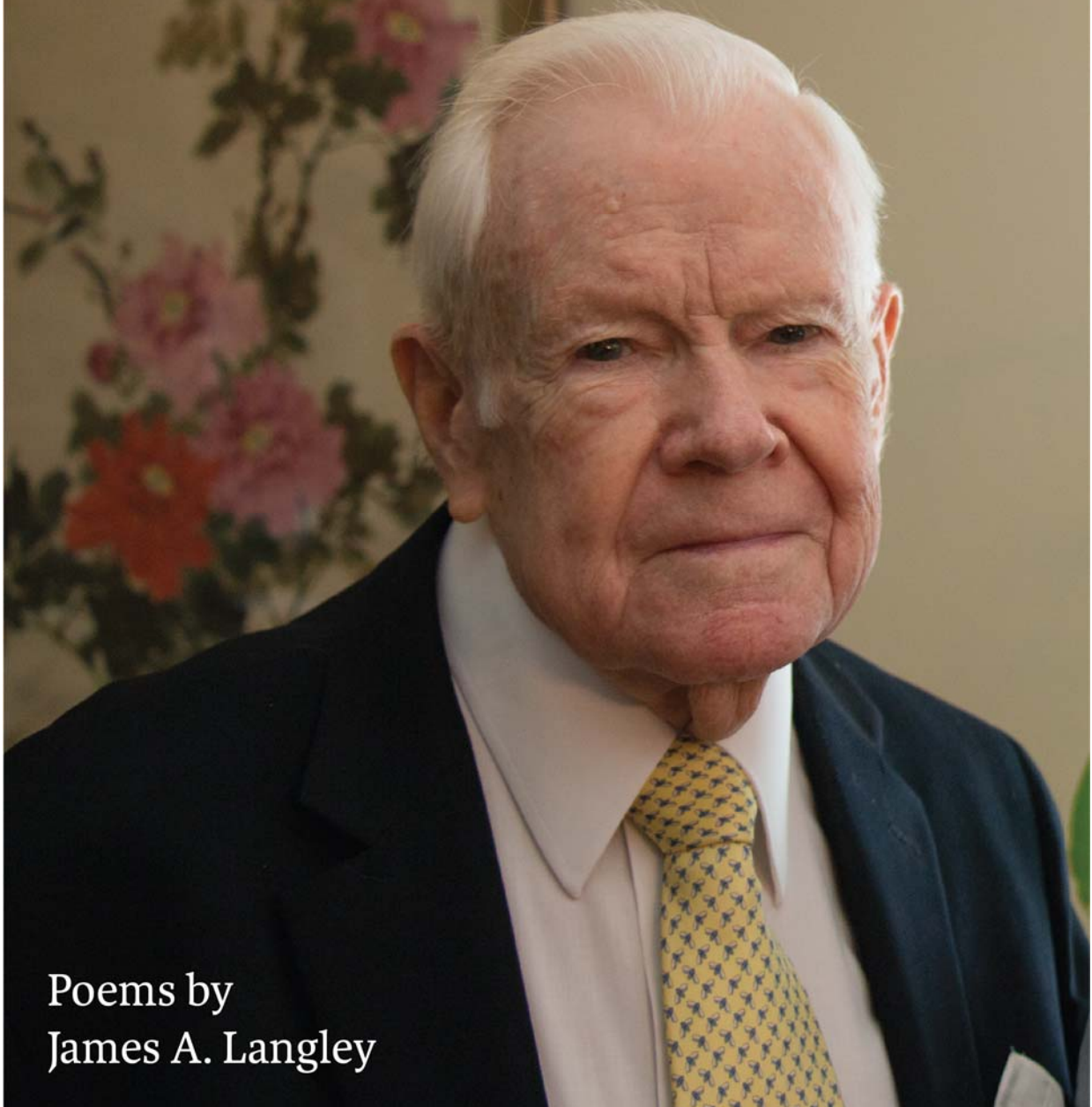


*With Zeal Aflame  
in Heart and Mind*



Poems by  
James A. Langley

## Table of Contents

The Apostle .....	3
Washington Spring .....	4
A Perspective on Man and a Century .....	6
War and Peace .....	14
Bringing Transcendence in Play .....	15
Blessed Bread.....	16
God Speaks in Many Ways .....	17
The Peril of Avarice .....	19
To Serve One’s Fellows .....	20
Where Grace and Peace Have Always Lain .....	20
When the World Is Too Much.....	21
Generations Crossed .....	22
Ask Not for Self.....	22
Say Not the Stranger.....	23
The Battle Is Not Done.....	23
I Will Not Fear .....	23
Truth the Essence of Life.....	24
Glimpses of the Great.....	27
Holocaust Image.....	31
This Cup .....	39
The Angelus.....	41
Stillness of the Winter Wood.....	43
Atonement: Mystery and Reality .....	44
The Light of That Holy Night .....	45
Raid at Harpers Ferry .....	47
We All Stand on Shoulders .....	49
The Prodigal.....	50
Tea Becomes a Sacrament .....	52

## *The Apostle*

Made bold by sense of Divine will  
And fired by a raging passion,  
Whatever wind blows, good or ill,  
Determined God's world to fashion;  
With zeal aflame in heart and mind  
To rid the world of the godless kind,  
"Stone those who see Truth a new way,  
Death to heretics without say!"  
Fanatical for sacred writ,  
Nor deterred by piety or wit,  
The Law! the Law must be obeyed,  
Line on line, precept on precept  
'Til all of Moses' words are kept,  
Lest Sinai's light should be betrayed.  
So on my holy mission bent,  
Stephen's death condign punishment.  
Damascus-bound, burning with malice  
To seize the Nazarene's disciples,  
Cleanse the land, waste the church, sans scruples,  
Make them drink their own blood-chalice.

