

HYMNS AND TUNES

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!

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¡Santo! ¡Santo! ¡Santo! Señor omnipotente

거룩거룩거룩 전능하신 주여

Author: Reginald Heber (1783–1826), alt.; Spanish trans. Juan B. Cabrera (1837–1916); Korean trans. The Christian Literature Society of Korea

First Published: *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for the Parish Church of Banbury*, 3rd ed. (London, 1826); Spanish trans. undetermined; Korean trans. undetermined

The Theological Vision Statement on pp. 926–27 of *Glory to God* affirms that “the overarching theme of this collection will be God’s powerful acts of creation, redemption, and final transformation.” It is therefore entirely appropriate that this hymnal opens with one of the best-known hymns of adoration, an opportunity for human beings to join in the unending heavenly song.

Not only is this hymn based on Scripture (Revelation 4:2–11), but that visionary Christian Scripture is itself based on Hebrew Scripture (Isaiah 6:1–5). So there is a sense here of participating in multiple levels of remembered song, from the ancient past to the very present moment of singing. Echoing along the corridors of time are the Hebrew song of the synagogue, the Greek and Latin song of the early church, the polyglot song of all the ages since—all singing some version of the angelic “holy, holy, holy!” When we sing this hymn, we are not initiating praise but joining a song that has been going on from before time and forever.

This versification of the narrative from Revelation was written by an Anglican priest (later a bishop) in order to give a congregation the opportunity to connect what they sang with the Scripture they heard read in church. As the author described his hymns when publishing a selection of them in a religious periodical, they were “designed to be sung between the Nicene Creed and the Sermon” (*The Christian Observer* 10, no. 10 [October 1811]: 630). The present hymn is based on one of the biblical texts appointed by the BCP for use on Trinity Sunday.

The earliest printing of this text as cited above is attested by *HA&MHE* (426) and Frost (230), though no copy could be located for examination. The references here to the original form of the text are based on the following year’s posthumous publication of Heber’s *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year* (London, 1827). The changes continued from *PH90* are few: 2.4, “who” for “Which”; 3.2, “sinfulness” for “sinful man.”

Familiarity with this text may obscure some of its unusual literary qualities. To begin with, its

11.12.12.10 meter immediately distinguishes it from most of the English texts that preceded it. Such long lines represent a significant break with the CM, LM, and SM texts in the tradition of paraphrased psalms and the hymns of Watts and Wesley. In addition, this text frequently changes its pattern of scansion from trochaic to iambic and back again, and extra syllables often appear.

Another remarkable feature of this text is that it depends on a single rhyme sound throughout its four stanzas, a rhyme that derives from the second syllable of the initial and repeated word “holy.” As a result, the entire hymn becomes an extended echo of this central word and an expression of the unending angelic adoration. In this way it fulfills the BCP’s announced intention for the liturgical *Sanctus*: “Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name, evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high.”

NICAEA

Composer: John Bacchus Dykes (1823–1876); desc. David McKinley Williams (1887–1978)

First Published: *Hymns Ancient & Modern* (London, 1861); desc. David McK. Williams, *Thirty-four Hymn Descants* (New York, 1948)

Joining this tune to Heber’s text was one of the numerous enduring hymnic marriages accomplished by the first edition of *HA&M*. Although other tunes had been created for this rather demanding text (see *H82C*, 3A:362–63 for examples), only Dykes’s tune has become almost universally associated with it.

Often compared with Philipp Nicolai’s *WACHET AUF* (see no. 349) because of the opening rising triad, Dykes’s *NICAEA* goes on to develop its own distinctive shape and feel. Where Nicolai’s tune is narrative, Dykes’s is ceremonial. As the ABA’C structure suggests, the shape of the melody here is determined more by recurrent rising and falling arcs than by a concern for forward motion. This pattern is also evident in the melodic intervals, which are more often gapped than stepwise. Though the prominence of the tonic triad pitches is sometimes obscured by harmonic maneuvers, they are the essential framework for the tune. This centrality of the triad strongly implies that it carries theological significance in setting this Trinitarian text; it is not simply a decorative flourish.

It is helpful to compare Dykes’s opening melodic strategies (up the tonic triad, hold the submediant for a while, return two-thirds of the way down the tonic triad) with the comparable patterns in Nicolai’s *WACHET AUF* (up the tonic triad, hold the dominant, submediant, dominant). These are the sorts of choices that determine the shape of the sonic environment in which the tune will develop, and Dykes delineates those boundaries by giving both the soprano melody line and the supporting bass line a rather noble objectivity. By contrast, the alto and tenor lines are much warmer, often employing melisma where the soprano and bass are sustained and several times moving in parallel thirds and sixths. Furthermore, these inner voices are the only ones that experience accidentals, while the outer voices operate entirely with unaltered scale values. On the other hand, Dykes mitigates the potential monotony of limited pitch values by introducing rhythmic variety in the form of dotted quarter notes at four strategic points: at the opening of the second phrase, in anticipation of the half cadence at the end of the second phrase, at the halfpoint of the third phrase (to emphasize its difference from the first phrase), and in the final cadence of the fourth phrase.

From a structural point of view, it is also valuable to compare the bar-form (AAB) pattern of *WACHET AUF* with the more compact but also more varied ABA’C pattern of *NICAEA*. Unlike Nicolai, Dykes never returns all the way to the tonic at the conclusion of a structural unit and thus is able to keep up the forward motion of his tune, most notably at the end of the second phrase, where he unabashedly deploys a seventh chord to move the singers on to the recurrence of the opening triadic figure. With comparable skill he balances the rising shape of the first and third phrases by beginning the final fourth phrase on the tonic octave then falling a fourth, rising one note to the submediant and again falling a fourth, rising one note to the subdominant and falling a third, then moving to the tonic by conjunct motion. It is the musical equivalent of moving from

heaven to earth, of regrounding the singer who has been dazzled by the apocalyptic glimpse of divinity Reginald Heber's text has paraphrased from the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation.

The tune name reinforces the Trinitarian implications of the tune. The ancient city of Nicaea (now Iznik, Turkey) was the site of the ecumenical council that in 325 created the preliminary form of the Nicene Creed (later perfected at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and ratified by the Council of Chalcedon in 451).

Performance Suggestions and Liturgical Use

Because of the close similarity between the first and third phrases of the tune, many congregations lower the final melody note of the third phrase by a third. Every effort should be made to keep them on pitch, especially given the fourth leap that follows.

This is a hymn that lends itself to additional instrumentation, especially brass. A brass quartet is ideal, but even a trumpet or cornet on the melody line can be effective. For the final stanza, the trumpet or cornet can take the descant to good effect.

The most obvious occasion for using this hymn is Trinity Sunday, the occasion for which Heber wrote it, even though the underlying passage from Revelation is no longer appointed for that day. Partly because of the "early in the morning" line, this hymn has often been sung in many congregations as a regular opening hymn on Sunday mornings (in some places every week). It will therefore have special meaningfulness for some members of current congregations. On the other hand, the language of this text may seem odd to people unfamiliar with its context: casting down crowns around a glassy sea, cherubim, seraphim. Part of the rationale for the informational notes in the hymnal is to help bridge such gaps.