

A HYMN I CANNOT SING!

Greg Deuble: greg.thebiblejesus.com

Singing hymns is a uniquely edifying Christian experience. Who else is qualified to lift heart, soul and voice to God for His amazing love and mercy given us in Christ, but those who know they have been called by the grace of God to be His very children? Who else finds their tongues so loosed because they have come out of great darkness into the glorious liberty and light of the Gospel of Christ?

The first Christians were known for their joyful singing. Flogged, bleeding, aching, and in a cold stoney jail with hands and feet held by stocks, Paul and Silas “were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16: 22-25). Whether singing in pain, singing in the arena with lions crunching their bones, or singing as their bodies were being torched in tar to light up Nero’s gardens, Christians were known for their joyful singing in all circumstances in praise to God.

Whenever they met for teaching and breaking bread and for worship, Christians sang “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” and were “singing and making melody with their hearts to the Lord” (Eph. 5: 18-19). Redeemed Spirit-filled folks can’t help but lift heart and voice in song to the Lord.

Whenever the Spirit of God has broken forth in mighty revival, the Church has burst forth into song. For instance, the great Welsh revivals in the early Twentieth Century were characterised by singing. Pub tunes were put to music with Christian lyrics. The remnant of that movement of God still reverberates around soccer fields to this very day with songs such as, “Nearer my God to Thee”.

In modern times, many great hymns are universally recognized even by the secular world. Sir Isaac Newton’s “Amazing Grace” is not only sung in churches around the globe, but also over the radio waves around the world 200 years on. George Beverly Shea made famous, “O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works Thy Hands have made ... Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee, how great Thou art, how great Thou art!”

NATURE SINGS

When God created “all creatures great and small” He put a natural desire for song in them. Birds sing, wolves howl, frogs croak, crickets ‘cricket’. And speaking of crickets, recent sonic tests have found that the song of the cricket and the song of the whale are identical apart from being a few octaves in between! In my humble opinion, the chorus of nature’s sounds all point in harmony to express the unity and glory of their Creator.

We had some guests from the USA staying with us once. I shall never forget one morning when the man (who himself is a wonderful musician) came to breakfast saying, “Your milkman comes early.” Looking rather puzzled, I said, “Milkman? We don’t have milk delivered round here.” “Well” said our guest, “I heard somebody whistling up and down the octave right on daybreak.”

I asked this musically inclined man to whistle the tune he had heard. And he whistled a tune of what we in Australia know to be that of a Butcher Bird ... a rather plain looking black and white bird. Our musical guest then said, “Well that bird sang all 8 notes of the octave to perfect pitch!”

DO ANGELS SING?

What a silly question, you say. Of course angels sing. You know, “Hark, the herald angels sing ...” Well, believe it or not, commentators are divided as to whether or not the Bible says that angels sing. A superficial reading of the few passages that seem to say they do sing might cause one to wonder why serious Bible students are not so sure. Take the first reference in the OT to angels “singing”. God asks Job;

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth ... when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38:4,7)?

It is common knowledge that the Hebrews loved parallelisms in their writing. They would reiterate a thought with a slightly different turn of expression. Thus, "the morning stars" are here equated with the angels who are called "the sons of God". Similarly, "singing" is paralleled with the angelic "shouts for joy". We must also note that the Hebrew word for "sang" does not always denote music. It can be also accurately translated "joyfully shouted". So, did the angels sing or shout for joy, or perhaps do both?

Another passage commonly believed to show that angels sing is when they announced the birth of Messiah. The heavenly host "were praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:13-14).

Strictly speaking the praise of this heavenly army (or "soldiery" as the Greek reads), was a celebration (as the Greek word "praising" may also be properly translated). Literally then, the angels were "saying" or speaking a message. Of course we can say something in a song. Songs carry meaning in their music, but this passage appears somewhat ambiguous as to whether the "herald angels" were singing or speaking the message ... the text only says they "were praising God saying ..."

