

## “Each Person Has a Hymn”

### The Creator-Savior Hymns

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Scholars have long recognized that the New Testament contains what may be a number of fragmentary or even nearly complete early Christian hymns extolling Christ as Savior and Creator.<sup>1</sup> Recovery of these hymns has been difficult because oftentimes the hymns were not written in a consistently discernable meter, or the author who quoted the hymn has disrupted the original meter and wording of the hymn.<sup>2</sup> An additional issue is that the musical notations of these hymns are not noted in early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

The most oft-mentioned New Testament hymns are those found in Philippians 2:6–11; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Timothy 3:16; and portions of John 1:1–18. Since their initial rediscovery, scholars have made great strides in their attempts to recover the hymns, and while there is a general acceptance that the New Testament does contain embedded hymns, there is still a vibrant discussion about them.

With respect to the Colossians hymn, scholars are approaching a near consensus on the structure and general outline of the hymn.<sup>3</sup> Studies on the hymn to the Logos in John 1:1–18 and whether it is a formal hymn or a type of poetic praise to the Logos have not arrived at a consensus.

A full study of the hymns is beyond the scope of a single article, and indeed the discussion surrounding each of these early hymns has generated a sizeable body of secondary literature. Instead of focusing on the question of whether these passages functioned as independent hymns and trying to establish their exact parameters, this paper will consider these passages from a different vantage point. First, this study will accept that Philippians 2:6–11 and John 1:1–18 represent partial hymns that predate the books in which they were recorded. Second, the paper will forego engaging in detail the question of the date and authorship of these hymns in order to look at a related issue: the theology of these hymns. These two early hymns will be discussed and analyzed as evidences of a developing, benevolent Creator-Savior theology that sought both to promote the humanity of Jesus as well as to testify of the continuity between the mortal, earthly Jesus and the premortal Creator.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, early Latter-day Saint hymn-singing practices will be used as evidence that the production of hymns provides a unique opportunity for exploratory theological engagement and development of ideas.

Early Christians, particularly those who knew the historical Jesus from Nazareth, were likely perplexed with embracing the full divinity of Jesus while accepting with equal openness his humanity. The problem became acute for monotheistic Jewish Christians and for gentile Christians who held cultural perceptions of the immortality of the soul that challenged their newfound faith's acceptance of the immortality of the resurrected flesh. This underlying tension is prevalent in the historical sources detailing events from Jesus's life. Those sources—the four Gospels—sought to find balance in the interplay between simultaneously recording the events from the life of the historical Jesus and promoting a belief in the exalted Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The Gospels were fundamentally shaped by the historical progression of Jesus's life—his actions define what events are retold—but in telling the story of the historical Jesus, the Gospel authors established a foundation for belief in Jesus as the exalted and resurrected Christ. Indeed, the New Testament Gospels declare Jesus to be God in three verses on two occasions—John 20:28 and twice in the Prologue (John 1:1, 18).<sup>6</sup> The tension between the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ, already expressed in a mortal and divine title that functioned later as a name, existed initially among those who knew him both as a person and who believed in him as their Lord.<sup>7</sup> The hymns of the New Testament explore that tension between man and God, but they do not attempt to resolve that conflict. Hymns devoted to illuminating that paradox were a source of spiritual exploration and new understanding.

## Early Christian Hymn Singing

The earliest indications of Christian hymn-singing practices following the death of Jesus are the two references to hymns in Ephesians and Colossians and the vivid eyewitness report of the Roman governor Pliny, who saw firsthand the gatherings of early Christians in Bythynia on the southwest shores of the Black Sea in 111–113 CE. He noted in a letter to the emperor, “On a fixed day they meet before dawn and sing a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god.”<sup>8</sup> In the letters of Ephesians and Colossians, the author notes the following about hymn singing: “Speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19), and “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting in all wisdom each another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).<sup>9</sup> During Jesus's lifetime, the disciples sang hymns at Passover, as Mark 14:26 records, “when they sang a hymn.”<sup>10</sup>

Two important features of the early witnesses to hymn singing are the emphasis on "speaking" or more properly "singing" (Greek, *lalountes*; Latin, *carmen*) and teaching or admonishing (*didaskontes*, *nouthetountes*) through hymns. From these brief testimonies, it is difficult to ascertain a compellingly complete idea of hymn singing in early Christianity, but several features are important. First, the practice was exclusionary as evidenced by words such as "among themselves" and "admonishing one another" attest. Second, the purpose of the hymn singing was to praise Christ, as phrases such as "to Christ" and "in your hearts to the Lord" clearly demonstrate. Third, Pliny as an outsider conveyed what he perceived to be their intent in singing, "to Christ, *as though he were a god*" (emphasis added). According to Justin Martyr, a Christian author from the second century CE, such hymns were sung to praise God as creator.<sup>11</sup>

