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THE FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT TAUGHT IN ANTE-NICENE HYMNS

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After the Council of Nicaea, the Arian controversy was far from over, and the battle raged on partly through the composition and dissemination of church songs. Portions of Arius's (ca. 256–336) songbook, the *Thalia*, are preserved in the polemical writings of Athanasius (ca. 296–373).[1] On the other hand, the Nicaean position was also promulgated by means of songs. In no place is this more evident than in the hymns of Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339–97).[2] The use of music to promote doctrine—whether it be orthodox or heterodox—is in keeping with Paul's command to use psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to address *one another* (Eph. 5.19) and to teach and admonish (Col. 3.16). But this practice did not begin with Paul. The use of singing as instruction has been part of the community of faith at least since the time of Moses (Deut. 31.19-22), and, as Matthew Gordley has shown, teaching was a feature of ancient communal music even outside of Jewish-Christian contexts.[3]

As I will demonstrate in this article, the didactic use of music continued even after Paul's command into the second and third centuries and specifically for the purpose of singing about the Father, Son and Spirit. Basil of Cae-

1. Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. edn, 2002), pp. 62-66, 98-116; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 318-81.

2. Many pseudepigraphic hymns were attributed to Ambrose; scholars generally agree that four hymns are confirmed to have been written by Ambrose himself. For recent translations of these hymns, see Boniface Ramsey, *Ambrose* (London: Routledge, 1997).

3. Matthew E. Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity: Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

sarea (ca. 330–79) gives testimony of this, reporting that Christians used a very 'ancient formula' when they 'praise Father, Son, and God's Holy Spirit'.[4] My concern is not only *that* early Christians taught with song but *what* early Christians taught with song. In this article, I will argue that the prevalence of the triadic formula in second- and third-century apocryphal and pseudepigraphic didactic hymns supports Basil's claim and that teaching the Father, Son and Spirit with hymns is germane to Christianity.[5]

Hermut Löhr's chapter, titled 'What Can We Know about the Beginnings of Christian Hymnody?' provides an important preliminary consideration. He makes a distinction between the disciplines of hymnography and hymnody, 'hymnography as a phenomenon of literary production and hymnody as a religious practice'.[6] Stated in simple terms, hymnography is concerned with the *composition* of hymns or hymnic material, while hymnody is concerned with the *use* of hymns among Christian communities. Also important, as Löhr has noted, is that the category hymn may be used for poetry, but also for exalted prose.[7] In other words, there may not be evidence that an ancient passage that scholars have labeled as a hymn or have recognized as having hymnic qualities was ever used in the synaxis or even sung. The hymns I will examine in this article contain evidence that suggests these hymns were written as songs. To what extent they were used in their perspective communities, we cannot be certain.

4. *Spir*. 29. Basil of Caesarea, 'De Spiritu Sancto', in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (14 vols.; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1895), VIII, p. 46.

5. In this article, following the pattern of G.L. Prestige in his classic work, when referring to the Father, Son and Spirit collectively, I will use the term 'Triad'. Prestige states, 'The word "Trinity" … I have normally represented by the less question-begging term "triad"' (G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* [London: SPCK, 1952], p. xxv). When the Triad occurs in a hymn in the order of the Father, Son and Spirit, I will refer to this as the 'triadic formula'.

6. Hermut Löhr, 'What Can We Know about the Beginnings of Christian Hymnody?', in Clemens Leonhard and Hermut Löhr (eds.), *Literature or Liturgy? Early Christian Hymns and Prayers in Their Literary and Liturgical Context in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), p. 171.

7. Löhr, 'What Can We Know?', p. 163.

The Father, Son and Spirit in the Musical Thought of Early Christian Writers

This article consists of two major sections. In this first section, I will consult four writers of the second and third centuries who promoted the use of music for teaching and admonishing concerning the Father, Son and Spirit. In the second major section, I will demonstrate that the triadic formula was prevalent in the didactic hymns of ante-Nicene communities.

Tertullian (and Valentinus)

Tertullian (ca. 155–220) wrote in opposition to the 'psalmis Valentini' that, according to Tertullian, taught that Christ did not receive a body of flesh from Mary.[8] Valentinus's book of psalms seems to have been widely distributed during Tertullian's time. Thus, in order to counter these hymns, Tertullian calls upon the Psalms of David: we have 'the support of the Psalms, not indeed those of that apostate and heretic and Platonic Valentinus, but of the most holy and canonical prophet David. He, in our Church, sings of Christ [*ille apud nos canir Christum*], because by him Christ sang of himself.'[9] According to Tertullian, in the congregations of Carthage, David is still instructing the church about the doctrines of Christ as they sing the Psalms.[10] While Tertullian's specific concern is the nature of Christ's body as it relates to being born of Mary, it should be noted that this is within the context of his teachings on the role of the Father and the Spirit in the birth of Christ.

The only extant psalm from Valentinus is known as 'Summer Harvest' which Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–235) records and simply calls θέρος ('Harvest').[11]

8. *Carn. Chr.* 17. Tertullian, 'De Carne Christi', in Ernest Evans (ed.), *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation: The Text Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1956), p. 59.