But doesn't Revelation 5: 9 say that in heaven " the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders ... sang a new song ..."? Whether these living creatures and the elders are angels is a moot question. The fact they are differentiated is a strong indication they may not be angels, at least in the conventional understanding. But let's read on.

In verse 11, "the voice of many angels around the throne" is added to and placed alongside "the living creatures and the elders". A distinction in the heavenly ranks seems to be made. Now note what is said about the praise of these "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands", in the next verse. They were;

"Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (v.12).

The next verse adds that "every living thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying. "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (v. 13).

Based on what the text actually states, the only thing we can say for sure is that whoever or whatever the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are, that they definitely "sang a new song", but when joined by the myriads of angels and the rest of creation, that they "say" their praise to God and to the Lamb. This agrees with the angelic heralds at the birth of Messiah speaking their praise with celebratory joy. This also is in agreement with Job 38:7 where the angels are said to "joyfully shout" as they watch God's handiwork.

These cautions duly admitted, personally I will not be dogmatic as to whether angels actually sing. Perhaps I am being driven more by sentiment and my traditional upbringing here, but I am still quite OK thinking that the angels do sing in their praise to the Almighty, and that on that Day of Glory we will all join together in anthems of praise.

ONLY CHRISTIANS CAN SING SINGS OF REDEMPTION.

However, I hasten to add that it is *only Christians who can sing the songs of redemption*;

For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the offspring of Abraham (Heb. 2:16).

In other words, angels know nothing of personal sin and the need of God's forgiveness and salvation (demonic angels have no hope of personal salvation or deliverance from certain judgment and Divine retribution). Angels may

very well sing to the praise of God's awesome wisdom, power and glory. They no doubt have looked on in awe at God's infinite mercy in providing salvation to sinners so rebellious and disobedient. ¹

However, angels have no personal experience of individual redemption. They don't need it. So they can't sing about the joys of having once been lost, but now being found. Angels can't sing from personal experience of having once been condemned to the fear of eternal death, but now being given new life in Christ. But Christians can, should and do sing, "Amazing grace! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see!"

This is why Muslims don't sing. Perhaps the nearest they come to it is the five daily calls to prayer by their muezzin from minarets above the mosques around the world. To many, this is an enthralling call. But it's not singing. Muslims know nothing of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Moslems don't believe God has a Son, much less that he loved us enough to die a redeeming death on the cross for us. Muslims have no assurance of personal salvation, for their hope lies in good works, but they can never be sure their good works will outweigh their sins.

The Buddhists, the Hare Krishnas and Hindus don't sing. They chant. It may be rhythmic. But it's not *singing*. How could it be? They know nothing of the glory of God's coming Kingdom on earth. They know nothing of how in Christ the saints will inherit immortality and the renewal of all things in the Age to Come.

Only Christians very conscious of our perilous state without Christ, very conscious that we were "dead in trespasses and sins", very conscious that we were prisoners in Satan's domain, very conscious that we (Gentile Christians) were "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world", but who are now "brought near by the blood of Christ", can sing redemption songs like, "To God be the glory, great things He hath done, so loved He the world, that He gave us His Son!"

HYMNS OF ADMIXTURE

Understand that I love singing many of the great hymns of the Christian church. That honestly said, I will also say there are some hymns I choke on. Please excuse the intended pun, but it's such a pity I have to add this rather negative note, for not all hymns are equal.

There are some hymns and choruses that are spoiled by unworthy admixture. They combine noble thoughts about God with poor theology. Take Charles Wesley's famous hymn, "And Can it be that I should gain, an interest in the Saviour's blood?" Inspiring, yes. Uplifting, absolutely. I can sing it with gusto, because it speaks of a lost soul's conversion from chains of darkness into God's glorious light. S/he who has experienced God's saving grace in Christ cannot help singing, "No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in him is mine; Alive in him my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, Bold I approach the eternal Throne, And claim the crown through Christ my own"?

