

My e-post yesterday --here, p2-- has gotten a predictable variety of responses. This page is commentary on a relevant hymn (in THE CELEBRATION HYMNAL (Word/Integrity/97).

1 First appearance, 1860 (HYMNS ANCIENT & MODERN, "For those at Sea")--here, expanded to prayer for sea-land-air travelers (on the trinitarian model: 3 stanzas for the Persons, 1 for the Unity).

2 Theme? "God's power over the elements" (Erik Routley, HYMNS AND THE FAITH (Seabury/56, p81).

3 Stanza #1 reflects Ps.104.9: God assigns limits to the oceans (compare Gn.8.21 [compare territorial assignments to "the nations" Ac.17.26]). Tsunamis transgress the "appointed limits" of the "ocean deep."

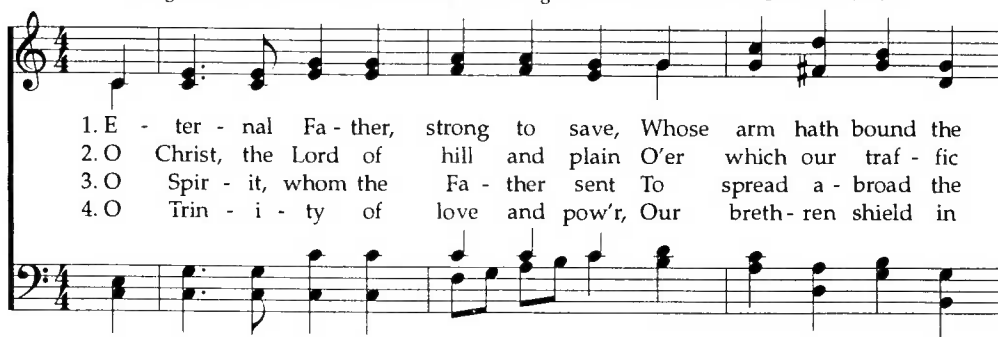
4 Stanza #2 asks God's "guiding hand" for land travelers. The original, on the model of M.4.34ff & parallels, has "the winds and waves" "submissive" to Jesus. Routley p84: The disciples "knew themselves to be safe--because they had found out something new and vital about Jesus....faith versus fear." Over nature, Jesus exercises Edenic (Gn.1.28) "loving dominion," which was lost by the Fall.

5 Stanza #3, in its original, was reminiscent of Gn.1.3. Here, the prayer is for air-travelers... Stanza #4 concludes "Glad praise from air and land and sea."

