MATTHEW E. GORDLEY

Teaching through Song in Antiquity

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Didactic Hymnody among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians

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To David E. Aune
My teacher, mentor, and friend

Preface

The idea for this volume grew out of my earlier volume on the Colossian hymn (*The Colossian Hymn in Context* [Mohr Siebeck, 2007]). In that volume I argued that Col 1:15–20 could be best understood as a quasi-philosophical prose-hymn utilized for purposes of instruction and exhortation in the context of the epistle. In other words, Col 1:15–20 was a didactic hymn. In the course of that study I encountered many hymns, psalms, and prayers that, while not specifically related to the Colossian hymn in any direct way, shared similar dynamics in that they utilized hymnic style or form for purposes of instructing a human audience. While specialized studies of many of those texts were plentiful, I noted that there was not one monograph that explored the vast variety of ways that ancient poets, in many times and places, utilized hymns in order to teach a human audience and shape a community's understanding of itself. It occurred to me that such a broad-ranging comparative survey would provide a foundation for further study of these texts, as well as reveal something of the inter-relatedness of the traditions of Judaism and Christianity as well as Greek and Roman traditions. This volume has emerged as my contribution to this topic, and I hope it will result in further efforts to engage more fully with these fascinating ancient texts that both praise and instruct.

Here I would like to express my deep appreciation to the professors who have contributed so much to my personal and professional development as a student of Scripture and other ancient texts. In particular I am grateful to David E. Aune who read through drafts of multiple chapters and offered insightful suggestions and critiques in many places. It is to David that this volume is gratefully dedicated. Naturally, many of my professors from my time at the University of Notre Dame continue to inspire and influence my work, especially James VanderKam, Hindy Najman, Greg Sterling, Jerry Neyrey, Mary-Rose D'Angelo, and Robin Darling Young. I would also like to acknowledge the ongoing influence of James Charlesworth, Ross Wagner, and Don Juel from the time I spent at Princeton Theological Seminary. I thank William V. Crockett of Alliance Theological Seminary for igniting in me a passion for the world of the New Testament, and also David Denyer and Bryan Widbin of ATS for their ongoing influence.

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Chapter 1

Beginning a Study of Ancient Didactic Hymns, Prayers, and Poems

A. Introduction

A primary purpose of most ancient hymns was the offering of praise, thanks, requests, or some combination of these, to the divine. That is, generally speaking, what hymns do. However, what unites the diverse and varied hymnic compositions under consideration in this volume is the way they employ hymnic forms and features from a variety of styles for a different primary purpose: instruction.

This study will argue that some poets, psalmists, and hymn-writers in antiquity took on a much more humanistic (and perhaps more difficult) task than praising a god or invoking the favor of a deity. They took on the task of molding and shaping the imaginations, thoughts, and perspectives of their audiences. They embraced the challenge of showing their hearers, through the medium of words, a world in which supernatural forces were at work. Often they confronted what their listeners could see in the world around them, creating a verbal portrait of the unseen world and bringing it into contact with the reality their community was experiencing. Through their compositions these psalmists and poets expressed a particular view of the world, of their community's place in it, and of the larger purposes of the divine among them. They espoused a way of seeing the world that was not always self-evident. In simplest terms, they took on the role of teachers and they taught through their hymns.

Of course, it is fair to say that all hymns and poems teach on some level. One could analyze any hymn and consider what values are inscribed within it, what it claims about the one being praised, and what it teaches about the position and status of the one reciting the hymn. One can also consider how a given hymn models praise and teaches the human audience about the nature of praise through its example. Even as hymns offer praise to a deity, they offer some amount of instruction to a human audience. Some hymns, however, indicate that teaching a human audience is a primary function of the hymn and not just a by-product. In some cases this is explicit while in others this teaching function, though primary, may only be

implied. Either way, the hymns that manifest this primary emphasis on teaching are those that we are calling "didactic hymns."

This study makes three related claims. First, didactic hymnody, carefully defined, is a recognizable and widespread phenomenon in Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian traditions of antiquity. Second, by attending to the specific contents, style, and strategies of a given didactic hymn, we can gain insight into issues facing a community and how the didactic hymn contributes to an ongoing process of identity formation for that community. Third, by comparing the use of didactic hymnody in a variety of cultural traditions in antiquity, we can gain a greater appreciation and understanding of the instructional dynamics of these texts and the strategies they employed as they functioned in the ancient world.