Pliny's witness is also important because of what he appears to have assumed, namely that the gathering for the purpose of singing was an intentionally peaceful and ordinary act, which later he asserts when he says, "Not to do some crime, not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not to falsify their trust."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the act of singing hymns was a signal to Pliny that early Christian gatherings were harmless and normal. This would indicate that in religious gatherings it would not be unexpected to hear hymns and that to sing to Christ "as though he were a god" was aligned with cultural examples where Greeks might sing to Asclepius or Zeus as though he were a god. For Pliny the only surprise appears to be the object of their singing: Christ.

If Christian hymn singing followed common Greek and Jewish cultural practices, which is the general consensus of recent scholarship, then it is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that singing usually accompanied meals, both religious and celebratory.<sup>13</sup> In connection with early efforts to commemorate Jesus's final meal with his disciples, early Christian communities would sing to Lord Jesus.<sup>14</sup> Clement of Alexandria observed this practice around 200 CE when he noted, "As is fitting, before partaking of food, that we pray

to the Creator; so also in drinking it is suitable to sing to him before partaking of his creatures. For the psalm is harmonious and wise. The apostle calls the psalm ‘a spiritual hymn.’”<sup>15</sup> Around the same time, Tertullian also noted the practice of singing at Christian meals: “After water for the hands come the lights; and then each, from what he knows of the Holy Scriptures, or from his own heart, is called before the rest to sing to God; so that is a test of how much he has drunk.”<sup>16</sup> For Tertullian, the practice of singing counteracted the inclination to drink too much wine, a feature that was also a concern in the letter to Ephesians where excess drinking was connected with singing hymns. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18–19 KJV).

An additional feature of early hymn singing was the inclusion of the responsorial element at the end of hymns, a feature that reveals audience engagement and participation. At the conclusion of a hymn, the congregants would respond by saying or chanting *Hallelujah!*<sup>17</sup> The exclamation means something like “let God be praised,” or literally “let Yahweh be praised,” and over time it seems to have come to include a general acknowledgment that God is mighty, great, and the object of worship. An early collection of hymns with both Christian and Jewish elements, entitled the *Odes of Solomon*, includes this ending for each of the hymns that were written in the first or second century CE.<sup>18</sup> By singing or chanting *Hallelujah*, Christians joined in the celebratory nature of the hymns and added their voices in praise to God.

To avoid permitting this conversation to become sidetracked in a conversation of early Christian hymn singing, it is important here to draw out the themes that help elucidate the thesis of this study. Christian hymn singing was overtly Christ centered, and the practice of singing is closely, and perhaps exclusively, connected with worship services where meals were eaten. Moreover, Christians sang to Christ as God, which was an intentional move to accept both the mortal and

divine Jesus Christ. The New Testament Gospels were reluctant to refer to Jesus as "God," but the hymns were not reluctant to do so. The hymns also encouraged, and may have originally included, an element of audience participation, thus joining cantor and congregant in praising Lord Jesus. Over time, trained choirs emerged, and early Christian sources report boys' and girls' choirs as well as men's and women's choirs.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Tertullian mentions the production of new Christian hymns, likely in Greek, together with the singing of the traditional hymns: the Psalms of the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup>

## The Philippians Hymn

Objections to the idea that Philippians 2:6–11 constitutes a preexisting hymn are significant enough that it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge their existence.<sup>21</sup> However, proponents of the hymn have clearly demonstrated a number of important parallels associated with Jewish and Christian hymns. Moreover, the passage contains a number of terms used nowhere else in Paul's letters, "seize," "form," and "to exalt" (*harpagmos*, *morphē*, and *hyperypsoō*). And the passage discusses themes that are not addressed elsewhere in Paul's letters, thus making it more likely that he has used a source from another author.<sup>22</sup> The question of whether this passage is a hymn cannot be resolved in a study of this length, and at the outset the overriding interest in pursuing the theology of two hymns makes this an issue of secondary importance.<sup>23</sup>

This study now moves with caution into a discussion of the theology of two of the earliest Christian hymns with the acknowledgment that the hymnic origins of the source is partially in doubt. Such concerns are further diminished because the Greek text of these passages is not in question, and therefore many of the conclusions will withstand scrutiny even if these hymns turn out to be didactic poetic narratives. In order to analyze the Philippians hymn more carefully, the hymn must be rendered into modern English that restores the general strophic pattern and sentence structure, while also avoiding

some of the infelicities of the King James Version. Verse divisions are noted in parentheses. The final phrase of verse 5, while not technically part of the hymn, provides the subject of the hymn and is therefore included in the translation.

