

# Hymns, Blessings, & Sayings

Liturgical & Catechetical Texts  
of the New Testament

*An installment in the series:  
Orthodox Anglicans Studying Scripture*

## **Lesson 1: Introduction**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The Liturgical & Catechetical Use of Scripture:**

All of the Scripture's content is intrinsically liturgical and catechetical, especially the NT Epistles because they were written to be read and heard in a *synaxis* context (Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27). As Anglicans, we continue this practice by using the Sunday & Festal Propers of Holy Communion and the Daily Lectionary of the Divine Office. Moreover, in accord with ancient custom, selections of Scripture have been arranged to form the parts of our liturgical rites.

Partly, this arrangement often reflects how and why a text was written. The NT is full of liturgical and lyrical phrases in use during the Apostolic Church era, which were woven into the Epistles (especially). Some texts have retained their original purpose, while others have been added to appropriate sections of rites, as liturgy has developed over the centuries.

The purpose of this study is to identify the major liturgical & catechetical texts embedded in the New Testament *Epistles* (only), understand their theological/spiritual meaning, and recognize their usage in the liturgy of modern Anglicanism and ancient British Christianity.

QUESTION – What types of liturgical compositions used in our Prayer Book do you think we will identify in the Scripture?

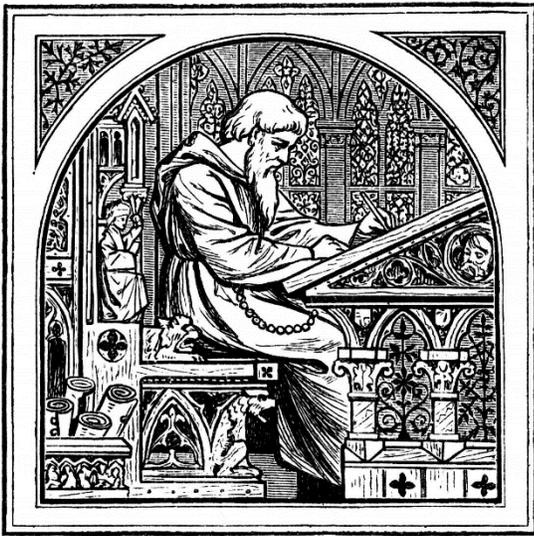
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### **Main Types of Liturgical Texts**

- Hymns – often of a confessional nature, declaring the mystery of the Godhead and/or the Person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Extant in whole or, more frequently, in select stanzas
- Doxologies – lyrical, but not metrical, praises to God and His attributes, often following a Trinitarian formula
- Benedictions – blessings (sometimes doxological in nature) intended for the encouraging / sanctifying of the assembly
- Sayings – proverbial fragments of catechesis used in liturgy or in the formation of the catechumenate or ecclesiastical vocation

### **Intact Examples in Anglican Usage**

- Closing Benediction of the Divine Office (2 Corinthians 13:14) *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. Amen.”*
- “What Saint Paul Saith” in the Comfortable Words (I Timothy 1:15) *“This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*



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## Lesson 2: NT HYMNS

### NEW TESTAMENT HYMNS

Periodically, in the composition of their epistles, the New Testament writers—especially Paul—break into lyrical interpolations. Although related to the context, these poetic insertions read with a liturgical quality which endues them with purpose beyond the letter. Scripture scholars (exegetes) believe that these hymnological/confessional poems are quotations from worship/didactic texts of the Apostolic Church.

#### **Christological Poems**

*1 Timothy 3:16*

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*Philippians 2:6-11*

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*1 Peter 2:22 – 25*

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*1 Corinthians 15:3-7*

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QUESTION – How do each of these hymns (or stanzas of) anticipate later compositions like the *Gloria in excelsis* & the *Te Deum Laudamus*?

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#### **An Early Baptismal Confession?**

*1 Timothy 6:11-16*

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### St. John's Apocalypse Hymns

*Revelation 4:8, 11*

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*Revelation 5:9, 12-13*

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Portions of the two hymns have been combined into the “Canticle of the Apocalypse” sung after the Gospel proclamation in Gallican liturgies used by Celtic Christians since the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