Though didactic hymns cannot be considered a distinct literary genre (as we will see, these texts are often found within a number of different genres), many hymnic and poetic praise texts show this primary concern for instruction and communal formation for a human audience. Didactic hymns, prayers, and praise poetry conveyed such things as knowledge of the past, perspective on the present, as well as beliefs, values, and ideals central to a community's self understanding. These compositions created a picture of reality in which a human audience could locate itself and find its identity. In light of these claims, we will articulate a broad definition of didactic hymnody and provide a broad survey of didactic hymns and prayers in Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian contexts. We will also examine a selection of didactic hymns from each tradition showing how poets and authors used a variety of strategies to instruct and engage their human audiences in considering the world and their place in it. The ultimate aims of this study, then, are a richer understanding of the individual compositions, a clearer picture of some of the authors and communities that produced and treasured these compositions, and a fuller appreciation of the ways that hymns and prayers functioned within the instructional landscape of Greco-Roman antiquity.

With these aims in view, the present volume contributes to recent scholarly discussions relating to the process of identity formation, the construction of identity, and the dynamics of communal formation among religious and social groups of antiquity. This field of study has emerged in recent years as an important and growing area of research for scholars of early Judaism and Christianity in particular.[1] For example, the recent volume of

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[1] Several recent volumes attest to the interest of scholars in these kinds of issues as well as the kinds of results that such an approach can yield: Zeba A. Crook and Philip A. Harland, *Identity and Interaction in the Ancient Mediterranean: Jews, Christians and Others: Essays in Honour of Stephen G. Wilson* (New Testament Monographs 18; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007); Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie

essays edited by Holmberg and Winninge in particular highlights a number of approaches and methods for examining identity formation within the New Testament and other early Christian writings. Their volume is to be commended for its variety of approaches including post-colonial criticism, intertextual analysis, consideration of literary techniques, and gender analysis. It also is helpful in providing some foundational understandings of identity.[2] Nevertheless, the Holmberg and Winninge volume shows a surprising omission in the consideration of hymnic, poetic, or other liturgical texts as aspects of identity formation for early Christians. This is regrettable since in the introduction to the volume the editors note that "among other things liturgy functions as an expression and a celebration of the distinctive norms, values, and ideals of the worshipping community."[3] While communal worship and its contribution toward the formation of identity is not addressed in their important volume, the present study is positioned precisely in the middle of this conceptual category.

Accordingly, we will look closely at how a certain kind of hymnic composition – didactic hymnody – instructs its audience and uses a number of strategies to contribute to a sense of communal identity among its listeners. We will see that didactic hymns are complex, artistic creations that use a variety of approaches to show forth a vision of reality that goes beyond what the audience could readily observe in the world around them. Hymns in particular were well-suited to bring into focus the work of the divine in the context of the earthly.

An exploration of instructionally oriented praise compositions from antiquity faces a number of challenges that are readily apparent to any serious student of the ancient world and its texts. The problems relate to terminology, selection of texts, and methodology, as well as the broad religious and cultural scope of the study. Recognizing these challenges, this

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Gripentrog, *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World = Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009); Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winninge, *Identity Formation in the New Testament* (WUNT 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Carol A. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[2] For example, the editors are careful to note that identity concerns much more than texts: "Identity is a larger, more complex social reality with both cognitive, ritual, and moral dimensions, crystallized into social relations and institutions, and developing in both predictable and surprising directions over time." Holmberg and Winninge, *Identity Formation*, vii.

[3] Ibid. In the conference that spawned this volume one of the seminar groups was apparently intended to consider how liturgy contributed to the formation of identity ("liturgy as identity formation"). Its focus apparently ended up being broader than liturgy with the result that liturgical concerns are not represented in the conference volume.

first chapter addresses the following issues in turn: a definition of didactic hymnody; identification of didactic hymns; and the scope and approach of this study. Next a discussion of methodology highlights a number of tools that we will use to explore the multiple levels of didactic impact of a given hymn. We will conclude this chapter by discussing features of didactic hymns that enable some degree of classification of these compositions.