But that said, Wesley's soul-stirring hymn is laced with serious Scriptural error. And a laced drink is a dangerous potion. I know that to write this will bring down the ire and hostility of countless Wesley fans who think I am just splitting hairs and "straining at gnats". But I will attempt to prove my contention and why it's important.

Wesley's hymn asks the astonishing question, "Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me?" It seems Wesley himself was arrested by the conflicting idea that *God could die*, and so he goes on to proclaim, "'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!"

If I said to you, "At this moment I am drinking orange juice laced with arsenic, but don't worry, it's still pure orange juice", you would think I had lost my mind and was about to lose my life too. For either I am drinking pure orange juice or deadly poison. Both propositions cannot be true at the same time. It's either poison or it's harmless juice. It can't be both.

If language is to carry any meaning, something cannot be the opposite of itself. Even God cannot be immortal and mortal at the same time ... unless of course, we change definitions and meanings. Might as well say you just saw a

¹ For example, Ephesians 3:10 in speaking about God's grace and unfathomable riches given through Christ, makes the point that this was "in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the heavenly authorities in the heavenly places."

square circle! Are you saying the circle was not round, in which case it was not a circle? Or are you saying the square was circular, in which case it was not a square? This is not a mystery ... it's meaningless nonsense, however imaginative it might be.

By definition there is no such thing as a square circle. And the Bible clearly states "God is not a man ... nor a son of man ..." (Numbers 23: 19).² The God of the Bible states categorically that He and mankind are infinite opposites. To say Jesus is the "God-man" (N.B. no such term is found anywhere in the entire Scriptural corpus) is to scuttle the word of God on a matter He says is impossible. To say something can be the opposite of itself is not a mystery, it's a contradiction.

GREEK METAPHYSICS AND WORDS WITHOUT MEANING.

For the Greeks this world was not real. They proposed that humans inhabit a shadowy, "unreal" (phenomenal) existence. However, almost anything could exist in the supposedly "real" world beyond human knowledge. As a result, the Greek-thinking Christian apologists, who appeared right after the Apostles had died, happily abandoned all rules of language and comprehension about the God of the Bible. Therefore, logical analysis about the unseen realm of God did not have to be logical.

With that defence the Greek-minded Christian apologists of the second and third centuries were not limited by language or common sense --- as scientists should be --- nor by the fact that their doctrine of God is stated nowhere in Scripture --- as theologians should be. They were free to invent new terms for the God of the Bible. He could be an "essence" or a "substance", He could be a composite Being of Three Persons who are "co-equal, co-substantial, co-eternal".

For these folks, God the Father was "unbegotten without beginning" but "God the Son" (a description found nowhere in Scripture!) could be "begotten with beginning"! Hah? And we all know a woman can be pregnant and not pregnant at the same time, don't we?!?

Augustine himself confessed he was driven to seek God's truth after reading "those books of the Neo Platonists".³ As a result of his mixing Greek philosophy with the Hebrew Bible, Augustine said he believed in the Trinity because it was unbelievable! Go figure.

For the Gentile Christian philosophers it did not matter that the Trinity is not open to rational explanation; its very irrationality made it believable. Get that. Rational explanation for clear Bible statements did not matter to the philosophical Greek apologists. Irrationality was believable because it was a "mystery"! The result is that;

More than eighteen centuries have passed since the true understanding of God held by the early Christian Church was corrupted. Principles of Greek philosophy have so infiltrated the teachings of orthodox Christianity that by now they are viewed, not as an element foreign to the Gospel, but as the foundation itself ... Rather than the teachings of the Bible those ancient Greek assumptions remain at the foundation of classical theism today ... Because of their fundamental belief in a metaphysical universe, the Apologists did not see themselves as limited to a rational explanation of God ... they cloaked their mistakes in the term "paradox", and turned them into points of faith.⁴

This same author states that few modern Christians are aware how Greek methods to defend the Gospel became the definitive trend in the second century and how Greek philosophy has so infused Christianity to the point where today the Church has in effect, become a branch of Hellenistic thought!⁵

Which brings us back to our hymns and to Charles Wesley. Without knowing it Wesley (with the pure desire to honour God I am sure) unwittingly smuggled Greek metaphysics into his hymn, for he has the "mystery" of the

² The Hebrew text reads of God, "Nor is He human that He should change his nature ..."

