

Hail, gladdening Light

Anglican Translations of the Ancient Hymn, Phos Hilaron

The ancient Christian hymn known as *Phos Hilaron* (Gk. Φως ἱλαρόν) was sung by early Christians at the lighting of candles at eventide, and is still a central feature of Vespers in the Eastern Church. Since the 19th century, the hymn has been regularly introduced in Anglican hymnals, Service books and Anthem repertoire.

The origins of the *Phos Hilaron* are not known, but the hymn is mentioned by St. Basil the Great (d. 379) who already regarded it as ancient. The hymn is an important liturgical artifact of the Early Church, both in terms of doctrine and liturgical practice. As an expression of praise to the Most Holy Trinity, One God, and as a celebration of the Son of God in his Incarnation, the *Phos Hilaron* embodies the two greatest dogmas established in the first centuries of the catholic Church.

St. Basil described the liturgical purpose of the hymn, saying that “It seemed fitting to our fathers not to receive the light of eventide in silence, but, on its appearance, immediately to give thanks.” (*On the Spirit*: 73) The Church hails Christ as the “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”. (John 1:9) It is very appropriate to revisit this hymn during Epiphany Season, as we enjoy a series of Gospel Lessons for Holy Communion which are ‘epiphanies’ to us of Christ in his Incarnation.

Let us begin with a translation of the *Phos Hilaron* included by the Rev. Blomfield Jackson (Vicar of Saint Bartholomew’s, Moor Lane and Fellow of King’s College, London) in his 1894 translation of the Homilies and Letters of Saint Basil the Great:

Joyful Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father,
the heavenly, the holy, the blessed Jesus Christ,
we having come to the setting of the sun and
beholding the evening light,
praise God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
It is meet at all times that thou shouldest be
hymned with auspicious voices,
Son of God, Giver of life: wherefore the world
glorifieth thee.

The *Phos Hilaron* is addressed first of all to Jesus Christ the Son of God, Incarnate, who is the Light and Glory of the Father. As the sun begins to set and the candles are lit, the Church rejoices in the Light of Christ which dispels the darkness of the world. The next statement of the hymn is an offering of praise to the Holy Trinity, “we praise God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost”. This part of the

hymn expresses the orthodox understanding of God, as One God in Three Persons. St. Basil cited the hymn to provide early evidence for his belief (and the belief of all Christians) that when glory is offered to God, it is right to praise the Holy Spirit along with the Father and the Son.

Having addressed our Lord Jesus Christ in his Incarnation, and having glorified the Holy Trinity, the hymn then presents the response of the Church. The Holy Trinity is praised at all times by the gladsome voices of those who have received the Joyous Christ-Light, and who now reflect this Light back in praise to God. As Christians continuously behold the Light of Christ, who is the image of the Father, they are transformed “into the same image from glory to glory...by the Spirit of the Lord”. (II Cor. 3:18, 4:4)

The *Phos Hilaron* has been used by Anglicans at least since the 19th century, but the precedent for interest in ancient eastern liturgies had already been established by Archbishop Cranmer, who incorporated a “Prayer of St. Chrysostom” in the Daily Offices, and patristic phraseology in the Holy Communion Service of *The Book of Common Prayer*. The Anglican Revival of the 19th century brought about a renewed interest in the continuity and shared doctrine of Anglicans with the patristic Church. This in turn resulted in a flowering of translations of many ancient Greek and Latin hymns, and their introduction into Anglican hymnody. Having rejected medieval Office Hymns addressed to the Virgin Mary, Anglicans were glad to welcome the *Phos Hilaron* – an ancient, beautiful and doctrinally wholesome addition to the repertoire of Evensong.

The most famous translation of *Phos Hilaron* was published in 1834 by John Keble, Oxford don and Tractarian. Keble gently paraphrased the text in order to adapt it to the metered, rhyming verse typical of hymnody in the Western Church.