B. A Definition of Didactic Hymnody

A significant challenge is that of defining the kinds of texts we are considering in this study. The term used in the title – didactic hymnody – has been used by other scholars. However, it has not been well-defined and has no consistent use within the scholarly literature that treats the kinds of texts that are under consideration in this study. Given that some degree of instruction is an inherent part of most expressions of song (in the modern world as well as the ancient), it is surprising that not one monograph has been devoted to the study of the didactic use of song in the ancient world.[4] The lack of scholarly discussion of this particular category, with definitions of the scope, contents, and function of texts within this category, simply means that those essential concepts need to be discussed here. In this section we first provide a definition of didactic hymnody that is as succinct as possible and at the same time allows for the complexity of the phenomenon being explored here. We follow this definition with discussion of some related terminology in order to clarify both what this study is and is not examining.

While each tradition employs a range of terminology for its praise texts this study recognizes that a number of different kinds of poetic or religious compositions can be considered didactic hymns when their contents register a didactic tone and their style participates in hymnic conventions. In light of this understanding, we propose the following definition:

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[4] To be sure, some specialized studies on one particular text or one particular tradition have raised the issue. Some recent examples include: Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); Terry Giles and William Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009); Jan Liesen, *Full of Praise: An Exegetical Study of Sir 39, 12–35* (JSJSup 64; Boston: Brill, 2000); Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space*; Johan C. Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (STAC 33; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). In spite of the excellent contribution of each of these studies, not one takes a broad enough view to be able to situate the didactic function of that one text or set of texts within the larger framework of instructional song in antiquity.

Didactic hymns, prayers, and religious poetry are those compositions which employ the stylistic and/or formal conventions of praise and prayer, but whose primary purpose was to convey a lesson, idea, or theological truth to a human audience.

Though somewhat unwieldy, the phrase "didactic hymns, prayers, and religious poetry" gives both the breadth needed in terms of genres while at the same time placing the emphasis on teaching and instruction within those genres. As a shorthand expression we will use the more manageable phrase "didactic hymnody," though the reader must bear in mind the broad sense in which we use the term "hymnody," particularly as it is discussed in the following paragraphs.

A number of other terms suggest themselves as good candidates for a category that reflects the scope of this study. Some terms are indeed relevant to our study, though they may not be suitable to describe the phenomenon as a whole. For example, the terms "instructional psalmody" and "didactic poetry" open the discussion to a number of relevant texts and get us moving in the right direction. We are concerned here with religious poetry that was written to instruct. However, in light of the broader scope of this project, which aims to encounter this phenomenon in antiquity in several religious and cultural traditions, these terms are not completely satisfactory. The term "psalmody" tends to be restricted to Jewish and Christian compositions and is therefore too limiting.[5] Similarly the expression "didactic poetry" refers to a phenomenon that is already closely associated with Greco-Roman literary traditions, and is therefore too restrictive for our broad survey.[6] The term is also too restrictive in that some of the didactic compositions we will examine here as hymns cannot technically be regarded as poetry. I refer here to the little studied prose hymns of antiquity, some of which explicitly claim that they are *not* poetry (cf. Aristides, *Or*. 45.1–14). In addition, didactic poetry as a category can also be considered to be too broad in the sense that its subject matter extends far beyond the religious contexts which are the primary focus of this study. While didactic poetry may employ didactic hymnody at times (e.g., the hymn to Zeus that makes up the proem of Aratus's *Phaenomena*), didactic poetry as a genre can cover anything from farming to astronomy. The term "didactic hymnody" is also broad, but in the more useful sense that it can include any number of ancient religious traditions; Jews, Christians, Greeks, and Romans all made use of hymnody, albeit in various forms. Further, the

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[5] Cf. Martin Hengel, "Hymns and Christology," in *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: Fortress Press, 1983), 78–96. Hengel observes, "The Jewish *psalmos* was fundamentally different from the traditional Greek hymn to the gods with its strict metre, dependent on the variation between stressed and unstressed syllables" (78).

