
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Two Early Christian Hymns: The "Gloria in Excelsis" and the "Te Deum."

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THEIR TEXT AND HISTORY.

I. "GLORIA IN EXCELSIS."

THE Angels' carol on the first Christmas morn is, of course, the earliest and simplest form of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and in this simple form it is used to-day in the Eastern Church at Lauds on certain festivals, and is called the Great Doxology. When or by whom the hymn was elaborated and expanded into the form in which it is familiar to us has not yet been determined. We recall St. Polycarp's ejaculatory ascription of praise at the moment of his martyrdom—"I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee" ("Mart. Polyc.," 14); but whether the dying saint was quoting a formulary, or whether the author of the formulary borrowed Polycarp's words, it is difficult to decide. The form which the hymn takes under the manipulation of pseudo-Ignatius in the Apostolic Constitutions (vii. 47) favours the latter supposition. It was, at any rate, composed before the last quarter of the fourth century, and is probably much earlier. It is essentially an Eastern hymn, inspired by the splendid devotion of the early Church. The Fourth Council of Toledo in 633 (Canon xii.: Mansi x. 623) ascribed it to the "doctors of the Church," and preferred to use only the opening words from St. Luke ii. 14 in public worship.

The earliest form of the hymn as we know it is given in the Alexandrian MS. (British Museum, facsimile iii. 569, 2), where it follows the thirteen Biblical canticles of the Greek Church, and is entitled "Morning Hymn." The following is a rendering of this Greek original, which keeps as closely as accuracy permits to our English Prayer-Book version:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord, Heavenly King,

O God, Father, Almighty,
O Lord, Only-begotten Son, Jesu Christ,
And Holy Spirit.
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, Have mercy upon us:
Thou that takest away the sins of the world, *Have mercy upon us;*[1] receive our prayer:
Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.
For Thou only art holy, Thou only art the LORD Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father." [Phil. ii. 11.]

Then follow some versicles from the Psalms and an antiphon, which was transferred later and found a place amongst the versicles which were attached to the *Te Deum*:

"Every day will I bless Thee, and praise Thy Name for ever and ever. [Ps. cxlv. 2.]
Vouchsafe, O Lord, this day also that we be kept without sin."
Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, and praised and glorified be Thy Name for ever. Amen. ["Song of the Three Children," 29 *f.*]
Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes" (*bis*). [Ps. cxix. 12.]

The general superiority of this text is at once obvious. The first part of the hymn, addressed to God the Father, as is that of the *Te Deum*, ends with the mention of each Person of the Trinity; while the second part, addressed to Christ, again as in the *Te Deum*, concludes with a citation of Phil. ii. 11, "[Every tongue shall confess that] Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father"—a reference hopelessly obscured in the Latin and English texts, which insert here, quite out of place, a mention of the Holy Ghost, and alter the grammar, reading "*in* the glory" for "*to* the glory." In one point only is the Latin version the better, and that is in the opening clause, "in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis"—"on earth peace to men of good will." The fact that the Alexandrian MS. has this reading in the Gospel, and yet deserts it in the hymn, proves that the form of the hymn best known to the scribe gave the nominative, and not the genitive, of the last word.

[1] This clause is written in the margin of the MS. in a cramped hand, and was evidently added as an afterthought. It is redundant, and spoils the symmetry of the three invocations.

A later interpolated or farsed *Gloria* is found in the Apostolic Constitutions (vii. 47) amongst a collection of hymns and prayers compiled in the latter half of the fourth century by pseudo-Ignatius. In some late MSS. of this work the section in which the *Gloria* occurs is headed "Morning Prayer."

"Glory to God in the highest, and in earth peace, goodwill towards men.
We praise Thee, *we hymn Thee*, we bless Thee, we glorify Thee, we worship Thee, *through the Great High Priest, Thee the One Unbegotten God, Alone, Unapproachable, through* Thy great glory, O Lord, Heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.
O Lord God, *the Father of Christ, the spotless* Lamb, which taketh away the sin of the world, receive our prayer. *Thou that sittest upon the cherubim*, have mercy upon us.
For Thou only art Holy, Thou only art the Lord *Jesus Christ of the God of all created nature, our King, through Whom be glory, honour, and worship to Thee.*"

Then follows the versicle from Psalm cxiii. 1, which begins the *Te Deum* in the Irish version—"Praise the Lord, ye servants, O praise the Name of the Lord"—succeeded by a repetition of some of the clauses from the *Gloria* already cited, the *Nunc Dimittis*, and a prayer for joy and gladness and efficiency in good works.