³ *Confess.* VII. 20.

⁴ Hopkins, Richard R. *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God*, Horizon, Springville, Utah. 2005. pp 206-207.

⁵ *Ibid* p 107 and p 199

Immortal God dying. What? The Immortal dies? As already stated, that's not mystery. That's contradiction, for something cannot be the opposite of itself. The Bible says categorically that the one true God is forever Immortal;

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. (I Timothy 1:16-17).

He Who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; Who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see ... (I Timothy 6:15-16).

The God who cannot lie, says He is the God who cannot die --- unless of course something can be the opposite of itself, which it can't --- and unless we feel free to invent our own meanings to words and appeal to unrevealed mysteries.

So, Wesley's stirring hymn which conveys so much good, is fatally flawed (pun intended). However, with a little editing I can still join in and sing the other verses. But, and it's a big but, there is one modern hymn I cannot sing, I refuse to sing because it is so corrupt ...

ONE HYMN I CANNOT SING!

Not too long ago Hillsong released a new worship song titled, "This I Believe (The Creed)" It assays to put the Nicene Creed to modern music. And I must admit that the combined effect of both words and tune create quite an impression. Get a congregation heartily singing "The Creed" and you'll find yourself caught up in the atmosphere. Before commenting on it, here are the first lines and chorus;

Our Father everlasting

The all creating One

God Almighty

Through Your Holy Spirit

Conceiving Christ the Son

Jesus our Savior

I believe in God our Father

I believe in Christ the Son

I believe in the Holy Spirit

Our God is three in one

After the congregation had sung this hymn one Sunday, I asked the worship leader if she could help me out. I told her that I could not sing the hymn because God's repeated Self disclosure is that He is One Person, the Father. Nowhere has He spoken of Himself as Triune. I told the worship leader that I could show her *hundreds* of Bible verses, in the Old and New Testaments, stating this fact unambiguously. I gently challenged her that if she could supply me with just *one* Bible verse saying God is Three Persons in the so-called Godhead, that I would henceforth be able to join in singing "This I Believe". So far she has not been able to give me that one verse! And I'll let you in on a little secret ... she won't be able to, I assure you.⁶

⁶ Also note the poor theology in this so-called creedal song that starts with, "our Father Everlasting through the Holy Spirit conceiving Christ the Son". Whoah. My Bible says it was **Mary who conceived** the Son of God **in her womb** by the generating power of God's Spirit. God did not conceive His Son ... He miraculously generated the Son in the virgin Mary.

JESUS HIMSELF IS A WORSHIPPER OF HIS FATHER

Did not Jesus tell us something critical about what constitutes acceptable worship in one of the best known and loved Bible stories? The Lord Jesus specifically spoke to the Samaritan woman of the importance of worshipping “the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him” (John 4:23).

Now read on: Jesus the faithful Jewish Messiah told the Samaritan woman, “ we worship what we know, for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4: 22). This proves **Jesus himself was a true worshipper** of God. He worshipped the God of the Jewish monotheistic confession (Mark 12:28ff). Did he not pray to God in John 17:3, “You, Father are the only true God ...”? For Jesus the Father is the only true God. Thus Jesus was a loyal unitarian monotheistic Jewish worshipper himself.

And observe that ***Jesus makes the true worship of the Father a “salvation” matter!*** He links knowing the God of the Jewish confession with salvation ... “we worship what we know for salvation is of the Jews”.

Today the distinguishing mark of Christian worship is that it is trinitarian. It appears Jesus forgot to mention this priority in his conversation about approved worship. Evidently Jesus failed to say that true worship consists of the mystery of worshipping “the Godhead Three in One”!?!