[6] Peter Toohey, *Epic Lessons: An Introduction to Ancient Didactic Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1996).

broad understanding of hymnody adopted here allows for inclusion of a wide range of texts within this category.[7] Though more specialized uses of the term are also attested in antiquity, the broadest definition of hymn relevant here is that which refers to any composition in honor of a god.[8]

Nevertheless, the idea of a hymn can take several manifestations, some of which are more specific or more technical in their meaning; not all of these are in line with our use of the term here.[9] In the study of the canonical book of Psalms, for example, form-critics distinguish hymns as one type of psalm among others (e.g., laments, songs of thanksgiving, songs of ascent, etc.) depending on the classification scheme used. A number of psalms have clear didactic emphases and yet do not fall into the form-critical category of "hymns." In order to avoid limiting the scope of this volume and excluding valuable comparative material, we include a variety of religious poetry and hymnic compositions which lay claim to didactic purposes. These include: psalms, prayers, poems, songs, and hymns. Each of these kinds of compositions can be crafted with the goal of communicating with a deity, and in many cases, this is understood to be one of their main purposes. But each of these kinds of compositions can also take on a didactic function – a function which may even be the primary purpose of the composition.

What we are most interested in are those compositions which have the appearance of being written to render praise to a deity (i.e., hymns) or to communicate with a deity (i.e., prayers), but which at the same time also teach a human audience, whether the individuals in the audience are passive listeners or active participants. In this study, then, we explore hymns, psalms, and prayers that have a didactic function. We also explore those compositions that employ the conventions of these categories to a significant extent. Thus we do include religious poetry at times even if it is technically not a hymn. Though religious poetry may not be cast in the form of

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[7] Note the range of uses of the hymn in the entries in Therese Fuhrer, "Hymnus III. The Christian Hymn," in *Brill's New Pauly* (ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider; Boston: Brill, 2005), col. 622–625.

[8] Cf. R. C. T. Parker, "Hymns (Greek)," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd revised ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 735–736. For a similar discussion of a broad definition of hymnody in antiquity see Josef Kroll, *Die christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandria* (2nd ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 8–12.

[9] See the further discussion in Parker, "Hymns (Greek)." He notes three meanings of ὕμνος, all of which employ the idea of song in honor of a god. Yet he also notes a broader use of the term as he writes that in our period "many hymns were also composed that were not, in all seeming, intended for performance: instances are as diverse as the hymns of Callimachus, Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus, hymns to fortune and to nature and to Rome, and in due course epideictic compositions such as the prose hymns of Aelius Aristides" (736).

a prayer or hymn, it often takes advantage of the conventions of prayer and praise to convey its message.

A brief example illustrates the complexity of this issue and also our approach in addressing it. In the Jewish tradition, Wisdom of Solomon 10 is a discourse on the saving role of Wisdom in Israel's history from the creation of Adam through the exodus from Egypt. Though not formally a hymn (there is no hymnic opening; it is not found in the context of a collection of psalms but rather is incorporated into a protreptic discourse; etc.) the passage does include a number of hymnic features in terms of both style and content. Further, there is no question that a major purpose of this chapter is to convince the listener of the value of aligning oneself with the powerful figure of Wisdom, clearly reflecting the Jewish historical and theological tradition. This passage is included in this study since a case can be made that it is a composition in hymnic style (if not form) with a heavy didactic emphasis. In that broad sense, Wis 10 may be considered to fall into our category of didactic hymns, prayers, and religious poetry.

Having briefly noted this example, it may appear to make sense to refer more broadly to "didactic religious poetry." However, the phrase "didactic religious poetry" is not appropriate here since there is a strong tradition of prose prayer and even prose hymnody in antiquity.[10] Moreover, since the publication of James Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* several decades ago, many scholars have called into question the clear-cut distinction between poetry and prose, at least within the Hebrew Bible.[11] While the present study recognizes a distinction between poetry and prose (however that is defined), both poetic and prose prayers and hymns fall within the scope of this study. Poetic form, rhythm, and meter are recognized as several features that may be indicative of a hymnic style. Nevertheless, the label "poetry" is not the only feature associated with hymnody nor is it determinative of a hymn in any case.

The term "didactic" as a descriptor is easier to defend as it emphasizes the primary function of the hymns in question here: instruction. This term is often used in distinction from other terms such as "cultic" or "liturgical," each of which suggests a primary purpose of giving praise, thanks, honor, or some form of verbal offering to a deity in the context of a worship ceremony or sacrifice. Of course, we must recognize that these categories are not mutually exclusive; didactic hymns could have been used in these kinds of communal worship settings. Even so, Sigmund Mowinckel

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[10] D. A. Russell, "Aristides and the Prose Hymn," in *Antonine Literature* (ed. D. A. Russell; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 199–216.