We will now print a translation of the Latin version of the hymn as it is given in the Bangor Antiphonary (seventh century). Here we shall see that the text is excellent in the opening clause, but exhibits several peculiarities in the first part, though ending correctly with the Trinitarian apostrophe; while in the second part one clause is omitted, a new one is inserted, and a second reference to the Holy Spirit is introduced, and the quotation of Phil. ii. 11 is lost:

"Glory to God in the highest, and in earth peace to men of goodwill.
We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, *we magnify Thee*, we give thanks to Thee *for Thy great pity*, O Lord, Heavenly King, God the Father, Almighty.
O Lord, the Only-Begotten Son, Jesu Christ,
O Holy Spirit of God.
And we all say Amen.
O Lord, Son of God the Father, Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us; Receive our prayer.
Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

For Thou only art Holy, Thou only art the Lord.
Thou only art glorious, with the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father. Amen."

Then follow the same three versicles as in the Alexandrine text, and eight others, concluding with the Mozarabic form of the *Gloria Patri*—"Glory and honour to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, both now and ever and for endless ages. Amen."

It is a pity that the preference of our Prayer-Book reformers for the less felicitous text of the Roman Missal has deprived us of the proper Trinitarian conclusion of the first part of the hymn, and of the Scriptural quotation at the end. In exact points of translation, too, we may regret that the strict rendering of the opening words, "Glory to God in the highest," was not adopted, as it is in the modern Scottish Prayer-Book. But the English Bible in current use in 1549 gave in St. Luke, "Glory be to God on high," and that rendering no doubt determined the wording of the hymn. But it is odd that the reformers did not follow the Latin in translating the clause, "on earth peace to men of goodwill." Here they doubtless believed that the Greek text of Erasmus was more to be trusted than the Roman Missal; and, indeed, all the Greek service-books concur in the form "goodwill to men," and here again, too, the English Bible supported them. In 1552, when the Communion Service was dislocated, the *Gloria in Excelsis* was transferred from the beginning of the Office to the end, where it now stands, with a duplication of the clause, "Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us." I agree with Bishop Dowden ("Workmanship of the Prayer-Book," p. 80) that this repetition was due to an accident—some clerical or printer's error. Mr. W. E. Scudamore, however ("Notitia Eucharistica," ed. 2, p. 795), hazarded the ingenious suggestion that the trine repetition of "Qui tollis peccata" in the *Agnus Dei* led to its incorporation here; but, as Dr. Dowden remarks, the 1552 revisers were not men likely to be influenced by a liturgical sentiment of that nature.

A more serious mistake, common alike in all versions, is the use of the plural "sins" instead of the singular, in the clause "that takest away the sin of the world." The text in St. John i. 29 is decisive. It is not the separate individual sins that are to be thought of, but the sinfulness, the common corruption of humanity, which the Lamb of God took away by the atonement which He wrought (see Westcott's note *ad loc.*). The Proper Preface for Easter Day has the singular correctly.

I pass to the use of this noble hymn in the Church Services. It was originally a morning hymn, and found place in the Greek morning worship. In the West, too, it remained for long simply a morning hymn, unconnected with the Eucharist. The Rule of Cæsarius of Arles (ob. 542) bade it be used every Sunday morning at Matins, and to this Sunday use the Rule of Aurelian of Arles (ob. 545) added all the greater festivals. A similar use prevailed in the Mozarabic Breviary; while in the Ambrosian breviary it was used daily after the canticles. In the Irish Church it was used as an evening as well as a morning hymn, as it is to-day in the Eastern Church.

Its introduction into the liturgy was due to the Roman Church. From earliest times the simple Gospel *Gloria in Excelsis* from St. Luke ii. 14 had been sung in the Eucharist in both East and West; but it was not until the sixth century, and at Rome, that the whole hymn as we know it was used in the Mass, and from Rome this Eucharistic use spread throughout the West, and gradually superseded the use of the hymn as a morning devotion, its place being taken by the *Te Deum*, the versicles and antiphons of the *Gloria* also being taken over and attached to it. According to Duchesne ("Origines du Culte Chrétien," p. 158), its earliest Eucharistic use at Rome was in the first Christmas Mass celebrated before daybreak. Thence its use was extended by Pope Symmachus (498-515) to Sundays and Feasts of Martyrs when the celebrant was a Bishop. Priests were allowed to say it only on Easter Day and on the day of their first performance of sacerdotal duties.