9. *Carn. Chr.* 17. Tertullian, 'De Carne Christi', p. 69. For the Latin text, see Geoffrey S. Smith, *Valentinian Christianity: Texts and Translations* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), p. 10.

10. This passage is also important because it provides a glimpse into the goals of Psalm-singing among early Christians in North Africa, especially the Christological nature of singing Old Testament Psalms.

11. *Haer.* 6.37.7. Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies* (trans. Matthew David Litwa; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), pp. 438-41.

(1) I see how all depends on spirit,
(2) I perceive how all is borne by spirit:
(3) Flesh suspended on soul,
(4) Soul clinging to air,
(5) Air suspended from ether;
(6) But from the depths, fruits being brought forth,
(7) From the womb, a child being brought forth.[12]

It does not seem likely that this is the same hymn that Tertullian had in mind, but the references to the Father, Son and Spirit in this hymn are worth briefly examining. Einar Thomassen argues that Valentinus's metrical psalm was 'used in communal worship, where it would be sung collectively by the congregation'.[13] Tertullian implied that the psalms of Valentinus are being sung in nearby communities and it is for this reason he must counter these psalms. Interpreting 'harvest' in the context of a complex Valentinian mythology and cosmology is outside of the scope of this article, but in keeping with my goals, there is a view of the Father, Son and Spirit in this psalm that accords with Valentinian theology. The most obvious reference is the use of spirit (πνεῦμα) on which everything—flesh, soul, air and ether—depends and is born (lines 1-2). This cosmological connection of spirit to the existence of all things is reminiscent of Gen. 1 when the Spirit of God moves upon the face of the water in creation. Also present in Valentinus's hymn is a reference to the birth of a child (ἐκ μήτρας δέ βρέφος φερόμενον [line 7]) which resembles the Christ-child in the canonical Gospels. Valentinus's reference to the Father (line 6) is less obvious. Thomassen has shown that the Greek word βυθός, translated as 'the depths' (line 6), is a name in Valentinian theology for the Father who is the hidden source of life.[14]

Although the functions of and the relationships between the Father, Son and Spirit were different in the hymnodic theology of Valentinus as compared to the views held by Tertullian, it is still important evidence to demonstrate that teaching about the Father, Son and Spirit was prominent in early Christian communities. Tertullian's opposition to Valentinus over the theological

12. Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 479.

13. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, p. 481.

14. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, p. 485. See also Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, p. 360.

teachings in church songs is reminiscent of the later conflict between Arians and Trinitarians. Another early Christian writer in North Africa also raged against musical false teachings; we will now turn our attention to this writer.

Origen of Alexandria

Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–253) also sees hymns as a means of imparting and preserving Christian teachings; he writes against the practices of a Greek philosopher, Celsus, whose writings survive only in Origen's work *Contra Celsum*. According to Origen, Celsus said that Christians 'appear to worship the great God much more if we sing praise [ὑμνῶμεν] to Helios and Athena'.[15] What Celsus specifically said is unclear, but he seems to have been promoting a view that equated the Christian God with the god of the sun, Helios, or the god of war and wisdom, Athena. Origen answers, 'We address our hymns [ὑμνοῦμεν] of praise to the supreme God alone and to His only begotten Son, the divine Logos.'[16] For Origen, hymns not only teach and preserve sound doctrine for the believers, but these hymns are also a counter-cultural testimony to outsiders.

Elsewhere, Origen shows great concern for using music to understand the teachings of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14.15):

> For neither can our understanding pray unless the Spirit prays first … neither can it sing psalms with rhythm and melody, in time and harmony, and praise the Father in Christ, unless the Spirit who

15. *Cels*. 8.67. Origen of Alexandria, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 503. For the Greek text, see Origen of Alexandria, *Origenes: Contra Celsum, Libri VIII* (ed. Miroslav Marcovich; Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 583.

16. *Cels*. 8.67. Origen of Alexandria, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, p. 503; Origen of Alexandria, *Origenes: Contra Celsum, Libri VIII*, p. 583. Although Origen does not mention the Holy Spirit in this context, Origen is widely recognized as an early voice for the doctrine that came to be called the Trinity. For more on Origen's views on the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit, see Giulio Maspero, 'Imagining the Unimaginable: Origen's Two Models of the Trinity', *Modern Theology* 38 (2022), pp. 247-59; Giovanni Hermanin de Reichenfeld, *The Spirit, the World and the Trinity: Origen's and Augustine's Understanding of the Gospel of John* (Studia Traditionis Theologiae, 40; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2021).

> searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God, first praises and hymns him whose depths he hath searched.[17]

Origen's desire that the church 'praise the Father in Christ' by the aid of the 'Spirit' reveals an Origenian view that songs *about* the Father and the Son are made possible *by* the Spirit. When Origen speaks of the Spirit searching all things, even the depths of God, he is applying Paul's teaching on having the wisdom of the Spirit and the mind of Christ in 1 Cor. 2.6-14 to the context of singing and prayer in 1 Cor. 14.15. Paul does not explicitly extend 1 Cor. 2 to singing but writes concerning his *speech* not resting in human wisdom. Origen's extension of the Spirit's wisdom to singing gives a glimpse of how early Christians in the Alexandrian community viewed singing as a means by which the Spirit imparted wisdom within the synaxis.

Clement of Alexandria

Another Alexandrian, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215), is an important figure in Christian music studies not only because he composed one of the earliest extant Christian songs, Στόμιον πώλων ἀδαῶν ('Bridle of untamed colts'), but also because his writings contain a treasure trove of metaphors that give us a window into the musical thought of early Christians. The fact that Clement chose to end his lengthy *Paedagogus* with the Στόμιον, a tribute song about Christ the Educator, is evidence of the didactic nature of music. For Clement, there is no better way to honor the Great Teacher than with a song about his teaching. Here are the final lines of this 64-line metrical song:

> (52) Let us all sing
> To Christ, our King,
> Songs of sweet innocence,
> Hymns of bright purity,
> Hallowed gratefulness
> For teachings of life;
> Let us praise gladsomely
> So mighty a Child.

17. *Or*. 2.4. Origen of Alexandria, 'On Prayer', in *Origen's Treatise on Prayer: Translation and Notes with an Account of the Practice and Doctrine of Prayer from New Testament Times to Origen* (trans. Eric George Jay; London: SPCK, 1954), p. 86.

(60) Let us, born of Christ,
Chant out in unison,
Loud chorus of peace,
We, undefiled, pure flock,
To God, Lord of peace.[18]

Although the triadic formula is not present in this song of tribute to the Educator, the Father, Son and Spirit do appear in the doxological material at the close of the book right before the hymn. Clement asks the Educator for help to 'sing eternal thanksgiving to the one only Father and Son, Son and Father, Educator and Teacher with the Holy Spirit'.[19]

The relationship of Father and Son is evident in the phrase 'Word of the Father' (line 12) but references to the Spirit are less obvious. The Spirit may be on the mind of Clement when he refers to 'wisdom' in (line 45). Later in this article, I will examine a hymn from the Acts of Thomas and a hymn from the Manichaean Psalm-Book, both of which explicitly call the Spirit 'wisdom'.[20] The 'spiritual' milk expressed from 'breasts of the Word' (lines 50-51) may also be a reference to the Spirit.[21]

18. *Paed*. 12.101. Clement of Alexandria, 'Paedagogus', in *Clement of Alexandria: Christ the Educator* (Fathers of the Church; trans. Simon P. Wood; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), p. 278. Simon P. Wood's translation has 64 lines. To avoid confusion, I have preserved Wood's numbering for the lines of Clement's song. For a recent translation that preserves the sixty-six lines of poetry, see Annewies van den Hoeck, '"Hymn of the Holy Clements to Christ the Saviour": Clement of Alexandria, Pedagogue III 101, 4', in Matyáš Havrda, Vít Hušek and Jana Plátová (eds.), *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 117; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 315–22. For the latest critical text containing Clement's Hymn, see M. Marcovich and J.C.M. van Winden (eds.), *Clementis Alexandrini: Paedagogus* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

19. *Paed*. 12.101. Clement of Alexandria, 'Paedagogus', p. 275.

20. Acts Thom. 6–7, 50–54. A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 28. *Mani. Ps.* 82.30-33. C.R.C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book: Part 2* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), p. 82.

21. For more on 'wisdom' as a name for the Holy Spirit and feminine imagery used for the Holy Spirit, see Johannes van Oort, 'The Holy Spirit as Feminine: Early

(41) O Jesus, our Christ!
Milk of the bride,
Given of heaven,
Pressed from sweet breasts
Gifts of Thy wisdom
These Thy little ones
(47) Draw for their nourishment;
With infancy's lips
Filling their souls
With spiritual savor
From breasts of the Word.

In another passage from Clement's writings, there is a more direct connection between teaching and music. He implores Christ to 'Sing praises and declare unto me God Thy Father … Thy song shall instruct me.'[22] Clement understands the value of song as a tool for instruction. He not only desires for Christ to instruct him through song, but he also wants Christ to illumine his understanding specifically concerning the Father in this song of instruction. Clement wants Christ to sing and tell him of the Father so that he and the community of faith in Alexandria might no longer stumble in the dark in search of God. For Clement, Christ is the Light who clears away the darkness of the mind, and in this passage, he desires that Christ do this work of illumination with a song.[23]

Clement is known for his metaphorical use of music, and this does seem to be such an occurrence; Christ literally singing a song in a second-century assembly is not likely what Clement has in mind.[24] But for poetic devices to work, there must be a real point of reference for the reader. This point of reference is Clement's quotation of the Messianic psalm just a few lines earlier

Christian Testimonies and their Interpretation', *HTS Theological Studies* 72 (2016), pp. 1-6.