[11] James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); James L. Kugel, "Some Thoughts on Future Research into Biblical Style: Addenda to The Idea of Biblical Poetry," *JSOT* 28 (1984): 108–117.

made a distinction when he spoke of "learned psalmography," a subset of Jewish psalms associated less with temple worship and more with the house of instruction. In using this terminology Mowinckel indicated something of the origin and authorship of a selection of psalms: those which appear to have originated within wisdom circles.[12] However, wisdom poetry and even "learned psalmography" as a phenomenon are really a subset of our larger category of didactic hymnody, and as such will be explored at some length. By referring to a larger category of didactic hymns, psalms, and prayers, the emphasis in this study is not on their authorship or origin (whether from wisdom circles or cultic circles) but on their content and function (how they function in their literary or social context).

Naturally, it must be admitted that it is usually extremely difficult to identify the origin of any ancient poem. Identification of the author is, in many cases, impossible. Even the idea of discerning the *intent* of the author in a given text is fraught with difficulty. However, from clues based on the form, contents, and the later collection and preservation of many of these psalms, hymns, or prayers, it is possible to speak of their didactic function as at least one purpose among several. A goal of this study will be to explore the kinds of lessons and instructions that were given through this medium of hymnody. Observations about the varieties of forms which these songs could take, in comparison with one another, will also be significant. For example, in the Jewish tradition, what kinds of lessons are conveyed through hymns that review history as opposed to wisdom poems? Or in the Greek tradition, what kinds of lessons are conveyed through a hymn to a deity as opposed to compositions in praise of a human ruler?

One other possible way of describing these kinds of texts brings out an additional challenge for this study. As a category "didactic religious discourse" is close to getting to the heart of the issue, since it combines the didactic function with a religious perspective. However, this phrase would suggest that the compositions are limited here only to the realm of the religious, which may imply a distinction between religious and other discourses such as philosophical or political discourse. No such distinction is intended in this study, though the texts chosen for study here do generally register a religious tone as a primary feature. Yet that overriding tone does not serve to remove political, social, or philosophical issues from the purview of their didactic designs. In addition, though we will concern ourselves with questions relating to discourse analysis (see below on method) the general term "discourse" is much too broad. The texts under consideration here tend to be shorter discrete units, a factor which needs to be kept

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[12] S. Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley* (ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; Leiden: Brill, 1960).

in mind as well. In light of the above discussion, the admittedly cumbersome expression "didactic hymns, prayers, and religious poetry" does justice to the concerns of this study.

C. Identification of Didactic Hymns

A second challenge we face from the outset is the recognition that within each of the cultural-religious complexes under discussion here (Greco-Roman, early Jewish, early Christian) many texts of different types and styles could lay claim to being both "didactic" on some level and "hymnic" to some extent. Selecting representative didactic hymns from among this wide range of potential texts is thus a major difficulty. The parameters of our definition of didactic hymnody serve as a starting point for these judgments. From there the specifics of which texts really ought to be considered didactic can and should be debated. However, the advantage of a broad survey such as this is that even if one, two, or ten texts are omitted which should have been included, the impact they would have on the overall thesis should not be too great. Likewise, space does not allow for a full analysis of all of the hymnic or prayer texts we might consider didactic. I have thus tried to select those texts which have potential to open up our understanding of the phenomenon, showing a variety of approaches to hymnic instruction. This section outlines the features that enable us to identify a hymn as didactic.

As we have already noted in passing, some ancient hymns made their teaching function explicit. This is most easily observable when the poet invites the human audience to hear and learn as the poet speaks or when the hymn makes prominent use of the language of instruction. For example, Psalm 78 begins with the call: "Give ear, my people, to my instruction; incline your ear to the words of my mouth."[13] When compositions with those kinds of didactic features employ a hymnic form or at least a hymnic style, it is clear that they fit our conception of didactic hymnody. Didactic hymns vary in the degree to which they make their teaching explicit and in the degree to which they address the audience directly. For those whose teaching is less clearly on display, it is often the context or other indicators that suggest the hymn should be considered among what we are calling "didactic hymns."