Suddenly a dazzling bright'ning  
From heav'n shone, thus to earth I fell;  
A voice like thunder and lightning  
Bared my soul, which no tongue can tell;  
That voice-such voice that wakes the dead-  
Men round me saw none, heard with dread;  
My name! He called me by my name.'  
Yet my name brought not pride but shame.  
Could this be Him on the tree slain  
At whose death the day turned to night,  
With rock-riven, grave-op'ning fright?  
The same! now risen and exalted,  
He it was I had persecuted  
When Stephen midst the stones had lain!  
Light brighter than the zenith sun,  
Brightest when the day is half-won,  
Blinded my eyes, and made me see  
That those I hurt are one with Thee.

He sends me, now a man in Christ:  
"To Jew and Gentile bear my Word,  
Righteousness by faith, beyond price,  
Grace gift to all who make me Lord." ■

## *Washington Spring*

Harbingers of spring, forsythia, daffodils,  
For rich and poor bring hope and golden glow,  
Hyacinths and crocuses in lowly wonder,  
Lilacs loveliness and fragrance bestow.

Laden with buds, pre-leaf Japanese magnolias  
Early and stunningly burst on the scene---  
Arousing many who are gardening novices  
With latent dreams of a thumb that is green.

Cherry blossoms awakening from winter's night,  
Shyly giving a lambent kiss to spring,  
Their signature setting here famed the world around,  
Symbolic gift from East to West of peace on the wing.[<sup>1</sup>]

Zinnias, foxglove, peonies, pansies brighten  
The way by common flings at gardening,  
Never royalty more gloriously welcomed  
Than by violets' regal carpeting.

An artist's palette mirrored in Netherlands' gifts,  
Long-stemmed cups raised to offer vintage wine;  
Beneath an emerald canopy dogwood bloom,  
Rose and white crosses lend a touch divine.

Queenly roses, radiant with sheer elegance,  
From humble homes to the Bishop's Garden,[<sup>2</sup>]  
Treasured by lovers, glory in form, sight and scent,  
Blest symbols of heaven's grace and pardon.  
Might Eden also have been tiered with azaleas  
In a spectrum of splendor, joy to man  
And God, and rhododendron rising with beauty---  
Has the Gardener outdone His first plan?

Wall-draped royal wisteria, justly fitting  
Accompan' ment to master works of art,[<sup>3</sup>]  
Redolent as proffering nectar of the gods,  
Evoking memories that move the heart.

---

1 Gift from Japan to the United States in 1912, 3,000 cherry trees surround the Jefferson Memorial along and near the Tidal Basin.

2 On the grounds of the National Cathedral; a larger rose venue is at Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, and famously there is the White House Rose Garden.

3 Wisteria drapes walls adjoining the West Building of the National Gallery of Art.

Resurrection *alleluias* trumpeted by  
White and saffron lilies, and broad avenues,  
Country lanes, long-lined by trees of flowering pear,  
Spring storm lifting, with Turneresque landscape views.[<sup>4</sup>]

With borders of hosta, impatiens, or clusters  
Of irises, lush lawns spread like a fairway,  
Drawing the eye to birches and weeping willows,  
Highlighting home or its children at play.

Lilting avian songs, stilled by wintry winds and snows  
(Warming sun's rays, new life the tuners),  
Revive with abandon, many-thorned tri-foliolate  
Orange, haven for birds and bane of pruners.

Robins returning warm the coldest heart, mocking  
Birds again assume their choirmaster role;  
Who can but join these winged creatures' *joie de vivre*  
And know nature points to a higher goal.

The National Arboretum, best known for its treed  
Banks of azaleas, Botanic, Hillwood,  
Dumbarton Gardens, Rock Creek Park, offer beauty  
Cultivated and wild, gracing one's mood.

Gardeners aid the well-to-do in splendid shows,  
Those of small means bring, their stories untold,  
Morning glories, geraniums and more to the  
Feast for the senses, no less for the soul.■

---

4 British author Kenneth Clark in his acclaimed book *Civilisation* (p. 284) writes: "[J.M.W. Turner] was a genius of the first order---far the greatest painter that England has ever produced. . . . No one has ever known more about natural appearances, and he was able to fit into his encyclopedic knowledge memories of the most fleeting effects of light---sunrises, passing storms, dissolving mists, none of which had ever been set on canvas before."

## *A Perspective on Man and a Century*

### I

Humankind by reason lifted  
To new heights of hope untrammelled,  
Throwing all, dreamers had gambled  
Science would prove how man was gifted,

And usher in a brave new day  
Of peace and progress non-pareil,  
Sparing the race the scourge of hell  
By ceaseless wars and evil's play.

They knew not the greatness of man  
Is deep-joined with his misery,  
His genius and philosophy  
Marred by hubris and selfish plan.

Prospects had never seemed more bright  
For bettering the lot of all,  
Breaking down each dividing wall,  
Hailing the dawn of endless light.

### II

Instead the new age would witness  
Death stalking the world grim visaged,  
Civilization near pillaged,  
Man shown greater but also less.

Devastating successive wars  
Brought the killing fields from the Somme[i]  
To Hiroshima, Vietnam--  
The victories less man's than Mars'.

The depth of the abyss came not  
From clashes on land, sea or air;  
Sheer malevolence was laid bare  
By genocide, a hell-hatched plot:

Blind hatred of others by birth,  
Race or religion, with fiendish  
Scheming, ruthlessness and relish,  
Damning their total human worth.