- (5) in Christ Jesus,  
 (6) who was in the form of God,  
       did not suppose that equality with God  
       was a prize to be seized
- (7) but he poured himself out,  
       and took the form of a slave  
       and he was born like human beings.
- And he was found in human form,<sup>24</sup>  
 (8) he humbled himself  
       and was obedient to the point of death:  
       death on the cross
- (9) Therefore, God exalted him on high  
       and freely bestowed on him the name  
       that is above every name
- (10) so that in the name of Jesus  
       every knee should bend in worship  
       in the heavens, on earth,  
       and among those who dwell beneath the earth
- (11) and every tongue will confess  
       the Lord Jesus Christ  
       to the glory of God the Father.<sup>25</sup>

The hymn is remarkable in its simple Greek and in its narrow focus on the exaltation of Jesus Christ. The hymn proposes three states of existence: the premortal Christ (Philippians 2:6), the passage through birth and mortality (2:7–8), and exaltation (2:9–10). This structure is paralleled in the prologue hymn: premortality (John

1:1–5), mortality (1:10–12), and exaltation (1:16, 18). Additionally, the Philippians hymn promotes the idea of an exalted mortal existence that lifts up the mortal existence to a higher plane while fundamentally leaving the physical nature of Christ unaltered. In other words, "God exalted him on high," but the hymn does not indicate that any substantive change took place in Jesus's body. He was exalted and given "the name," which refers to both his mortal name, Jesus, and the title, Christ.

These theologically rich statements encourage reflection on the process of and pathway to exaltation.<sup>26</sup> As stated so powerfully in the opening section, the premortal Christ has his own determinative will, and he deliberates or considers his premortal condition. The author offers this powerful reflection, "[He] did not suppose that equality with God was a prize to be seized." While still in a premortal state, the Christ "supposes" that he cannot be fully equal to God, it is a prize that he cannot fully achieve.<sup>27</sup> This thinking, sentient being realizes a shortcoming, and the means of remedy will be birth and mortality.<sup>28</sup> One might critique such a reading of the hymn based on the modern revelation found in Doctrine and Covenants 38:1: "Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the same which looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made." These two differing viewpoints are not mutually exclusive even though the statement from the Doctrine and Covenants represents the work of a fully exalted and divine premortal Christ while Philippians describes a tentative, deliberative premortal Christ who is aware of limitations. Philippians is an exceptionally early reflection of a believing Christian navigating the humanity of Jesus while accepting his divinity. The Doctrine and Covenants is a personal statement of premortal glory given to a prophet who was distantly removed from knowing the mortal Jesus personally.

After realizing or "supposing" a way of achieving or "seizing" equality with God, Christ literally "poured himself out" into a human form like a slave. This describes an active process where Christ lowers

himself from one state to another: God does not pour Jesus into a physical body; instead, Jesus takes on a body himself.<sup>29</sup> This new existence is described as a type of slavery (Philippians 2:7), but it is not slavery to God, and Christ chose to seek this state. Although it must remain a conjectural interpretation of the hymn, the language appears to describe the general state of humanity, a state of slavery, a state of subjection to passions and appetites.

The exaltation of Christ is also described vividly in the hymn when the author connects the earthly state of Christ to his exaltation through an act of obedience. He “was obedient to the point of death,” which means that he obeyed to the point that he was killed, and “therefore” God raised him up. These verses (8–9) present the culmination of the journey of Christ’s soul from the premortal existence, through an obedient mortality, to an exalted postmortal existence. The hymn avoids drawing attention to this journey of the soul as an example for others to follow, but Philippians 2:1–5 clearly frames the hymn with this intent in mind. Christian life should be patterned on the example set forth by Christ, and this seems to summarize Paul’s reason for including the hymn in his letter.

Finally, the hymn probes the question of Christ as the Creator, not as premortal Creator but as postmortal steward over all existence. The language of the hymn praises him in the following way, “so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend in worship in the heavens, on earth, and among those who dwell beneath the earth” (Philippians 8:10). This exploration of the theme of how Christ became the exalted Lord, equal with God, and therefore connected to the creation of the world is achieved through Christ’s act of obedience. In the language of the hymn, Christ was appointed to stand above all creation, and all creation was directed to be Christ centered and to show reverence to his name. Modern revelation might not speak of Christ in that way, as the appointed Creator (see Mosiah 3:8; Doctrine and Covenants 38:1), but this hymn represents a developing, nascent faith. In this position, Christ is able to act as Savior. All creation looks to him, and he is uniquely positioned to redeem or save his people.