In many instances the teaching function of an ancient hymn is far less explicit and must be more carefully discerned. A number of factors can indicate the priority of a hymn's didactic purpose, even if the language of

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[13] Unless otherwise noted, translations of biblical passages are my own.

instruction is absent. First of all, direct address to the human audience, even in portions of the hymn, can signal that the hymn-writer has as a primary goal the conveying of ideas, information, or values to the human audience. This can be done in connection with or in addition to praising the divine; the tasks of praise and teaching are not mutually exclusive. However, when the poet addresses the audience directly, we should at least consider that the hymn may be intended to shape the perceptions and thoughts of that audience.

A second indicator of the didactic nature of a hymn is the extent to which it makes direct claims about the nature of the one being praised and/or about the community offering the praise. Direct claims about the deity, his powers, and his characteristics at least reveal something of the theology of the hymn. Likewise comments about the worshippers (whether they are blessed, specially favored, etc.) reveal the perspective of the hymnist about the community. It is possible, of course, that these claims may be incidental and subsumed under a main purpose of praising the divine. In such instances the didactic role of such claims may be less significant. However, at times the direct claims about the deity become the focal point of the hymn, enabling us to identify a major purpose of that hymn as instruction. Again, instruction may not be the only purpose, but it is a primary one when a central aspect of the hymn is making claims about the deity that the audience is expected to accept.

A third indicator is related to the second. When the hymn, in the form of narrative, recounts events of the mythic past or recent past, we should be aware that a didactic purpose may be present. A didactic role may be seen particularly clearly when the narrative about the recent, distant, or mythic past relates to the present concerns of the community from which the hymn comes. While that is not always the case (i.e. a narrative may be included for reasons other than teaching a lesson), the presence of narrative elements in a hymn should at least be considered one clue to the purpose of that hymn. The didactic function of such a narrative is rendered more certain when the hymn also addresses the audience directly at times and makes explicit claims about the deity and/or the audience.

The indicators noted above are elements within the hymn that enable us to consider that it may have been composed, in part, for purposes of teaching a human audience in addition to praising the divine. However, we will also see that some hymns, whose original purpose may not have been primarily didactic (i.e. they do not contain language of instruction, do not address the audience directly, and do not have direct claims or didactic narrative as a primary element), *become* didactic when they are preserved and used by later generations in new contexts. In some cases a hymn whose primary purpose may have originally been praise and whose teaching pur-

pose was only a secondary concern, can be employed in a new context which renders the didactic purpose as the primary function. This is particularly the case for hymns and psalms embedded in narrative and epistolary contexts of which there are numerous examples in the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and other early Jewish and Christian writings. Even the collecting of hymns together in one document provides a new context for each hymn and may serve to cause the teaching purpose to be highlighted, depending on the use of the larger document within a given community. For example, if a psalm from the Jewish Psalter was originally composed primarily as a vehicle for praise of God, when collected with other psalms it may retain that focus when the Psalms are used as a prayer and praise book. But when Psalms is read as a prophetic text, the content of a given psalm is then considered much more instructional than praise-oriented. Accordingly we must be aware of the possibility of multiple uses and functions of a text depending on its context and the disposition of the community that is composing it, reciting it, or reading it.

In some cases, a hymn or poem may be found in the context of a larger composition whose purposes are instructional. For example, Lucretius's didactic poem *On the Nature of the Universe* contains a number of hymnic passages. Likewise, Hesiod's *Works and Days* begins with a hymnic prelude as does Aratus's *Phaenomenon*. In cases like these, the didactic focus of the larger composition enables us to consider hymns it contains as potentially didactic as well. Questions about the didactic function of such hymns would center on how the themes and emphasis of the hymn contribute to the teaching of the larger composition. As we will see, many poets made effective use of hymnic forms to prepare audiences to receive their instruction.

In this volume we examine hymns that place a primary emphasis on teaching a human audience some kind of lesson (theological, historical, moral, political) whether that is explicit or implicit. Or, if the hymn itself does not suggest the primacy of a teaching function, its placement in a particular context indicates that it was understood by a later community to carry a didactic function. We thus recognize that didactic hymnody is not a monolithic category but a way of viewing certain kinds of hymnic texts found in a wide range of literary genres.

