accordance with the doctrines of the Church. And such was the popularity of Ephraim, that from his day the Syrians sang his odes, and followed the instructions they contained.

Augustine wrote a hymn to check the errors of the Donatists, who were making extensive use of newly composed sacred songs to render their opinions triumphant.

In Ireland, St. Patrick, about the middle of the fifth century, led a chief bard, accustomed to celebrate in song the warlike exploits of his countrymen and the glories of their Druidical divinities, to the Saviour of souls; and Dubrach MacValubair, drawn to the Redeemer, immediately began to make hymns in praise of Christianity.

Bede's Ecclesiastical History contains a hymn of his, of which the following is a part:

Hail, Triune Power, who rulest every age,
Assist the numbers which my pen engage.
Let Maro wars in loftier numbers sing,
I sound the praises of our heavenly King.
See from on high the God descends, confined
In Mary's womb, to rescue lost mankind.
Behold, a spotless maid a God brings forth,
A God is born, who gave even nature birth.

Caedmon, in the year of our Lord 680, had a species of divine inspiration to make hymns, as he asserted, and as his friends believed. One night after caring for his horses, according to his office, he fell asleep at the proper time, and a person appeared to him in his sleep and commanded him to sing; he refused; the command was imperatively repeated, and a subject given him for versification; he forthwith began to make beautiful hymns. In the morning he

told his dream and he repeated his hymns. He was soon after elevated from stableman, in Whitby Abbey, to be a brother in the convent, by St. Hilda, the Abbess. He made hymns on creation, the origin of man, the departure of Israel out of Egypt, and their entrance into Canaan, the incarnation, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension of the Saviour, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the apostles, the judgment day, and the delights of heaven. "Whatever was interpreted to him out of Scripture, he soon after put into poetical expressions of much sweetness and humility. By his verses the minds of many were often excited to despise the world and aspire to heaven. Others after him in England attempted to compose religious poems, but none could compare with Caedmon."

Part of an Ancient Hymn attributed to St. Patrick.

This hymn is written in a very old dialect of the Irish Celtic; it has no appeals to saints, angels, or the Virgin Mary. If not the work of St. Patrick, it must have been the composition of some one who lived near his time. This version was made by Dr. Todd, a distinguished Irish scholar:

I bind to myself today
The strong power of the invocation of the Trinity,
The faith of the Trinity in unity,
The Creator of the elements.

I bind to myself today
The power of the incarnation of Christ,
Wit that of his baptism;
The power of the crucifixion,
With that of his burial;
The power of the resurrection,
With that of the ascension
The power of the coming
To the sentence of judgment.

I bind to myself today
The power of God to guide me,
The might of God to uphold me,
The wisdom of God to teach me,
The eye of God to watch over me,
The ear of God to hear me,
The word of God to give me speech,
The hand of God to protect me,
The way of God to prevent me,
The shield of God to shelter me,
The host of God to defend me.

Of the Lord is salvation,
Christ is salvation,
With us ever be
Thy salvation, O Lord.

Greek Psalmody.

The hymns of the Greek Church are chiefly the composition of poets who flourished in the eight and ninth centuries, Kosmas, John of Damascus, Theophanes, Joseph of Constantinople, Andreas, Bishop of Crete, and Germanus, Bishop of Constantinople.

Modern Catholic Psalmody.

A few of the hymns now used in Catholic churches have been handed down from the earliest times and from the middle ages. But Romish hymns are chiefly of modern origin, in their doctrines, semi-deities, and composition. Peter F. Cunningham, of Philadelphia, with the approval of Bishop Wood, has published a little book containing 209 hymns. Of these, sixty-five are about Mary, forty-six about saints and angels, sixty-six about Christ, sixteen about the Father and the Spirit, and a few others not capable of classification under any of these heads, Caedmon had no song addressed to Mary. There is no early hymn written in her praise.

