

## *Aspects of Worship in the New Testament Church*\*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Church which meets us in the pages of the New Testament is a worshipping community of believing men and women. This is clear from the descriptions in the Acts of the Apostles (i. 14; ii. 42, 46; iv. 31; v.12, 42; xiii-13; xx. 7-12), and from the statements of Paul in his Letters (notably 1 Cor. x-xiv). From these sources we learn something of the distinctive features of Christian worship. In brief summary, these features are three in number. First, the presence of the living Lord in the midst of His people, according to His promised word (Matt. xviii. 20), marks out an element of Christian worship for which no other religion can provide a parallel. Then, the fact that worship stands within 'the magnetic field of the Holy Spirit' (to use the expressive phrase of Professor van Unnik)<sup>1</sup> is both a characteristic and an impressive fact. He both prompts true worship (1 Cor. xii. 1 ff., xiv. 14, 15; Rom. viii. 26 f.; Eph. v. 18, 19, vi. 18; Jude 20) and checks any tendency to offer to God that which is unacceptable (1 Cor. xii. 3, xiv. 32 f.). Indeed, Paul regards the ministry of the Spirit as the distinguishing mark of Christian worship (Phil. iii. 3, RV; cf. John iv. 24). A third feature in the cultus of the Pauline Churches is the concern for upbuilding (οἰκοδομή); and this aspect may claim our attention in some detail (cf. 1 Cor. xii. 7, xiv. 3-5, 12, 17, 26).

If we take the Church at Corinth as a norm, we may notice three components of Christian worship in that community. There was (i) *the charismatic element*. By this we mean the offering of enthusiastic praise and prayer under the direct afflatus of the Spirit, whether in intelligible or in ecstatic language (i.e. *glossolalia*, or the gift of 'tongues', 1 Cor. xiv. 2, 6 ff.). While Paul does not censure this latter form of worship, he insists that there must be an accompanying interpretation (xiv. 5, 13, 28) so that the Church may benefit and be edified (verse 5). Then, there was (ii) *the didactic side*. This covers all ministry in intelligible speech which aims at clarifying the will of God to the congregation, whether by teaching (1 Cor. xii. 8), instruction (1 Cor. xiv. 26), prophesying (i.e. preaching, 1 Cor. xi. 4, 5; xiv. 3) or discerning the truth (1 Cor. xiv. 29; cf. 1 Thess. v. 21; I John iv. 1). Here again the rubric applies: 'Let all things be done for edification' (1 Cor. xiv. 26). The third element (iii) was *eucharistic*, which means simply the offering of praise to God, whether by prayer (1 Cor. xiv. 16), hymns and canticles (Eph. v. 19 f.; Col. iii. 16 f.; 1 Cor. xiv. 15 fill out the bare mention in 1 Cor. xiv. 26) or by the distinctive Christian ordinance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. xi. 18 ff.). Again the ideal is that all these acts shall be for the

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Church's good. Written large over all the Apostle's directives for public worship at Corinth are the words: 'Strive for the upbuilding of the Church' (1 Cor. xiv. 12).

With this introduction our study turns to focus upon one aspect of early Christian worship: the presence, use and significance of Christian hymns in the New Testament Church.

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<sup>1</sup> W. C. van Unnik, art. 'Dominus Vobiscum: The Background of a Liturgical Formula', *New Testament Essays in memory of T. W. Manson*, ed. by A. J. B. Higgins, 1959, 270-305 (294).

## I. ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR THIS STUDY

At first glance the evidence for early Christian canticles in the literature of the New Testament appears to be very slight. The verb 'to sing a hymn', 'to praise in a hymn' (ὕμνεϊν) is found only in a few places; and these references are non-significant. In the first sense, Matthew xxvi. 30 = Mark xiv. 26 relates to the singing of the second part of the Hallel (Pss. cxiii-cxviii) at the close of the Passover meal. The second meaning is represented by Acts xvi. 25 which tells how Paul and Silas sang a hymn in the Philippian prison; and Hebrews ii. 12 quotes Psalm xxii. 22: 'in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee'. In no case, however, does the New Testament text explicitly say that the content of a Church hymn is being quoted. And this conclusion is unchanged when the evidence for some cognate expressions (e.g. 'to sing praise' to the accompaniment of a harp: ψάλλειν in Rom. xv. 9; 1 Cor. xiv. is; Jas. v. 13) is considered.

Yet, there are three factors which encourage a study of New Testament *carmina*.

First, that the Christian Gospel should bring with it an outburst of hymnody and praise to God is what we might expect. A. B. Macdonald makes this point when he writes:<sup>2</sup> 'A priori, we should expect that a movement which released so much emotion, and loyalty, and enthusiasm, would find expression in Song.' After quoting the cases of religious awakening in the history of the Church and showing that these have been accompanied by outbursts of song, he goes on: 'So it would have been strange indeed if the Church had remained songless in that first glorious dawn when the light from Christ came breaking across the horizons, making all things new'. There are two subsidiary points which are important at this juncture and make it eminently reasonable to suppose that the birth of the Church would be heralded by a manifestation of religious song.

The fact that the Christian community did not spring, Athene-like, into existence is plain from the records of the entire New Testament. God sent His Son to a prepared people. Jesus Himself acknowledged the rich inheritance of the ancestral faith in which He was nurtured. The Church was cradled in Judaism. And as such the earliest believers who were all Jews entered the Church with no *tabula rasa* of spiritual experience, but as those who stood in a long and developed cultic tradition, with forms of Divine service and liturgical offices and language already known to them. 'The first disciples were Jews by birth and upbringing, and it is a priori probable that they would bring into the new community some at least of the religious usages to which they had long been accustomed'.<sup>3</sup> One religious usage would be the stress which the Jewish faith and cultus placed upon corporate praise. There is some doubt as to the extent to which the singing of praises had developed in the Palestinian synagogues.<sup>4</sup> It

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<sup>2</sup> A. B. Macdonald, *Christian Worship in the Primitive Church*, 1934, 112. The full study of P. G. S. Hopwood, *The Religious Experience of the Primitive Church*, 1936, reminds us that religion in the early Church was, first and foremost, a religion of first-hand experience and that the first companies of believers were 'men of the Spirit', filled with a new enthusiasm and power in their worship as much as in their proclamation of the message. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Apostolic Age*, 1955, chapter iv. J. Quasten, *Musik und Gesang in den Kulturen der heidnischen Antike und christlichen Frühzeit*, 1930, 78, comments on the character of the early Church as expressing its joy through song (den gesangsfreudigen Charakter des Urchristentums)

<sup>3</sup> T. W. Manson, art. 'The Jewish Background', *Christian Worship: Studies in its History and Meaning*, ed. N. Micklem, 1936, 35.

<sup>4</sup> H. Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church*, ET 1949, 148; W. Bauer, *Der Wortgottesdienst der ältesten Christen*, 1930, 21 for the opinion that the Psalms were not sung in the Hebrew synagogues of the first century. And similarly, J. Leipoldt, *Der Gottesdienst der ältesten Kirche*, 1937, who expresses himself clearly: 'Die alte Synagoge kennt keine Lieder, die von Zeitgenossen gedicht sind: auch keinen Gesang', 36.

is probable that the synagogues of the Judaism of the Dispersion were more advanced in the use of psalmody.<sup>5</sup> But there can be no doubt that

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the early Christians inherited the desire to express their gratitude and adoration in the offering of vocal praise. The spiritual tradition in which they had been born and in which, as believers in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, they stood would ensure this, because in becoming Christians they did not cease their worship of the covenant God nor cast off their former manner of worship, however much they might seek to fill the old forms with a new content.

The new content, as far as the early Church in Jerusalem is concerned, is epitomized in the conviction that the Messiah had come and that His name is Jesus of Nazareth. This fact is seen in that, as far as cultic praxis was concerned, the chief things which marked out the 'sect of the Nazoraeans' was the offering of prayer in the name of Jesus and the distinctive practice of table-fellowship. Both these expressions of worship in the nascent Church are important; and there are indications that some early Christian liturgical fragments go back to this period.

As the Church moved out into the Greek world and the understanding of its message deepened and became enlarged, it became clear that the Christian faith stood out sharply against its pagan rivals as well as Judaism. While, therefore, certain terms and expressions of religious usage are shared with the Hellenistic cults of the first century world, some fundamental differences are to be noted.

One of the features of Greek religion which would be familiar to the Christian converts from their acquaintance with the cults of their day was hymnology. As the Church became more and more habituated in the Hellenistic society of the first century and its converts were drawn from this *milieu*, the Greeks who attached themselves to the Church would bring over into their practice of the Christian cult ideas and forms of worship which they had known in their non-Christian days. There is more than one allusion to this pre-Christian state in the Pauline literature (1 Cor. viii. 5-6, xii. 2; Gal. iv. 8; Col. i. 21; Eph. ii. 1 ff. iv. 22, v. 8). A second subsidiary element in our expectation that the New Testament Church will be a hymn-singing Church is the setting of the early communities in the Graeco-Roman world where hymns were offered to the cult divinities.

There are some obvious points of contact as we compare Greek and Christian hymnody. In both, songs of praise were addressed directly to the Deity. Many of the Greek hymns contain elevated thoughts and aspirations. It is emphasized that the hymns should be worthy of the gods. They are the work of εὐσέβεια on the part of the poet; and there is a blend of individual and corporate devotion. Certain formal connections are noticeable; and Norden<sup>6</sup> and Kroll<sup>7</sup> have analysed such features as the invocatory style, the participial style and the relative style. Both writers have shown points of formal agreement, the latter concluding 'The Christian hymn... runs, in part, into the stream of the stylized, metrical and prose religious speech of the

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<sup>5</sup> So Lietzmann, *op. cit.* 148 and earlier, 101-103: The worship of the sectaries at Qumran evidently included musical forms (e.g. *Manual of Discipline*, x. 1-9; and the Hôdâyôth on which Cf. M. Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns*, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 1923 ed. He discusses the various styles of predication (Du-Stil: Er-Stil) along with Der Relativstil—und Der Partizipialstil—der Prädikation, in great detail, 143 ff.

<sup>7</sup> J. Kroll, *Die christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandria*, 1921, 9.

Graeco-Roman paganism'.<sup>8</sup> But these common elements do not concern the deep issues of theology and human aspiration, and in those areas which Karl Keyssner, in a definitive work,<sup>9</sup> has labelled 'Gottesvorstellung and Lebensauffassung' there is a gulf separating the two sets of religious ideas. The differentiae which mark off Christian hymns and prayers are:

(a) With much pagan hymnology there is a fitful uncertainty of the Deity. For this reason honorific epithets are piled up and many gods are invoked in the

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hope that at least one name will reach the target.<sup>10</sup> The Christian celebrates a God whose nature is known and whom he approaches with sure confidence.

(b) Christian hymns focus their interest upon the activity of God in history by relating all that He has done in His saving power. While Divine power is often lauded in Greek anthems and God is hailed in His attributes of omnipotence He is only vaguely personal. The motif of God's redeeming enterprises belongs uniquely to the Hebraic-Christian tradition. This explains why it is that Christian hymns often have the character of confessions of faith, as Delling remarks;<sup>11</sup> and the same is true of parts of the Old Testament. In both Testaments redemption calls forth the loudest notes of praise; and redemption is rooted in historical event.

(c) Directly arising from this emphasis Christian hymns keep clear the tremendous distinction between God and man. This difference is not always observed in Greek thought; and man is thought to reach his truest fulfilment by attaining to divinity which the gods enjoy. The conclusion of Keyssner's full study takes up this theme:<sup>12</sup> 'The Greeks have placed their gods exactly in a human frame, and have made them according to the "picture of the ideal" (*Idealbild*) set before their eyes; and so the divine existence corresponds to the conditions of life as men picture them... Such an exact correspondence shows that the highest human desire is to come as nearly as possible to the divine existence, to become as the gods.' The motive which inspires many typically Greek hymns of supplication is that of self-realization, and leaves the underlying aspiration open to the charge of self-centredness. Thus Delling concludes a critique of heathen prayer by saying that, even when it is elevated, it knows no great concern which frees a man from his isolation and egocentricity.<sup>13</sup> Christian worship

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<sup>8</sup> J. Kroll, *Gnomon*, v, 1929, 31.