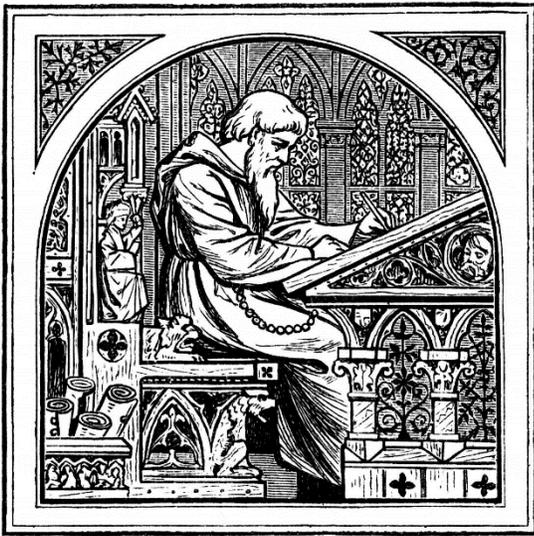
QUESTION – How do each of these hymns (or stanzas of) anticipate later compositions like the Preface/*Sanctus* & the *Te Deum Laudamus*?

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#### **“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”**

John's record of the heavenly worship he witnessed inspired the hymn “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” first used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Liturgy of St. James (the “Cherubic Hymn”), and retained in Byzantine Liturgy of St. Basil. It was likely included at the “Great Entrance” in Gallican rites (Stowe & Bobbio) used by the Celts, which have been reproduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for Western Orthodox Christians (the Liturgy of St. Germanus of Paris). Although not a liturgical element, Anglicans still use “Let All Mortal Flesh” as a Communion Hymn based on the poem by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglican hymnographer, Gerard Moultrie.



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## **Lesson 3: NT DOXOLOGIES**

### **NEW TESTAMENT DOXOLOGIES**

The doxology—a short hymn of praise to God—is a synagogue liturgical custom that Christians have continued to include into the liturgy, and to add to the end of canticles, hymns, and psalms. The practice was likely begun by the Apostles who incorporated them into early Christian worship, and also included in their Epistles.

In the epistolary writings, we find them woven into various places, but especially near the beginning, and at the end of letter sections or even the letter itself. Like other hymns, the apostles use them within the context of larger theological excursus to emphasize doctrine, explore the mysteries of God and His attributes, and to nurture Christian faith and hope.

#### **Salutation Doxologies**

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4 & Ephesians 1:3*

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*1 Peter 1:3-5*

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*Revelation 1:5-6*

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QUESTION – What about the content and structure of these can you identify in the two most frequently-used doxologies used in Anglican worship/prayer, the *Gloria Patri* and the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*?

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### **Concluding Doxologies**

*1 Timothy 1:17*

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*Romans 11:33, 36*

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*Ephesians 3:14-21*

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The practice of using concluding doxologies not only influenced Christian spiritual writing, but the development of liturgical prayer, especially in the structure of the Collect, many of which—including those kept in Anglican BCP—finish with a doxological acclaim to God for His grace and blessings mentioned earlier in the prayer.

#### **A Heavenly Hymn's Doxology**

*Revelation 7:12*

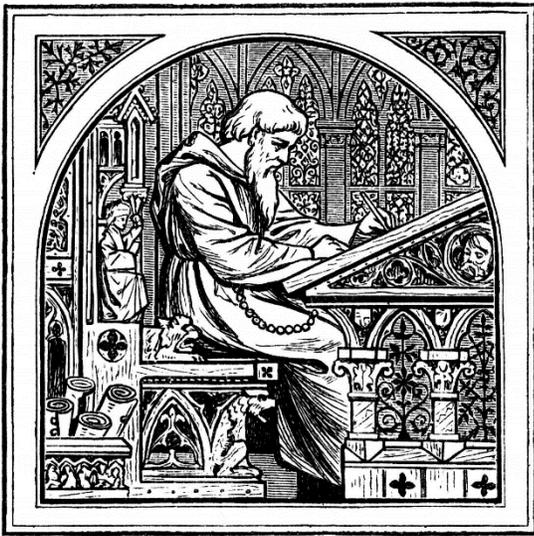
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QUESTION – Of which Morning Prayer canticle are many of these biblical doxologies reminiscent? What does that say about this canticle and about much Christian hymnody?

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#### **The Doxology in Other British Liturgies**

While the doxology has remained extant in Anglican liturgy, other British liturgical traditions with more ancient and Eastern roots continue to use it more frequently. The Gallican rites used by the Celts utilized a greater variety and more numerous through the liturgy.