D. Scope and Approach of this Study

In light of our definition of didactic hymnody and our goal of exploring hymns with didactic emphases in a number of genres, a third challenge for the present study arises from the diversity of the cultural and religious

background of the texts we consider to be didactic hymns. It is an under-statement to say that the literary traditions of ancient Judaism, early Christianity, and Greco-Roman cultures are incredibly diverse. In light of that reality we must consider whether there is much value in attempting to compare such a wide range of texts. What value will accrue, for example, from putting Psalm 105 and Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus* on the same playing field? What insights will come from bringing the *Hodayot* of Qumran and the "star hymn" of Ignatius of Antioch into conversation? In short, though each tradition can and should be considered in its own right, a volume that was limited to just one (or even two) of these cultural traditions would be at risk of missing valuable data for comparison and contrast. It is easiest, perhaps, to see how the Christian tradition is dependent on earlier Jewish traditions. However, the Christian tradition of didactic hymnody must also be understood within the larger Greco-Roman context in which it devel-oped and to which it is also indebted. To examine the early Christian use of didactic hymnody apart from other expressions of didactic hymnody (forms which were surely familiar to the first and second-century Chris-tians) would severely limit our ability to appreciate the dynamics affecting their use of hymnic material, themes, and styles. Likewise, comparisons between Jewish and Greco-Roman expressions of didactic hymnody can shed light on the complex inter-relationship of these cultures, particularly in the Hellenistic period and beyond.[14] Even within one tradition later manifestations of hymnic praise need to be understood in light of hymnic conventions that have been passed down from earlier poets.

Accordingly, the scope of the present volume is a safeguard against iso-lating each tradition unnecessarily from influencing factors within its sur-rounding environment. More sharply focused investigations into the de-ployment of didactic hymnody within one particular tradition or within one particular work will surely continue to be desirable. This volume is inten-tionally focused more broadly as it aims for the insights that a wide-angle view can generate. As a result of this survey, subsequent specialized stud-ies will be able to position themselves within this larger playing field, as they also add depth, nuance, and/or correction to the findings presented here.

This study offers close readings of specific texts within the context of a broader survey in order to more adequately hear what the texts have to say and to assess their significance as hymns and prayers within a specific community. Our approach is two-fold. On the one hand, we employ a wide-ranging survey and comparative analysis to situate each text within

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[14] Unfortunately, the comparison of ancient Israelite didactic poetry with the poems and hymns of the Ancient Near East falls outside the scope of even this wide-ranging survey.

some of its larger contexts (literary, cultural, religious, historical, etc.). This approach leads to the overall structure of the work and results in conclusions that go beyond observations about one particular text or tradition, and serves to highlight more general features and trends of didactic hymnody and its functions in the ancient world. On the other hand, we selectively utilize detailed textual analyses of individual hymns, drawing on the tools supplied by a number of critical methodologies. This aspect of our study leads to insights regarding specific texts that arose within specific communities. These close readings of a number of representative texts feed into the comparative analyses with the result that the survey aspect of this volume is not merely descriptive. The broad-ranging survey is itself a means of drawing attention to the complex and multi-faceted use of hymns, prayers, and poems for religious instruction and identity formation in antiquity.

Each of the three main sections of this book explores the phenomenon of didactic hymnody in one major tradition and thereby contributes to a greater appreciation of this instructional method and its deployment over time within that cultural context. Part one (chapters two through four) looks at examples of didactic hymnody from a wide variety of Greco-Roman authors. Since literary and textual evidence in this case does not permit a focus on the development of one specific tradition over time, it is necessary to explore a number of didactic hymns and poems from diverse times and places. The intention is not to create a monolithic picture of "Greco-Roman didactic hymns." Such a picture would likely be more of a distortion of the evidence rather than an accurate reflection of it. Instead, study of examples from many corners of the Greco-Roman world will allow for some significant conclusions about the varied nature and use of didactic hymns in the Greco-Roman world. The Homeric Hymns and the poetry of Hesiod provide a starting point for our considerations since their influence in later Greco-Roman hymnody cannot be over-rated (chapter two). A chapter on the use of didactic hymnody within philosophical settings will show how the medium of hymnic praise, influenced by traditional hymnody, was used to paint a portrait of reality which a student would be invited to embrace (chapter three). A third chapter in this vein explores the Greco-Roman practice of praising exceptional humans, whether victors or rulers, as it developed from Pindar and his victory odes in the fourth century BCE to Pliny the Younger and his *Panegyricus* at the beginning of the second century CE (chapter four). Like the philosophical hymns in the same time period, these praises of human subjects invited listeners to see the world and their place in it in a certain way as the hymn-like praise situated the honoree in the larger context of the divine and human worlds. Such a broad survey will also allow for a greater appreciation of the varie-

ty inherent in these didactic compositions as well as the way they functioned within specific social and cultural circumstances. We will see that Greek and Roman hymns contributed to an ongoing process of formation of and reinforcement of a particular communal identity focused on values and ideals that were central to a particular community. In the Greco-Roman world these didactic hymns often related to negotiating the relationship between the human and divine worlds.