This type of reading of the Philippians hymn may initially raise questions about contradicting doctrinal statements and disagreement between scriptural sources since Christ is described in the hymn as progressing and yet, for example, in other sources he is proclaimed as the premortal, exalted Lord of creation. To help lessen these objections, the early Latter-day Saint practice of singing hymns will be discussed briefly as a potentially illuminating corollary to the early Christian practice and also to show that early LDS hymns were also experimental in their theological interests. Early Latter-day Saint hymns were exploratory in the doctrines they proposed, they encouraged new ways of thinking about the divine, and they at times went beyond canonical scriptural statements.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, they served a similar purpose for early Christian authors who penned nonbinding hymnic reflections on the nature of Christ. One of the primary examples of this practice was Eliza R. Snow's poem entitled "My Father in Heaven" that was later put to music under the title "O My Father."<sup>31</sup> That hymn contains the famous exploratory refrains, "Truth is reason; truth eternal Tells me I've a mother there" and "Father, Mother, may I meet you In your royal courts on high?"

This hymn is credited with being the first formal declaration of the Latter-day Saint belief in a heavenly mother, and like the Philippians hymn, it probably represented common themes and interests of the day.<sup>32</sup> The hymn "O My Father" also presents an exploratory reflection on the nature of deity that moved beyond canonical statements but simultaneously reflected the sincere faith of the author. Likewise, early Latter-day Saint hymn writing was exceptionally productive during the early years of the Church, and Helen Hanks Macaré has drawn attention to the fact that a remarkable sixteen new Latter-day Saint hymns were composed between 1832 and 1833 alone.<sup>33</sup> These new hymns treated the themes made important in the Restoration such as the redemption of Zion, the restoration of priesthood, and the nearness of the Second Coming.<sup>34</sup>

Although Latter-day Saint hymn authors did not treat the same themes as those found in Philippians, they were extraordinarily

prolific in the number of hymns they composed, and there is a close connection between the topics presented in the hymns and those discussed in sermons and publications from the same time period.<sup>35</sup> Such connections may also have existed in Paul's day. The early LDS hymns show an interest in exploring new doctrines or in drawing attention to doctrines that were substantially expanding through the Restoration. This phenomenon may have parallels with the Philippians hymn and may help explain the large number of hymn fragments that remain embedded in the New Testament. Authors seem willing to explore and navigate their belief in ways that were nonbinding but also inspiring to the community of believers. An additional parallel was Latter-day Saint willingness to adapt existing hymns to suit new purposes and interests, a feature that also seems to be prevalent among New Testament authors. W. W. Phelps, like Paul, certainly drew upon the work of another author and adapted it for his own purposes. One of the most radical examples of this was Phelps's adaptation of "Joy to the World," which became a hymn about the spread of the gospel.<sup>36</sup> Here is a stanza from Isaac Watts's original version and Phelps's adaptation:

He rules the world with truth and grace  
 And makes the nations prove  
 The glories of his righteousness  
 And wonders of his love. (Watts's original)

Rejoice! Rejoice! in the most High,  
 While Israel spreads abroad,  
 Like stars that glitter in the sky,  
 And ever worship God. (Phelps's adaptation)<sup>37</sup>

## The Logos Hymn

There is broad consensus today that John 1:1–18 contains the remnants of an early Christian hymn to the Logos, or to the Word.<sup>38</sup>

Although there is still a significant amount of disagreement over the precise structure and parameters of the hymn, a near consensus exists that these verses preserve a hymn.<sup>39</sup> The hymn speaks of the Logos-Word specifically, but most commentators accept the fact that the author intends the hymn to be read in praise of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> This helps explain why the author of the Gospel of John adds to or comments upon the original hymn by adding narrative explanations such as the following, "There was a man, sent by God, whose name was John." The author of the hymn may not have been the same as the author of the Fourth Gospel, and certain stylistic features suggest that the hymn portions were authored by an earlier writer.<sup>41</sup> The hymn is extremely simple in its wording, but it achieves a certain elegance through the ideas it proposes. The hymn is here reconstructed in a modern language translation with the narrative insertions, those added by the Fourth Evangelist, set off through the use of parentheses.

- (1) In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.
- (2) Thus he was in the beginning with God.
- (3) All things were created through him,  
and without him nothing was created.  
What was created (4) in him was life,  
and the life was the light of humanity.
- (5) And the light shines in the darkness,  
but the darkness does not comprehend it.