22. *Protr*. 11. Clement of Alexandria, 'Protrepticus', in *The Exhortation to the Greeks, The Rich Man's Salvation, To the Newly Baptized* (trans. G.W. Butterworth; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. 243.

23. *Protr*. 11. Clement of Alexandria, 'Protrepticus', p. 243.

24. For a discussion on Clement's use of musical metaphor versus actual music, see Charles Cosgrove, 'Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music', *JECJS* 14 (2006), pp. 255-82.

in which Christ sings of the Father in the congregation: 'I will declare thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing praises to Thee' (Heb. 2.12; Ps. 22.22). This Scripture reference is itself didactic as Christ tells of himself in the assembly of God's people. Clement's asking Christ to teach him through song is indicative of a way of thinking about music in the church that is rooted in this New Testament quotation of Ps. 22.

Hippolytus of Rome

Across the Mediterranean Sea, another early Christian writer, Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170–235), offers a unique perspective on the didactic nature of music.[25] Like Tertullian, he holds a high view of the Psalms and sees the Hebrew psalter as an authoritative source for instructing God's new covenant people. He calls the Psalms 'the second book of doctrine' after the Law of Moses, and he tells us that 'the Hebrews also divided the Psalter into five books, so that it might be another Pentateuch'.[26]

Hippolytus even suggested that the construction of David's stringed instrument provided a teaching lesson: 'And the sound does not come from the lower parts, as is the case with the lute and certain other instruments, but from the upper' which helps Christians in 'seeking things above' rather than 'pleasures' and 'passions of the flesh' that are below on this earth.[27] Hippolytus connects David's instrument with the act of imparting God's truth when he states that David 'prophesied with an instrument, called by the Greeks the *psaltery* and by the Hebrews the *nabla*'. It is not clear precisely which instrument Hippolytus believes David played—whether he is historically accurate is not a concern for this article. What is important is that Hippolytus sees David's instrument as a source of nonverbal instruction. M.L. West explains that not much is known about the *nabla*. It is a 'Phoenician harp that arrived in Greece about the end of the fourth century BC', sounds 'throaty', was

25. Authorship of the catena of commentary fragments on the Psalms has been questioned. Some of these fragments are more likely written by Origen or Eusebius. For more, see Alice Whealey, 'Prologues on the Psalms: Origen, Hippolytus, Eusebius', *Revue Bénédictine* 106 (1996), pp. 234-45.

26. *Comm. Ps.* 1.1, 8. Hippolytus of Rome, 'Fragments from the Scriptural Commentaries of Hippolytus', in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (10 vols.; trans. Stewart D.F. Salmond; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1919), V, pp. 199, 201.

27. *Comm. Ps.* 1.6. Hippolytus of Rome, 'Fragments', V, p. 200.

'played without a plectrum' and 'was suitable for merrymaking'.[28] If Hippolytus is describing the Phoenician *nabla*, then we also learn from this early Christian source that it was also straight with no curve.[29]

Hippolytus inquires why there are 150 psalms and in doing so, he uses the triadic formula: 'Thus, then, it was also meet that the hymns to God … should contain not simply one set of fifty, but three such, for the name of Father, and Son and Holy Spirit.'[30] Hippolytus's concern for form and content led him to conclude that not only did the Psalms themselves impart God's teachings, but the literary form of the Psalms and even the form of David's stringed instrument were didactic, instructing the church about the Father, Son and Spirit. Just as Tertullian saw the Psalms as teaching about Christ, so does Hippolytus see Christ and the Spirit in these ancient texts.

The Triadic Formula in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Hymns

With an overview of how these four second- and third-century Christian writers saw music as a means of teaching the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let us look now at apocryphal and pseudepigraphic didactic hymns that contain the triadic formula. Matthew Gordley defines a didactic hymn as 'those compositions which employ the stylistic and/or formal conventions of praise and prayer, but whose primary purpose was to convey a lesson, idea, or theological truth to a human audience'.[31] While there are very few extant hymns from 'orthodox' sources, there are numerous didactic hymns from communities that began in Christianity and developed doctrines that are later judged as heretical. The hymns presented in this section are limited to those that contain the triadic formula—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The prevalence of the triadic formula in these hymns provides valuable insight into early Christian views on the Triad.

The Odes of Solomon

The Odes of Solomon consist of forty-two (forty-one are extant) pseudepigraphic, psalm-like poems attributed to King Solomon that may have been in

28. M.L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 77.
29. *Comm. Ps.* 1.6. Hippolytus of Rome, 'Fragments', V, p. 200.
30. *Comm. Ps.* 1.3. Hippolytus of Rome, 'Fragments', V, p. 199.
31. Gordley, *Teaching through Song in Antiquity*, p. 5.

circulation as early as the beginning of the second century but no later than the early third century.[32] Although authorship is unknown, Michael Lattke has demonstrated that the unity of this collection is 'almost universally accepted' and 'the poems originated in one religious community'.[33] Scholars have noted Jewish and gnostic elements within this early Christian songbook, but this is no surprise given the Jewish origins of Christianity and the Christian origins of those communities and teachings labeled as 'gnostic'. Each of the forty-one songs ends with 'Hallelujah', a liturgical response that has its roots in Judaism.

