HYMNS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When one thinks of hymns in the New Testament, one thinks first perhaps of those that have been traditionally used by the church. Thus the *Magnificat* (Luke i. 46 ff.), the *Benedictus* (Luke i. 68 ff.), the *Gloria* (Luke ii. 14), and the *Nunc dimittis* (Luke ii. 29 ff.) come to mind. There is also some express hymn singing in Revelation.[1]

For some time, however, there has been an awareness in some circles that the New Testament contained other hymnic materials. Joseph Kroll, in 1921, began working in the direction of a study of New Testament hymnody by analyzing and characterizing other early Christian hymns.[2] Building on the earlier philological work of Eduard Norden,[3] Kroll pointed out the festive, emotional, and dramatic character of Christian hymnody.[4] More important, he attempted to distinguish hymns from prayers and confessions. Thus, although both hymns and prayers may be characterized by thanksgiving and petition,[5]

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[1] Cf. for example Rev. iv. 8–11; vii. 10–12.

[2] Joseph Kroll, *Die christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandreia. Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen an der Akademie zu Braunsberg im Sommer 1921* (Königsberg, 1921; reprinted Darmstadt, 1968).

The subject matter of this introduction, and of ch. 1, has now been treated extensively and admirably by Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit. Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, 5) (Göttingen, 1967). As this work only became available to me in the final stage of preparation of the MS of the present work, it was impossible to deal with Deichgräber's evidence and conclusions in the thoroughgoing manner that would seem to be indicated. The more important aspects of his work, however, especially agreements and disagreements, are taken account of in the footnotes, with his reasons. At this point, particular note should be made of the thorough treatment of the history of the formal study of early Christian hymnic materials given by Deichgräber, pp. 11–21.

[3] Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Stuttgart, 1956[4]; originally written 1912). Norden had pointed out, in particular, the use of *relative clauses* and *participial predications* in liturgical texts. Cf. particularly *ibid.* pp. 168, 221 f. He distinguished between oriental predications (including those translated into Greek), which have substantive participles, and truly Hellenic predications, which have predicative or attributive participles (*ibid.* pp. 202 f.).

[4] Kroll, pp. 11, 78.   [5] *Ibid.* p. 10.

Kroll saw hymns as displaying more 'ardor of enthusiasm' than prayers, and as being more formally constructed.[1] If this is a rather generalizing distinction, and one feels that one still could not always distinguish between a hymn and a prayer, this feeling is intensified somewhat by Kroll's distinction between confessions and hymns. 'A confession-like formula', he suggests, 'can very easily have its place in a hymn...Thus a hymn can receive an expressly doctrinal character.'[2] Nevertheless, Kroll saw confessions as distinct from hymns in that a confession is regularly characterized by an 'enumeration of the data of salvation'.

This general usage of the word 'hymn' to indicate a religious song, which usage is carried over into the more recent discussions of liturgical materials in the New Testament, is not thoroughly considered;[3] yet it is possible that the use of the term 'hymn', comparable to the precise form-critical usage of the term in Old Testament research to designate one *Gattung* of psalm, may ultimately be applicable here in equally as precise a way. Hermann Gunkel designated one of the four major *Gattungen* of psalm the 'hymn', calling it also a 'song of praise'.[4] A hymn normally began, as he saw it, with the plural imperative 'praise', 'sing', or 'thank', and the body of the hymn recounted the deeds or gave the attributes of God. Claus Westermann, who has directed some criticism at Gunkel's position,[5] prefers the term 'psalm of praise' to 'hymn',[6] and distinguishes between 'descriptive praise' and 'narrative praise', referring the former term to most of the passages Gunkel had designated 'hymns' and the latter term to those passages placed by Gunkel in the category of 'thanksgiving song'.[7] Westermann devotes particular attention not only to the 'thanksgiving' category of psalm, but to the concept, to the phenomenon of thanking as well,[8] finally finding in the phenomenon of thanking an understanding of existence in which man

[1] *Ibid.* p. 11.   [2] *Ibid.* p. 16 n. 2.

[3] It was so for the New Testament period also, of course; cf. Eph. v. 19: 'speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always...'; cf. also Col. iii. 16. On the varied use of the term 'hymn', cf. Deichgräber, p. 21 n. 3.

[4] Hermann Gunkel, 'Psalmen', *RGG*, edd. Gunkel and Leopold Tzscharnack, vol. IV (1930²), cols 1612–14.

[5] Claus Westermann, *Das Loben Gottes in den Psalmen* (Göttingen, 1961²).