### III

Infamous names! Hitler, Stalin,  
    Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, Mobutu,  
    Pol Pot, Idi Amin--fat'd due:  
O how are the mighty fallen!

The long, dark annals of man show  
    No like age of such terror, grief  
    And ruin. Yet 'tis also chief  
Of all spans changing status quo.

Down with tyrants! Up with freedom!  
    Ran the cry, with liberating  
    Power, tho' misrule unbending  
Still grips millions, spurs martyrdom.

Valor will we long remember  
    By the Marne and in Flanders fields;  
    Who can measure the bloody yields,  
Fame more than a dying ember?

Stalingrad, Alamein, Midway,  
    Normandy--bat'les that turned the tide  
    For forces of 'freedom' allied,  
And raised strong hopes for a new day.

In the Great War's train came the rise--  
    And fire-fall of Nazism's far-flung  
    Sway, like a Gotterdammerung<sup>[ii]</sup>  
With vict'ry in Cold War disguise.

Since Bolsheviks seized the Tower,  
    Tyranny worse than the Czars' reigned  
    In Russia; higher Force ordained  
The Soviets' fall from power.

### IV

Titanic's voyage, glorious  
    Epic feat to show man master  
    of Neptune's realm--its disaster  
Made ship, and pride, notorious.

Yet here too heroism would shine  
    Thro' some, as with the Dorchester,<sup>[iii]</sup>  
    And send signals by this gesture  
That men may rise to the sublime.

The dustbowl, earthquakes, storms and floods  
Ravaged the earth, scarred survivors;  
Galveston, 'Frisco, sent tremors  
Long and deep, touching human moods.

The Great Depression wrenched masses  
So deeply they would not forget;  
A new wave of wealth rose and set  
Highs, wider dividing classes.

Assassinations--Ferdinand's,[iv]  
Of President Kennedy, King,  
And great statesman Rabin, would bring  
Reactions across many lands.

## V

With science's sev'n-league boots, time-space  
Became more friendly, the whole world  
A village; medicine unfurled  
New flags of health and healing grace.

Scientists thro' fusion and fission  
Found secrets of atoms, unleashed  
Powers of Armageddon--or peace,  
Raised the question of man's mission.

Sputnik gallvanized the space race,  
'Til man's 'one giant leap' to the moon;  
Probes unmanned brought many a boon,  
Tho' of like-being signs no trace.

Computers' modest beginnings  
Hardly showed mega-quantum strides  
In micro chips now used as guides,  
For all things the underpinnings.

Linked to the world by web world wide,  
Information ever-flowing,  
Instant, pervasive, all-knowing--[v]  
Wise, then good, oth'rwise a fool's guide.



## VI

"Greatest woman since Joan of Arc,"  
This was Mark Twain's unique tribute  
To Helen Keller, deaf, blind, mute,  
Who inspired transcending world spark.

How indebted humanity  
Is to selfless Marie Curie's[vi]  
Epoch making discoveries  
For diagnostic clarity

And much more; Einstein's formulas  
And theories, herculean  
Break-throughs for all empyrean  
Science, atomic avatars.

The Wrights' machines, Lindbergh flying  
The Atlantic, Bartok's dances,  
Yeats' and Eliot's insights, fancies,  
Salk's cure for crippling and dying;

Gandhi richly earned the title[vii]  
Accorded him; the strength, vision  
And courage of Cady Stanton,  
Anthony, later won their bat'le[viii]

Fermi's mind, the gift of Anne Frank,  
Stravinsky's fire, Picasso's art,  
Mother Teresa's loving heart,  
These such are they we have to thank.

Hemingway's skill with a story,  
But Mann the loftier writer;  
Solzhenitsyn, the grand fighter  
For truth, deserves higher glory.

Courageous Mandela and King,  
Prophets of justice, the caring  
Of Schweitzer, Bonhoeffer's daring,  
Gave hope and grace authentic ring.

Nixon who resigned as Pres'dent,  
Charged with grave abuse of power,  
Will be known too for a dower  
Of foreign actions prescience.

Wilson, Franklin Roos'velt, loom tall,  
Yet Churchill, resolved, defiant,  
Sounding 'the lion's roar,' triumphant  
'Gainst monstrous evil, stands o'er all.

## VII

Era images still remain--[ix]  
The Hindenburg crashing in flames,  
Montana, Gretsky, winning games,  
Truman, victor, mocks Dewey's claim.

Darker images sear from far-  
Apocalyptic mushroom cloud,  
Wretched souls beyond trapped and cowed:  
Auschwitz, Katyn[ix] and Babi Yar.[x]

Children's bloated bellies, spindly limbs,  
Mocked by first world's surfeit of fat,  
And weak policies that stand pat--  
Dark blight on an age--its victims.

'Stars-stripes' on Iwo Jima raised,  
Marchers attacked in quest of right,  
'Challenger' explodes soon in flight,  
Raoul Wallenberg justly praised.[xi]

## VIII

Simpson case, pros'cutorial,  
Police and judicial wreck;  
Lindbergh kidnapping trial trek  
Played to media carnival.

*Brown-Board* wrought justice long deferred;  
The High Court in *Roe versus Wade*  
Broke new judicial ground, made  
Strong controversy undeterred.

## IX

Billy Graham preached to large throngs,  
Christianity grew world wide,  
Tho' some saw its weight at ebb-tide;  
Late gain to Muslim faith belongs.

Religion's Grand Inquisitors  
Undermined the freedom of soul,  
Long the free church's cherished goal,  
Of true faith made themselves gov'rnors.

Rome's Vatican Two gave promise  
Of deep reforms in 'Peter's seat';  
John Paul Second held them discreet,  
Leaves a record *sui generis*.