([6] There was a man, sent by God, whose name was John.  
[7] He came as a witness in order to testify of the light, so that  
all might believe through him. [8] He was not the light, but a  
witness of the light, [9] the true light that lightens all human-  
ity, those who come into the world.)

- (10) He was in the world,  
and the world was created through him,  
but the world did not know him.
- (11) He came to his own,  
but his own did not comprehend him.
- (12) And to all who receive him,  
to those who believed in his name,  
he gave them power to become the children of God,

((13] who were born not from blood nor the will of the flesh, but from God. [14] And the word became flesh and lived among us in a body, and we saw his glory, which is the glory of an Only Begotten of the Father, who is full of grace and truth. [15] John testified of him and declared, “This was him of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is greater than me because he was before me.’”)

- (16) And from his fullness we have received grace in  
place of grace.

((17] The law was given through Moses, and grace and truth began as a result of Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God.)

The Only Begotten God,  
who is in the embrace of the Father,  
he has declared him.

This following discussion of the Logos hymn will focus on the hymn proper and not on the narrative additions (verses 6–9, 13–15, 17–18a), a detour that would take the discussion unnecessarily too far afield into the theology of the Gospel of John. The hymn’s opening line contains a clear echo of Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heaven and earth.”<sup>42</sup> The author of the hymn has borrowed the first two words of the Greek translation of Genesis—the

Septuagint—to initiate a new hymn, although this new hymn is not to God the Father, but to the Logos-Word.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the parallels to Genesis are quite prevalent through verse 5: creation, darkness, and light, but thereafter the author wholly departs from Genesis. This new composition is therefore not a simple reflection on Genesis that replaces God with Logos, but an entirely new composition with new interests and purposes.<sup>44</sup>

One matter concerning the meaning of the hymn is whether the author intended to say that the Logos-Word is God or divine.<sup>45</sup> Scholars are divided over this issue, which arises from the absence of the definite article “the” before the word “God” in verse 1.<sup>46</sup> The specific issue is whether “and the Word was God” should instead be translated as “and the Word was divine.”<sup>47</sup> The grammatical issue is simultaneously easy to describe but impossible to translate unequivocally, and author intent also plays a significant factor in the discussion. The phrase has a clear qualitative, or descriptive, meaning, and without attempting to solve the grammatical debate over the issue, it seems that by stating “the word was God” the author was not saying “the word was God the Father,” but “the word was a God” or that he was a God who existed alongside God the Father.<sup>48</sup> The question will remain over whether the author of the hymn proposed that there were two Gods in heaven, a question that cannot be solved here. This study will accept that the intended meaning was close to the idea that the Logos was indeed God because of his ability to bestow the status of “children of God” and the hymn’s conclusion that declares “The Only Begotten God, who is in the embrace of the Father” (John 1:18).

With these caveats in place, it is now possible to consider this hymn in light of the Philippians hymn that told of the premortal, mortal, and postmortal states of Christ. The Logos hymn is similar with a premortal Logos, who creates a ministry to “his own” in the world, and a postmortal existence as the exalted “Only Begotten.” But the prologue hymn offers a profound reflection on Christ before he lived on earth. Whereas the Philippians hymn proposed a deliberative soul that realized an insufficiency, the prologue sends out reason,

the basic meaning of the Greek word *logos*, throughout all creation. God's reason in the person of the Logos, his way of thinking, planning for, and implementing the salvation of humanity, permeates the created world. This appears to be the basic intent of "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As a spiritual reflection on God, the hymn reports that God's Word was intended to weave itself into the very fabric of existence because that Word "was God." The prologue blurs the lines between God the Son and Father, but in making them nearly synonymous, the author has shown just how fully the fabric of life is interwoven with the reasoning of the Father and Son.

The next major episode of the hymn, apart from the insertion of verses 6–8 that record John the Baptist's witness to the Logos, focuses on the mortal mission of Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup> The creation that is permeated with light, a "light [that] shines in darkness" (John 1:5), is unable to understand the light, a word that implies that the world can see the light but that they fail to make it their own.<sup>50</sup> Verse 10 highlights the tension between a world that sees the Logos but does not fully understand him when it reports, "He was in the world . . . but the world did not know him." A surprising note follows: "He came to his own, but his own did not comprehend him" (John 1:11). Unlike the Philippians hymn, there is a subtle criticism of believers who also fail to comprehend the Logos.<sup>51</sup> Despite the criticism, some do "receive him," and to them "he gave . . . power to become the children of God."