The triadic formula is found in Ode 23 which employs the imagery of a letter that has been signed:[34]

> (21) But the letter became a great tablet
> that was entirely covered with writing by the finger of God.
> (22) And the name of the Father was upon it
> and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
> to reign as king for ever and ever. Hallelujah.[35]

The reference to 'the name' and the order of the Triad (line 22) is reminiscent of the triadic formula in Mt. 28. Leslie Baynes has suggested that the *letter* is a metaphor for Christ, the Messiah.[36] In this song, the Father, Son and Spirit sign the Letter to show that they are in perfect agreement with the message of the Letter (v. 21), and the ones singing the ode can rest assured that this agreement will last for eternity just as the reign of the Lord which is forever and ever (v. 22).

32. Michael Lattke, *Odes of Solomon: A Commentary* (ed. Harold W. Attridge; trans. Marianne Ehrhardt; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), pp. 6-10.

33. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, p. 5.

34. The Father, Son and Spirit also occur in Ode 19, but as Lattke has observed, 'in a less formulaic expression'. The ode states, 'A cup of milk was offered to me and I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord's kindness. The Son is the cup, and he who was milked, the Father, and [the one] who milked him, the Spirit of holiness' (*Odes of Solomon*, p. 339).

35. Odes Sol. 23.21-22. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, p. 325.

36. J. Rendel Harris, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon: Published from the Syriac Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), p. 63; Leslie Baynes, 'Christ as Text: Odes of Solomon 23 and the Letter Shot from Heaven', *BR* 47 (2022), pp. 63-72.

This central metaphor, a letter, is by nature didactic. In this song, as is the case for most epistles, the Letter is sent forth so that the reader might increase in understanding. The contents of the epistle are not concealed forever; all is revealed when the document arrives in the hands of the intended recipient (v. 10). It states that 'The letter was also a decree' (v. 17) and that 'those who saw the letter followed it, that they might perceive where it would settle and who would read it and who would hear it' (v. 10). This letter would be read *and* heard by a broad audience; it is not a secret message containing *gnosis*. The likely recipients of the Letter are the 'saints' or the 'elect' who are identified in the first three verses as the ones who are learning the ways of 'joy', 'grace' and 'love'.

(1) Joy belongs to the saints,
and who will put it on
except they alone?
(2) Grace belongs to the elect,
and who will receive it
except those who trust in it from the beginning?
(3) Love belongs to the elect,
and who will put it on
except those who gained it from the beginning?[37]

Lattke identifies vv. 1-3 of Ode 23 as a didactic introduction. Notice the didactic language of 'put on' and 'receive'.[38]

In another ode, there is an emphasis on teaching through music which indicates that the didactic use of music was at least on the mind of the poet and was to some extent an aspect of the community where this songbook originated:

(7) Teach me the odes of thy truth,
that I may bear fruits by/in thee.
(8) And open the cithara of thy holy spirit to me,
that I may praise thee with all the tones, Lord.[39]

37. Odes Sol. 23.1-3. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, p. 324.
38. Odes Sol. 23.1-3. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, p. 325.
39. Odes Sol. 14.7-8. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, p. 197.

In this passage, the worshipper is asking the Lord by means of a song to teach him the songs that promote truth. This 'teach me' request is common in the Psalms of the Old Testament (Pss. 25.4, 5; 27.11; 34.11; 86.11; 119.12, 29, 33, 64, 66, 108, 124, 135, 171). But this ode does not just offer a song requesting God's teaching; it also offers musical imagery for how the worshipper will learn to give praise. The writer asks the Lord to 'open the cithara of thy holy spirit to me'. Lattke suggests that this phrase may be a poetic abridgment for 'open my mouth, the cithara of thy holy spirit'.[40] If this is the case, then the mouths of singing Christians are the sacred harp of the Spirit, and the Church is taught by the Spirit as the songs proceed from their mouth unto the Lord.

The Oxyrhynchus Hymn

The date for the papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt that contains a Christian hymn is widely accepted as late third century which means the hymn itself was likely composed at an earlier date. Of all the hymns examined in this article, the Oxyrhynchus hymn is unique because it is the only one accompanied by music notation. This hymn is one of more than three dozen musical documents from the Roman period, so studies in early Christian hymnology are, in this instance, greatly benefitted from Roman-era musicology.[41] This Greek form of notation, preserved largely in the surviving writings of Alypius of Alexandria, a late-Roman musician from the fourth century, provides the intervals for the singer; the rhythm of the hymn follows the natural, prosodic rhythm and meter of the spoken words as is the practice in Roman-era notation. The ellipses represent portions that cannot be translated due to damage to the papyrus:

> … together all the eminent ones of God …
> … night] nor day (?) Let them be silent. Let the luminous stars not […],
> … [Let the rushings of winds, the sources] of all surging rivers [cease].
> While we hymn
> Father and Son and Holy Spirit, let all the powers answer, 'Amen, amen, Strength, praise,

40. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, p. 203.
41. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, pp. 280-326.