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## **Lesson 4: NT Benedictions**

### **NEW TESTAMENT BENEDICTIONS**

The benediction (literally meaning “good word” from God), like the doxology, was a Jewish liturgical tradition, although likely older—originating in the Mosaic religion of the Old Testament Hebrews. Perhaps the best known—used by all kinds of Christians—is the famous and beautiful “Aaronic Blessing” found in Numbers 6:24-26, “*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*” Apostles, such as Paul, who were well-versed in Jewish liturgy and theology probably transferred the benediction quite early into early Christian worship, which is why we find them in similar frequency with doxologies in their Epistles. Like the doxology, a benediction reiterates the mystery of God and His attributes—especially His Triune character. However, whereas the doxology is oriented vertically in praise of God, the benediction is oriented horizontally over the Church to bless and comfort Christians in the Holy Name of their God.

#### **Sovereign Benedictions**

*2 Corinthians 13:14*

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*1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 28*

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*Jude 24-25*

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*Hebrews 13:20-21*

#### **Ecclesiological Benedictions**

*Romans 15:5-6*

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*Colossians 3:15-17*

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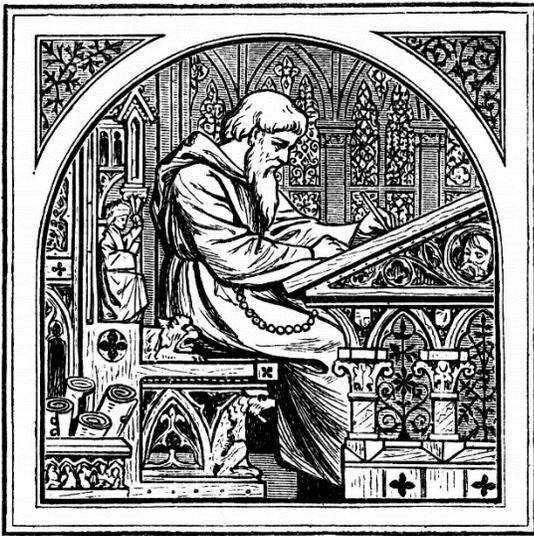
QUESTION – How would you describe the difference between the content and the message of the “sovereign” vs. the “ecclesiological” benediction? How is each, in a different way, important for conveying a “good word” from one of God’s representatives on His behalf?

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#### **The Benediction in Other British Liturgies**

In our Western Tradition (including our own Anglican), the benediction has been reserved to the end of the Eucharistic liturgy. In the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, our Anglican benediction is a blend of both styles.

While the Western tradition has included a blessing in the liturgy of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the Gallican rite has included blessings throughout the liturgy (e.g. at the Gospel & Communion) and (some) feature a more Scriptural Final Benediction.



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## Lesson 5: Sayings

### NEW TESTAMENT SAYINGS

The Apostles—particularly St. Paul—include didactic “sayings” which convey, in memorable fashion, some ramification of Christian doctrine or action of grace, or even application of virtue pertinent to Church life and/or personal spiritual growth. These sayings are reminiscent of the “wisdom literature” of the Old Testament that was common with the Hebrews, as well as among most cultures of the ancient world.

Like their literary forebearers, the sayings are meant to be a spiritual gift passed from the mature teacher & pastor to be imitated by his pupils, and likewise passed on to the next generation as a legacy in saintliness. In view of the Christian texts that followed centuries later, these sayings are the predecessors of the spiritual writings left by the “Desert Fathers” of the Eastern Orthodox hesychast tradition, as well as the medieval spiritual masters of the West.

#### **The “Faithful” Sayings**

*1 Timothy 1:15*

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*1 Timothy 3:1*

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*1 Timothy 4:8-10*

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*2 Timothy 2:11-13*

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*Titus 3:4-8*

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QUESTION – In addition to 1 Timothy 1:15, which of these “sayings” could you likewise see being included in our Anglican liturgy, and in what specific context?

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#### **Sayings of Conduct & Spiritual Virtue**

*Galatians 5:22-25*

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*Philippians 4:8*

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#### **The Sayings in Other British Liturgies**

In our Western Liturgical Tradition, including the Roman, Ambrosian, & Gallican, the sayings only appear in our Anglican—1 Timothy 1:15 as the third of the “Comfortable Words”, the Scripture quotations Thomas Cranmer inserted between the Absolution and the *Anaphora* (beginning with the *Sursum Corda*) which prefaces the Eucharistic Canon. The editor’s notes of the Lorrha-Stowe Missal recognize its peculiarly 16th century reformed use with some helpful commentary/suggestions (see handout).