Verses 5–12 represent the most significant departure from the Philippians hymn because they demonstrate a clear didactic purpose. Two ways of encountering the Logos are presented: incomprehension and reception. And in presenting the way to God in this way, the hymn has prepared the reader for Jesus's later teaching, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).<sup>52</sup> Thus the context for accepting Jesus Christ as Savior is put forward as a purpose of his mortal existence.

The final portion of the hymn has been the most difficult to reconstruct, in part because it seems to have been the most heavily edited by the author of the Fourth Gospel. Assuming that verses 13–15 and 17–18a are commentary on the hymn, it is possible to recover some of the intent of the hymn's closing strophe. After welcoming some to become the children of God, the final lines of the hymn seem to address the question of how this was accomplished and how that status as children altered a person's fundamental relationship with God. Those who receive the Logos will also receive "grace in place of grace," a phrase that has become an obstacle for interpreters because it uses a preposition in an unusual way and appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Without delving into the many different ways that this phrase can be interpreted, the translation provided here assumes that the author is promoting a replacement theology. The first state of grace would then represent the law of Moses and God's attendant grace given to the Israelites, whereas the second state of grace represents that brought by the Logos, or the Son of God.<sup>53</sup> This reading of the hymn would shift the meaning toward the Logos who brings with him a new day of grace, a period of becoming sons and daughters of God again that is compared to a previous day of grace.

Finally, the lines at the end of the hymn have triggered a significant amount of discussion because they seem to imply that no one has seen God at any time (John 1:18). Although the interpretation of the hymn offered in this study must remain a reasoned conjecture, the claim that "no one has ever seen God" fits well within the framework promoted here. If indeed God represents both states of grace, the law and instructions given in the Old Testament *and* the teachings of Jesus Christ, then up until that time no one had fully seen God for who he really was. Each testament bore witness to one part of God's grace, thus making the final line of the hymn worthy of an exclamation point: "The Only Begotten God, who is in the embrace of the Father, he has declared him!" (1:18). Following the reasoning of the hymn and the comments added to it by the author of the Gospel

of John, the reader can now engage God fully, openly, and in truth because it is through the Son that one can come to know God.

## Conclusion

Admittedly, the attempt to reconstruct the meaning of a source without having access to that source in its original language and setting is a difficult endeavor. The hymns examined in this study may have been substantially longer with other clear and even stronger points of emphasis. As this study has demonstrated, the meaning of the hymns will always be partially dependent upon the contexts into which they were copied. With these caveats in place, a couple of unifying features of these hymns emerge as interesting and informative.

The first Christian author to write and have those writings survive in the New Testament was Paul, and fortunately Paul drew upon sources that either were contemporary to him or predated him. This would make the sources that he quoted possibly older than his own writings, and one important example of this is the Philippians hymn. The same is true for the Gospel of John, whose author quoted a potentially earlier hymn to the Logos. Both of these hymns can claim to be among the earliest documents written by a Christian believer. And in an interesting turn of events, both of these hymns bear strong similarities in their contents and the purpose for which they were written.

Both the Logos hymn and the Philippians hymn sing of a pre-mortal Christ who descends to earth and is subsequently exalted on high. While the journey of the soul motif was common in the ancient world, these two hymns give purpose to Christ's journey. He came to earth to save and redeem, and these hymns give purpose to his mortal life. As the Gospels clearly demonstrate, Christ did many miraculous things, but those same authors do little to explain the value of those miracles in light of Jesus's atoning sacrifice: they are connected, they brought people to faith in Jesus, and they generated opposition. But the hymns reflect on these events in a different way: they show descent and mortality as a pathway to exaltation, and they

show Christ pouring himself out for others even in his premortal state. The hymns show a greater perspective on the meaning of Jesus Christ's life, and they openly declare him to be God, something that is done only one other time in the Gospels (John 20:28).

Early Latter-day Saint hymn-singing practices provide a corollary to the early Christian practice, and both show a willingness to probe new ideas and beliefs. They capture the interests of their day, and they immortalized those interests in song. Also, the hymns of this dispensation made their way into temple dedications, baptismal services, and sacrament meetings. Likewise, early Christians sang hymns at the meals that were intended to commemorate the Last Supper. They also sang at baptisms and other liturgical events. And in those hymns, they sang to Christ the Lord and openly shared their most profound beliefs in the man from Nazareth who was also God.

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## Notes

"Each person has a hymn" is my translation of 1 Corinthians 14:26.