To England the hymn came probably with St. Augustine from Rome, and from the first occupied a place in the Missal.

The American Church, in permitting its use at Morning or Evening Prayer at the end of the Psalms, instead of the *Gloria Patri*, has reverted more nearly to the original use of the hymn in primitive times.

There remains the question whether it is liturgically desirable for the *Gloria in Excelsis* to be said or sung at every celebration of the Holy Communion. The old rule of the Church of England before the Reformation ordered it to be said on Sundays and festivals only, and to be omitted entirely during Advent and the period between Septuagesima and Easter. It is undoubtedly a mistake to obliterate or minimize the differences in the Church Services between the penitential and festal seasons. They ought to be more marked than they are at present.

As our Morning Prayer now stands, for example, there is no distinction between the services of Christmas Day and of Ash Wednesday until the Proper Psalms are reached: there is nothing to distinguish the First Sunday in Lent from the First Sunday after Christmas until we reach the Lessons. And in the Liturgy Easter and Christmas are only distinguished (apart from the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels) by the very brief Proper Prefaces. Would it not be a liturgical gain if the omission of the *Gloria in Excelsis* were permitted on ordinary weekdays, and during the whole of Advent and Lent? I am far from undervaluing the splendid teaching of the hymn as a thanksgiving, whether at the beginning or at the end of the Eucharist, nor can it be overlooked that the hymn contains cries of suppliant entreaty as well as glorious ascriptions of gratitude and adoration. Doubtless its prayer for mercy, thrice repeated with wistful solemnity, strikes a note of penitence that cannot be hidden. But, just as I believe that the recitation of the Decalogue would come with greater force and heart-searchingness were it less frequently rehearsed (say in the penitential seasons only), so do I feel that the *Gloria in Excelsis* would be sung

with more earnest joy and more heart-felt adoration were it used only on the Sundays and festivals that fall without the penitential periods.

II. "Te Deum."

Unlike the Eastern hymn which we have just considered, which combines the loftiest adoration with the lowliest pleas for mercy, the question of whose authorship has never elicited any very interesting theories, the *Te Deum* has attracted around itself for centuries a network of fascinating legend and literary guesswork. But within the last ten years constant researches have brought to light a great deal of information about the authorship, structure, rhythm, and text of this splendid psalm of praise and belief; and practically all doubts as to its authorship have been set at rest by Dom Morin's ingenious identification of the writer with Niceta of Remesiana, whose name (variously spelt Niceta, Neceta, Nicetius, Nicetus) was appended to the hymn in certain therebefore scarcely examined Roman, Gallican, and Irish MSS. and hymn-books of the tenth century. The *editio princeps* of Niceta's works, published by the Cambridge University Press in 1905, which formed Dr. Andrew E. Burn's thesis for the Doctorate of Divinity, admirably sums up all that is known of Niceta and of his See.

A Serbian village, marked on the war maps during the late Balkan troubles as Bela Pelanka, represents the site of Remesiana. Here, at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century, Niceta lived, busied with missionary work among the heathen Dacians. The times then, as to-day, were restless politically, racially, and ecclesiastically. The Nicene Faith was questioned. Pagan superstitions held their own, and often burst through the thin veneer of superimposed Christianity. Work must have been arduous and not seldom disappointing. But beyond all his missionary and theological work, Niceta was, to the Western Church's undying gratitude, a hymn-writer, and to him we owe the greatest, perhaps, of the Christian non-Biblical hymns. The date of its composition may be placed

about the years 382-385. The plan and structure of the *Te Deum* are very simple. The first thirteen verses form a hymn of praise addressed to God the Father, recording the tireless worship ever ascending to Him from all created intelligences invisible and visible. The first six of these verses, expressing the worship of the invisible heavenly host, seem to have been modelled partly on the opening words of Psalm cxlvii.: "O praise the Lord of heaven, praise Him in the height. Praise Him all ye angels of His, praise Him all His host"; and partly on a passage in the ancient Latin liturgy in which the Cherubim and Seraphim were described as saluting the thrice-holy name of God, as in the visions of Isaiah (vi. 3) and of St. John in the Apocalypse (iv. 8).