<sup>9</sup> K. Keyssner, *Gottesvorstellung und Lebensauffassung im griechischen Hymnus*, 1932, esp. 166 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Compare: 'Zeus, whoever he be—if to be called and invoked by this name is pleasing to him, even thus do I address him', is the confession of the chorus in Agamemnon, lines 160-165. Lucius invokes the Queen of heaven under various names—Ceres, Venus, Diana, Proserpina, Hecate—for he does not know which suits her best. *Metam.* xi. 1-2.

Even the majestic exordium in Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*: 'Most glorious of the immortals, Zeus all powerful', trails off into an identification of Zeus with Fate. Cf. A.-J. Festugière, *Personal Religion among the Greeks*, 1960 ed. 111 ff.

<sup>11</sup> G. Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, ET 1962, 87-88.

<sup>12</sup> Keyssner, *op. cit.* 168-169.

<sup>13</sup> Delling, *op. cit.* 114. Aelius Aristides (II cent. AD) is the author of prayer to Zeus which provides interesting comparative material. The hymn is a panegyric upon the deliverance which he has known, but the occasion is a vow that he has made when in need at sea. It is dangerous not to keep such a promise.

Aristides' *Hymn to Serapis*, which was recited at Smyrna shortly after he returned from Egypt, is important for a type of aretology which is representative of Greek theology.

Serapis is hailed as the Lord of death; as judge and helper; as entering into a fellowship-meal with the cult devotees; and as healer and worker of miracles. Delling, *op. cit.*, 101 comments that all this eulogistic material is true to experience, but we must observe that it is not Aristides' personal experience. As Wilamowitz-

fastens the believer's attention upon objective realities which call forth altruistic interests—the coming of the Kingdom of God, the progress of the Gospel and the upbuilding of the Church. Christian hymn and prayer should lift a man's thought above himself, break through the circle of his own selfishness and bid him rise to the challenge of a life 'worthy of God'.

Christian hymnology stands in relation to both Jewish antecedents and pagan examples as the fulfilment stands to the longing which precedes it. That which explains the transition is the Gospel of God. This brings with it to the Church an awareness of eschatological fulfilment, the conviction of living in the decisive hour of human history wherein God has visited and redeemed humankind. It is this feature which is the key to the newness of the songs which the New Testament sings. As M. Mezger puts it, 'The newness lies in the eschatological hope, not in new forms';<sup>14</sup> but the forms serve the interest of the Gospel.

Older forms which are unsuitable are discarded. New forms are created as they are needed. Because the New Testament is the record of the Divine interposition into history in Christ and of human response thereto, it would be singular indeed if no voices of praise and acknowledgement proclaimed this event. If at creation's dawn the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy, is it not reasonable to expect that at the new creation, at the inbreaking of a new Age, hymns of joy with a *Gloria in excelsis* should herald it?

The second encouragement in the task of locating New Testament cultic songs lies in the following direct evidence which the New Testament itself

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supplies. Two sets of data (*a.* 1 Cor. xiv. 26; and *b.* Col. iii. "6 and Eph. v. 19) provide some explicit testimony to the fact that, in the worship of the New Testament Churches—at least, those of Pauline foundation—psalms of praise were sung.

*a.* 'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation' (RSV).

Added to this is 1 Corinthians xiv. 15: 'I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also', which looks forward to the reference to the 'hymn' of verse 26. The Corinthian Church rejoiced in the possession and exercise of many spiritual gifts (τὰ χαρίσματα: cf. i. 5-7). Paul comments in chapter xiv on the way in which all the Church-members came together (συνέρχθητε) for public worship; and the tense he uses puts vividly before us the moment of the gathering of the congregation when each person, who has a gift, comes with the eager purpose of exercising it. It is true that Paul does not actually say that each of the gifts which he mentions was available; and in that sense Lietzmann is right in describing this rubric as depicting an ideal state of affairs.<sup>15</sup> But there is an overtone of the Apostle's wish too: 'Let

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Moellendorff notes, there is no trace of special devotion to the god. There is in these hymns of the rhetorician 'not the slightest trace of personal religion' (Festugière, *op. cit.* 99). And, as Delling concedes, no thought of the planned saving action of the god in history, but only the occasional intervention in the life of the individual. On Aristides' ἱεροὶ λόγοι and 'the character and religious ideas' of the poet, cf. André Boulanger's full study, *Aelius Aristides et la Sophistique dans province d'Asie au II<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère*, 1923, 163-209.

<sup>14</sup>M. Mezger, *RGG*<sup>3</sup>, iv, Col. 1221.

<sup>15</sup>H. Lietzmann (revised by W. G. Kümmel) *An die Korinther (HzNT)* 1949, *ad loc.*

each of you have a hymn, etc.' There is certainly no warrant for supposing, with Abbott,<sup>16</sup> that Paul deprecates the use of these gifts. His main concern is that whatever gift is used, all spiritual exercises should serve the one end: πάντα πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν γινέσθω.

The commentators are divided over the question: Does the placing of ψαλμός as the first in the list mean that the Corinthian service began with public praise?<sup>17</sup> If there is this significance in the order, the mention of psalmody at the head of the list would link up with the synagogue worship which begins with the note of praise. The exact meaning of ψαλμός is also disputed. It may be an allusion to an Old Testament psalm (the word is so used in Luke xxiv. 44, Acts i. 20, xiii. 33). The suggestion is more likely, however, of a newly composed utterance which the inspiring Spirit placed on the lips of the enraptured worshipper, as verse 15 implies.<sup>18</sup>

The oldest allusion to primitive Christian hymns is found in these sections of 1 Corinthians xiv. Verses 3-16 seem to indicate that 'the speaking with tongues'—*glossolalia*—expressed itself in the form of an inspired hymnic prayer. Verse 15 sets praying and singing side by side; and it is apparent from the phrasing of the Pauline sentences that both activities at Corinth were thought of as directly inspired by the Spirit—and consequently highly valued. Verse 16 explicates the preceding verse by replacing 'praying' and 'singing psalms' with 'blessing in the Spirit', which is then called 'giving thanks' εὐχαριστία; and this new terminology is continued in verse 17. From this development in the Apostle's discussion it may be submitted that the ψαλμός of xiv. 26 is in the nature of an ecstatically-inspired hymn of thanksgiving to God, as the worshipper is caught up in an emotion of ecstasy and pours forth his praise in blessing God. The Apostolic rubric, while recognizing this type of utterance as a product of the Spirit's activity (cf. the admission of verse 18: 'I thank God I speak in tongues more than you all', with a possible pun on εὐχαριστεῖν) places the emphasis more on the praying and 'hymning' with the mind. Along with this shift of emphasis goes a series of injunctions (verses 27-33) which E. Kasemann has classified as traces of 'sacred law' in the New Testament on the basis of verse 38.<sup>19</sup>

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- b. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.'  
Col. iii. 16 (RSV)

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<sup>16</sup>Quoted by Robertson-Plummer, *1 Corinthians (ICC)* 1914 *ad loc.*

<sup>17</sup>A negative answer is returned to this question by Robertson-Plummer. In the *IB*, x, 1953, *ad loc.* the exegete asks, 'From its position in the list are we not to conclude that their meetings opened with song?' The expositor is more sure: 'Apparently they began with a hymn: the note of praise is struck at the outset'. Cf. J. Moffatt, *1 Corinthians (MNTC)* 1938, 227.

<sup>18</sup>J. Kroll, *op. cit.* 6 shows that there is no intended contrast between ψαλμός and ὕμνος. He says categorically that 1 Cor. xiv. 26 does not refer to Old Testament psalms. Cf. the discussion in C. Weizsacker, *The Apostolic Age*, II, ET, 1895, 257 ff.

The total range of possible meanings of ὕμνος in 1 Cor. xiv. 26 is discussed by H. Schlier, *Die Verkündigung im Gottesdienst der Kirche*, 1953, 39 ff. Denying that Old Testament psalms are intended, he classifies: hymns which took shape in the meeting and were sung *ad hoc*: hymns composed in earlier meetings: and hymns which developed in different gatherings and repeated at the service envisaged in the text. He refuses to decide between spontaneously produced hymns and traditional ones.

<sup>19</sup>E. Käsemann, art. 'Sätze heiligen Rechtes im Neuen Testament', *NTS* i, 1954-1955, 248 ff. especially 250.

‘Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks’.

Eph. v. 19, 20 (RSV)

The older English-speaking commentators sought to find distinctions in the terminology of ψαλμοί, ὕμνοι, ᾠδαὶ πνευματικαί. W. Lock interpreted<sup>20</sup> the threefold phrase as:—

(a) ψαλμοί are probably the Psalms of the Old Testament, but the term is not limited to these. Lightfoot<sup>21</sup> similarly maintained that ψαλμοί refers ‘specially, though not exclusively, to the Psalms of David’ which, he says, ‘would early form part of the religious worship of the Christian brotherhood’.

(b) ὕμνοι are literally ‘hymns’ in praise of God or Christ (so Lock,) and Lightfoot amplifies this remark by saying that ὕμνοι designates ‘those hymns of praise which were composed by the Christians themselves on distinctively Christian themes, being either set forms of words or spontaneous effusions of the moment’.

(c) ᾠδαὶ πνευματικαί are defined by Lock as spiritual songs of the type represented by certain portions of the New Testament. ᾠδή is a general term for a song. In Colossians iii. 16, as C. Masson remarks,<sup>22</sup> its meaning is decided by the adjective πνευματικαί, although it is true that in the New Testament ᾠδή is exclusively used of a sacred song. There are characteristic references in the Apocalypse to the songs of the heavenly worshippers (v. 9, xiv. 3, xv. 3). ᾠδή, says Lightfoot, gathers up the other two, and extends the precept to all forms of song, with the limitation, however, that they must be πνευματικαί.

It is doubtful, however, if these firm distinctions can be drawn; and more recent scholars are unwilling to delimit the exact scope of the three terms.<sup>23</sup> The epithet πνευματικός may be taken to extend to all the terms, as E. F. Scott and Delling propose.<sup>24</sup> Whatever may be the different emphases suggested by the use of three separate terms it is the Spirit who stirs the worshipper and directs his thought and emotion in lyrical praise.<sup>25</sup> The inspiration of the

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<sup>20</sup> W. Lock, art. s.v. ‘Hymn’, *HDB* ii, 1899, 440 f. and the same author’s *The Epistle to the Ephesians (WC)*, 1929, *ad loc.*

<sup>21</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, 1879, *ad loc.*

<sup>22</sup> C. Masson, *L’épître aux Colossians (CNT)*, 1950, *ad loc.*

<sup>23</sup> So, for example,—

E. Norden, *op. cit.* 179 note 3.

Kroll, *Die christliche Hymnodik*, 5: ‘The most likely thing is that Paul did not have a difference in view in the meaning of the three terms... he by no means intended a distinction in the meaning of this praise’.

J. Marty, art. ‘Étude des textes cultuels de prière contenus dans le Nouveau Testament,’ *RHPR*, iii, 4/5, 1929, 367: ‘Entre ψαλμοί, ὕμνοι et ᾠδαί la distinction est plutôt pratique et “courante” que nettement définie’.

E. F. Scott, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians, (MNTE)*, 1930, 75: ‘Paul seems here to distinguish between several kinds of Christian song, though it may be that he is only describing the same thing in different words’.

H. Schlier, *TWNT*, s.v. ᾠδω, i, 163, 4, declares that there is no distinction in meaning. The terms refer to ‘Kultlieder der Gemeinde’.

<sup>24</sup> E. F. Scott, *op. cit.* 75; G. Delling, *op. cit.* 87.