> [and glory forever to God], the sole giver of all good things. Amen, amen.'[42]

The call for a 'cosmic stillness' across the earth (lines 1-3) is a feature found in both Jewish and Greek religious music.[43] Why must the inanimate creation be silent and still? So that the song of the saints who hymn the Triad can be heard. Note that in this song, the Christians are hymning all the Father, Son and Spirit.

It should also be noted that the song to the Triad does not conclude with the song of the saints; the angels answer the chorus. Cosgrove argues that the 'powers' (δυνάμεις) are the angels,[44] and the reason why the writer did not use some form of ἄγγελος, Cosgrove proposes, is poetic meter: 'The word δυνάμεις is a perfect half of an anapestic metron.'[45] Although the idea of angels offering praise to God is rooted in the Scripture (Pss. 103.20-21; 148.2; Isa. 62.3; Rev. 4.8; 5.8-14), the concept of humans carrying out liturgical acts in conjunction with the angels seems to have originated with Clement of Alexandria (cf. *Strom*. 7.12.78; 7.7.49; *Protr*. 12.119). Origen also mentions the saints' and angels' song in a passage this article has already explored. In *Cels*., he states, 'We sing praise to God and His only-begotten Son, as also do the sun, moon, and stars, and all the heavenly host. For all these form a divine choir.'[46] The response of the angels to the song of the saints in the Oxyrhynchus hymn, 'Amen, amen, Strength, praise and glory forever to God', is reminiscent of the song of the Cherubim in John's Revelation: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen' (Rev. 7.11-12).

The 'Hymn of Jesus' in the Acts of John

The Acts of John is an apocryphal document written in Greek that claims to provide an account of the deeds of John in western Asia Minor. While some have advocated for a later date of the early third century, Pieter Lalleman ar-

42. Charles H. Cosgrove, *An Ancient Christian Hymn with Music Notation, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786: Text and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

43. Cosgrove, *Ancient Christian Hymn*, pp. 38-44.

44. Cosgrove, *Ancient Christian Hymn*, p. 50.

45. Cosgrove, *Ancient Christian Hymn*, p. 50.

46. *Cels*. 8.67. Origen of Alexandria, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, p. 503; Origen of Alexandria, *Origenes: Contra Celsum, Libri VIII*, p. 583.

gues that the final form of the Acts of John was completed by the middle of the second century.[47] In what has been called the 'Hymn of Jesus' or the 'Hymn of the Dance', the hymn writer states that the occasion of this hymn is before Jesus was arrested by the Jews.[48] This presumably takes place somewhere between Jerusalem and the Garden of Gethsemane. An expanded version of the triadic formula begins the hymn using λόγος for the Son as is common in the Johannine corpus:

> Glory be to you, Father!
> Amen.
> Glory be to you, Word!
> Glory be to you, Grace!
> Amen.
> Glory be to you, Spirit!
> Glory be to you, Holy One!
> Glory be to the glory!
> Amen.[49]

Since John's Gospel does not record that Jesus sang a hymn in the upper room before departing to the Mount of Olives (see Mt. 26), the 'Hymn of Jesus' could be a version of the Johannine community's tradition of that upper room hymn. On the other hand, since the upper room hymn was likely a Hallel psalm (Pss. 113–118) which was traditionally used with the Passover meal, it is possible that the 'Hymn of Jesus' was an additional song that was not recorded in Scripture. It is also possible that the pseudonymous author fabricated the hymn to express a received tradition that Christ often sang with his disciples.

47. Pieter J. Lalleman, *The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation into Johannine Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), p. 270.

48. It is outside of the scope of this article to cover the details of the dance. According to Hendrik F. Stander, dances were performed by early Christians at 'wedding ceremonies, at church festivals, and at the graves of martyrs', and that dancing was not 'an integral part of the liturgical worship services of the "orthodox" church' (Hendrik F. Stander, 'Dance', in Everett Ferguson [ed.], *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* [London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 1999], p. 317).

49. Acts John 94.8-14. I am referencing the English translation and the Greek text in Barbara Ellen Bowe, 'Dancing into the Divine: The Hymn of the Dance in the Acts of John', *JECS* 7 (1999), pp. 83-104 (84).

The Acts of John contain a large amount of Valentinian theology; thus, it was condemned by Eusebius, Augustine, and the Second Council of Nicaea (787). Despite this condemnation, the Acts of John provides a window into early Christian communal singing, specifically the didactic use of the 'Amen' which occurs twenty-nine times. In the 'Hymn of Jesus', the Lord asks his disciples to gather around him forming a circle, and to answer 'Amen' to his teachings in musical form. While in early Christianity the 'Amen' was most often said after prayers, the custom of saying 'Amen' after a song is rooted in the canonical Scriptures (Pss. 41.13; 72.19; 89.52; 106.48; 1 Cor. 14.14-16; Rev. 5.9-14).[50] The call-and-answer pattern with the 'Amen' is a distinguishing feature of the 'Hymn of Jesus'. This repetition of the 'Amen' is a didactic feature used by the pseudonymous author to create multiple occasions for the disciples to say 'may it be so' to the teachings of their Lord.