## X

Garlands many to wide acclaim,  
Yet few so enduring and bold  
As Ruth's heroics, Jesse's gold,[xii]  
Or Bobby Jones' grand slamming fame.

Nurmi,[xiii] Nicklaus, define merit,  
Pele, legend in his own time;  
None is like Jordan in his prime,  
The Armstrongs' triumphs of spirit.[xiv]

Nolan Ryan's pitching prowess,  
Ripken's endurance, McGwire's clout,  
Aaron's record--the lure about  
Their game with such will not grow less.[xv]

## XI

Movie fame has gone with the wind:  
Garbo, Gable, Taylor, Monroe,  
Fade; only affairs soul-size go  
On and enduringly contend.

Films, television, internet  
May entertain, inform, inspire;  
But where's the light and where the fire  
If 'wasteland' grows, virulence set?

## XII

Symbols of hope, faith and courage  
Abound: democracy's wide rise,  
Life span grows, apartheid's demise,  
Berlin Wall's fall, Beijing's rampage.[xvi]

Amundsen first at the South Pole,  
Hillary, Tenzing climb Ev'rest,  
Piccard--altitude, ocean test  
Pioneer, pushing mankind's goal.

Lend-lease aid and the Marshall Plan,  
Debts of poorer nations forgiv'n,  
The hurting helped, many have striv'n;  
Chapters of man's concern for man.

Women's and civil rights at last  
Gained thro' hard struggle over wrong,  
Shame and prejudice ages-long;  
Human rights key the future's cast.

### XIII

If it was 'the American  
Century,'[xvii] America still  
Confronted much to test her will  
For good, where'er her writ still ran.

The mind of man so rich in gifts  
Wrought works of genius, brilliant, deft,  
Still at century's end has left  
Mankind plagued by ominous rifts.

If man would conquer his heart's flaw,  
By Divine grace he must recov'r  
Selflessness with greatness, discov'r  
His brother in love, God in awe.■

### Endnotes

[i] The British alone suffered 60,000 casualties (killed and wounded) on the first day of the Battle of the Somme "without gaining a single yard." (William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill--Alone*, 1932-1940, 47)

[ii] The finale of Wagner's magnum opus, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, of which the central motif is the mythical figure Wotan's love of power. Hitler, as William L. Shirer noted in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (p. 101), "worshiped Wagner". He was a close friend of the Wagner family and frequented performances of Wagner at Bayreuth. *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods), the last opera Hitler ever attended, which he saw shortly after the fall of France (Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler*, 351), climaxes with Valhalla--the castle built to consolidate Wotan's rule--crashing in flames and total catastrophe. Shirer adds: "It is not at all surprising that Hitler tried to emulate Wotan when in 1945 he willed the destruction of Germany so that it might go down in flames with him" (Op. cit., 102).

[iii] In World War II in the North Atlantic, four chaplains (Protestant, Catholic and Jewish) aboard the torpedoed troopship USS *Dorchester* (February 3, 1943) gave their life jackets to servicemen who had none, and went down with the ship, survivors said, with their arms linked and heads bowed in prayer.

[iv] The assassination of Austrian crown prince Archduke Ferdinand (and his wife Countess Sophie) in Sarajevo, June 28, 1914, was the immediate and ostensible cause of World War I.

- [v] Joel Achenbach (The Washington Post, March 12, 1999) referred to the late 20th century as "The Too-Much-Information Age"--commenting that "today's data glut jams libraries and lives, but is anyone getting any wiser?" Librarian of Congress, James Billington, calls it "the Tower of Babel syndrome."
- [vi] Marie Curie and her husband Pierre Curie jointly discovered polonium and radium in 1898. Pierre was killed in a street accident in 1906; Mme. Curie continued her scientific work well into the 20th century, and was the first person to be awarded two Nobel Prizes (in Physics--shared with her husband and A.H. Becquerel, 1903, and in Chemistry, 1911). The Curies refused to patent their processes or otherwise profit from the commercial exploitation of radium.
- [vii] Mahatma means 'great soul'. Indian spiritual and political leader, Gandhi was the catalyst for his nation's independence from British rule. His insistence on non-violence powerfully influenced the Civil Rights Movement in America. Eschewing material possessions, he strove to improve the lot of the poor, and for the abolition of untouchability--the lowest caste.
- [viii] The decades of labors for women's rights in the 19th century by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) and Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) finally led to the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1920), guaranteeing women's suffrage.
- [ix] During World War II some 4,250 Polish officers were executed in a forest near the Russian village of Katyn. Though the Soviets tried to blame the Germans for the atrocity, in 1989 Soviet scholars revealed that Stalin had ordered the massacre.
- [x] Babi Yar, a ravine near Kiev, where Nazis machine-gunned about 35,000 Jews on September 29-30, 1941, by 1943 had become a mass grave for more than 100,000 persons, mostly Jews.
- [xi] Swedish diplomat and businessman assigned to Sweden's legation in Budapest, Wallenberg helped save approximately 100,000 Jews from the Holocaust. He issued Swedish passports to some 20,000 Jews, and sheltered others in places he bought or rented. Wallenberg survived a Nazi attempt on his life, but in 1945 the Soviets imprisoned him, possibly because of work he was doing for the U.S. secret service. In 1957 the Soviet government announced that he had died of a heart attack in a Moscow prison in 1947, though he was reported seen at later dates. (Columbia Encyclopedia, Fifth Edition)
- [xii] African-American Jesse Owens upset Nazi Aryan racial theories in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, breaking two world track records, equaling another, and shared in winning a relay race, as Hitler looked on but left before medal presentations.
- [xiii] Paavo Nurmi, Finnish track star, set 20 world running records, and won nine Olympic gold medals and three gold medals in team events between 1920 and 1932.
- [xiv] Astronaut Neil Armstrong was the first man on the moon. American Lance Armstrong battled back over cancer to win the grueling Tour de France in 1999.
- [xv] Nolan Ryan holds major league baseball's all-time strikeout record--5,714. Cal Ripken, Jr. played in 2,632 consecutive games (Lou Gehrig had held the record at 2,130), and is the only short-stop in major league history to have more than 2,800 hits, 350 home runs and 1,500 RBI. Mark McGwire's 70 home runs is the single season record, and his 180 homers in three consecutive seasons is the best in history. Henry (Hank) Aaron holds the career record for homers at 755 (eclipsing Ruth's 714), for RBI--2,297, and total bases-6,856.
- [xvi] The tragic crushing by Chinese army forces of pro-democracy demonstrations in April, 1989, in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, and the killing of hundreds of students, highlights the regime's determination to prevent the rise of political freedom, but also the extraordinary courage of the demonstrators, exemplified in particular by a lone unarmed man standing down a column of tanks, an image sent round the world.
- [xvii] A phrase coined by Henry Luce, head of Time, Inc., in a famously triumphalist editorial in Life magazine.