[6] *Ibid.* pp. 17 ff.   [7] *Ibid.* p. 23.   [8] *Ibid.* pp. 17–21.

knows himself to be in need of God.[1] This interest in the thanksgiving psalm and its relation to the hymn proper is maintained by Georg Fohrer in his Old Testament introduction.[2] Fohrer follows Westermann in separating the thanksgiving from the hymn, but notes that 'hymnic motifs are frequently employed in the explanation [of the thanksgiving]'.[3] Fohrer keeps the terms 'hymn' and 'song of thanks'. Following the opening call to thanksgiving, according to Fohrer, the body of the song of thanks recounts a previous situation of need, and how God saved from that need. The conclusion of the thanksgiving psalm, as is the case with the hymn, then repeats in some way the praise given at the beginning.[4]

It seems likely that this *Gattung* of thanksgiving psalm (or 'narrative praise'), so closely related to the *Gattung* 'hymn' (or 'descriptive praise') as to be at times almost indistinguishable, is the *Gattung* to which most of the New Testament passages to be discussed here belong. In this regard,[5] James M. Robinson seems to have shown fairly clearly the existence in early Christianity of the liturgical formula, 'I thank thee, Lord, for...', followed by two lines giving the cause for thanksgiving. The prayer of thanksgiving itself then followed these two lines, and this prayer could become more or less hymnic, so that Robinson can refer to 'hymnic prayers of thanksgiving'.[6] Some of the 'prayers' following the characteristic introductory thanksgiving formula are so obviously poetry or liturgical songs, however, that Robinson refers to them as 'hymns'.[7] The two examples of this phenomenon are Rev. xi. 17 f. and Matt. xi. 25–7 = Luke x. 21 f. Of these passages, Robinson says, 'Where it is simply a matter of inspired singing, precisely here the *hodayoth* formula turns up intact'.[8] He also takes

[1] *Ibid*. p. 53.

[2] Georg Fohrer, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, begründet von Ernst Sellin (Heidelberg, 1965[10]).   [3] *Ibid*. p. 290.

[4] Regarding the relation between thanksgiving and hymn, cf. further Deichgräber, pp. 21–3, who agrees in general with Westermann.

[5] James M. Robinson, 'Die Hodajot-Formel in Gebet und Hymnus des Frühchristentums', *Apophoreta, Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen*, edd. W. Eltester and F. H. Kettler (BZNW, 30) (Berlin, 1964), pp. 194–235.

[6] *Ibid*. pp. 213–21.   [7] *Ibid*. pp. 226–35.

[8] *Ibid*. p. 226. His reference to 'inspired singing' of course recalls the festive, emotional, and dramatic character of Christian hymnody to which Kroll called attention, and the 'ardor of enthusiasm' present in hymns.

Col. i. 12 ff. to be an early Christian hymn on the same pattern,[1] seeing in the words, 'giving thanks to the father', in *v*. 12 an allusion to the characteristic *hodayoth* formula, and in *v*. 13 the characteristic two-line designation of the cause for thanksgiving:

Who has delivered us from the power of darkness

and transferred us to the kingdom of the son of his love.

Following this mention of the son come the words, 'In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (*v*. 14), which 'completes the transition to Christ';[2] and then follows the Christ 'hymn' of *vv*. 15–20. One will note the rather close formal similarity between Col. i. 12–20, as Robinson explained the formal structure of the passage, and the description of the 'song of thanks'—one *Gattung* of psalm—given by Fohrer. At the beginning is a call to thanksgiving, and this is followed by a recounting of a situation of need and how God saved from that need (by means of the cosmic drama described in *vv*. 15–20).

Thus it seems that the designation of at least this passage as 'hymn' in Gunkel's usage, as 'narrative praise' in Westermann's terminology, or as 'song of thanks' in the description given by Fohrer would be justified. As the *Gattung* represents, for the Old Testament at least, one type of psalm, the designation 'thanksgiving psalm' would also be appropriate. Since the New Testament writers (Col. iii. 16; Eph. v. 19) apparently made no distinction among 'psalm', 'hymn', and 'thanksgiving', the term 'hymn', which is the word normally used today for religious songs, seems to be appropriate as a general designation for referring to all such passages.[3] The formal relation of the other passages to be discussed here to Col. i. 12–20 and to the *Gattung* 'hymn' (or 'thanksgiving psalm') will be indicated in the analysis following.

One element of early Christian hymnody to which Kroll called attention was the dramatic character and the 'ardor of

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[1] *Ibid*. pp. 231 f.   [2] *Ibid*. p. 233.

[3] Thus Deichgräber, who basically distinguishes between 'hymn' and 'prayer' (prayers of petition and of thanksgiving), recognizes the rather indefinite line between hymn and thanksgiving and does not at all mind using the designation 'hymnic' in the broader sense in which 'hymn' is used here; cf. *ibid*. pp. 22 f., 47.