<sup>25</sup> There is a strict connection between Eph. v. 18b: πλῆροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι and verse 19.

Paul’s concept of the Spirit who inspires Christian prayer and praise is one of the chief contributions he makes in the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. G. Harder, *Paulus and das Gebet*, 1936, places this distinctive contribution in a wider setting by showing how men in the ancient world were fearful of evil spirits which they believed prevented their communion with God (sect. III. 2: Der antike Mensch Paulus and das Gebet,

Spirit is matched by the subject-matter of the hymns, and it is this feature which marks out Christian from pagan hymns. 'The content of the primitive Christian hymns which have been handed down to us is not, therefore, subjective effusions of the emotions but they express in clear-cut sentences praise for the saving activity of God in Christ'.<sup>26</sup> The manifoldness of the terminology indicates that there were many aspects of this redeeming act which called forth Christian adoration in various ways. This is what Schlier apparently means when he writes:<sup>27</sup> 'Spontaneous accumulation (of terms) would signify the fulness of song in the worship'. And the common motif running through the variety of liturgical expressions is thanksgiving to God (εὐχαριστοῦντες, Col. iii. 17: Eph. v. 20). From the verses which have been studied we may draw the following picture of the form and content of the psalmody of Christian worship in the primitive Churches. The characteristic note was one of spontaneous praise which expressed thanksgiving to God. There is no suggestion of a stereotyped pattern, except that in the Corinthian assembly the 'psalm of praise' is placed at the head of the list. Unpredictable spontaneity under the

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immediate afflatus of the Spirit seems to have been the distinctive characteristic. 'Someone in the meeting would suddenly be stirred by an emotion which would break out of its own accord into rhythmical language to the accompaniment of a rude tune'.<sup>28</sup> There is no evidence for the use of musical instruments;<sup>29</sup> and if we picture the believers as men and women drawn from the poorer strata of society and meeting clandestinely,<sup>30</sup> the non-mention of instrumental music is not surprising. The 'making melody' (ψάλλοντες; Eph. v. 19) is 'in the heart'.

These early 'inspired odes' would no doubt be of little value, and their contents would be quickly forgotten. There is some evidence to show that, partly under Pauline influence, the flow of spontaneous utterances of this type was checked, and a more formal, stylized pattern of worship emerged. The development is one towards a more set and regular order of public worship which leads to the Church manuals and service-books of the second century onwards. But at least the texts which are just quoted testify to the existence of early Christian *carmina*; and raise the question whether, in fact, any traces of such material still remain in the documents of the New Testament period.

A third incentive to the prosecution of the task before us arises from a new understanding of the documents we call the New Testament. There are two germane factors which may be considered. The first relates to the way in which the New Testament books—and the Pauline Epistles, in particular—were written. On a new understanding, the Epistles are no longer viewed as deposits of Christian doctrine which set the scholar the task of extracting the 'teaching concept' (*Lehrbegriff*) from any given passage. As N. A. Dahl brings out,<sup>31</sup> from about the year 1900 onwards the researches of scholars have been concerned with the New

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159 ff.). It is by an understanding of the Spirit of God as the Inspirer and Guide of prayer that 'der Christ. Paul. kann die Gebetsproblematik des antiken Menschen Paulus überwinden', 163.

<sup>26</sup> Delling, *op. cit.* 87 f.

<sup>27</sup> Schlier, *op. cit.* 39.

<sup>28</sup> E. F. Scott, *op. cit.* 75; cf. G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Ephesians (ExB)* for a vivid, if imaginative, account of this, 345 f.

<sup>29</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 1961, 65; cf. the same author's *The Birth of the New Testament*, 1962, 26, 27, for an interesting reference to Apoc. xiv. 2.

<sup>30</sup> G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*,<sup>2</sup> 1945, 141 ff. has an unforgettable description of this aspect of the Church's life *vis-à-vis* the first century world.

<sup>31</sup> N. A. Dahl, art. 'Anamnesis. Mémoire et Commémoration dans le christianisme primitif,' *ST*, 1, 1947, 69-95.



Testament literature as portraying not systematized dogma in an abstract form but Christian truth related to life. 'Le fondement n'était pas le dogme christologique, mais le culte du Christ'. The New Testament was seen as a transcript of the life of believers as they were engaged in the actual business of worship, preaching and living the Christian life.<sup>32</sup>

This statement implies that the books were composed, circulated and read with the spiritual needs of the early believers always in view. They were written as 'Church' documents, written 'from faith to faith',<sup>32a</sup> and addressed to their recipients as men and women who were members of the worshipping body of Christ. Moreover the Epistles in particular are not the work of religious or literary geniuses, intended to be analysed and discussed as though they were works of art. The background of Paul's Letters is far different from that of the student in the study or the library. It is not 'the leisure of the scholar, nor the quiet of the academy, but the turmoil of a life of action and of continual danger' that provides the proper setting.<sup>33</sup>

Added to this is the fact that much of the contents of the Pauline Letters assumes that he is with the congregations at their worship when he writes to his Churches, that is, he is present with them 'in the Spirit' (cf. 1 Cor. v. 1 ff. ; Col. ii. 5); and that he expects that his Epistles will be read out in such services (Col. iv. 16; 1 Thess. v. 27).

Paul reminds the Corinthians (in 1 Cor. i. 2) that they are united with all the other communities in the world which (in worship, for the verb ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου is parallel with the Old Testament cultic term *gārā' b'šem Yahweh*; 'to invoke the name of Yahweh in worship') 'call upon' the name of

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Jesus, i.e. make profession of their faith in Him in the public assembly. It seems clear, therefore, that before his mind's eye, as he wrote, Paul had a picture of the Church assembled for public worship. His introductory greetings and prayers of thanksgiving also point to the same conclusion;<sup>34</sup> and confirm the verdict of modern scholarship that the New Testament literature was composed with services of worship distinctly in view. The claim which this scholarship makes, then, is that the reader of the New Testament today is able to enter into the public worship of the early Church because just beneath the surface of the written corpus we call the New Testament are the praises, prayers, hymns and confessions of faith of the first

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<sup>32</sup> One of the earliest writers persuasively to bring out the significance of the cultus for primitive Christianity was A. Deissmann, *St. Paul, ET*, 1912, 169 f. For the debate between the cultic and non-cultic interpretations of the New Testament texts, cf. E. Sjöberg, art. 'The Church and the Cultus', *This is the Church*, ed. A. Nygren, *ET*, 1952, 75 ff.

<sup>32a</sup> This description was applied to the Gospel tradition by J. Weiss, *Das älteste Evangelium*, 1903, 41.

<sup>33</sup> F. W. Beare, *St. Paul and his Letters*, 1962, 17.

<sup>34</sup> This subject has been thoroughly investigated by L. G. Champion, *Benedictions and Doxologies in the Epistles of Paul* (Diss. 1934). He shows that:

i. In the opening greetings of the Letters the mention of God or Christ is seldom made in a short, simple phrase, but is usually followed by one or more phrases containing the ascription of attributes or mention of activities. These additional phrases are in participial clauses (cf. the Jewish prayers in the *Shemoneh 'Esreh*; and Anglican Collects): 2 Cor. i. 3; Eph. i. 3; 2 Thess. ii. 16; Rom. iv. 17; 1 Thess. v. 24; Phil. iv. 7; Gal. i. 4; 1 Thess. ii. 12.

ii. Divine attributes are often expressed by genitival phrases, which is another liturgical trait borrowed from the synagogue: 2 Cor. i. 3 ; xiii. 11; 2 Thess. iii. 16; Rom. xv. 13.

iii. The full titles used of God or Christ are expressed in a solemn liturgical form. The majority of the phrases used do not occur in the body of the Epistles. The conclusion here is that Paul draws upon common traditional material. It would be the common property of the Church in its worship.

believers.<sup>35</sup> The writers of the several Epistles (and, so recent Gospel criticism maintains, the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John)<sup>36</sup> incorporated into their productions various liturgical and cultic forms in a way similar to that in which devotional writers today use material from the hymnbooks and the liturgical language of the Church down the ages. And the Gospels and Letters were intended to be read out to gatherings of God's people as they came together on the Lord's day.

If this claim is well-founded, the New Testament text will need to be subjected to close scrutiny if such 'deposits'<sup>37</sup> are to be exposed to sight. There are certain criteria by which cultic and confessional forms may be detected. E. Stauffer has provided us with twelve tests;<sup>38</sup> and these will be examined in due course. It is sufficient at this point to register the fact that, on a new approach to the letter-writing processes of the Apostles, many allusions to Christian hymns and hymnic prayers may lie just beneath the surface of the texts and be the living expression of the writers' or readers' participation in the worshipping life of the Churches of their day.

A second element in recent New Testament study which is relevant to our concern is a revised evaluation of the place of the Apostle Paul. This change is marked by a comment penned in 1936: 'At the present time the most vital books being written on the New Testament are those which seek to penetrate into the "twilight period" before the earliest Christian traditions had taken literary form'.<sup>39</sup> This period is the time of the pre-Pauline Church, the decades which separate the birth of the Church and the literary activities of the Apostle.

A. M. Hunter has produced a comprehensive survey of the lines of this enquiry.<sup>40</sup> He demonstrates that it is wrong to think of St. Paul as a sort of spiritual Columbus, or with a change of metaphor, as 'a lone pioneer blazing single-handed, the trail of early Christianity'. He was chosen and called to his Apostolic ministry, but not in splendid isolation from the rest of his fellow-believers who were 'in Christ' before him (cf. Acts ix. 10 ff.; Romans xvi. 7). The demonstration is conducted on a wide front as he combs the canonical Letters for the evidence. His excavations show that there are fragments of early Christian creeds which Paul learned from the Churches in Jerusalem and Antioch; early hymns which, no doubt, he heard in their worship; sayings of Jesus he would remember and pass on to the converts in the Gentile Churches he corresponded with; collections of Old Testament proof-texts which he learned to use, and did use, in his Letters; the rich inheritance of the Gospel sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, into which he entered; and above all, a Christology which

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<sup>35</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, art. 'The evidence in the New Testament for early creeds, catechisms and liturgy'. *ExT*, lxxi, 12, 1960, 359 ff.

<sup>36</sup> G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel of Matthew*, 1946. P. Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar*, 1952 (on Mark): *According to Mark*, 1961. For an up-to-date discussion see E. P. Blair, *Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, 1960, Chapter 1.

O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, *ET* 1953, 37 ff. (on the sacramental interest in the Fourth Gospel); A. Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*, 1960; and for an extreme statement of the case, W. H. Raney, *The Relation of the Fourth Gospel to the Christian Cultus*, 1933, who attempts to show that the Prologue and other parts of the Gospel represent in form 'Prose hymns' which were meant to be sung by choristers as preludes or postludes to the public reading of the narrative parts.

<sup>37</sup> This is Delling's term 'und der Niederschlag dieser Vorgänge wird für uns sichtbar in den Briefen', *Gottesdienst im neuen Testament*, 1952, 55. This term is somewhat obscured in the *ET*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, *ET* 1955, 338, 339.

<sup>39</sup> G. H. C. Macgregor in the foreword to P. G. S. Hopwood's *The Religious Experience of the Primitive Church*, 1936.

<sup>40</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*, 1940 (rev. 1961).

was already there before he appeared on the scene, but which he immeasurably enriched, while at the same time remaining loyal to the

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basic convictions he learned from his Christian predecessors. The true estimate of him is that which pictures him as a wise 'masterbuilder' who, under God, reared up the great edifice of Christian truth—but who used the stones 'already quarried and hewn into rough shape' by his predecessors.

A corollary of this estimate of Paul is that it is more than likely that he will draw upon the common liturgical traditions and confessional formulas when he writes to his fellow-Christians. He will not write *de novo*, but where the argument requires and the situation demands he will appeal to that which his readers and he have in common<sup>41</sup>—whether it is an accepted piece of teaching, a Church-practice which is familiar or a snatch of hymnody which his fellow-believers will immediately recognize—and this will add extra weight to his ruling or give added persuasiveness to his plea.