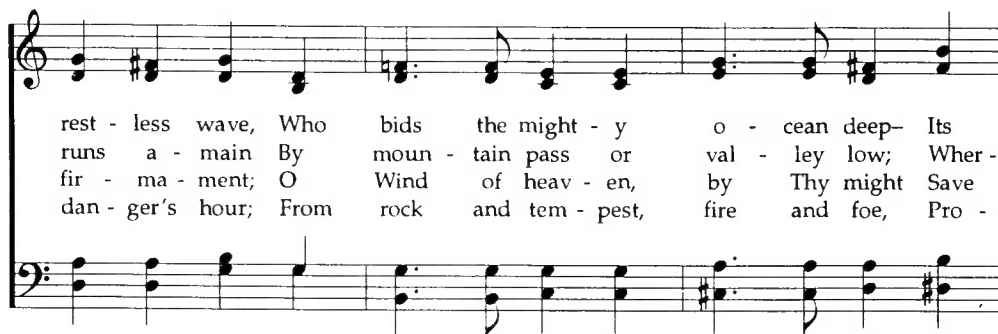
SPECIAL TIMES AND SEASONS

808 Eternal Father, Strong to Save

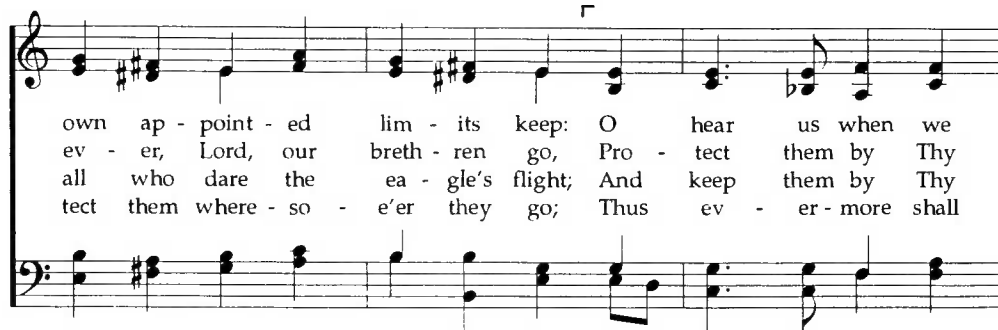
He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord. Psalm 107:30-31



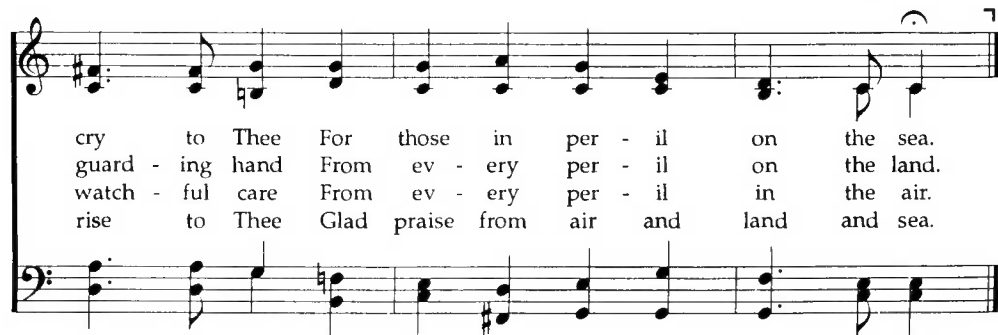
1. E - ter - nal Fa - ther, strong to save, Whose arm hath bound the
 2. O Christ, the Lord of hill and plain O'er which our traf - fic
 3. O Spir - it, whom the Fa - ther sent To spread a - broad the
 4. O Trin - i - ty of love and pow'r, Our breth - ren shield in



rest - less wave, Who bids the might - y o - cean deep- Its
 runs a - main By moun - tain pass or val - ley low; Wher -
 fir - ma - ment; O Wind of heav - en, by Thy might Save
 dan - ger's hour; From rock and tem - pest, fire and foe, Pro -



own ap - point - ed lim - its keep: O hear us when we
 ev - er, Lord, our breth - ren go, Pro - tect them by Thy
 all who dare the ea - gle's flight; And keep them by Thy
 tect them where - so - e'er they go; Thus ev - er - more shall



cry to Thee For those in per - il on the sea.
 guard - ing hand From ev - ery per - il on the land.
 watch - ful care From ev - ery per - il in the air.
 rise to Thee Glad praise from air and land and sea.

TEXT: William Whiting, stanzas 1,4; Robert Nelson Spencer, stanzas 2, 3
 MUSIC: John Bacchus Dykes

MELITA
8.8.8.8.8.

Elliott & Thinfishets
 309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
 Craigville MA 02632
 Phone/Fax 508.775.8008
 \$10 per year
 elliottwl@comcast.net

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Willis/Loree Elliott

From: "Willis/Loree Elliott" <elliottw@comcast.net>
To: <confessingchrist@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 29, 2004 5:09 PM
Subject: How think/play preach the Indian Ocean Tsunami? (LONG POST)

What'll I preach about? What should our Confessing Christ yahoo group talk about? Let's not skip over the Indian Ocean's Tsunami 2004.

Assumptions:

- 1 **Everything has to be preached**, Christ being "Lord of all."
- 2 **Everything is providential**, providence being the doctrine of "divine direction or superintendence" (Webster/1913) of the whole creation.

Assignment:

To use every occasion for glorifying God in manifesting love, in deepening one's insight into (David Bentley Hart) "the beauty of the infinite," in growing toward "the fullness of the stature of Christ," in "building up the body of Christ," & in affirming creation as a "very good" gift of God.