The next three verses record the worship of human beings living on both sides of the veil, and are based upon some words of Cyprian (A.D. 252, *De Mortal.*, 26): "There is the glorious choir of the Apostles; there is the company of the Prophets exulting; there is the innumerable multitude of Martyrs, crowned on account of their struggle and the victory of their passion." Here we note, first, that the Prophets, being placed after the Apostles, are not the Old Testament Patriarchs and Prophets, but the Prophets of the New Testament, those of the early Christian Church, such as we read of in the Acts of the Apostles and in early Church history. Secondly, the word translated "noble," in "the noble army of martyrs," is *candidatus*, "white-robed"; and white uniform was the mark of distinction worn by the specially selected troops who formed the personal body-guard of the Emperor. The martyrs are thus regarded by Niceta as Christ's "Own" special corps, and as nearest to His Person.

A Trinitarian confession forms the climax of the worship of "the Holy Church throughout all the world," and closes the first part of the hymn.

The second part of the hymn is addressed, not to God the Father, but directly to the Son, following in this respect, as we have seen, the lines of the *Gloria in Excelsis*. It confesses first

Christ's eternal glory as the Son of God, then His wondrous condescension in the Incarnation, then His triumph over Death's murderous dart (Hos. xiii. 14; 1 Cor. xv. 55), and His thereby throwing open for the faithful the way into heaven; and then it falls into the language of the Creed, proclaiming His session at the right hand of God and His constant attitude of coming Judge in glory. On these grounds it implores Him to help those whom He has redeemed, and to grant them the reward of everlasting glory with His saints.

In these verses there are some faulty translations in our English version, and at least one error due to following an inferior text. "When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man" would be more accurately expressed as "When Thou tookest manhood, or human nature, to deliver it." The reference is to the assumption of human nature by the Son of God in the Incarnation, not to the Atonement. This sense of *homo* is quite common in Tertullian, Augustine, Hilary, Leo, and Boetius. But the better and fuller Irish text has preserved a word which is unrepresented in our version. It reads: "Thou tookest manhood to deliver *the world*," a phrase which recalls those passages in St. John's writings which speak of Christ as "the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 42; 1 John iv. 14), and of God's immense love for the world displayed in His surrender of His Only Son (John iii. 16, 17).

Again, "the sharpness of death" is an unfortunate rendering of a concrete word by an abstract. The *sting* of death is the phrase familiar to us from its occurrence in the passage from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians which we read in the Burial Office. But even *sting* does not quite convey the meaning of the original, which denotes an instrument of torture, the point of a goad or a dart. In this same verse there is nothing in the original to correspond with our "all." The Latin has simply *credentibus*.

Again, the thoughts in verses 18 and 19 are confused. The division should run: "Thou sittest at the right hand of God. We believe that Thou shalt come in the glory of the Father to

be our Judge." The Scriptural emphasis is laid, not on the *session* in glory, but on the *coming* in glory.

Finally, there is one ever-to-be-regretted alteration in the text which, by the interchange of two letters, transformed *munerari* into *numerari;* and so we sing, "Make them to be numbered with Thy saints," instead of, "Make them to be rewarded with Thy saints with glory everlasting." No MS. reads *numerari*, which first appeared in a printed edition of the Breviary in 1491—probably due to a reminiscence of some familiar words in the liturgy which prayed that the worshippers might be numbered in the flock of God's elect (*in electorum Tuorum jubeas grege numerari*).

Here the *Te Deum* proper ends—that is to say, the hymn as composed by Niceta. The remaining verses, which form the third part of the whole, are merely a collection of antiphons, or versicles and responses, which come, with one exception, from the Psalter. The exception—"Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin"—belonged originally, as we have seen, to the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and when the *Te Deum* supplanted it in the West as the Morning Hymn, this antiphon went with it. But it is found also in late evening services with the word "night" substituted for "day."

In the Irish version of the hymn an antiphon from Psalm cxiii. 1 is prefixed to it—"Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini"; and the whole is entitled "Ymnum in die dominica." The Milan version is headed, "Hymnus in honore Trinitatis."

The *Te Deum* is the Creed touched into music; and viewed in this light, as a baptismal canticle, we may recognize a possible background of truth behind the old legend of the eighth and ninth centuries which attributed its composition to St. Ambrose and St. Augustine. For the hymn may very well have become known in Milan before the year 387, when Augustine was baptized, and have been sung during the service of that memorable Easter Eve, April 25, 387.

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