The existence of 'traditional' forms which both the Apostle and his converts shared is a further *prima facie* reason why we should seek in what comes from his hand traces of hymnic material which belongs to the common stock of the nascent Church.

## II. THE PRESENCE OF HYMNS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### A. *Hymns, Confessions and Creeds*

One prominent feature of early Christian cultus which derived from the worship of the synagogue was the public confession of the congregation's faith. In Judaism this proclamation is made in the terms of the *Shema*. The desire to make a public and united declaration of faith, as far as the worship of the new Israel is concerned, is attested by the various terms which are used in the New Testament. The chief of these is from the root ὁμολογ- (noun: ὁμολογία; verb: ὁμολογεῖν).

The noun ὁμολογία is used both actively and passively. In the first sense it means 'an act of confessing', as in 2 Corinthians ix, 13: 'Your confessing the gospel finds expression in obedient subjection to its requirements'.

In the sense of 'confession', 'admission', 'an acknowledgment that is made' the use of ὁμολογία is more significant. Thus we notice Hebrews iii. 1: 'Jesus, the apostle and high priest of whom our confession speaks'; Hebrews iv. 14: 'hold fast our confession'; Hebrews x. 23: 'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope', i.e. the confession in which is our hope.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> We may instance:

His use of the formula ἡ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι; in, e.g. Rom. vi. 3. Rom. vi. 17: 'the standard of teaching to which you were committed': Col. ii. 7 'as you were taught'; Eph. iv. 20, 21. Cf. 1 Cor. XV. 11.

1 Cor. xiv. 33; xvi. 1; and especially xi. 16; 'If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God'. The reference Paul makes to the 'traditions' is an important factor in showing his dependence upon other Christians (1 Cor. xi. 2; xv. 1 f.; Gal. 1. 9; Col. ii. 6; 1 Thess. iv. 1, 2; 2 Thess. ii. 15). See, in particular, B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, 1961, 288 ff.

<sup>42</sup> A baptismal setting of such 'confessions' in Hebrews is proposed by G. Bornkamm, art. 'Das Bekenntnis im Hebraerbrieff' in his *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze/Band II*, 1959, 188 ff. Cf. the earlier conclusions of a similar nature by A. Seeberg, *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit*, 1903, 145 f.

In 1 Timothy vi. 12 testimony is borne to Timothy: 'You made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses', as the Lord did before him (verse 13).

The range of meanings covered by the verb is wider.<sup>43</sup> In Matthew xiv. 7 the verb is used of Herod's promise to Herodias' daughter; but the more usual meaning is 'to declare publicly' some personal conviction, either as an expression of loyalty to a person or as an acceptance of a proposition (Matt. x. 32 = Luke xii. 8: confessing Christ before men; John ix. 22, xii. 42: confessing Christ before the Jewish leaders; Acts xxiv. 14: Paul's admission to Felix. The latter usage, with the sense of the acceptance of a statement, is expressed by the Greek construction of a noun clause introduced by ὅτι, as in Heb. xi. 13, 1 Jn. iv. 15). The most important references, for the purposes of an understanding of Christian worship, are those which speak of the believers' public and solemn

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declaration of faith in Christ (as in Rom. x. 9, 10; Heb. xiii. 15; 1 Jn. iv. 2. O. Michel aptly compares 2 Cor. iv. 13).

Recent studies have shown the importance which was attached to congregational confessions in the worship of the early Church.<sup>44</sup> The responses which the texts envisage are not those in terms of 'a formulation of religious experiences, an individual confession, but a response to and repetition of God's word'<sup>45</sup> which is addressed to the Church. The words which the congregation take upon their lips are a suitable response to what God has done and said in Christ. As W. Maurer puts it, 'Confession is the reply of the Church to the revelation in Christ which God has given to it... it is the Spirit-inspired response to the divine act of grace'.<sup>46</sup> As believers assembled for worship and as they were reminded of all that God had accomplished on their behalf in the Gospel, they would break forth in some formula of grateful acknowledgment which was both a confession of their praise and appreciation, and an expression of their faith.

A second feature of Christian confession has been noted in modern study. The place where the Church could see and hear most clearly the nature of all that God had achieved was in the sacraments. In an objective form the kernel of the Gospel would be revealed and make its appeal to the gathered company. Both Gospel ordinances powerfully conveyed the reality of God's redeeming action in Christ. Baptism depicted the inner meaning of what God had done and how men were brought within the sphere of the Gospel's saving influence (Rom. vi. 4. ff.; Col. ii. 12 ff., iii. 1 ff.; cf. Gal. iii. 27, Eph. v. 25 ff., Tit. iii. 5-7). It is not difficult to imagine that it was at a service of baptism that the newly-awakened Christian would wish to make some definite verbal response to the message he had heard and accepted.<sup>47</sup> And there is

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<sup>43</sup> O. Michel, *TWNT*, v, 206 ff. gives a full survey of the texts and the literature.

<sup>44</sup> The fullest study is that by W. Maurer, *Bekennntnis und Sakrament I*, 1939.

<sup>45</sup> G. Bornkamm, *loc. cit.* 192.

<sup>46</sup> W. Maurer, *op. cit.* 1.

<sup>47</sup> This is the major thesis of Maurer's book cited above: 'the principle of the credal development is the principle of the sacramental life of the Church' (2). This is especially true, he states, in baptism in which the 'verbal confession corresponded to that which baptism pictured. The word and the action go together' (6). See J. Crehan, *Early Christian Baptism and the Creed*, 1950, 36 ff.

Two passages in the New Testament, apart from the instance of the Ethiopian in Acts viii. 36, 37 (D), seem to make reference to a baptismal confession: Ephesians v. 25, 26, which C. A. Anderson Scott, *Christianity according to St. Paul*, 1932, 119, renders: 'Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for her, that he might consecrate her after cleansing in the waterbath (of baptism) together with the Formula'. On the last phrase,

evidence that this is precisely how confessions of faith were made; and how confessions grew into creeds.<sup>48</sup>

At the Lord's table also the declaration was made of all that the Lord's death involved (1 Cor. xi. 26), after the pattern of the Jewish recital (in the *Haggādāh*) of God's redemption of the fathers from the Egyptian bondage. H. Lietzmann has argued with cogency that confessions of Christ find their natural *fons et origo* in the Eucharistic prayers which gave meaning to the rite.<sup>49</sup>

Another significant factor in the evoking of confessions should not be overlooked. We admittedly know little about the way in which ceremonial and sacramental acts were performed in the New Testament Church; and it is easy to speculate without much evidence to corroborate the theory. O. Cullmann has argued that every assembly for worship in the early Church was attended by some sacramental observance, especially the Eucharist. He lays it down categorically that 'as a rule there was no gathering of the community without the breaking of bread'.<sup>50</sup> A number of scholars have pointed out that this really goes beyond the evidence at our disposal.

If any conclusion about New Testament worship is possible, it would be safest to say that the general impression the records give is one of spontaneous and uninhibited freedom. This is certainly the case as far as Paul allows us to enter into the worship of the Church at Corinth, although it would be a mistake to think that Corinthian worship was the accepted pattern throughout the Pauline and Apostolic Churches.

1 Corinthians x—xiv present us with a series of cameos in regard to the

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worshipping life of the Church in that city. The main characteristic feature seems to have been that of variety as each member made his or her contribution to the pattern of worship, all of which should ideally have drawn the minds and emotions of the worshippers to the redeeming acts of God. The believers would give expression to these deep sentiments in praise, hymn, prayer, *glossolalia* and confession; and with the interpreting word given to them by one member who had the charisma of teaching, they would be in a right frame of mind to meet at the Table.<sup>51</sup>

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he comments: 'By the Formula Paul probably means the public acknowledgment by the persons to be baptized of Jesus as Lord' in terms of Rom. x. 9. And the other passage is 1 Peter iii. 21 which may mean 'the "pledge"... given in response to a demand: the baptismal candidate answers affirmatively to God's request for faith and obedience' (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 1962, 261).

<sup>48</sup> This is Lietzmann's hypothesis, which is succinctly stated in his own words: 'It is indisputable that the root of all creeds is the formula of belief pronounced by the baptizand, or pronounced in his hearing and assented to by him, before his baptism', *Die Anfänge des Glaubensbekenntnisses: Festgabe von Fachgenossen und Freunde A. von Harnack... dargebracht*, 1921, 226-242 (228)—quoted and closely scrutinized by J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 1950, 30 ff.

<sup>49</sup> H. Lietzmann, art. 'Symbolstudien VIII-XII, *ZNTW* xxiii, 1923, 257-279 especially 265.

<sup>50</sup> O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, 29. Cullmann's thesis: 'kein Gemeindegottesdienst ohne Abendmahl' is criticized by E. Schweizer, *Gottesdienst im Neuen Testament*, 13 f.; and by implication in V. Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, 1958, 161-166 and B. Reicke, art. 'Worship in the New Testament' in *New Testament Essays in memory of T. W. Manson*, 1959, 206.

<sup>51</sup> For the aspects of Christian worship in 1 Cor. xiv, see E. Schweizer, art. 'The Service of Worship', *Interpretation*, xiii, 4, 1959, 400-408; and J. M. Robinson's essay (as yet unpublished) 'Primitive Christian "Hodayoth" '.

The term 'confession', therefore, is to be explained as the jubilant response of the fellowship as they share in these acts which remind them of—and, in a sense, take them up into—the saving activity of God in Christ. At least one fragment of confessional material has survived in its original Aramaic form the invocation *Mārānā thā*: 'Our Lord, come'. It has been proposed that this prayer belongs to the Eucharistic liturgy. But in any case it almost certainly belongs to the congregational worship of the primitive Church at Jerusalem; and carries us back to those post-Pentecostal days when the Nazoraeans met for the practice of 'the apostles' instruction, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers' (Acts ii. 42-47).

It is hard to draw a firm line between responses which are properly called confessions and those which took on a poetic and hymnic form. R. Bultmann, however, makes a rough distinction which we may accept and utilize. Commenting on the text of 1 Peter iii. 18-22 he writes:<sup>52</sup> 'Is the text a hymn or a creed? We cannot always distinguish between the two; for the style and language and construction may be the same in both cases. We know too little about the cultic praxis of the early Churches to say just how far cultic doxology, creed and hymn were separated from one another. In general, however, we can say that a creed in the strict sense, and particularly a baptismal creed, was relatively short. Originally it would have consisted in a simple "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Rom. x. 9), or in a short sentence like the Western text of Acts viii. 37: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Gradually this creed became extended. Christ was characterized by descriptions of His Person and His saving work, until that confession of Him took precedence over the confession of God. Compared with the relatively brief creeds, the hymns must have had a wider range—for instance Philippians ii. 5 ff., Colossians i. 15-20 and the Odes of Solomon.'

Bultmann mentions in this paragraph some of the main credal forms which scholars have detected and classified. The criteria by which such credal and hymnic forms may be seen in the New Testament text may now be set down.

### ***B. Criteria for ascertaining Confessions and Hymns***

(a) Early Christian credal formulations may be detected, using the tests which E. Stauffer offers:<sup>53</sup>

*i.* The forms may be introduced by terms like 'deliver', 'believe' or 'confess'. Romans x. 9 and 1 Corinthians xv. 3 ff. are most illustrious examples of this trait. The use of special grammatical constructions after the verbs affords further evidence.

*ii.* The insertion of credal material is often marked by contextual dislocations, as in 1 Timothy iii. 16.

*iii.* There are syntactical disturbances which show that the writer is deliber-

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<sup>52</sup> R. Bultmann, art. 'Bekenntnis—und Liedfragmente im ersten Petrusbrief' in *Coniectanea Neotestamentica in honorem A. Fridrichsen*, xi. 1947, 1-14. This quotation comes from his article, 9, with the texts he cites in the Greek translated also into English.