## *War and Peace*

O Peace, how bereft you seem, how debased,  
In the shock and awe of war, how effaced,  
What short shrift is accorded you in plans  
Of the mighty to gain riches or lands.

Against laser missiles and armored might,  
What chance has peace to rule or win the fight?  
In the world's scales peace has so little weight  
It is often shunned in schemes of men's fate.

When bombs fall, rockets flash, shells detonate,  
Both buildings and bodies disintegrate,  
Children cower, grown men and women weep  
At war's carnage, appalled, life is so cheap.

Peace! Peace! men may cry when there is no peace.  
But true peace is a gain of such release  
Of human worth, little of man's life here  
Can compare in all on earth he holds dear.

Is it ordained: win the war, lose the peace?  
No! Yet our resources for peace decrease  
In inverse proportion to those of strife,  
As tho' only war were of death or life.

If those at the summit were in harm's way,  
With a legion of demons loosed to play  
Their havoc in the gruesome clash of arms,  
And generals' glories were joined with harms,

Would preventive war be so quickly chosen,  
Other means of restricting evil be frozen,  
While armies and navies are moved at will,  
Youth and new ages left to pay the bill?

Wars decimate the race, robbing still more  
Of lives which nature's Maker had in store;  
War's wild excitement, vain and callous thrills,  
Give way late and soon to myriad ills.

Wars' desolations—Verdun, Stalingrad,  
Hiroshima—horrify, drive men mad.  
Swords shall one day be turned into ploughshares,  
What seemed weak or null will root out the tares.

One day of true peace surpasses most wars,  
Whose proud victories are less man's than Mars';  
Peace inspires like a Pierian Spring,  
Lifting human spirits with heart and wing.

Mass destruction is an abiding threat  
Midst the evils by which man is beset;  
All the more reason to change killing fields  
By waging peace and gaining peaceful yields.

Peace's origin is in divine blessing;  
Man's quest begins in earnest confessing:  
The Prince of Peace shall exercise full sway,  
If heaven's boon arrives on earth to stay.

If a just war there be, with toll so great,  
And freedom hanging on its awe-ful fate,  
What fools we are to give injustice rein,  
When justice might have brought us peace in train.

Justice and righteousness are bound to peace—  
They must lead the way if wars are to cease;  
Thus comes the summons from the realm of light:  
Make straight the high road with the just and right.

Ah, blessed Peace! You shall yet win the field!  
From Guernica<sup>[1]</sup> to Baghdad your appeal  
Endures, and a guerdon shall be laid down,  
Hailing your achievements the world around.■

<sup>[1]</sup> Guernica is a town in north central Spain destroyed in 1937 by German and Italian aircraft—the first bombing of an urban community.

### ***Bringing Transcendence in Play***

If I can lift up hope to a soul despairing,  
Or strive for justice with the will to stay,  
If I befriend another in burden-bearing,  
Forgive a wrong through Christ like caring,  
Oppose any of myriad evils with daring,  
Or guide a wanderer lost to find the way,  
Show compassion to the poor from day to day,  
Or inspire fresh courage that may  
defeating fears allay,  
I shall share in bringing transcendence in play.■

## *Blessed Bread*

*"Give us this day our daily bread." Matthew 6:11*

A grain of wheat falls in the ground  
Without fanfare, struggle or sound,  
Close-joined, its tomb and womb is earth,  
There it dies, and there given birth.

Gift of the soil and sun, nourished  
By snows and rain, it has flourished  
By multiple labors unhailed;  
Our lives depend that they not fail.

Take not common bread for granted,  
Lest presumption should be planted,  
Knowing dependence for the least  
Shows the way to God's greater feast.

Ask not for your bread for this day,  
Breaking the bonds God has in play,  
The Giver of bread, sans fable,  
Should preside at the world's table.

Staff of life from the Creation,  
Daily we raise supplication  
That it be granted mutually  
For us and all humanity.

Bread from God's good earth holds promise  
For all God's children; first premise  
Of faith---blest to be a blessing,  
Living love by deeds confessing.

Will they believe in Providence  
If, starving, find no sustenance?  
To the hungry without a crust,  
Ev'n Bread of Heaven may seem dust.

Intercessors confront a need  
With prayer, but more; they will feed  
The hungry, care for the hurting,  
Widows, orphans, not deserting. ■



## *God Speaks in Many Ways*

God of heav'n and earth speaks in many ways,  
Revealing himself and his sov'reign will,  
In grace, commands and guides us all our days,  
Earnest seekers, thus led, may truth distil.