1. The two pioneering works in English on the topic of hymns in the Bible are those of Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, rev. Joachim Begrich; trans. James D. Nogalski (1926; repr. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998). These two works published in the early twentieth century seem to have been the impetus for the discussion of psalms in the New Testament. Important for the New Testament hymns are Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Marsh (London: SCM Press, 1955), 338–39, who offers a discussion of twelve

features of hymns, and W. Hulitt Gloer, "Homologies and Hymns in the New Testament: Form, Content and Criteria for Identification," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11 (1984): 115–32.

2. This may be due to the fact, among other factors, that the hymns may have been composed in Aramaic and translated into Greek.
3. Notably, N. T. Wright, "Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1:15–20," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 444–68, argues against the consensus.
4. Colossians and 1 Timothy will be excluded because of questions surrounding their date and authorship. E. P. Sanders, "Literary Dependence in Colossians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 28–45; I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 57–91.
5. The work by Daniel Liderbach, *Christ in the Early Christian Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 34–35, pursues a similar line of inquiry regarding the purpose of the hymns.
6. For a history of this discussion, see B. A. Mastin, "A Neglected Feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 22 (1975): 36.
7. This approach assumes that the Gospels are at least in part historical reminiscences about Jesus. The effort needed to nuance the discussion to identify how the Gospel authors nuanced and adapted their historical sources lies beyond the scope of this paper.
8. All translations are the author's own, including biblical passages, unless noted otherwise. The Latin text reads, "quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo quasi deo" (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96).
9. The phrase "making music" refers to plucking a stringed instrument, and the author here clearly refers to the practice of using a stringed instrument in accompaniment to singing.
10. The common assumption is that Jesus and his disciples sang the Hallel Psalms 115–18 since the singing of the Hallel Psalms was associated with Passover celebrations.
11. 1 *Apology* 13.2.
12. Author's translation of "non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta ne latrocinia ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent" (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96).

13. Valery Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gatherings: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 212–14.
14. Tobin thinks that hymns were also sung during the Eucharist or at baptisms. Thomas H. Tobin, "The World of Thought in the Philippians Hymn (Philippians 2:6–11)," in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, ed. M. M. Mitchell and D. P. Moessner (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 92.
15. Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.2.44.1–2. The reference to the "apostle" is to Paul's statements in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19.
16. Tertullian, *Apology* 39.18. Translation from T. R. Glover, *Tertullian: Apology: De Spectaculis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). See also Ignatius, *Romans* 2.2, who mentions Christian choirs.
17. Alikin, *Earliest History of the Christian Gatherings*, 219.
18. James H. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday: 1985), 2:725–71.
19. Lucian, *Ver. Hist.* 2.15, boys and girls sing in a choir. Aulus Gellius, *NA* 22.1.
20. Tertullian, *Apology* 39.18.
21. Gordon Fee, "Philippians 2:5–11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992): 29–46, forcefully rejects the notion that this is a hymn.
22. The most readily accessible introduction to the hymn is that of Ralph Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1997).
23. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Psalms, Philippians 2:6–11, and the Origins of Christology," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003): 361–72, discusses the various possibilities and offers a substantive argument that it is a hymn. My own work is also similar to that of William Furley and Jan Bremer, *Greek Hymns: Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 1:2.

24. The King James Version mistakenly attributes this stanza to verse 8, a result of the Textus Receptus, the foundational Greek text used by the King James Version.
25. Author's translation based on the Nestle-Aland<sup>28</sup> edition of the Greek text. There are surprisingly very few textual variants for the hymn. Later manuscripts, represented chiefly by Codex Bezae, omit the definite article in verse 9 so that the translation would be "and freely bestowed on him a name."
26. The hymn does not distinguish between exaltation and salvation.
27. Unlike the other hymns, in Philippians the premortal Creator has self-will and determines to pursue a goal. See Tobin, "World of Thought in the Philippians Hymn," 94.
28. Other scholars interpret the passage to mean that Christ was equal to God, but chose to descend to the lower state of humanity. The Greek is admittedly unclear because of the lack of a finite verb for this clause. See Fee, "Philippians 2:5–11," 30–31.
29. The Greek verb used here, ἐκένωσεν, signifies descent from one state to another, or to render something useless, which in this case is the existing state of Christ before the act of pouring himself out.
30. Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 3–4, notes that in upstate New York at the time of the First Vision there were two camps who opposed the public singing of hymns: Baptists and Quakers. He also notes that Methodists were much more accepting of hymn singing and advocated the practice. Presbyterians had choirs, which were viewed with suspicion by Methodists. Lucy Smith may have sung in the Presbyterian choir in Palmyra, and the Smith family sang hymns in the home. The Book of Mormon also mentions singing (see Ether 6:9).
31. The poem was written in Nauvoo in October 1845 and then was published in the *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 November 1845) under the title "Poetry, for the Times and Seasons."
32. See Jill Mulvay Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journal of Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97): 84–126; David Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "'A Mother There': A Survey of Historical