<sup>53</sup> These 'zwölf Kriterien formelhaften Glaubensgutes' are given by E. Stauffer in his *New Testament Theology*, ET 1955, Appendix iii, 338, 339. For a judgment on the relative merit of these criteria, cf. O. Cullmann, *Earliest Christian Confessions*, ET 1949, 20 note 1. A comparative list of criteria for identifying the special literary genre of New Testament formulas is given by J. Schmitt, *Jésus ressuscité dans la prédication apostolique*, 1949: avant-propos xiv. f.

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ately borrowing a text which is set into his writing as a 'foreign body'; e.g. Apocalypse i. 4.

*iv.* Sometimes the text is linguistic and the hypothetical insertion is full of a terminology and style which are different from their context or from the author's accepted writing. The Aramaic watchword *Mārānā thā* is an example of the former; and 1 Corinthians xi. 23 ff. an instance of the latter.

*v.* The content of the credal formulas betrays its presence. Passages which set forth the events of the story of Christ and the achievements which spring therefrom, and do so in short, pregnant, 'lapidary' sentences and clauses, wear all the marks of the language we find in the later Church creeds. We may cite 1 Timothy iii. 16; the closely-knit theological compendium of Romans i. 3 f. and iv. 24-5; and the creeds which apparently lie embedded in 1 Peter (i. 20, ii. 21-24; iii. 18 ff.).

(*b*) When it comes to the question of the detection of hymn-forms (as distinct from credal statements) the evidence is more difficult to assess. The boundaries between the two types of cultic formulations are, as we have noted, not finely drawn; but the following additional criteria may be tried out:

*i.* The clearest sign that a hymn-like passage is being quoted is that a relative clause marks its opening, and is continued by the use of participles in preference to main verbs. Instances of this occur in Philippians ii. 5 f.; Colossians i. 15 ff.; 1 Timothy iii. 16; 1 Peter i. 20 (participles); ii. 23 ff. iii. 18 ff. (participles). In certain of these texts there is intentional antithesis, with two clauses set side by side. The usual symbol for this contrast is  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\text{:}\pi\nu\epsilon\delta\mu\alpha$ . The formulation then takes up the twin themes of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians v. 16 for the symbol). Also, Romans i. 3 f. contains this antithesis.

*ii.* The antithetic style is only one of the rhetorical devices which tend to give a rhythmical quality to the verses. There is the use of anaphora and epiphora (i.e. the opening and ending of the words are composed of the same vowel sounds, thus imparting a rough rhyme and assonance). Examples of this are in Colossians i. 15-20, especially if we accept the elaborate analysis of Masson who introduces the element of metrical quantity.<sup>54</sup> He finds a pattern of metre caused by the regular sequence of syllabic length; and in Philippians ii. 5-11, according to the equally complex analysis of G. Gander.<sup>55</sup>

*iii.* Other stylistic criteria are: the use of gradation (as in 2 Timothy iii. 16; cf. Romans viii. 29-30; x. 13-15): *parallelismus membrorum*, both antithetical (Rom. i. 3-4; 1 Tim. iii. 16; 2 Tim. ii. 8) and synonymous (Eph. v. 14; Rom. x. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 39-41, 53-55); the positioning of the words in such a way that lines and strophes may be arranged (Phil. ii. 6 ff.; Col. i. 15 ff.; 1 Tim. iii. 16; John i. 1-14-these are the most noteworthy passages); and even that a verse-form may be detected (Eph. v. 14 where a division into three lines produces a swinging trochaic rhythm, with *homoeoteleuton* in the first two lines).

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<sup>54</sup> C. Masson, *L'épître de saint Paul aux Colossiens (CNT)* 1950 *ad loc.*

<sup>55</sup> G. Gander, '*L'hymne de la Passion*' (unpublished Diss. Geneva, 1939). The author's kindness in loaning this is acknowledged.

iv. The language test shows the presence of rare terms, in some instances *hapax legomena* as far as the authors are concerned, which produces an elevated, ceremonial, hieratic style. It may be that the words in question were selected because of their syllabic length and case-ending, with a view to producing the right number of stresses in the line and the correct vowel at the end of the line. Instances of this are observable in Philippians ii. 5 ff.; Colossians i. 15 ff.; and 1 Corinthians xiii. 1 ff., xi. 23 ff.; 1 Timothy iii. 16. The artistic structure,

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rhythmic style and stately bearing stand out all the more clearly in vivid contrast to the narrative prose of the surrounding verses.

v. Introductory formulas are sometimes a tell-tale mark, e.g. Ephesians v. 14 διὸ λέγει); Philippians ii. 5 (ὁ καὶ ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ); 1 Peter ii. 6 (περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ); 2 Timothy ii. 11 (πιστὸς ὁ λόγος).

vi. A final criterion is of very recent date, and of debatable validity. A number of scholars have found Gnostic motifs in the New Testament,<sup>56</sup> and in the most important places where these motifs are seen, the structure of the passages is hymn-like. This is true not in the canonical New Testament only, but in the Apostolic Fathers (e.g. Ignatius) and the Gnostic literature of the second and third centuries (e.g. Acts of Thomas, Gospel of Truth, Odes of Solomon). Some of the traits are uniform in all the documents (e.g. the descent of Christ into Hades, His victory of evil spirits). It is therefore argued that where these doctrines are mentioned or alluded to, the passage is likely to be in the literary form of a hymn (Phil. ii. 6-11; Col. i. 15 ff.; 1 Tim. iii. 16; 1 Peter iii. 18 ff.; and certain hymnic portions of Hebrews which, it is claimed, utilize the framework of the Gnostic redemption-myth).<sup>57</sup>

With these criteria in mind, we turn to examine those passages in the New Testament which have been classified as early Christian *carmina*.

### III. THE CLASSIFICATION OF NEW TESTAMENT HYMNS

The most obvious distinction which assists in the tabulating of early Christian hymns is that which marks off Jewish-Christian canticles in the New Testament from those compositions which are distinctively Christian. It must be admitted that this method of division is not to be applied in a hard and fast way; but it will provide a starting point in the attempt to classify the various hymnic forms in the New Testament. The following sections may be placed under the captions of Jewish hymns which the early believers took over and modified to suit their own purposes, by additions and alterations at certain points; and of Jewish-Christian fragments and ejaculations:

a. The Lukan Canticles (Lk. i. 46-55; 68-79; ii. 14.; ii. 29-32).

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<sup>56</sup> R. Bultmann's statement of the case, art. 'Mythos and Mythologie im N.T.' in *RGK*<sup>3</sup>, iv, 1278-1282, gives perhaps the best survey in short compass. At least, so it must have seemed to the editors of *RGK* for Bultmann's contribution was left unchanged from the second edition 'because it has become a classical presentation' (E. Fuchs, *loc. cit.* 1282); see, further, the same author's *Theology of the New Testament*, I 164 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Especially characteristic of this approach is E. Kasemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk: Eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief*,<sup>4</sup> 1961.



b. Jewish-Christian fragments (Rom. xi. 33-36; 1 Tim. i. 17; and certain liturgical forms like "Āmēn", 'Hallelû-jāh', 'Hôša'nā', 'Abbâ' and 'Mārānâ thâ').

c. As a third group we may cite the hymnic forms of the Apocalypse, certain sections of which draw directly from the liturgical vocabulary of the Hellenistic synagogues (e.g. Apoc. iv. 8; iv. 11; xi. 17 f.; xiv. 7; xv. 3 f.) while other parts contain distinctively Christian versicles (e.g. v. 9 f.; v. 12; xii. 10-12; xix. 1 ff.).

d. For hymns which are *de novo* Christian creations, the following classification may be suggested, although it is not possible to fit the New Testament hymns into a rigid pattern. The examples tend to overflow from one category into another; and any one hymn may be classified in more than one way.

With this *caveat* in mind, we submit that, among the hymns in the New Testament Scriptures which are distinctive Christian compositions and which

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bear witness to the new Age which dawned with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are four families represented:

- i. Sacramental
- ii. Meditative
- iii. Confessional
- iv. Christological

(i) Under the heading of *sacramental hymns*, the following texts may be placed: Ephesians v. 14; Titus iii. 4-7;<sup>58</sup> and (although this is very debatable) Romans vi. 1-11,<sup>59</sup> Ephesians ii. 19-22.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For Titus iii. 4-7 ((this is the delimitation of the hymn, according to Meinertz and Scott in their respective commentaries: B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 97, confines the hymn to verses 5b-7 on the ground that it is in these verses that the thought is centred around baptism (102): W. Lock thinks only verses 4-6 are included, or (in a later part of his commentary) 5-7: Dibelius takes in verse 3 to verse 6a: and Jeremias translates verses 5-7 in versified form)) as a baptismal hymn, with a formula which comes at the end (in verse 8a) and which thanks God in the so-called 'We-style' for the grace of baptism (so Jeremias), the full treatment in M.-E. Boismard, *Quatre Hymnes baptismales dans la première épître de Pierre*, 1961, 20 ff. and (on the exegetical side) G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 1962, 209 ff. may be quoted.

<sup>59</sup> For an older attempt to treat Romans vi. 1 ff. as containing an earlier Christian hymn see A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*,<sup>2</sup> 1961, 38. He comments that there are rhythm and parallelism, even *homoeoteleuton*, in verses 8-10; but nothing in the contents to show that the passage is not the elevated argumentation of the Apostle himself. On the other hand, O. Michel, *Römerbrief (Meyer)* 1957, 131, believes that Paul is making use of a traditional baptismal hymn or liturgy.

<sup>60</sup> W. Nauck, art. 'Eph. 2: 19-22: ein Tauflied?', *EvTh.* xiii, 1953 362-371 returns a positive answer to the question which provoked his study; while G. Schille, 'Liturgisches Gut im Epheserbriefe' (unpublished Diss. Göttingen, 1953) believes that a considerable number of baptismal fragments maybe traced in the Letter as a whole. He discusses the following passages: i. 3-12 is an 'Initiationslied', composed of an introit in verses 3, 4 and two strophes (verses 5-8: 9-12), each strophe having four lines. Eph. i. 17-22 is a prayer in the baptismal-liturgical tradition, with its theme an epiclesis for the Spirit. Eph. ii. 4-10 is a 'Versöhnungslied', set in a baptismal context (cf. verse 5b), followed by an 'Erlöserlied' in verses 14-18. These fragments are all parts of a baptismal liturgy on which the author is drawing. In Ephesians v. 14 there is 'a call to awake' (Weckruf) and a hymn of awakening (Weeklied). The main support he finds for this elaborate analysis of the Letter—and he is compelled to regard many verses as glosses in order to carry through a systematic analysis—is the alternation between the first person plural and the second person plural in the verbs. This, he deduces, is caused by the

It is generally recognized that Ephesians v. 14. is the clearest witness, in the New Testament corpus, to the existence of Christian hymns in the primitive Church. There are some good grounds for this confidence:

a. The introductory formula διὸ λέγει reads as though it were added expressly to prepare for the citation of a hymn.

b. The verse naturally divides into three lines on stylistic grounds. A. M. Hunter has noted the 'swinging trochaic rhythm in the Greek, and homoioteleuton in the first two lines' of the triplet.<sup>61</sup>

c. As to the *Sitz im Leben* of the verse, this is most suitably found in the cultic life of the early Church. The verse contains an invocational appeal addressed to the Christian and summoning him to action; at the same time, it offers him the promise of Divine favour. The first two lines are a rousing summons to moral activity; and the third line is the accompanying promise: διὸ λέγει :

ἔγειρε ὁ καθεύδων,  
καὶ ἀναστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,  
καὶ ἐπιφάσει ὁ χριστός

This may be reproduced in translation as:

'Awake, O sleeper,  
From thy grave arise.  
The light of Christ upon thee shines' (Wand's translation)

In view of the stirring exhortation contained in the verse, and the combination of metaphors (sleep, death, light) applied to the spiritual life of the Christian, the most natural event with which it is associated is Christian baptism. The lines would then, *ex hypothesi*, be the accompanying chant to the baptismal action; and the solemnity of the occasion—especially if there are eschatological overtones in the hymn, as B. Noack has suggested<sup>62</sup>—would fix the verse indelibly upon the mind and heart of the neophyte as he emerged from the baptismal water.