God may speak in lightning rending the skies,  
Crashing thunder---or, silence of the spheres;  
Acts of love and kindness, a child's troubled cries,  
Grace abounding amid recurring fears.

By great cataracts of the Zambesi,  
Or awesome Niagara's plunging roar,  
Some wild flower, a mountain majesty,  
When hummingbirds hover, and eagles soar.

With a child's deep trust, and clasp of the hand,  
The convolutions of the human ear,  
A questing mind's search to know and understand,  
The faithful, through travail, conquering fear.

Dostoyevsky probing the psyche's depths,  
An exquisite aria by Gounod,  
Remembrance, near or far, of some saint's steps,  
Millet's *Angelus*, a tyrant's overthrow.

A profligate fling of diamonds across  
The velvet night, sunset flaming the sky,  
Healing, or an irreplaceable loss;  
At times we sense a wordless Presence nigh.

Where disease ravages and hunger stalks,  
And many are broken, or bowed in shame,  
There assuredly the Lord walks and talks,  
Summoning us to minister in his name.

A mushroom cloud holds humankind hostage;  
Can we not also discern the same Voice  
Calling us to turn from killing and carnage,  
All wars' stygian ways, by wiser choice?

By the mind he gave, with God communing,  
The stars which "he made also" are telling  
His glory, infinite, all surpassing,  
In whose heart are all the virtues dwelling.

If the Almighty in a still, small voice  
Marks the human path, why should it surprise?  
No sound heard among the stars by God's choice,  
And heaven oft'n shows its ways in disguise.

Prophets walked with God in lonely exile,  
At other times among princes and kings,  
Spoke truth to power, blocked the devil's wile,  
Soared with insights as if on angels' wings.

God still speaks by these movers and shakers,  
Calling for justice for the poor and weak,  
Love for mercy, severe on evil-makers,  
Exalting the God-like strength of the meek.

Divine light shines through the sacred pages,  
Spirit inspired oracles blest in seeing,  
Tested guide and compass across the ages,  
That ever know and find our inmost being.

In this final age God speaks by a Son,  
Paradox of paradoxes, God-Man,  
Lately come, redemptive work to be done  
Revealing God's magisterial plan.

He speaks as no other has ever spoken,  
By his cross and resurrection power,  
Healing lives, and a world that is broken,  
The way, the truth, life and love, his dower.

O hear! hear the Word, written and living!  
Listen for the vital truth God will give,  
To the willing God is ever giving,  
O discern God's gracious will! hear and live! ■

## *The Peril of Avarice*

What desolations may ensue from greed  
These tragic tales are plain for all to see,  
More danger than a storied Trojan steed,  
Deceiving high and low with tempting plea.

Like cancer, it may well metastasize,  
The common good is scorned, greed's ways are rammed,  
Accumulation is its steady prize,  
Compassion's aid for weak and poor be damned.

The wise long past divined soul loss in greed;  
They marked the demon deadly, one of seven,  
It deals with people as pawns, with little heed,  
The greedy forge new hells while mocking heaven.

With corporate boards or lone, their aims the same,  
Join greed with hubris, eager then to laud  
Unbridled schemes of greedy minds; they game  
The field and set the stage for stunning fraud.

Obscene are pay, rewards and perks in millions,  
At times in spite of massive loss, not gains;  
Madoff grew rich while losing many billions;  
Key rules are scrapped: the greedy want no reins.

In small concerns the Scrooge opprobrium  
Wreaks pain and grief—but, see! the scourge advances;  
When greed has reached a scale gargantuan,  
It drives a riptide wrecking world finances.

Where greed is rampant, public trust erodes,  
Accountability long overdue,  
While confidence, across the board, implodes;  
Affairs now dire, require the nation's rescue.

A widening gap of rich and poor bodes ill,  
gregious hurt is spawned by wanton greed,  
The jobless forced to take a bitter pill;  
From greed, by grace alone we may be freed.

And greed can work its will in common ways,  
A must-have zeal betrays and robs the soul,  
Our selfish surfeit garners empty praise:  
This way is sure to miss the Kingdom's goal.

If we could see where avarice will lead:  
To wealth in things but hollowness in spirit,  
We might more truly shun this ruinous creed;  
To master greed demands our willing it.

But more: the heart so surely choked by greed,  
If grace takes root, will blossom like a rose;  
That heart will nurture many a generous deed,  
And meeting need will bring a glow God knows.■

### *To Serve One's Fellows*

To be or not to be, that is not the question;  
To serve one's fellows is the highest consideration,  
Love for God the spring and safeguard of selfless service,  
Across the generations the goal of the God-fearing,  
Inspired by all in that Realm we trust we are nearing,  
In service the Master calls us from exclusivity  
To aid widows and orphans, and the least of humanity;  
To live and gladly give, as ordained, in the common cause,  
With compassion for all as neighbors made in God's image,  
Very sure that one day our Judge will bear the divine visage,  
For this we were born, not to be served, but to serve others,  
Not to be as islands, but living as sisters and brothers,  
Wise legislatures will support, not hinder, such with their laws.■

### *Where Grace and Peace Have Always Lain*

Late blossoms, cool breezes, soften the summer's wane,  
So empathy can assuage a lingering pain,  
Kindness paves the way for shalom in train,  
A helpful deed may open a bonding refrain,  
And care for those in need is never in vain,  
An enemy reconciled is a blessed double gain,  
Humility may redeem even a troubled reign,  
Words are easily shunned, a good life few will disdain,  
Sublime it is when life is linked with the transcendent plane,  
'Tis the realm where grace and peace have always lain.■