The main focus for part two, early Judaism, is the writings of the Second Temple period. However, the hymns and psalms of Second Temple Judaism reflect earlier hymnic and exegetical traditions to such a great extent that they can only be fully appreciated in light of those earlier traditions found in the Hebrew Bible. We therefore devote a chapter to the examination of didactic hymns of the Hebrew Bible as they are found within a number of literary contexts including psalm collections, narratives, Wisdom literature, and prophetic writings (chapter five). As we move on to explore the Jewish writings of the Second Temple period we will encounter further developments in didactic hymnody within the same broad range of genres (chapter six). A specific chapter on didactic hymnody within the Dead Sea Scrolls will enable us to consider the role of instructional psalmody in one specific community (chapter seven). The scope of this section is therefore quite broad in order to adequately explore the phenomenon of Jewish didactic hymns in antiquity. As we examine the broad reach of this tradition we will see that Jewish poets and teachers utilized didactic hymns to reflect on present realities in light of the past, and to situate themselves in the larger story of the ongoing work of the God of Israel among his people.

Part three (chapters eight through ten) explores didactic hymnody within the New Testament and other early Christian writings. The scope of this section is limited to the first two centuries because of the complexity and variety of this material. Drawing, as much of it does, on the earlier Jewish traditions of instructional psalmody, it is important to recognize the extent to which Jewish models are in view and the extent to which Christian writers chart their own paths in this area. In addition, later Christian hymnody is influenced by the New Testament model and the growing canon-consciousness of what Christians will come to conceive of as the Old and New Testaments. Accordingly the focus on the earliest Christian writings (chapter eight on the epistles; chapter nine on gospels and the apocalypse) will be important as foundational work for further study of the employment of didactic hymns and prayers in Christian writings of the second century CE (chapter ten). In particular we will consider the setting of each of these early Christian didactic hymns within the broader cultural context of the Roman Empire. We will see that the early Christians made frequent use of

hymnic forms to paint a portrait of reality in which Jesus is the agent of God in God's work of the redemption of humanity.

As we have seen, in surveying and assessing these kinds of didactic hymns, prayers, and religious poetry, it will be necessary to move at the intersection of several spheres of literary and generic categories. Recognition of the level of complexity of the material covered in this study serves as a caution against conclusions which are too neat or too simple. This complexity points to the need for an analytical approach that is multi-faceted and that can be adapted for a variety of texts. It is to such an approach that we now turn.

E. Methodological Considerations

While situating texts by attending to historical-critical issues and issues of genre and literary form, we also draw on some of the insights, sensitivities, and questions raised by reader-response criticism, discourse oriented analysis, mnemohistorical analysis, and performance criticism. These methodologies provide tools that enable us to consider the ways that hymns and prayers convey meaning, shape the thought-world of their communities, create a portrait of reality, alter the needs and possibilities of their readers, reinforce or challenge cultural norms and values, and/or portray the world to their audiences. In simplest terms, these approaches help us to consider not merely what these texts *say* to their readers or hearers, but also what these texts *do* within their communities. Though this volume is not governed by any one of these methodological approaches, the kinds of questions raised by these types of analyses provide a mix of tools that will be particularly helpful for exploring the wide range of texts under consideration here.

1. Discourse Oriented Analysis and Reader-Response Criticism

One methodological approach that has proven useful for our detailed analyses has been discourse oriented analysis. Two features of discourse oriented analysis which are most helpful in the context of the current study are the focus on the text itself and the concern for the communication from author to hearer.[15] While sources and influences on the text are surely sig-

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[15] McKnight explains, "Discourse oriented analysis is a productive way of coordinating New Critical and socio-historical emphases. Discourse oriented analysis is an advance on source oriented analysis in that the text is the focus instead of some realities behind the text…The discourse is the center of attention because it embodies the intention of the speaker and guides the response of the hearer," Edgar V. McKnight, *Postmod-*