Several hymns in Cunningham's book, and in the "Mission Book," are well-known Protestant compositions. Of this class are "Rock of Ages," by Toplady; "Soldiers of Christ, Arise," by Charles Wesley; "Jesus, Lover of my Soul," by Charles Wesley; "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne," by Dr. Watts; "Come Sound His Praise Abroad," by Dr. Watts; "Children of the Heavenly King," by Cennick; and "Sweet the Moments, rich in Blessing," by Allen and Shirley. These Protestant authors would be astonished could they know that their hymns were sung in Catholic churches; and many of the faithful would be utterly confounded if they were aware that heretics had made their holy songs. We present the following as samples of the hymns sung in Catholic churches, either as praises of, or prayers to creatures; of course, the hymns are abridged.

ST. ALOYSIUS.

Charmed with the Deity alone,
Terrestrial pursuits he forsakes,
And ere yet half to manhood grown,
His virgin vows to Mary makes.
Amiable and angelic youth,
Aloysius pray for us.

ST. ROSE OF LIMA.

And while amidst his glories now,
Thou seest him face to face, O deign,
St. Rose, to hear thy suppliants' vow,
That grace and glory we may gain,

ST. AGNES

O holy martyr, spotless dove,
With joy we celebrate thy day;
Thou dwellest now in bliss above,

Where tyrants o'er thee have no sway.
Sweet Agnes, let thy pleading voice
For us at Mercy's throne be heard.

HYMN OF ST. ALPHONSO RODRIGUEZ—A JESUIT.

Chorus.—Hark hark! the vaults of heaven
Re-echo in joyful lays:
Angels tune their golden harps
To sound the blest Alphonso's praise.

Servant of God, though lowly was thy state
Whilst here on earth, thy labors were great;
And now, in heaven above the starry skies,
At Mary's feet, thou enjoyest the blissful prize.

HYMN TO ST. IGNATIUS.
(Founder of the Order of Jesuits.)

Ye angels now be glad,
And thou exult, O earth
Loyola's happy shade,
Rejoice at thy saint's birth,

Chorus.—Loyola's son all hail,
By angels crowned above;
Ignatius, father dear,
Accept thy children's love.

Stretched on a bed of pain,
Christ's holy life he reads,
While for his mis-spent youth
His heart now sorely bleeds.

Chorus.—Loyola's son all hail, etc.

HYMN TO BLESSED JOHN BERCHMANS—A JESUIT.

Chorus.—In life's joyous morning,
Aiming for the skies,
See our blessed Berchmans
To perfection rise.

Worthy child of Mary,
Faithful, meek, and pure,
Vain were earth's enticements,
Vain the tempter's lure.

Chorus.—In life's joyous morning, etc.

ST. PHILIP NERI,

If from earth a fervent prayer,

Up to heaven the angels bear,
Shall his prayer have less of grace
Who sees Jesus face to face?
Holy Philip, bend thine ear,
Our petition kindly hear.

Chorus.—Ora pro nobis, ora pro nobis,
Holy Philip, pray for us.

ST. PATRICK.

Hibernia's champion saint, all hail!
With fadeless glory crowned;
The offspring of your ardent zeal
This day your praise shall sound.
Great and glorious St. Patrick,
Pray for that dear country,
The land of our fathers:
Great and glorious St. Patrick,
Hearken to the prayer of thy children.

MARY.

Hail, queen of heaven, the ocean star,
Guide of the wanderer here below!
Thrown on life's surge we claim thy care:
Save us from peril and from woe.

Chorus.—Mother of Christ, star of the sea,
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me.

BLESSED PETER CLAVER.

The slave, the desolate to cheer,
Honors and riches, all most dear,
Gladly, blest Claver, you did leave
Treasure in heaven, to receive.
Our voices are blending,
Our prayers are ascending.
Take us for thy children, we'll honor thy name.
Blest Claver, thy love, thy protection we claim.

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