

Who's Reginald Heber?

February 1995

“**R**eginald Heber was born in the area of Cheshire, England, on April 21, 1783, of scholarly and well-to-do parents. At the age of seventeen he entered Oxford University, where his scholarship and literary abilities received much attention. Following his ordination to the ministry of the Anglican Church, he served for the next sixteen years at an obscure parish church in the little village of Hodnet in western England.

“In 1823, just three years before his early death at the age of forty-three, Heber was sent to India to serve as the Bishop of Calcutta. This responsibility included not only India but the Island of Ceylon and all of Australia as well. The pressures of this work along with the humid climate of that area wore heavily upon his health. One Sunday morning, after preaching to a large out-door crowd of Indians on the subject of the evils of their caste system, he evidently suffered a sun-stroke and died very suddenly.

“One year after his untimely death, a collection of his fifty-seven choice hymns was published by his widow and many friends. Most of these hymns are still in use today” (*101 Hymn Stories*, p. 94-95).

One of the songs written by Reginald Heber is the song *Holy, Holy, Holy*, based on Revelation 4:8-11. Heber wrote this song to emphasize the “trinity,” the doctrine that deity is comprised of three distinct Persons co-equal in their power, character and eternal existence.

Many of the hymns we sing today have been written by denominational composers. But the writer of a hymn and his or her theological error have no bearing on our worship. We may just as well dispose of our Bibles because they were translated by denominational theologians. As long as what we offer to God is “in spirit and in truth,” then no other person can interfere with or nullify it.

We must give attention, however, to the words we sing and make sure that they are consistent with Scripture. Some allowance must be made for poetic license, for songs are essentially poetry set to music. What one brother may see as an unscriptural verse might be sung with a clear conscience by another who interprets it differently. “*I will sing with the spirit and ... with the understanding*” (1 Cor 14:15).