## ***When the World Is Too Much***

*“Courage! The victory is mine; I have conquered the world.” (John 16:33, NEB)*

A child, hopes dying aborning, is abused,  
And met not with kindness, but only to be used,  
The yearning for caring continually refused  
When the violence of war is commonplace,  
And death reigns daily with a mighty mace,  
How vain to the trapped must seem the claims of grace  
By the millions flows the stream of refugees,  
Beset by cold and hunger and threat of disease,  
Life turned upside down, the proudest brought to their knees  
Swiftly disaster strikes, leaving in its wake  
Souls bereft of loved ones and much of earthly stake;  
Hope may rise by aid for the sufferers' sake  
Singular or systemic, rampant are racial offenses,  
Made more bitter and enduring by our pretenses,  
Must they run, and run still more, through all the tenses?  
To be treated without worth is a burden none should bear,  
To rob persons of dignity is an egregious affair,  
It offends the Creator and causes many to despair  
Fleeing poverty and violence, fueled by passion,  
On a dangerous trek, risking all, hoping to fashion  
A new life, will they be shown any compassion?  
How reprehensible the depraved  
Treatment of persons in white slavery trade,  
All Heaven revolts at evil so grave  
Waves of terror, cruelty beyond bounds,  
Leave in their wake bitter silence and appalling sounds,  
Prisoned by fear where ruthlessness abounds  
As many endure an abyss of evil,  
And it appears control is given over to the devil,  
Does heaven bring hope from time primeval?  
The heart broken, tears without end, or unable to weep,  
Depression unceasing, no sanctuary in the deep,  
With hopes all fled, is life worthy to keep?  
There is a Friend, who stays closer than a brother,  
Through all vicissitudes like no other,  
The answer to the deepest prayers of a mother

As hatred, with a vengeance, rises to fulfill  
Many a hellish scheme, moved by the devil's will,  
The Savior opens a healing flood from Calv'ry's hill  
'Deliver us from evil' should be  
A daily soul cry and fervent plea,  
Exulting for all in Him Christ's victory  
Send the word across the world like a trumpet call,  
To the hurting, grieving, despairing, to all,  
There is hope for the stricken whatever may befall  
Rejoice! divine power is Christ's to wield;  
By love all-surpassing He triumphs the field,  
Evil's doom is set, forever sealed.■

### *Generations Crossed*

With shining curls beneath a bonnet,  
So innocent against the wide, wide sea,  
At a tender age, lovelier than a sonnet,  
Entranced with sand and surf, carefree.  
Her smile and wave, like mine, were not striven,  
The generations were crossed beside the sea;  
There, and since, I hoped I may have given  
What she so freely gave to me.■

### *Ask Not for Self*

Ask not for elevation of self, ask for  
openness to truth,  
A caring and just society as a devoutly  
sought goal,  
An aim, though never perfect, producing  
its own proof,  
In the long march of history, worth its  
weight in gold.■

### *Say Not the Stranger*

Say not the stranger has nothing to teach,  
No wisdom to share, no worthy views to impart;  
Such a meeting may offer a startling reach  
Of learning, friendship, guidance, some fresh start.  
Discernment is crucial lest we be led astray  
By a false friend, or charlatan bent on harm,  
Who will poison the well and only bring dismay;  
The corrupters an Unseen Friend will help to disarm.  
Strangers' gifts are open to those who care,  
A gracious Providence has so willed,  
Thereby we may meet some angels unaware,  
Even encounter the Christ and prove Emmaus fulfilled.■

### *The Battle Is Not Done*

Overdue the removal of the battle flag of a 'Lost Cause'  
To some museum, or other relegated place,  
It stands for slavery and a master race,  
Lift high instead a just standard, fairer laws.  
Raise Old Glory, with thanksgiving, for a new day won,  
For bigotry unmasked, and in retreat,  
The hubris shown for its conceit,  
Yet knowing that the battle joined is not done.■

### *I Will Not Fear*

A radiance shines from eternity,  
In every age and sphere  
From the same power that sets us free,  
Therefore come what will, I will not fear.■

## *Truth the Essence of Life*

Beyond price, truth is the essence of life;  
To reject the truth is to opt for strife  
And disorder within, without, breaking the ties  
Binding humankind, with a cascade of lies,  
Undermining human freedoms, ordained to be rife.

Truth is the universe's moral foundation,  
The bedrock from generation to generation,  
Through Orion to the most distant stars,  
The core of integrity standing above all that mars;  
The stars for right still fight for confirmation.<sup>[1]</sup>  
A Mind, a Heart, a Will behind it all?  
More surely than the existence of this terrestrial ball,  
Or that the primeval world was fashioned *ex nihilo*,  
Worlds within worlds, around, above, below,  
Marred, wittingly, early and late, by man's great fall.  
The acts of God are true and righteous altogether,  
He calms the storm, wings the eagles and sows the heather,  
The poor are championed, women elevated, slaves are freed,  
God's high aim is transforming man to a new breed,  
The Master was predestined to be our bellwether.

Aid for the hurting, the poor, the least, is the true,  
The Almighty's way, with the world in purview,  
While truth denied or ignored makes a desert of the soul,  
Opening for forces of corruption ways to control;  
The Redeemer is Truth with pow'r forever to renew.

The curse of prevarication and the double tongue---  
What appalling destruction and grief these have wrung,  
For men and nations the catalogue is long,  
Happiness stolen, untruths paving the way for graver wrong;  
What tragedy has been averted when to truth men have clung.