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enthusiasm' common to hymns.[1] It may be noted here, how-
ever, that this is not merely a stylistic or formal observation, but
refers as well to the *content* of the hymns, since early Christian
hymnody tends to deal with a divine *drama*, a cosmic redemp-
tion, thus with an 'exalted' subject.

[1] See above, pp. 1 f.

PART 1

FORMAL ANALYSIS OF
THE HYMNS

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGICAL HYMNS

PHILIPPIANS ii. 6–11

6 Who, Being in the form of God,
　　　　Did not think it robbery to be equal with God,
7　　　But emptied himself,
　　　　Taking the form of a slave.

　　　　Becoming in the likeness of men
　　　　And being found in fashion like a man
8　　　He humbled himself,
　　　　Becoming obedient unto death
　　　　　　　　[the death of the cross].

9　　　Wherefore God highly exalted him
　　　　And bestowed upon him the name above every name,
10　　　That in the name of Jesus every knee may bow
　　　　in the heavens and on earth and beneath the earth,
11　　　And every tongue confess,
　　　　'Jesus Christ is Lord!'
　　　　　　　　to the glory of God the father.

The arrangement given here is essentially that of Joachim Jeremias.[1] Ernst Lohmeyer had earlier arranged the passage strophically into two stanzas of three strophes each, each strophe containing three lines having three stresses each.[2] Since this arrangement involved placing only one finite verb in each stanza, and since the analysis took account of the numerous participles and emphasized the consciously structured character

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[1] Joachim Jeremias, 'Zur Gedankenführung in den paulinischen Briefen', *Studia Paulina in honorem Johannis de Zwann*, edd. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik (Haarlem, 1953), pp. 146–54. Cf. the earlier designation of the form of the hymn as *zweigliedrig* by Rudolf Bultmann, 'Bekenntnis- und Liedfragmente im ersten Petrusbrief', *Coniectanea Neotestamentica*, vol. XI (1947), p. 6 n. 10. Cf. further Deichgräber, pp. 118–33.

[2] Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus. Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5–11. Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-hist. Kl. (Jahrgang 1927/8, 4. Abhandlung; reprinted Darmstadt, 1961).

of the passage, Lohmeyer's arrangement remains widely
accepted.[1] The insistence of Jeremias, however, that the passage
is structured along lines of Semitic *parallelismus membrorum* seems
more adequately to explain the structure of the passage, at least
for *vv*. 6–8. Jeremias pointed out that the two lines of *v*. 6 should
be seen as parallel, as well as the two lines of *v*. 7 *a*, *v*. 7 *b*, and
v. 8. By omitting the words 'in the heavens and on earth and
beneath the earth' in *v*. 10 and 'to the glory of God the father'
in *v*. 11, Jeremias gained two more pairs of lines exhibiting
parallelismus membrorum. He then claimed that the three stanzas
thus produced presented respectively the pre-(earthly) exist-
ence, the earthly existence, and the post-(earthly) existence of
the redeemer.[2]

   That this division of the passage into three stanzas, giving
three stages in the existence of the redeemer, is the correct
division can hardly be doubted, Lohmeyer and the verse
enumerations notwithstanding. Not only can *vv*. 6–8 be seen to
contain four pairs of parallel lines, but the two stanzas are in
fact built on the same pattern. The first line of each stanza
begins with and ends with a participle, and gives the state or
'place' of the redeemer in either case. The second line in either
case then explicates what was said in the first line; this is done
synonymously in the second stanza ('likeness' = 'fashion', 'of
men' = 'like a man') and complementarily in the first stanza.
'Humbled himself' is the equivalent in the second stanza to
'emptied himself' in the first;[3] and the fourth line of each

   [1] Cf. Ernst Käsemann ('Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2, 5–11', *Exegetische
Versuche und Besinnungen, Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. I (Göttingen, 1960), p. 52),
Günther Bornkamm ('Zum Verständnis des Christus-Hymnus Phil. 2, 6–11',
Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum, Gesammelte Aufsätze, vol. II (Beiträge zur
Evangelischen Theologie, 28) (Munich, 1959), p. 178). That *vv*. 6–11 are
quoted by Paul at this point seems adequately to have been demonstrated
by Lohmeyer, pp. 4 f., who called attention to the 'strongly unified and . . .
carefully formed' aspect of the passage, as well as to the way in which it
follows abruptly on *v*. 5, and who pointed to the wealth of participial
predications; and by David M. Stanley ('The Theme of the Servant of
Yahweh in Primitive Christian Soteriology and its Transposition by
St Paul', *CBQ*, vol. XVI (1954), p. 421 n. 97), who lists the *hapax legomena*.
   [2] Jeremias, 'Zur Gedankenführung in den paulinischen Briefen',
pp. 150–4.
   [3] Lohmeyer, incidentally, in his commentary (*Die Briefe an die Philipper,
an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das

stanza, like the second line, explains the preceding line by giving the new state of the redeemer. Even those two designations (the fourth line of either stanza) are comparable: 'slave', 'obedient'.[1]