JESUS WILL DO THE WORSHIP LEADING

So, Jesus himself worships the one God. He includes himself in that number who are true worshippers whom the Father seeks. To modern Christians accustomed to elevating Jesus as co-equal with God the Father, this might sound rather strange. But we are indeed told that Jesus will lead the songs of praise to his Heavenly Father. Bet you didn't hear that in church last Sunday, or any Sunday recently!

We read that Jesus;

Is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will proclaim Thy Name to my brethren, in the midst of the Church I will sing Thy praise” (Hebrews 2:11-12).

We get a glimpse of Jesus singing in the midst of the congregation leading the praise service in Revelation 15. The victorious saints are pictured as standing on a sea of glass, holding harps before God. And they “sang the song of Moses ... and *the song of the Lamb*, saying, ‘Great and marvellous are Thy works, O LORD God, the Almighty ... Thou alone art holy; for all the nations will come and worship before Thee ...’” (Rev. 15: 2-4).

Get that. Jesus the Lamb of God (who was slain and dead proving he was mortal man and not the Immortal God) sings to the praise of the One LORD God Almighty. Part of Jesus' song includes the confession that His Father alone is holy and worthy of exclusive praise as the Single Supreme Deity. Observe it's also called “the song of Moses”, meaning Jesus agrees with Moses that “the LORD our God is one LORD” (see Mark 12:28ff)!

Thus, as on earth in the days of his weakness, so now in heaven glorified in resurrection power, Jesus' confession and song of praise is strictly unitarian monotheistic ... which is to say, when Jesus is the worship leader in the Glory, he will be standing alongside his brothers and sisters in full throated throttle of hymns of praise to the One LORD God Almighty, the Father. ⁷

Jesus does not sing because he was a sinner needing to know God's forgiveness. Perish the thought! Even though he “was tempted in all things as we are” yet he “was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). But Jesus does sing for God's faithfulness in vindicating him and raising him from the dead. Jesus does sing for the great things God has anointed and appointed him to do for the blessing of others. Jesus does sing because he is thrilled the Father's will has been fulfilled, and His promises to Messiah kept. Jesus does sing because God has given him the promised kingdom. Jesus does sing because all the saints through and with him inherit the glory of the Kingdom of God the Father. Jesus does sing because his greatest joy will at last be complete ... His Father will be acknowledged as the uniquely Supreme Sovereign God over all.

⁷ The NT identifies God (in the Greek text it mostly has the definite article, “the God”) as “the Father” approximately 1,350 times ... never once is “God” Three persons who are one!?!

Oh, what a day that will be to hear Jesus proclaiming “Thy Name” to his brethren in the midst of the Church by singing “Thy praise”! Thus, by no stretch of language is Jesus a trinitarian worshipper.

JESUS ACCEPTS THE CROWN OF LORDSHIP FROM NONE OTHER THAN GOD HIMSELF.

Modern Christians have no compunction singing to Jesus as God and putting the crown of Deity on him. How little we understand the Jesus of Scripture. He refused to take the crown of lordship from anybody but his Father. When the Devil offered to make him king, Jesus refused (Matthew 4). When the Jews wanted to make him their king, Jesus hid himself (John 6).

Even now in heaven the mighty hosts do not confer on Jesus’ brow his kingship ... they cast their crowns at his **feet** knowing Jesus accepts that honour from God his Father alone (Rev. 4:4-11)! Unlike the modern church these mighty spiritual beings are never presumptuous as to imagine they have the right to crown Jesus by putting their crowns on his head. They understand Jesus perfectly, even if we don’t!

In the Bible it is God the Father who puts the crown on Jesus’ brow. And it’s not the crown of Deity that Jesus accepts from His Father God. It’s the crown of authority over the nations (Matthew 28:18). It’s the crown of messianic lordship (eg. Acts 2:36). God has “given” Jesus the name above every other name and decreed that “the angels of God worship him” (Hebrew 1:6). Jesus’ lordship is “received from the Father”, that is, derived. And the day when “every knee will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”, will be the day when God the Father who has conferred this honour upon him is ultimately glorified through that confession (see Phil. 2:11).