If the snatch of hymnic exhortation relates to such an event in the cultic life of the community, the reason why the author of the Letter can quote it as something well-known to

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constant change from the text of the baptismal liturgy to the author's *applicatio*. (This summary of an inaccessible dissertation is based on H. Greeven's 'Nachtrag', appended to Dibelius' *An die Epheser (HZNT)*<sup>3</sup> 1953, 112 f. Cf. *ThLZ*, lxxx, 1955, 183 f.).

<sup>61</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*,<sup>2</sup> 39.

<sup>62</sup> B. Noack, art. 'Das Zitat in Ephes. v. 14', *ST*, v, 1952, 52-64, has offered a full examination of the liturgical background of this text. He begins by granting that 'it is most probable that Eph. v. 14 is to be explained as a baptismal hymn', but he parts company with the majority of scholars in refusing to interpret the key-terms (sleep, awake, and shine) in a metaphorical way. He wishes to take them as literal; and thus 'only the Second Advent of the Lord can be meant, when He comes again on the clouds of heaven, and summons the dead from the graves. The hymn is concerned with the resurrection of the dead at the Parousia, and is an eschatological hymn whose words, strictly speaking, have not yet sounded out, but will do so first at Dooms day' (62). Then, 'Christ will be to the one who is raised from the dead both light and sun'; yet inasmuch as baptism points forward to the resurrection of the dead, the hymn is 'still a baptismal hymn' (64), serving to remind the neophyte that he is raised now with Christ to newness of life, and will be raised to the fulness of that life at the Parousia.

his readers, and introduce it quite naturally at this point in his ethical counsels to the 'Ephesians' as a challenging call to that newness of life into which the convert was first introduced at baptism, will be explained.

Further endorsement of the fact that this is the right *Sitz im Leben* of the hymn is supplied by the use of the verbs ἔγειρε, ἀναστα and ἐπιφύσει which are common often in a baptismal context. In the primitive Church baptism is frequently known as 'enlightenment' (φωτισμός); and the rising of the

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convert from the death of sin to union with the living Lord is represented by the sacrament of initiation.

(ii) We should classify the following as *hymn-like meditations*: Ephesians i. 3-14;<sup>63</sup> Romans viii. 31-39 and 1 Corinthians xiii. These passages are marked by a highly rhetorical style, the use of elevated and stately language and a concern with profound theological and ethical themes. But it would be rash to say that they are to be identified as Christians hymns, used in Divine service, unless we are prepared to give (as some writers are willing to do)<sup>64</sup> the name of hymn to any New Testament passages of poetic and lyrical structure.

(iii) There is more justification for the title of hymn as applied to 1 Timothy vi. 11-16 and 2 Timothy ii. 11-13. There is no agreement as to the exact setting of the first passage. Timothy is reminded of 'the good confession' he has made 'in the presence of many witnesses' (verse 12); and is charged 'to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach' (verse 14). The reference to the confession and the vow may relate to the promise given in baptism, or to Timothy's ordination vow, or to an arraignment at court.<sup>65</sup> The hymnic form of the passage is most apparent in verses 15 f. in which the employment of a rhythmical—and even rhyming—language, the marks of an elevated style and the presence of some unusual expressions seem clearly to point to the incorporating by the author of some traditional, hymnic material, possibly borrowed from the Hellenistic Diaspora. 'As often, so here, the thought of the Apostle comes to rest only in the worship of God... he prays in solemn language with the words of a well-known doxology, which is associated with the prayer-forms of the Hellenistic synagogues' (Jeremias).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Reference may be made to an analysis of Ephesians i which first attempted to treat the passage as a hymn: T. Innitzer, art. 'Der "Hymnus" im Epheserbriefe (i. 3-14)', *ZKT* xxviii, 3, 1904, 612-21. He called attention to the literary characteristics of the passage, such as the 'spinning-out' (Fortspinnen) of the sentences by the use of relatives; the way in which it is noticeable that the sentences are not only rhythmical but have a marked euphony; and the division of the passage into strophes (I. 3-6; II. 7-12; III. 13-14). He concludes: 'Do not all these signs mean that... we have not merely an elevated, solemn passage, but rather that we have to do with perhaps something, in poetic form, of a splendid Pauline thanksgiving?' (616).

The later modifications of this attempted Formanalyse (mainly under the influence of Lohmeyer) are noted in the excursus in Dibelius-Greeven, *An die Epheser*,<sup>3</sup> (*HZN*) 59 f. Add J. Coutts, art. 'Ephesians i. 3-14 and 1 Peter i. 3-12', *NTS* iii. 2, 1957, 115-127; L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of S. Paul, ET*, 1959, 407 f.

<sup>64</sup> W. H. Raney is a writer who has a broad definition of a canonical hymn. This enables him to bring under the heading of hymns in the New Testament many of the passages which other writers classify as poetic. Thus he concludes his discussion of Prose-hymns by saying: 'It may almost be taken for granted that whenever a passage in the Old or New Testament exhibits a combination of parallelism, rhythm and poetic beauty, it may be classified as a hymn or ode' (*op. cit.* 18). G. Dellings, *op. cit.* 89 notices that this is too broad a definition.

<sup>65</sup> The various possibilities are considered by E. Käsemann, art. 'Das Formular einer neutestamentlichen Ordinationsparanese', *Exegetische Versuche and Besinnungen* I, 1960, 103.

<sup>66</sup> J. Jeremias, *Die Briefe an Timotheus and Titus (NTD)*<sup>6</sup> 1953, 39.

2 Timothy ii. 11-13 carries all the marks of an independent hymn which the author has taken over and utilized in the course of his Epistle. It is prefaced by an introductory formula: 'The saying is sure'; and is built up of four couplets to form a unified poem on the theme of martyrdom.

'If we have died (with him)  
we shall also live (with him);  
if we endure,  
we shall also reign (with him);  
if we deny (him),  
he also will deny us;  
if we are faithless—  
he remains faithful; For he cannot deny himself.'

It is not universally agreed that all three verses are to be included in the hymn. B. S. Easton maintains that the 'faithful saying' extends only to verse 12a on the ground that the first two sets of couplets have a rhythm and assonance which is not continued in the later verses.<sup>67</sup> But this is a questionable assertion in the light of verse 13a with its obvious and carefully worded contrast. Verse 13b may conceivably be the comment of the Apostle on the hymn's last line. The hymn is written as a tribute to the martyr's endurance and its vindication, although some recent commentators have sought to anchor it in a baptismal setting, on the assumption that the 'dying with Christ' motif is linked with Pauline teaching in Romans vi. 1 ff. The two themes of baptism and the prospect of martyrdom are closely allied, for 'endurance of suffering for Christ is a natural outcome of dying with Christ in baptism'.<sup>68</sup>

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It must be confessed that, up to this point, the evidence for early Christian hymns is somewhat exiguous and doubtful. Of the texts we have quoted above, those that have the strongest claim to the description of being hymnic are Ephesians v. 14 and 2 Timothy ii. 11-13. In both instances there is an *Einleitungs formel*. The style is rhythmical and stately, and certain rhetorical devices (such as *homoeoteleuton* and assonance) are employed to give a lyrical form. The language confirms the impression which the literary style leaves with the reader; and it is not difficult to place these passages in the cultic life and worship of the early Church, and to think of a baptismal setting for both hymns. Both odes are taken up with the themes of Christian experience; and are cited in an epistolary context as traditional material, familiar in the worshipping life of the Churches.

(iv) From considering these snatches of Christian hymnody we go on to examine some outstanding Christological passages in the New Testament. And special attention will be given to those places in the literature where traces, not only of *carmina* but of *carmina Christi*, have been detected.

The material which falls under the caption of possible Christ-hymns is rich and full. This is exactly what may be expected. For when Christians think and write about their Lord, their thoughts would naturally tend to be expressed in lyrical and worshipful terms. As was noted earlier, the borderline between prayer, creed and hymn is very difficult to fix precisely.

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<sup>67</sup> B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 1948, 52.

<sup>68</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.* 208.

Religious speech tends to be poetic in form;<sup>69</sup> and meditation upon the person and place of Jesus Christ in the Church's life and in the experience of the believer is not expressed in a cold, calculating way, but becomes rhapsodic and ornate.

Illustrations of these points may be sought and discovered in those sections of the Apostolic literature which have been classified as both 'Christological' and 'hymnic'. The most notable examples are Hebrews i. 3; Colossians i. 15-20;<sup>70</sup> Philippians ii. 6-11<sup>71</sup> and parts of 1 Peter.<sup>72</sup>

Our attention will be confined, however, to another text which, of all the putative hymns of the New Testament Church, has been regarded as the most obviously identifiable: 1 Timothy iii. 16.

#### IV. A STUDY OF 1 TIMOTHY III. 16.

'Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:  
He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated in the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
preached among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory' (RSV)

The scholar who pioneered the study of liturgical forms in the New Testament literature, E. Norden,<sup>73</sup> found in this text 'a liturgical confessional-formula', made up of six lines. There is an introductory sentence which endorses the supposition that a confessional fragment is being quoted; and this sentence contains some expressions which are in keeping with the type of literature which

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<sup>69</sup> R. Schutz, art. 'Die Bedeutung der Kolometrie für das NT', *ZNTW*, xxi, 1922, 162 ff. especially 182-184: 'Die religiöse Sprache des Altertums war keine prosaische, sondern eine poetische' (182).

<sup>70</sup> The present writer hopes shortly to publish a full study of the discussion on the hymnic form of Col. i. 15-20, in the *Evangelical Quarterly*.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. the writer's *An Early Christian Confession: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation*, 1961. It is hoped that an expanded version of this monograph, with a full survey of the Continental debate and incorporating some modifications of the author's earlier conclusions as to authorship, provenance and the Christological 'tendency' of the hymn, will appear in the near future.

<sup>72</sup> See 'The Composition of 1 Peter in Recent Study', *Vox Evangelica*, 1962, 29-42 [[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol01/1peter\\_martin.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol01/1peter_martin.pdf)].

<sup>73</sup> E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 1923, 254-257; H. A. Blair, *A Creed before the Creeds*, 1955, regards the text as a *carmen Christi* and a formula of confession. He describes it in four ways:

- i. It is centred on Christ:
- ii. It confesses Him as God:
- iii. It is poetic in form and content:
- iv. It is probably slightly cryptic in its terms, which would be fully understood by believers only (*op. cit.* 4, 5).

This text shows clearly the difficulty of drawing a line between a confession, a hymn and a creed. J. Schmitt, *Jésus ressuscité*, 101, denies to it the character of a confession, but he is justly criticized for this by A. Hamman, *La Prière, I*, 1959, 259 note 3.

Delling, *op. cit.* 88 makes the point that, at this stage in the Church's life, confessions did not have the legally binding force which they later came to have, and that therefore a confession of faith could very well be expressed in hymnic form as an expression of praise and adoration. The presence of the adverb Cf *ὁμολογουμένως* certainly points to the verse as a statement of common faith.

is represented in the lines. These are the words ὁμολογουμένως ('confessedly', 'by common consent'); τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον which Moffatt renders 'the divine truth of our religion';<sup>74</sup> and the place of the adjective in the sentence μέγα ἐστὶν in the predicative position).