A passage exhibiting such a structure of lines and stanzas might be called simply a poem and not a hymn; but to these observations regarding structure one may add observations of a liturgical nature. Thus one may note that the presence of an abundance of participles and the general absence of the article throughout most of the passage point to a liturgical setting for the poem,[2] as does the likely allusion to a doxology at the end of the passage.[3] If one would normally refer to a liturgical poem as a hymn in a general sense, the opening relative (ὅς) and the closing doxological allusion probably indicate a more precise setting for the hymn, i.e. as a hymnic expansion of a thanksgiving[4] and thus probably justify the designation of this passage as a 'hymn' in a precise sense.[5]

If Jeremias' analysis of the strophic arrangement of *vv.* 6–8 seems to be correct, Lohmeyer's arrangement of *vv.* 9–11 will

NT) (Göttingen, 1964 (= 1930)), pp. 94 f.), saw that lines one and three of what is Jeremias' second stanza were analogous to lines one and three of what is Jeremias' first stanza; but his own strophic arrangement, of course, prevented his drawing the correct implications from these observations. This evidence is overlooked by Deichgräber, p. 124, who, by relating ἐκένωσεν (against Jeremias) to the incarnation, opts for a twofold division.

[1] Jeremias followed Lohmeyer in omitting the words 'the death of the cross' as being a Pauline addition to the quoted material. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus*, p. 44, had argued that the qualifying involved in the phrase 'unto death' of the absolute subjection and humiliation as the lowest stage of existence brings, by emphasizing the *type* of death, a discordant note to the theme of the passage. This view is widely accepted and is certainly correct.

[2] Cf. the information given by Norden, above, p. 1 n. 3.

[3] Cf. Phil. i. 11 and my earlier discussion of this phenomenon in 'The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus', *JBL*, vol. LXXXI (1962), p. 357.

[4] Or of a blessing, which is an alternate form to the thanksgiving, and was finally entirely replaced by the thanksgiving in Christianity. Cf. Robinson, p. 204; further, A. D. Nock, 'Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments', in *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background* (New York, 1964; originally published 1952), p. 134. Deichgräber, however (pp. 124 f.), though recognizing the possibility of such a setting, pronounces a '*non liquet*' over 'the question regarding the original wording of the beginning', and conjectures Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, κύριος, or even αὐτός as the original for which ὅς now stands. [5] So also Deichgräber, p. 118 n. 4.

hardly be the original one. But Jeremias' arrangement of these verses also leaves something to be desired. Not only is there a change of subject at *v.* 9, but the two elements that so strongly characterized *vv.* 6–8 as hymnic, absence of the article and wealth of participles, are precisely missing in these last verses, with the exception of the acclamation and doxological ascription of praise at the end; but the doxological final line was omitted by Jeremias.[1] There is the further problem that *vv.* 9–11 rely heavily on an Old Testament passage, Isa. xlv. 23 f., something which is not the case for the first two stanzas. Thus, if the original formal structure of *vv.* 6–8 seems accurately to have been reconstructed, this is not quite the case for *vv.* 9–11; and perhaps the original has been enough changed in these verses, by Paul or by the congregation from which he learned the hymn, to prevent a thoroughly accurate reconstruction of the original.[2]

COLOSSIANS i. 15–20

15	Who is the image of the invisible God, first-born of all creation,	18*b*	Who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, [that he himself might be pre-eminent in everything]
16	For in him was created everything in the heavens and on earth, [the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships, whether rulers or authorities] Everything was created through him and unto him.	19	For in him all the fulness was pleased to dwell,
		20	And through him to reconcile everything unto himself.

[1] Georg Strecker ('Redaktion und Tradition im Christushymnus Phil 2, 6–11', *ZNW*, vol. LV (1964), p. 70) has argued for a division into two stanzas, dividing between *vv.* 8 and 9. Although this solution is in some respects tempting, it fails to make adequate use of the now obvious formal structure of *vv.* 6–8.

[2] On the possibility of pre-Pauline additions in *vv.* 9–11, cf. also Deich-gräber, p. 126.