

Devotion on Hymns of the Church - Hymn 435 - *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* –
6 February 2016, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: 12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

I love this hymn dearly, but did have mixed emotions about writing a devotion on it. I like some of the works of its author, John Greenleaf Whittier, but do not think I would have liked the man personally. Some of his writings reflect a certain degree of animosity toward those who do not accede to all that he says or thinks. But there is another reason I hesitated to write about this hymn, and that is the doctrinal and biblical error of its title, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." You may ask, "But where is the error in that?" Well, I will reveal that error as we proceed to the devotion. In the final analysis, I decided to write about it for the very reason that I did not want to - to reveal, not only its beauty, but also that single error in its title.

Though born into a Quaker family, and adhering to that faith most of his life, Whittier had tendencies and inclinations toward a universalist¹ view of the Bible and of mankind. This universalist view is reflected in the title of the hymn, too.

This hymn was published in 1872 and was derived from a longer narrative poem entitled, "The Brewing of Soma." Soma was a concoction the Vedic priests (Hindu) used to drink in forest retreats until they were drunken to a stupor. They believed getting thus drunk would attune their souls to religious experiences beyond the plane of the ordinary; and, indeed, it did; but it was not the Spirit of God which moved them, but of

¹ *Universalism* is a school of Christian theology which includes the belief in the doctrine of universal reconciliation, the view that all human beings will ultimately be restored to a right relationship with God in Heaven and the New Jerusalem. Many in the Universalist camp believe that all human beings are already reconciled to God even if they are unaware of it.

demons. I believe Whittier was addressing this abuse in his hymn before us. The hymn tune I prefer is 'REST' by Frederick C. Maker, and appears as an alternate tune in the 1940 Hymnal. I have added one verse of the hymn omitted in our Hymnal. (Verse 4, below hi-lighted)

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind,

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of Thy call,
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall
As fell Thy manna down.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind, Forgive our foolish ways; Reclothe us in our rightful mind, In purer lives Thy service find, In deeper reverence, praise. The salient phrase in this verse is also the leading error of the hymn. God is not the Father of all on earth anymore than the larger mass of mankind is the brother or sister of the Christian. There are only two families - one under the Fatherhood of God; and the other under the fatherhood of their father the devil. Every soul belongs to one or the other of these two families. Though all may have belonged to the cursed one, by the election and calling of Christ, those who believe are adopted into the family of God.

The Fatherhood of God

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of

adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. (Romans 8:15-16) If we are not sons and daughters of the Living God, then whose are we?

The Fatherhood of the Devil

43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. 44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:43-44) Those who act on their own corrupt, 'free wills - wills that are in bondage to Satan' belong to that other family that remains under the curse of Adam's Fall. So we all belong to one or the other. It all depends upon whose Voice we hear and heed.

Now the hymn becomes very reverential and biblically sound. Our ways are foolish ways that are mindless of God and fully informed by ungodly desires. We have a remedy for this affliction and that is in putting on the mind that was in Christ Jesus - *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:* (Phil 2:5) We need to dispense with our filthy rags of sin and take upon us the White Robe of Righteousness made available in Christ. The Christian will be pure and reverent in living and in worship.

In simple trust like theirs who heard, Beside the Syrian sea, The gracious calling of the Lord, Let us, like them, without a word, Rise up and follow Thee. Peter, Andrew, and others were busy along the shores of the Syrian Sea (Galilee) when Christ called them to follow. Without hesitation, they dropped their labors and followed on. We must all, likewise, drop the cares of the world and follow Christ. Nothing is more important!

O Sabbath rest by Galilee, O calm of hills above, Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee The silence of eternity, Interpreted by love! Anyone who loves the Lord more than all earthly passions interprets his desires by that love, and not desire. The Christian enjoys an eternal Rest (Sabbath) in Christ. All of our true labors for our Lord are, in reality, not our labors, but His working in and through us. The greatest calm is always on mountaintops. Why? Because the nearer the peak we approach, the less of the world that surrounds us.

With that deep hush subduing all Our words and works that drown The tender whisper of Thy call, As noiseless let Thy blessing fall As fell Thy manna down. It is very difficult to hear the uttering's of the Holy Ghost in the midst of the noise and racket of the world. We need often to withdraw to a quiet place of solitude for our prayers and meditations upon the Lord. Our words are of no consequence, but the Words of the Lord are of great consequence. He does not scream at us as a bad parent, but speaks softly and tenderly as to a precious and beloved little daughter - and we should never shout or scream our prayers to Him. He demands our reverence. The Manna came unseen as the Dew of Heaven. So comes the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness, Till all our strivings cease; Take from our souls the strain and stress, And let our ordered lives confess The beauty of Thy peace. The delicate drops of dew form unseen and unfelt during the wee hours of the pre-dawn darkness. We do not see or hear its coming, but the evidence is seen at first light. It distills invisibly in darkness just as the seed we sow germinates in the darkness of the soil as we wait in hope for its bursting forth into the light of day. Just remember: God is not a drama-monger. He speaks softly and in whispers to His own. All who are not His own will not hear his beautiful Voice. Our lives lived are the evidence of our faith - let them be ordered, peaceful, and full of love.

Breathe through the heats of our desire Thy coolness and Thy balm; Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire; Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire, O still, small voice of calm. The Balm of the Lord is life itself - the same which He breathed into the nostrils of Adam at Creation. May that living Breath penetrate the heat of our ungodly desires and fill our sails for a righteous course on the sea of life. The 'sense' referred to is the sense of our flesh that yearns for the exotic and forbidden fruit from the cursed tree of Eden. The more anesthetized the flesh, the keener the spirit of man. That still, small Voice does, indeed, yet speak through earthquake, wind and fire. But not always what we expect or desire. God has promised to send the wind, and the whirlwind, against our tall towers if we are disobedient, and He has done so.

A word to the wise is sufficient!