The six lines are distributed as follows:

- i. [ὄς] ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί
- ii. ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι
- iii. ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις
- iv. ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν
- v. ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ
- vi. ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ

### A. Formal characteristics of 1 Timothy iii. 16

The liturgical style of the verse is shown by the following traits: the repetition of the verb at the beginning of each line—and as each verb is the aorist passive a species of rhythm is produced by the same sound at the end of each verb; this is a rhetorical device known as *parison*; and *homoeoptoton*;<sup>75</sup> the use of the relative ὄς;<sup>76</sup> the difference in style between verse 16a and what follows; an example of *isocolon*<sup>77</sup> and *homoeoteleuton* in the first couplet:

line i. 9 syllables, ending in ἐν σαρκί:

line ii. 9 syllables, ending in ἐν πνεύματι;

and the gradation of ideas throughout the composition. All these features give a special character to the words, and imprint upon them what J. Schmitt calls 'un rythme hiératique'.<sup>78</sup> There is a lyrical quality about the verse which defies translation. As B. S. Easton comments, 'the Greek assonances cannot be reproduced and the crisp allusiveness is lost on modern ears'.<sup>79</sup> Examples of this assonance are:

a. the verbal ending in -θη (six times), and each verb occupying the same place in the lines;

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<sup>74</sup> This expression is almost synonymous with τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως (iii. 9 in this Epistle); and is a description of the central core of the message of salvation which is recounted in the aretology of Christ which follows (so Dibelius-Conzelmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe*<sup>3</sup> (HzNT, 13), 1955, 49).

The 'mystery' refers to that which was hidden in the counsels of God and is now revealed in the preaching and with the epiphany of Christ (cf. Bornkamm, *TWNT* iv, 828): so Rom. xvi. 25 f., Col. i. 26; Eph. i. 9, iii. 9 f.; vi. 19. Col. ii. 2-3 is particularly instructive.

<sup>75</sup> For πάριδον and ὁμοιόττωτον cf. Quintilian, *Orat. Inst.* ix. III, 76, 78.

<sup>76</sup> This is the reading of S, A, C and Ephr. (all first corr.); and of Sahidic, Coptic and Ethiopic vss, many Fathers and all modern editors. The neuter ὄ is read by Beza (first hand), the Vulg. and some Latins. Less reliable MSS which the AV follows have θεός. θεός is to be rejected, while ὄ is meaningless. It arose by a desire to make the relative conform to the gender of μυστήριον.

The relative pronoun is a common sign which points to the presence of liturgica in an epistolary composition. Norden has demonstrated this feature with a wealth of detail: *op. cit.* 168 ff. 201-207, 383 ff.

<sup>77</sup> For ἰσόκωλον Cf. Quintilian, *ut supra* 80. Norden was one of the first to observe this trait. *Op. cit.* 256.

<sup>78</sup> J. Schmitt, *op. cit.* 100.

<sup>79</sup> B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 1948, 136; similarly, D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles (TNT)*, 1957, 89: 'The lyrical quality of this hymn is missed in the English translation, but is most impressive in the Greek.'

- b. the repetitive use of ἐν (five times);
- c. contrasting parallelism (to be noted later) with *chiasmus* in lines iii, iv.

There is also the witness of the vocabulary. The contrast of ἐν σαρκί / ἐν πνεύματι is a familiar one in the confessions of early Christianity. Some of the verbal forms are unusual, especially ἐπιστεύθη in line v. The passive form is *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament (except in 2 Thessalonians i. 10)<sup>80</sup> and a strange construction, as von Soden notes.<sup>81</sup> He puts this down to poetic licence; but Norden prefers to regard it as a further liturgical and rhetorical trait.

The doctrinal content of the lines is another indication of the type of literature before us in this piece. The verse tells the story of Christ in a series of antitheses and by a process of gradation. Opinion is divided over the question of the correct arrangement of the lines into strophes. There were three suggestions among older scholars.<sup>82</sup>

According to one of these, the hymn is to be analysed into two verses or stanzas of three lines each. The first strophe covers the earthly life of Jesus as the incarnate One, from His birth when He appeared 'in the flesh' to His return to heaven ('seen by angels'). The second part relates His continuing life as Lord of the Church, from the Apostolic preaching to the final glory at the

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end of the Age and the advent of the eternal Kingdom 'in glory' (ἐν δόξῃ).

A second suggestion divides the hymn into three 'movements', each containing a couplet:

- i—ii. His incarnate life is 'manifested' and 'vindicated' by the Spirit;
- iii—iv. His exalted status as the risen Lord is proclaimed following the attesting of the angels:
- v—vi. His final glory at the end of the Age is anticipated when the gospel is preached to every creature and His Kingdom is realized.

A third scheme is offered by E. F. Scott who observes that it is difficult, on the two previously-mentioned arrangements, to fit the third and sixth lines into the picture which the other lines produce.<sup>83</sup> He proposes that the hymn is in two parts, each with two lines and with the third and sixth lines added by way of a refrain or chorus. Thus we have:

a. Christ's earthly life in stanzas i-ii:

b. His larger life in the Church in stanzas iv-v. And at the conclusion of each part there is a line which completes the sense with a note of triumph sounded. This proposal is accepted by B. S. Easton and, apparently, J. Moffatt.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> It is used in Diognetus xi. 3 in a passage which has many of the lyrical qualities of 1 Tim. iii. 16: ὃς ὑπὸ λαοῦ ἀτιμαθεῖς, διὰ ἀποστόλων κηρυχθεῖς, ὑπὸ ἔθνῶν ἐπιστεύθη.

H. G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 1949, 137.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted by Norden, *op. cit.* 255 note 3 ; cf. his *Die Pastoralbriefe (Holtzmann Kommentar)* 1891, 233.

<sup>82</sup> See J. Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*<sup>3</sup>, 1918, 58; and E. Schweizer, *Erniedrigung and Erhöhung*, 1955, 63 note 272 for some Continental attempts.

<sup>83</sup> E. F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (MNTC) 1937, 42.

<sup>84</sup> B. S. Easton, *op. cit.* 136; J. Moffatt, *op. cit.* 58.

This attempt to account for the structure of the text by finding the corresponding references to the life and rank of Christ—His humiliated condition followed by His exalted place—is now largely *démodé*. The reason for this change of approach to the hymn is twofold. The first newer approach is a Form-critical one, based on the insight that 1 Timothy iii. 16 is a Coronation-hymn in honour of the exalted Lord; and the second analysis rests on the supposition that the author has taken over an old Gnostic hymn and adapted it to his Christian purposes. In both cases the Form-analysis is governed by the commentator's attitude to the contents of the hymn.

J. Jeremias,<sup>85</sup> following Norden, has utilized the formal pattern of the ancient Egyptian coronation ritual to explain the structure and meaning of the hymn. This pattern has three parts:<sup>86</sup> exaltation; presentation before the circle of the gods; and enthronement as the king takes his authority. Jeremias interprets the Christological text in the light of this idea. The act of coronation begins with the declaration that Christ who became incarnate has been vindicated by God in the resurrection (which in turn came about through the operation of the Holy Spirit, Romans viii. 11: hence ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι. It is succeeded by the demonstration to both worlds (earthly and heavenly) of the exaltation. He takes His place in heaven and enters upon His rule; likewise this rule is attested as the gospel is preached upon earth. 'This introduction of the exalted One into His realm of heavenly lordship corresponds to His preaching in the realm of His earthly lordship: the preaching of the gospel of redemption through Jesus Christ is the proclamation of His claim to lordship over the nations'.<sup>87</sup> The final scene is taken up with the act of coronation itself. He is taken up in glory', and hailed in heaven as Lord, seated at God's right hand; on earth He receives His lordship as men submit themselves in faith to the message of salvation. In this way Jeremias is able to regard the hymn as built up, in the form of *parallelismus membrorum*, of three pairs of couplets, each of which describe an aspect of the exalted place of the risen Christ. He is highly honoured in the resurrection; His glory is declared to angels and men; and He has taken His kingly place in the court of heaven and in the hearts of His people

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on earth. The whole is made up of a series of antitheses: flesh—spirit: angels—nations: world—(heavenly) glory.

A modification of this analysis has been recently proposed by E. Schweizer and H. Conzelmann.<sup>88</sup> In short, the newly suggested arrangement is based on the thought that the first couplet summarizes the work of salvation as a whole. The hymn opens with the declaration that the Redeemer is 'He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit'. The phrases ἐν σαρκί and ἐν πνεύματι are intended to designate the two halves of the cosmos and the two spheres of existence (*Seinssphären*), the one above and the one below. The Redeemer

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<sup>85</sup> J. Jeremias, *Die Briefe an Timotheus u. Titus (NTD)*<sup>6</sup> 1953, 22 f.; similarly *idem*, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, ET 1958, 58 f., E. Schweizer, *Erniedrigung*, 65; and D. M. Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology*, 1961, 237, who cites C. Spicq, *L'épître aux Hébreux*, II, 23, as adhering to this view. So too Hamman, *op. cit.* 259 note 2.

<sup>86</sup> For the details of this ceremony see A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, III, 1953, 149 ff; T. Arvedson, *Das Mysterium Christi*, 1937, 123 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Jeremias, *loc. cit.* 23.

<sup>88</sup> E. Schweizer, *Erniedrigung*, 63 ff. (partly in *Lordship and Discipleship*, 64 ff.); Dibelius-Conzelmann, *Die Pastoralbriefe (HzNT)*<sup>3</sup>, 1955, 50.



entered the sphere of a human existence at His incarnation. He was taken into the sphere of the Spirit at His exaltation.<sup>89</sup> The 'flesh' is the sphere in which the divine epiphany took place; and the 'spirit' is the corresponding sphere in which the exaltation occurred. The rest of the lines are a commentary on this 'text' for the purpose of showing that 'the act of salvation and the proclamation of the gospel belong together', as events are related which belong to the two realms of existence. Christ's being received into the celestial world is marked by four stages in which His triumphal procession is described. Each stage of His journey in the heavenly sphere is matched by a parallel stage in the earthly sphere. Thus, He is 'seen by angels'. This is His *anabasis* through the celestial regions. Lines iv and v describe the progress of the Saviour on earth: 'preached among the nations, believed on in the world'. The final line denotes the taking up of Jesus into heaven itself (i.e. thought of as the immediate presence of God), as the climax of the Redeemer's ascent from earth through the celestial spaces.

The opening lines (i and ii), in Schweizer's analysis, are composed of an antithetic couplet which sets the pattern for the remainder of the hymn. The whole is an example of elaborate *chiasmus* of the scheme ab: ba: ab:—<sup>90</sup>

a [ὄς] ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί  
b ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι  
b ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις  
a ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν  
a ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ  
b ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ

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<sup>89</sup> The meaning of the verb δικαιῶσθαι is hard to determine. There is no Pauline parallel which will fit the case of this verse. The text could be taken to mean that by His resurrection through the Spirit's power Christ was vindicated (ἐδικαιώθη as in Lk. vii. 35). This is how B. Weiss and Jeremias take it. The latter comments: 'In beiden Fällen (*sc.* whether the verb is to be interpreted in the Hellenistic sense of 'divinize' or in the Old Testament sense of 'declare righteous') ist sachlich mit der Rechtfertigung die Auferstehung gemeint' (*loc. cit.* 23).

E. Schweizer interprets the meaning in the light of Rom. iii. 4 (= Ps. li. 4) where it is parallel with νικᾶν (in the forensic sense of 'to win a verdict'). There are parallel usages with this meaning in Pss. Sol. ii. 16, iii. 5, iv. 9, viii. 7. But it is not easy to follow him when he goes on to declare that the verb in 1 Tim. iii. 16 thus means 'eingeht in die göttliche Sphäre'.

For this latter meaning the best parallel is that cited by Conzelmann: *Ignat. Phil.* viii. 2: θέλω ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ ὑμῶν δικαιωθῆναι where the last words mean 'to reach the presence of God' (as H. Schlier, *Religionsgesch. Untersuch. zu den Ign. briefen*, 1929, 171 remarks, citing ad Rom. v. 1 and interpreting the verb δικαιωθῆναι to imply the equivalent of θεοῦ ἐπιτυχεῖν, a common Ignatian phrase for martyrdom as the gateway through which he will enter the presence of God: see Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *s.v.* ἐπιτυγχάνειν for the repeated use of this verb).