James Dunn is right on the money when he writes;

At the very least we have to recognize that the Philippian hymn (2.6-11) envisaged acclamation of and reverence before Christ which, according to Isaiah, God claimed for himself alone. On any count that is an astounding transfer for any Jew to make or appropriate.

Yet, at the same time, we have to note the final line of the hymn: "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2.11). This means that the acclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord involved no heavenly coup or takeover, no replacement of God by Christ. On the contrary, it was God who would be glorified in the confession of Jesus, And not because the one was identified with the other (Jesus is Lord, God is Father). But, most obviously, because the one God (of Isaiah 45) had chosen to share his sovereignty with the exalted Christ. In other words, we are back once again in the scenario of 1 Cor. 15.24-28. The universal lordship of Jesus Christ has been determined and effected by God, but the supreme glory is God's.

⁸

Jesus’ greatest joy and honour will be to finally surrender the entire redeemed cosmos unto his Father who alone is Almighty God, and ultimately recognized by all creation as the only God Who is “all in all” (I Cor. 15:28).

Even in his resurrected glory in heaven now, the Lamb is worshipped only in association with God the Father. The Lamb is not worshipped in isolation from the LORD God Almighty his Father.

CONCLUSION

So, ask yourself. When Jesus leads the singing in the congregation of the redeemed, do you really think he will be singing, “Our God is Three in One”? To ask the question is to answer the question. Is it not a repulsive proposition?

A careful recall of the evidence must answer that in the negative: Impossible!

When he endorsed Israel’s unitarian creed by saying the first and greatest of all commands is to confess and to love “The God who is one LORD”, Jesus proved he was a true worshipper in line with Israel’s monotheistic faith. The “true worshipers” for Jesus were only those who knew “in spirit and in truth” the one God of Jewish monotheism --- “the Father”.

⁸ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp 251-52.

In his Revelation the apostle John saw Moses and Jesus singing in harmony to the glory of the one true LORD God Almighty. And just by the way, in this capstone of all Scripture --- the Book of the Revelation --- where is the worship of the Third Person in the Godhead? Where is the person of "God the Holy Spirit" worshipped in the great climax of redemptive history? Right at the very end and culmination I am still looking for that one Bible verse that says, "Our God is Three in One"! There is not the slightest hint of any worship of a Trinitarian God here.

And remember that Jesus linked this true knowledge and worship of the one God with "salvation". We therefore alter Jesus' express statements on acceptable worship to our own eternal shame and hurt.

We are clearly informed that when Jesus sings in the midst of the redeemed congregation in the glory of that Kingdom, that he will lead all praise to the Singular Person of God whom he calls "my God and your God", and "my Father and your Father" (John 20: 17). What joy will fill his heart when he finally hands all things over to God his Father ---including his own worshipful submission --- so that "God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15: 28).

Observe again the pronouns referring to God as sung by Jesus on that Day. They are all in the third person singular;

Great and marvelous are *Thy* works, *O LORD God, the Almighty*; Righteous and true are *Thy* ways, *Thou* king of the nations. Who will not fear, O LORD, and glorify *Thy* Name? For *Thou alone art holy*; for all the nations will come and worship before *Thee*, for *Thy* righteous acts have been revealed" (Rev. 15:3-4).

No. Jesus will not be singing "This I believe ... our God is Three in one". When he leads the congregation of the redeemed he will be singing to His Father, "O LORD God the Almighty, Thou alone art holy"! Jesus would be horrified at today's unauthorised worship and would complain, "In vain they worship, teaching for doctrines the precepts of men" (Matthew 15:9).

Therefore, "This I believe (The Creed)" is one hymn I cannot sing. Nor should you if you want to qualify as a "true worshipper" singing in harmony with Jesus in the midst of the congregation!