- Teachings about Mother in Heaven," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2011): 70–97.
33. Helen Hanks Macaré, "The Singing Saints: A Study of the Mormon Hymnal, 1835–1950" (PhD diss., UCLA, 1961), 96. The first LDS hymns were published in June 1832 in the initial issue of the *Evening and the Morning Star* under the title "Hymns." The subject of the earliest LDS hymns were persecution, missionary work, revelation, and the last dispensation; and later topics included baptism and sacrament.
  34. *Evening and the Morning Star* 2, nos. 15–24 (December 1833–September 1834) contains seven new hymns.
  35. Hicks, *Mormonism and Music*, 11, notes the Zion themes of early LDS hymns.
  36. Macaré, *Singing Saints*, 94: "Clearly beginning to emerge here (in the first hymnal) is a pattern of altering, adapting, varying, and rewriting old hymns, and of creating new hymns for the use of Zion's children."
  37. Another example of this was Phelps's adaptation of John Newton's hymn, "Rock of Ages," which Phelps adapted to "Rock of Enoch." Macaré, *Singing Saints*, 84–85.
  38. The Greek word *logos* can be translated as "reason, logic, word, and rational thought." In philosophical thought it can take on a variety of other nuances such as the "animated thought in creation" or even the "deliberative word of god."
  39. Ed L. Miller, "The Logic of the Logos Hymn: A New View," *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 552–61; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 1:1–42, proposes a much longer hymn.
  40. More representative of my approach is Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 268.
  41. Stan Harstine, *A History of the Two-Hundred Year Scholarly Debate about the Purpose of the Prologue to the Gospel of John* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2015); Stephen Voorwinde, "John's Prologue: Beyond Some Impasses of Twentieth-Century Scholarship," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002):

- 15–44: Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001): 243–84.
42. Boyarin, “Gospel of the Memra,” 263–67, proposes that the hymn editorializes on the opening chapters of Genesis. For a criticism of this view, see Matthew Gordley, “The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions: A New Case for Reading the Prologue as a Hymn,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 781–802.
43. The opening line of John 1:1 reads, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, whereas the opening line of Genesis 1:1 in Greek reads, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός. The parallel position of the Logos and God in these two passages is striking.
44. A similar conclusion is reached by Thomas Tobin, “The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Wisdom Speculation,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 252–69.
45. The Greek word *logos* is complicated to render into English, and context is important when doing so. Philo, a first-century Jewish writer, often referred to the logos as wisdom. See Philo (*Som.* 1:65–66; 2:242–45; *Fug.* 97, 109; *Post.* 122; *Deus* 134–35, but *Her.* 188 where it is similar to Stoic ideals; also *Fug.* 110). Stoic and Platonic philosophers advocated for differing roles of the logos in creation. My own work on the topic favors the idea that the hymn promotes Stoic ideals more closely. See Diogenes Laertius, *D.L.* 7.134: “They [the Stoics] hold that there are two principles in the universe, the active principle and the passive. The passive principle, then, is a substance without quality, that is, matter, whereas the active is the reason (λόγος) inherent in this substance.” The word *logos* is not used as a technical term in the Gospel of John despite appearing as the center point of the hymn to Logos in the prologue. Johan Thom, *Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 495–97.
46. See Philip Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 75–87.
47. Anarthrous θεός should be translated as “divine,” a view first proposed by Origen (*Commentary on John* 2.13–18).

48. Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 179–87.
49. Various commentators have attempted to make sense of the insertion of verses 6–9. One of the common views is that the verses were added to reach out to followers of John the Baptist who were hesitant to accept Jesus. Gordley, "Johannine Prologue," 794. The proposal goes back to Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth, Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 1:249–53.
50. The Greek word can mean to "seize, make one's own, comprehend, or grasp."
51. The Greek verb is a near synonym to the one used in John 1:5, and in this verse it carries the nuanced meaning of "joining with someone or something." Hengel, "Prologue of the Gospel of John," 277–78, sees this as a reflection on Genesis and the separation of the light from the darkness.
52. Gordley, "Johannine Prologue," 786, has drawn a similar conclusion about the didactic purposes of the hymn.
53. This position is argued for by Ruth Edwards, "XAPIN ANTI XAPITON (John 1.16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988): 8–9.