Conzelmann therefore takes the line to mean: 'the entrance into the divine sphere, the sphere of righteousness'. He proceeds, in dependence upon Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, 1927, 257 f. who quotes *C.H.* xiii. 9: χωρὶς γὰρ κρίσεως ἰδὲ πῶς τὴν ἀδικίαν ἐκήλασεν. ἐδικαιώθησεν μὲν ὡς τέκνον, ἀδικίας ἀπούσης: the initiate experiences a 'new birth' and becomes 'deified', to relate this idea to the victory of the Redeemer who is himself redeemed and re-enters the divine glory.

A. Descamps, *Les justes et la justice dans le christianisme primitif*, 1950, 88 thinks of a re-entry into the divine glory, but on the Old Testament ground that there is an affinity between justice and glory. The risen Lord is vindicated and glorified—two sides of the same process.

<sup>90</sup> To have identified this chiasmic structure is the merit of E. Schweizer's contribution: *op. cit.*, 63 note 272 (ET 65 note 1) and *Spirit of God*, ET 1961, 57.

The theme of the entire piece is the unity between heaven and earth which the Saviour effects. The terminus of His mission is the exalted status which He at length enjoys; and the worship of heaven and earth confirms that He is the victorious Lord of both orders of existence.

It is possible to connect the lines of the hymn in yet another way. This arrangement depends upon the view that the author is following the pattern of the Gnostic Redeemer-myth, according to which the Saviour descended into this world, and then returned to His world of light, passing through the regions of celestial space en route.<sup>91</sup> The hymn, it is alleged (like its parallel document, *The Ascension of Isaiah*), uses the framework of the Redeemer's journey from earth to heaven in order to set forth the Way of Christ. Thus He entered upon the realm of the spirit—the verb ἐδικαιώθη suggesting that He is now redeemed and born anew.<sup>92</sup> In His return to the heavenly regions He is seen by the angels (line iii). This thought links up with *Asc. Isa.* where the glorified Christ is seen by all the angels and powers who pay homage to Him as the Lord of glory (*Asc. Isa.* x. 15, xi. 23 ff.)<sup>93</sup> He is proclaimed unto the Gentiles—a line which

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Cullmann and Bultmann relate to the preaching to the dead, as in 1 Peter iii. 18 ff.<sup>94</sup> The latter scholar comments on the Petrine text: '“The spirits in prison” are the souls of the dead who during their ascent to the heavenly regions have been intercepted and made prisoner by the hostile spirit-powers which live between heaven and earth'. Line v speaks of the response which the elect make to the Redeemer's appeal: they believe on Him who at length is assumed in glory. He returns to His native splendour.

On this theory the lines are in order as they stand;<sup>95</sup> and recount the Way of the Redeemer in His redemptive mission and journey from earth to the heavenly sphere. But dependence upon the myth of the Redeemer is very questionable.

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<sup>91</sup> As in the hymn of Ignatius, *Eph.* xix in which the death of the Lord is followed by his glorious manifestation to 'the Aeons' (a Gnostic term for the cosmic powers, as in the canonical *Eph.* iii. 9 ?), as He triumphantly ascends on high (cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 177; Easton, *op. cit.* 137 f.). But this understanding of the Ignatian text is disputed by Virginia Corwen, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch*, 1960, 176 ff.

<sup>92</sup> For this use of δικαιώσθαι we may compare the passage of Odes Sol. xvii. 1 ff. as quoted by Schlier, *op. cit.* 171:

'I was crowned by my God: my crown is living;  
And I was justified in my Lord: my incorruptible salvation is He;  
I was loosed from vanity, and I was not condemned;  
The choking bonds were cut off by His hands:  
I received the face and the fashion of a new person;  
And I walked in it and was saved.'

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*, 1909, 178 ff.: '...bei seiner Menschwerdung war Christus den Engelmachten verborgen geblieben, nun wird er ihnen sichtbar als Herr der Herrlichkeit' (180).

<sup>94</sup> O. Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, ET 1949, 60 note; R. Bultmann, art. 'Bekenntnis - and Liedfragmente' *Con. Neo.* xi. 1949, 5. See *Vox Evangelica*, 1962, 33.

Or else, this line (if taken to mean a preaching of the gospel to the Gentile world) may be a deliberate correction of the Gnostic thought of the permeation of the cosmos in a physical way. Cf. Schweizer, *NTS* art. 'The Church as the Missionary Body of Christ', viii, 1961, 10.

<sup>95</sup> On this understanding of the hymn as the Redeemer's ascent through the spheres into the final glory, the objection would be met that the order of the lines is not chronological—as many commentators assert (Conzelmann, *loc. cit.* 50: 'The contents of the fragment in its existing form are not to be regarded as a chronological enumeration of the "events of salvation": if that were the case, ἀνελήμφθη would come before ἐκηρύχθη and ἐπιστεύθη: J. Marty, *loc. cit.* 369; Schweizer, *op. cit.* 65).

**B. The meaning of the Christ-hymn in 1 Timothy iii. 16**

Our study of the literary form of the verse has inevitably drawn into discussion the motifs which go to make up the themes of the hymn. The introductory sentence: 'Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion', prepares us for some solemn declaration of Christian truth. The relative pronoun ὃς indicates that it belongs to a larger statement because, as it stands, the hymn lacks an explicit subject. It is possible that the relative has been inserted by the Apostle in order to supply the connection between the introductory sentence and the hymn. But the lines appear to form a self-contained unit, which stands on its own.

The form of the hymn is clearly to be seen. By a series of antithetical couplets it sets forth the kerygmatic message of Christ. It treats of two world-orders, the divine and the human. On this canvas the story of Christ is seen as made up of the pattern, humiliation-exaltation. The pattern then is as follows:

κατά σάρκα	κατά πνεῦμα
Who was revealed in the flesh	Vindicated in the Spirit
Preached in the nations	Seen by angels
Believed on in the world	Taken into glory.

The two spheres, denominated by the terms σάρξ-πνεῦμα, are the setting for the actions which follow. Each action on the earthly plane is matched by a corresponding event on the celestial. And the meaning seems to be that, by this divine epiphany of the Incarnate, the two spheres of existence are brought together. 'Salvation consists in the newly-found unity of the two spheres'.<sup>96</sup> And the salvation which He secures is brought about by His coming into the realm of the human existence—'the flesh'. His presence there and His passage through this world is the redeeming factor. No suspicion is given that He came *to die*,<sup>97</sup> although D. M. Stanley infers that His epiphany is related to His redemptive death (as in 2 Tim. i. 10),<sup>98</sup> but there is nothing to support this idea in the hymn. The contrast in the first couplet is not that of death and risen life. It is that of His humiliated state on earth and His being glorified by God as He entered (albeit by the resurrection, but this is only tacitly included) the spiritual sphere.

The effect of His coining and His exaltation is seen in the acknowledgment of His lordship upon earth as the gospel is preached and men believe; and in the celestial sphere His triumph is attested by the homage of the spirit-powers and His supreme place in the heavenly court 'in glory'. Thus the victory of Christ is universal; and His dominion has cosmic ramifications. L. Cerfaux<sup>99</sup> makes

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the interesting comment that Christ's victory is known in those areas in which Judaism had failed: the world of the Gentiles and that of the celestial powers. Other writers refer the session of Christ in glory and the world-mission of lines iv and v to the events of Pentecost (Acts ii. 5-36). The risen Lord is exalted over His foes and inaugurates the Apostolic mission

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<sup>96</sup> E. Schweizer, *ut supra*; and Conzelmann, *loc. cit.* 51.

<sup>97</sup> Conzelmann, *loc. cit.* therefore comments: 'Im Gegensatz zu Phil. ii. 6 ff. ist nicht der Tod als Wendepunkt markiert, and nicht der Gegensatz von Niedrigkeit/Hoheit akzentuiert'. Cf. D. Guthrie, *op. cit.*, 91, who remarks upon the 'surprising' omission of any reference to the death and resurrection. And it is hard to see how any allusion to these events can be read into this hymn.

<sup>98</sup> D. M. Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology*, 1961, 237.

<sup>99</sup> L. Cerfaux, *Le Christ dans la theologie de S. Paul*, 282 (ET 374).

'to the uttermost parts of the earth' (Acts i. 8). On this view the hymn is treated as an early composition which belongs to the liturgy of the primitive Church of Acts. But the thought of the hymn seems to be essentially Greek, with its contrast between the two worlds, and its stress upon the epiphany of Christ and His elevation into the divine order. The cosmic dominion of Christ suggests that the Church in which this hymn was sung had grasped both the thought of the dimensions of the redemption of Christ which embraces all orders of existence, and its own responsibility to carry the gospel to the whole of creation. It is more likely to be a product of some Hellenistic Jewish-Christian community, of which the school of Stephen is the most illustrious example in the pre-Pauline period.

There is no means of telling how this hymn came to be formed. Some (J. Schmitt, D. M. Stanley)<sup>100</sup> find its *Sitz im Leben* in a baptismal liturgy as it 'commemorates the principal events of the Christian salvation-history which concurred in creating the symbolism of Christian Baptism: Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and the episode of the first Pentecost'.<sup>101</sup> But these ideas are hardly the main themes of the hymn.<sup>102</sup> A stronger point would be the submission that Christ's victory over the cosmic powers is an important motif of the hymn; and in other hymnic compositions this thought is often found in a baptismal context. The baptizand is confronted with his liberation from the old world in which hostile spirits dominated his life and his sharing in the new creation which Christ has established by His overthrow of the powers. The hymn, on this understanding of its setting, tells the story (in confessional form) of Christ's triumph as the foundation of that new order of existence 'in the Spirit' into which the converts enter as they are united with Him in the act of baptism. The old nature is put to death, the body of flesh is put off, in the baptism; and the neophyte embarks upon his new life as he begins to 'walk in the Spirit' (Col. ii. 11-15, iii. 9-10; Rom. vi. 4-11; viii. 4. ff. ; Gal. iii. 3, v. 16 ff.).

## V. CONCLUSION

Our study of the literary form and Christological content of 1 Timothy iii. 16 has brought to light certain features which are also characteristic of other New Testament Christ-hymns (notably Col. i. 15 ff.; Phil. ii. 6 ff.; Heb. i. 1 ff.; John i. 1 ff.). The Church's Lord is depicted in a cosmological role in the double sense of that adjective. First, His pre-existence and pre-temporal activity are made the frontispiece of the hymns, and from the divine order in which He eternally is He 'comes down' as the Incarnate One in an epiphany. Then, at the conclusion of His earthly life He takes His place in God's presence, receiving the universal homage and acclamation of the cosmic spirit-powers which confess His lordship. His saving work is seen as that of bringing together the two orders of existence (the celestial and the terrestrial), and His reconciliation is described in a cosmic setting. The hymns are essentially *soteriological* in their purpose, and set forth the Person of Christ in relation to His work. But inasmuch as He accomplishes what God alone can do—the pacification of the hostile powers of

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the universe, in particular—and has taken His place on His Father's throne (Apoc. iii. 21, v. 1-14) as the divinely appointed *Cosmokrat* and Judge of all history, it was a short step for the

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<sup>100</sup> J. Schmitt, *op. cit.* 100; Stanley, *op. cit.* 236, 239.

<sup>101</sup> Stanley, *op. cit.* 239.

<sup>102</sup> H. Lietzmann's theory (*Mass and Lord's Supper*, ET 1953, Fasc. iii, 145) that the hymn is part of a Eucharistic liturgy is stated only tentatively and with little supporting evidence.

early Christians to take to set Him in *loco Dei* in their cultic worship. From this point of conviction that 'Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. ii. ii) the line runs on to the Bithynian Christians' *carmen Christo quasi Deo dicere secum inuicem*; and to the *Te Deum*: 'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ; Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father'.

N.B. While the above study was in the printer's hands, the writer's attention was drawn to W. S. Smith's Amsterdam dissertation, *Musical Aspects of the New Testament*, 1962, which contains much germane and interesting material.

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