

Hymns of the Church (Hymn 519 - Once to Every Man and Nation) – 12 August 2014,
Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

Has the heart of man changed since the beginning of time? No, not as long as it remains in his ownership and will; but the heart of man assumes an altogether different nature when it is owned by the Lord Jesus Christ! That ownership is transferred from man to God by the secret and silent urgings of the Holy Ghost in the deep and unseen chambers of the heart. The Elect are drawn as if by an iron hook in the jaw to the shores of salvation by the mighty Fisherman of Galilee. There is a time for decision, and that time is ALWAYS NOW! When you consider what point in time we own, it is a razor thin sliver on the dial that represents merely the exact PRESENT. After saying that, the moment has already moved into history and we are at the next point of the present that has arrived and is gone into another instant. The very next second may be forfeited by death. So NOW is always the time for decision on matters of such great import as a man's soul. As the apostle Paul counsels, ". . . *behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*" (2 Cor 6:2)

Today's hymn stands among the greatest ever written. It gravely warns of our lost condition and the remedy therefor. If improvement were not possible or desirable, what point would there be in a warning? The glorious truth stands as a monument at the door of our hearts: "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" (Matt 11:28-30)

This hymn was written by James Russell Lowell in 1845. It is sung to the tune, *Ton-y-Botel (Ebenezer)*, *Yn y glyn* by Thomas J. William in 1890. Lowell wrote the poem, *The Present Crisis*, from which the words for the hymn were taken. This poem was written to protest issues of slavery leading up to the Mexican-American War. Later, particular verses were extracted to build the great hymn. Though written more than a century and a half ago, this hymn stands as a cutting reminder of the Hand that rules the history of men and nations, and the One who will ultimately write the final

chapter of this present world and which, in fact, has already written.

Once to Every Man and Nation

Once to every man and nation,
comes the moment to decide,
in the strife of truth with falsehood,
for the good or evil side;
some great cause, some great decision,
offering each the bloom or blight,
and the choice goes by forever,
'twixt that darkness and that light.

Then to side with truth is noble,
when we share her wretched crust,
ere her cause bring fame and profit,
and 'tis prosperous to be just;
then it is the brave man chooses
while the coward stands aside,
till the multitude make virtue
of the faith they had denied.

By the light of burning martyrs,
Christ, thy bleeding feet we track,
toiling up new Calvaries ever
with the cross that turns not back;
new occasions teach new duties,
ancient values test our youth;
they must upward still and onward,
who would keep abreast of truth.

Though the cause of evil prosper,
yet the truth alone is strong;
though her portion be the scaffold,
and upon the throne be wrong;
yet that scaffold sways the future,
and behind the dim unknown,
standeth God within the shadow,
keeping watch above his own.

“Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide, in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side; some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight, and the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.” One salient point of this hymn is the burden that it places, not only upon the individual man, but upon nations as well to obey God and to honor His Law. If decisions to obey God are made in the hearts of the people of a nation, that nation will also follow in like obedience to that Law. If we find that our beloved nation today has gone from following God to following after the world, it is because our ministers and churches have failed to call her citizens to repentance. When we begin to see national laws that forbid sin to be repealed, and those laws converted to the side of evil, then we shall know the extreme danger of our national condition. There is only one great decision – to follow God! All others are subordinate to that one immutable principle and subsist in the degree of faith with which we follow. As long as life continues, that choice remains operative, but when the curtain of life descends, our

condition as either saint or sinner is fixed. There is no ambiguity about which is right, Heaven or Hell, for one is marked by abject darkness, and the other by brilliant light.

“Then to side with truth is noble, when we share her wretched crust, ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just; then it is the brave man chooses while the coward stands aside, till the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.” We enjoy an extraordinary measure of liberty in America, but that liberty was not cheaply purchased. It came at the cost of the blood and treasure of our beloved Founding Fathers who gave us a nation ‘conceived in liberty’ and which recognized that all legitimate laws descend from God. This is the ‘wretched crust of truth’ which must be purchased at great cost ere the rewards become abundant. The man of the world will not stand for right and truth. He will shrink from any responsibility that places his personal safety in danger. The man of the world is, quite frankly, a coward. He knows no obligation to God or his fellow man, so he considers his own hide of far greater worth on earth than it shall be in Hell. Shakespeare says, in *Julius Caesar*, “A coward dies a thousand times before his death, but the valiant taste of death but once. It seems to me most strange that men should fear, seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come.”

Once valiant men have purchased liberty at the cost of blood and treasures, the multitudes then may meekly follow for a while until they discover that they may vote themselves rewards from the public treasury. Then greed supersedes their claim to faith and righteousness. Stand with the Lord, and Liberty is assured. He is that Spirit of Liberty. *“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”* (II Cor 3:17)

“By the light of burning martyrs, Christ, thy bleeding feet we track, toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not back; new occasions teach new duties, ancient values test our youth; they must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth.” Liberty is a grant of God and not of governments. Righteous government can only recognize that Sovereignty, and not impede the will of God for their citizens. How many pulpit-dandies, or TV evangelist, can you count that would go to the burning fires that the bodies of Cranmer, Hus, Ridley, and Latimer fueled in defense of a single issue of biblical truth? Not many, for most are in the business of extinguishing that truth in every manner imaginable. Our beloved Lord Jesus Christ bore a cross that was not truly His, suffered shame and humiliation that was ours, and died a horrible death that we should have died by right of law. He never wavered in His fervor to perform the full measure of sacrifice that was essential for our salvation. Did He not tell us to *“take up our crosses daily and follow Him?”* Have we done so? Have we suffered an iota for righteousness and faith? If not, it is time for serious introspection. The pursuit of truth and righteousness is no bed of red roses, but that Via Dolorosa (Way of Suffering) upon which Christ trod two thousand years ago. It is a never ending road as long as earth and shadow remain. The light lit by the martyrs has grown to a bright and burning beacon for our day. Do we see that Light, or do we avert our eyes to the world-side of darkness?

“Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong; though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong; yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.” Are the people of the nation joyful when the wicked (like unto their own hearts) rule? No. Even the wicked mourn wicked rule and suffer. *“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”* (Prov 29:2) When the wicked rule, even the wicked mourn for justice.

Classical art, music, and literature are called classical because they possess an enduring nature of beauty and meaning. True art extols truth and virtue, as well as imitates the great beauty of God's Creation. If any form of art distorts that beauty, it is not art, but mere obscenity. It must always be a comfort to the elect of God that God sees their suffering in faith, but He also sees their valor and steadfastness in the face of threatening and seemingly insurmountable challenges. He stands at the far edge of the Battle Line and watches the valiant and courageous Christian push on to the great objective set before him by the Captain of His soul. He also sees the flagging and fearful souls who shrink from the line of battle and fall into headlong retreat back to the unprofitable sanctuary of the world.

America has turned her back on God. Yes, there remain SOME faithful, but their numbers have shrunk fantastically from those of four generations ago. It is never too late to make a decision to follow God. Do we have the intestinal fortitude to do so – as men and women, as boys and girls, as a Church, and as a nation? There is a simple remedy for the proliferation of sins and misery in America – turn back to the God of our fathers. *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* (II Chronicles 7:14) America must ask herself a question – a very OLD question: *“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* (Joshua 24:15)

Dear Christian and American: can you hear that charge of Joshua echoing down the centuries and millennia to our hearts. Whom will you and YOUR house serve?