*Hail, gladdening Light, of his pure glory pour'd,
Who is the immortal Father, heavenly, blest,
Holiest of holies, Jesus Christ our Lord!
Now we are come to the sun's hour of rest;
The lights of evening round us shine;
We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Divine.
Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung
With undefiled tongue,
Son of our God, giver of life, alone!
Therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they
own. Amen.*

John Keble's translation was included in the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861), set to an irregular Anglican chant setting by Sir John Stainer. His text has been used in Anthems, as well. The Anthem by Sir George C. Martin is an especially expressive and powerful setting, climaxing in a four-voice fugue on the last sentence, "Therefore in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own." The Anthem of Irish composer Dr. Charles Wood has become a regular feature of Anglican choral repertoire. Wood's setting for double *a cappella* chorus is mostly composed in a homophonic idiom enlivened by occasional modulations.

In *The Hymnal, 1940* we have two translations of the *Phos Hilaron* for congregational use, one by Edward Eddis (1864) and another by Robert Bridges (1899), poet laureate of England. Both are mildly paraphrased and rendered in metered verse, similar to the translation of John Keble. The translation by Edward Eddis appears at 173 with music by Clement Scholefield and at 768 with music by Gerald Near (here featured).

The translation of Robert Bridges (hymnal 176) is set to a melody of Louis Bourgeois, and harmonized by Claude Goudimel.

*O gladsome light, O grace of God the Father's
face, the eternal splendor wearing;
Celestial, holy, blest, our Saviour Jesus Christ,
joyful in thine appearing.
Now, ere day fadeth quite, we see the evening
light, our wonted hymn outpouring;
Father of might unknown, thee, his incarnate
Son, and Holy Spirit adoring.
To thee of right belongs all praise of holy songs, O
Son of God, Lifegiver;
Thee, therefore, O Most High, the world doth glo-
rify, and shall exalt forever. Amen.*

Another interesting English translation is that of the American Poet, Henry W. Longfellow, in his *Golden Legend* (1851). In Longfellow's drama, a family sings an "Evening Song" (the *Phos Hilaron*) while lighting the lamps of their farm house.

In 1979 the *Phos Hilaron* was made a regular evening Office Hymn in the prayer book of The Episcopal Church. This was a promising development of Anglican Evensong that continued the liturgical trajectory begun by Archbishop Cranmer. As a non-metrical and non-rhyming translation of the *Phos Hilaron*, it also paved the way for the freer style of chant which then appeared in *The Hymnal, 1982*.

Regrettably however, the translation adopted by the Standing Liturgical Commission for the 1979 book cannot be highly commended, due to editorial liberties of translation and punctuation that alter the meaning of the hymn. For example, the word *hilaron* was translated as "gracious", which would actually require a different original Greek word (a form of *charis*, and not a form of *hilaros*) with a different theological meaning. Secondly, the unfortunate decision to render the Holy Trinity as "God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit" effectively makes God known as either one Person who goes by three names, or as one Person that is known in three Modes of operation, rather than as One God in Trinity of Persons, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The translation of sacred texts from one language to another can be a difficult task, fraught with various pitfalls. In this regard, the 19th century Anglican translations of the *Phos Hilaron* still represent a very high standard for English-speaking Christians, both in terms of beauty and doctrinal clarity. Perhaps in the future another attempt can be made to render *Phos Hilaron* in the style of the 1979 Office Hymn, but with more attention paid to Christian theology and to the Anglican literary heritage. Then the good work that went into crafting the musical settings for *The Hymnal, 1982* can also be put to work with the improved text. Until such time, however, the translations of John Keble, Edward Eddis and Robert Bridges remain authoritative for Anglicans to enjoy and use in worship.

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the twenty-first century receiving converts.

[See further *Anglican Formularies and Holy Scripture* and *Anglican Identity* both available from

www.anglicanmarketplace.com and also *Reforming Forwards. The Doctrine of Reception*, available at www.latimertrust.org]

No to Rome's advances and Yes to the Anglican Way!