The final doxology of the 'Hymn of Jesus' has a more concise statement of the triadic formula. If Lalleman's date is correct, this final doxology is a mid-second-century occurrence of the Lesser Doxology or the 'Gloria Patri' which gives equal glory the Father, Son and Spirit.

(39) Glory be to you, Father;
Glory be to you, Word;
Glory be to you, Holy Spirit!
Amen.[51]

The 'Hymn of the Bride' in the Acts of Thomas

The Acts of Thomas (not to be confused with the gnostic Gospel of Thomas discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945) is an apocryphal document that gives an account of the missionary journey to India of the Apostle Thomas as well as his martyrdom. The Syriac version which contains the hymn that is examined later in this article is dated around the beginning of the third century in the Eastern Church.[52] The Acts of Thomas is a rich text for early liturgical studies as it contains two hymns as well as accounts of baptism and the Eucharist. The second hymn, which has been called the 'Hymn of the Pearl', is more widely known. This article will focus on the first hymn, a 54-line

50. Everett Ferguson, 'Amen', in Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 1999), pp. 44-45.

51. Acts John 96.39-41. Bowe, 'Dancing into the Divine', p. 86.

52. Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, pp. 4-15.

metrical song that has been called the 'Hymn of the Bride'. It contains the triadic formula in the final lines:

> (50) And [they] have drunk of the life
> which makes those who drink of it long and thirst (for more);
> and have glorified the Father, the Lord of all,
> and the only-(begotten) Son, who is of Him,
> and have praised the Spirit, His Wisdom.[53]

In the context of the Acts of Thomas, this song is being sung at a Christian marriage, but the theme of this hymn may be an indication of its use within the synaxis. The metaphor of the bride is a picture of the church which is evident in the opening line: 'My church is the daughter of light' (line 1). Using bridal imagery, the hymn speaks of the church as the dwelling place of truth. It states, 'within, truth dwells in humility. Her gates are adorned with truth' (lines 28-29). This mixing of the church and truth with building imagery is reminiscent of Pauline language when he calls the 'Church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth' (1 Tim. 3.15). Like Paul, this hymn also refers to God as 'living' Father (line 45). This emphasis on truth is certainly a didactic quality, especially since the King 'feeds those who dwell with him beneath' his truth (lines 8-9).

In this hymn, the bride is accompanied by a wedding party (lines 30-34) which is wearing shining garments (line 43) as they await the Bridegroom who has a 'kingdom which shall never pass away' (lines 37-38). This passage mirrors the metaphors used in the Apostle John's Revelation. John tells of the bride who will be clothed in 'bright and pure' linen and who is ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19.6-9). The thirst imagery in association with the water of life and the bride (line 51) is also used by John: 'The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come". And let the one who hears say, "Come". And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price' (Rev. 22.17).

The triadic formula is used again in the Acts of Thomas in a liturgical context, this time in the context of a baptismal invocation as the apostle anoints with oil the one being baptized. It is not clear whether this text was meant to be sung, but it certainly has hymnic qualities:

53. Acts Thom. 6–7, 50–54. Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, p. 28.

> Come, you holy name of the Christ that is above every name.
> Come, you power of the Most High, and the compassion that is perfect.
> Come, gift of the Most High …
> Come, Holy Spirit, and cleanse their reins and their heart,
> and give them the added seal, in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.[54]

The Manichaean Psalm-Book

The Manichaean Psalm-Book is a collection of psalms from the community that adhered to the teachings of the prophet Mani (ca. 216–77), who was born in southern Babylonia (now in Iraq) and became a missionary to India. Mani mixed elements of Christianity with Zoroastrian and Buddhist teachings.[55] The Manichaean Psalm-Book is preserved in an early fourth-century Coptic papyrus, but its original form would have been earlier and the songs themselves would have likely been composed even earlier. As is the case for Valentinian theology, the Manichaean view of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit differs from what will be called 'orthodox'.[56] The triadic formula is overwhelmingly present throughout the Manichaean Psalm-Book. Here is one such instance:

> (30) Victory to thee and glory, O Living Father, and to Jesus Christ
> thy son, and to thy Holy Spirit. Victory to the soul
> of Plousiane, the soul of the blessed Mary,
> Theona, Pshai, and Jmnoute.[57]

54. Acts Thom. 1.27. Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*, p. 77.

55. Paul Mirecki, 'Manichaean Literature', in Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer (eds.), *The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts of Mystical Wisdom from the Ancient and Medieval World* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), pp. 567-654.