The occasion:

As I write (12.29.04), the death toll seems to have equalled the 60,000 of the 1755 Lisbon land-&-sea earthquakes. Then, the earth opened & swallowed hundreds of buildings; lamps burned down the city; & an estimated 50-foot wave completed the devastation--the greatest natural disaster in Europe's history, & nature's most significant

impulse toward the making of *the modern mind*.

Not far to the north, the philosophers who were shaping up the intellectual component of what was to be called the French Revolution waded into the receding waters of that tsunami. Voltaire tried to retain the event within the doctrine of providence, including nature as "very good" (Gn.1.31)--here, a surprising defender of the biblical (classical Jewish & Christian) mind. But Rousseau cut nature loose from morality, restricting "evil" to the decisional realm (so natural disasters were no longer evil, no longer subject to theological interpretation). Noah's flood killed almost everybody for no particular reason. Lisbon's tomb/fire/flood had no transcending meaning.

The decision:

In Tsunami 2004, do you go with how Voltaire or Rousseau went with Lisbon 1755? The former is, as the latter was, a teaching moment--but what to teach?

- 1 Both V. & R. taught **compassion**, safe & solid no matter one's theology. As Camus in the spirit of Rousseau put it, "We must be kind, for God is not." In his

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great etching "The Christ of the Breadlines" (1950), Fritz Eichenberg has Jesus as one in the middle of a food-line, reminding us of Whitehead's God-definition as "the Fellow-Sufferer Who Understands." The MA/UCC exec suggests we view this latest natural tragedy in light of "the pathos of God"--which reminds me of Bill Coffin's Riverside Church sermon, the Sunday after his 25-year-old son drowned: "God was the first to weep." All to the good, necessary....

- 2but sufficient? Rather, Hart would say, blasphemous if **transcendence** does not balance this radical immanence. He recovers the Greek Father's doctrine of God's transcendence of feeling (& thus of suffering), the divine *apathia*. Christian theology centers not in God the Victim but in God the Victim-VICTOR (crucifixion-RESURRECTION). So, how preach triumph through tragedy, life through death? How was it done after "9/11," which seemed to combine natural disaster & evil intent? "Is it [i.e., 9/11] Lisbon?" asked Susan Neiman in her great *EVIL IN MODERN THOUGHT* (Princeton/02, p252; the index has 25 references to Lisbon 1755; p267-8: Lisbon "demanded recognition that nature and morality are split.... Nature has no meaning, its events are not signs.... a conflict in the heart of being that nothing will ever resolve."). Well, do Tsunami 2004 & 9/11 illumine--disagree with--one another, & Lisbon 1755? (Each of these three events was worse than the other two: how? Historical analogies have real, though limited, usefulness.)
- 3 For classical Christians, theodicy is not dead. Milton's project to "reconcile" God's ways to our understanding; Is. 55.8's mysterious divide between God's "ways"/"thoughts" & ours; Lincoln's "the Almighty has his reasons."
- 4 Neiman, p4: "Rousseau invented the modern sciences of history and psychology to cope with questions the [1755 Lisbon] earthquake brought to the surface...." What, intellectually, if anything, will come of Tsunami 2004? May it be to the glory of God!
- 5 Notice that compassion is theologically **ambiguous**: we must be compassionate (a) because God models it (the biblical view) or (b) because of fellow-feeling, a characteristic our species shares with some other mammals (the secular view). (The UN Director of Emergencies reported yesterday that \$100 million has come in for Tsunami 2004, & regrets it's so hard to raise funds for "minor emergencies.") At breakfast in our home this morning, a New Yorker said "Walking the walk is more important than talking the talk." Very American, but not very Christian: compassion is human but not specifically Christian.
- 6 We do not "confess Christ" unless we combine (as Aristotle says in *RHETORIC* 1.1) the essentials of *persuasion*: logos (sense-making), pathos (feeling), & ethos (behavioral implicatures). Sour Voltaire was closer than sweet Rousseau, whose *sentimental romanticism* (*in much modern theology*) substitutes for the gospel. V. would have the courage to ask how Tsunami 2004 is providential (since the biblical-classical doctrine of providence is inclusive of nature, history, & the human heart).

Grace and peace--
 Willis Elliott