And adding to Bishop Duncan's statements on page 2

Apparently the Pope has authorized various officials to look into ways to facilitate the conversion of confused and disaffected Anglicans—especially in the West—to the Church of Rome (*Sunday Times*, London, Nov 19). And unless the people called Anglican in North America get their act together, as we say, then Roman Catholic facilitators are going to be very busy in the next decade.

Certainly we seem to be in a period when Anglicans in the West, even those who claim to be orthodox, do not seem to have the guts to stand wholly by the Anglican Way as it has existed, been known and defined since the sixteenth century. They seem to prefer to move on a very wide front of alternatives and choices with a massive mixture of liturgies, rites and ceremonies, not to mention varieties in doctrine.

However, even in the depression and anxiety of Anglican life, there is positive talk concerning the renewal of Anglicanism in North America and the forming of a new Province of the Anglican Communion (to take the place of the present “sick” ones). Concerning this optimism the following observations may be made:

First of all, those American Episcopalians who, desiring to find a common basis for Anglicanism, are suggesting that that the BCP (1662, but obviously without prayers for the monarch) be made the general norm should be definitely encouraged! But they should be advised not try to jump over the centuries to this BCP neglecting what exists between 1662 and 2006. They need to recognize the development and use of this BCP in its USA form—in the American editions of 1789, 1892, 1928—and use these as necessary bridges back to the 1662. Such a routing would help them to understand what actually is the Common Prayer Tradition and how the classic BCP has been both first celebrated and then tragically rejected—in 1979—by The [Protestant] Episcopal Church.

In the second place, the following proposal should be welcomed: that the BCP 1662 (without the prayers for the monarch) should be the Template for all present and future Anglican Liturgy; that it should be available to be such in both its original classic English and also in an agreed contemporary English; and that in each Province there should be an appropriate commission to rule on approved additions and minor variations to this Template. (Presumably these would include from the start the minor revisions of 1662 made in the

USA and Canadian editions of the Prayer Book—1962 & 1928—and such others as are deemed to be according to the doctrine and style of the 1662 edition. Obviously the number would have to be controlled or the future would soon begin to look like the present confusion—i.e., many different forms of service with much varied doctrine and not a sign of liturgical unity before God.).

The aim of all this is to make possible Anglican Unity in One Faith under One Lord and using One Liturgy (with appropriate local minor variations) in one Province. Of course, there would also be the need to settle which versions of the English Bible were to be used for public worship and what Lectionary would be in use. So there would be a minimal yet necessary uniformity—with comprehensiveness of churchmanship and ceremonial—and Anglican worship would become coherent and obviously Anglican again.

Now, in the third place, wisdom—based on experience—requires the addition of this suggestion. Since The BCP, Ordinal and Articles all printed in the 1662 edition (as well as in the 1928 & 1962 editions) of the One Book of Common Prayer do assume and require—by their inbuilt doctrine—the practice of male headship and thus, as they stand, they do not allow for women to be deacons, priests or bishops, any new Province which makes the BCP 1662 its Formulary should only have a male Threefold Ministry.

How difficult it is to retain the Formulary and to ordain women have been already seen and painfully experienced in the Anglican Communion; and it may be seen right now in the C of E in the attempts therein to make it possible for women to be made bishops. In this regard, the so-called “Anglican doctrine of Reception” needs to be revisited for it is more of a diplomatic agreement than it is a genuinely Christian doctrine! To produce the greatest harmony for the future, it would be the wise thing not to have ordained women clergy at all in the new province, but to make all kinds of imaginative and practical forms of women's ministry prominent and important in the new arrangements.

There are other issues and problems to be solved in the creation of a new Province but one thing is certain and it is this. Unless there is agreement on a common formulary, liturgy and ministry by Anglicans, then the Pope's facilitators will be over-employed for the rest of the first decade of
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