56. Gardner and Lieu have observed a connection between Manichaeanism and Marcionism (see Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p. 18). For more on Manichaeanism, see the English translation of Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism* (trans. M.B. DeBevoise; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

57. *Mani. Ps*. 82.30-33. Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book*, p. 82 (additional occurrences of the triadic formula can be found on pp. 14, 39, 49, 57, 62, 75, 82, 113, 115, 116 and 164). In Allberry's Coptic/English copy, not all the psalms are numbered. Because Allberry preserves the page numbers of the papyrus, my numbering system reflects the page number and the line of poetry. For more on the Manichaean

The mention of names such as 'Plousiane, the soul of the blessed Mary, Theona, Pshai, and Jmnoute' is reminiscent of the personal endings of the canonical epistles written by the apostles (the function of these names is covered later in this article).

In a psalm that C.R.C. Allberry has titled 'Psalm to the Trinity', the Triad makes music together:

> (25) The Father rejoices always, the Son also makes music
> to the Father, but his is wisdom entire,
> even the Holy Spirit.[58]

As the Father, Son and Spirit make music in perfect harmony, they also teach important virtues for the soul and body. The writer continues using the Triad:

> (28) The Love may we get for ourselves towards the Father, the faith
> which is in us towards the Son, the fear of our heart
> towards the Holy Spirit.
> (31) The seal of the mouth for the sign of the Father, the peace
> of the hands for the sign of the Son, the purity of virginity
> for the sign of the Holy Spirit.[59]

In this Manichaean psalm, the psalmist's view of the Triad is more than just a doctrinal position; they are the source of virtuous teaching, learning and doing.

The Psalms of Heracleides are included as part of the Manichaean Psalm-Book. One of these psalms reveals something about the relationship of the Triad to the church:

> (25) The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit—this is the perfect
> Church.
> (27) When I utter Amen the doors of the skies open.
> (28) O psalmist of the sky, Amen, to whom they make music.[60]

Psalm-Book, see Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book: Prosody and Mandaean Parallels* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1949).

58. *Mani. Ps*. 115.25-33. Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book*, p. 115.
59. *Mani. Ps*. 115.25-33. Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book*, p. 115.
60. *Mani. Ps*. 190.25-28. Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book*, p. 190.

In the triadic formula of this song, the presence of the Triad is necessary for a whole and complete church (ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲁⲏⲕ). Elsewhere in the Psalms of Heracleides, the writer has a concept of the ecclesia rooted in the New Testament. The author likens the ecclesia to a bridegroom (193.25; Rev. 18.23; 19.7) and calls Peter the foundation of the ecclesia (194.7; Mt. 16.18). The community of the ecclesia holds a special place in this psalter; a unifying literary device is the inclusion of members of the community in the final doxology of each of the 289 psalms. For instance, psalm 190 mentions Mary and Theona and psalm 82 mentions 'Plousiane, the soul of the blessed Mary, Theona, Pshai and Jmnoute'. Allberry suggests that these could be martyred saints.[61] The Manichaean psalm-writers hold the saints of the ecclesia in high regard, but apart from the Triad, the church is lacking and incomplete.

Elsewhere in the psalm of Heracleides, the Amen is called the 'Psalmist of the Sky'. Once again, God as music-maker is the theme. When the singer calls out to the Amen (cf. Rev. 3.14), the doors of the skies open. In the Old and New Testaments, when the skies open, it is associated with God's blessing (e.g. Ps. 78.23-24), judgment (e.g. Gen. 7.11) and revelation (e.g. Ezek. 1.1; Lk. 3.21). In this psalm, God speaks forth revelation in the form of music while the saints make music. This didactic theme of making revelation was presented in another occurrence of the Triad at the beginning of this psalm:

> (30) Amen, the Father, Amen, the Son:
> let us answer to the Amen.
> (31) Amen, Amen, Amen, the Holy Spirit, that makes revelation:
> let us answer to the Amen.[62]

Conclusion

In this article, I have provided the testimony of four early Christians whose writings span the end of the second century to the middle of the third century. Tertullian and Origen used the Psalms of David to combat false teachings;

61. Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book*, p. xx. 'Martyrs' are mentioned at the conclusion of 157.13 and 173.12.

62. *Mani. Ps*. 189.30-31; 190.1-2. Allberry, *Manichaean Psalm-Book*, pp. 189-90.

Clement asked Christ to instruct him with song and provided a hymn of tribute to the Educator; Hippolytus and Origen used the triadic formula in their teachings on the didactic nature of music. To further demonstrate that hymning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was, as Basil said, 'an ancient' practice, I have examined hymns from apocryphal and pseudonymous sources of the second and third centuries that contain the triadic formula. This examination has revealed that even among groups who began in Christianity and were later labeled as 'heterodox', teaching the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with hymns is germane to Christianity. Across three continents, from Rome to North Africa and all the way to India, in Greek, Latin, Coptic and Syriac, early Christians raised their voices to sing:

> Glory be to you, Father;
> Glory be to you, Word;
> Glory be to you, Holy Spirit!
> Amen.[63]

63. Acts John 96.39-41. Bowe, 'Dancing into the Divine', p. 86