Slander is a grievous abomination,  
It reaches a demonic low in desecration,  
Once practiced by supposed friends on the patriarch Job,  
And now against opponents including those wearing a robe;  
Surely the angels weep at such vilification.  
Railers, dissemblers, the bitter, the cynical,  
Rejecting our shared humanity and evidence empirical,  
May distort and stymie truth yet not defeat it,  
Friends of truth may lose a fight, but must not forfeit;  
Truth is a bulwark against the reprehensible.



When is truth done, a failing light? Never.  
Born in eternity, truth lives forever,  
It will rise and flourish though appearing spent,  
It abides in spite of shunning, and seasons turbulent,  
Soaring versus the earthbound malicious or merely clever.

When demagoguery befouls the public square,  
A nation suffers in ways that are difficult to repair;  
Misguidance in religion produces a diabolical sway,  
Leaving full many with a terrible price to pay;  
These malevolent palls bring young and old to despair.

‘Dewey’s win over Truman’ is a classic case  
Of false news;<sup>[2]</sup> but fake news intends to debase,  
Adding a sinister element to the run of news,  
Sacrificing truth to promote opposing views,  
Fostering a social and political malaise.

Overwhelming evidence points to man-made climate change,  
Yet obscurancy leads to the debunking of that range,  
Unpleasant facts are set aside for ‘alternative facts’,  
Coupled often with *ad hominem* attacks;  
Exceptionalism touts rejecting science is passing strange.

Repeatedly Scripture warns against being deceived,  
But charlatans pander to be believed,  
Drawing crowds of the susceptible eager to hear  
Support for their passions, but mainly what they fear,  
Fomenting lasting harms they little conceived.

Declared Disraeli: “Justice is truth in action”;  
The stirrings of defense for the weak give truth traction,  
They light a fire of hope among the distressed,  
Challenging a stand for truth and right to the rest,  
Bidding well to bring high heaven’s acclamation.

Truth may be simple: a circle’s not a square,  
Both are valued, but a surgeon is more than an au pair,  
Truth is often complex, hidden in the Eternal  
Who passionately desires to guard us from the infernal,  
Yet rewards seekers of truth who are willing to dare.  
Truth at times appears in the form of paradox,  
Not surprisingly, given the sacred Scriptural *vox*;  
“The greatest truths can only be expressed in paradoxical form,”  
Thus did the inspired Pascal highlight a biblical norm,  
Truth that shines with the Grecian flair for *dox*’.<sup>[3]</sup>

The importance of truth rises exponentially  
At the highest level of leadership nationally;  
As no man is an island, so with a nation,  
There irresponsible behavior may risk a world conflagration,  
Speaking truth to power is our charge providentially.

Can truth be spoken truly without compassion,  
Truth expressed in rhetoric but not in action?  
St. Paul lifts up a dimension of truth from above,  
Such truth requires speaking the truth in love,  
Truth prospers when lived with an energizing passion.

Knowing all truth is far from the province of any man,  
No matter how learned or status how grand,  
Our knowledge of the universe is little more  
Than a few grains of sand on an infinite shore;  
Humility befits us, awaiting God's eternal plan.

None of us is right in all we think,  
Saintly biblical characters validate this link,  
All the more reason for self-effacement,  
And to be on guard when tempted to vent,  
The overcoming life depends on more than instinct.

Pilate's question about truth remains germane  
In every age, but shorn of his spirit profane,  
The cynicism that undercuts the earnest quest  
For truth, with light and goodness suppressed,  
Truth the purveyors of that mind contemptuously disdain.

What is truth? Not the absence of ambivalence,  
Nor only the tested triumphs of vaunted science  
That lead to, but not into, the inner sanctum,  
Truth demands unending dedication to plumb,  
Truth is the Word and Way originating in transcendence.

"Each new grain of truth is packed, like radium,  
With whole worlds of light,"<sup>[4]</sup> rarely noted on vellum,  
But enshrined forever by the Giver of light,  
Here and hereafter taking the faithful to each new height,  
Thus to share in God's boundless truth with Him. ■

---

[1] "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera" (Judg. 5:20)--the writer's powerful way of declaring that the universe is "on the side" of right and truth.

[2] On November 3, 1948, the Chicago Daily Tribune, believing it had a scoop, published an edition with the mistaken bold headline: "Dewey Defeats Truman."

[3] The Greek word *doxa* means 'glory'.

[4] Alfred Noyes, *The Torch-Bearers: Watchers of the Sky*---Copernicus

## *Glimpses of the Great*

A cornucopia to us is given  
In music, deeds, and tales well told,  
By which with diligence our lives may fold  
True riches by the gifted who have greatly striven.

With soul fire and courage they countered the odds  
Undeterred by low counsel of a well-meaning friend,  
Or opposition regardless how it might descend,  
And seized the challenges as stirring prods.

Whether the past abides as weight or wings,  
Bringing loss or a gain to nature and man,  
Much depends through all on one's aim and *élan*,  
From the source imbibing whence all good springs.

Man's full measure, the moods we shun or hold dear,  
From ways of commoners to kings, dazzlingly discern,  
The ages his wit and wisdom confirm,  
And hail with wonder the mastery of Shakespeare.

A genius from youth in math and science,  
Pascal's brilliant *pensées*, his compassion for the poor,  
His passion for truth, and exemplar of the pure,  
Make him a true guide for the ultimate, with prescience.

What insights Tolstoy reveals of life and death!  
Quest unceasing for a healing means in a hidden lair,  
Madame Curie yielded not to danger or despair;  
And Lincoln inspires to our last breath.

Thrice trapped by darkness in a hopeless world,  
Anne Sullivan enabled her to break free from the dark,  
"The greatest woman since Joan of Arc,"  
Judged Clemens of Helen Keller, who made a shining world.  
The only da Vinci painting in America depicts its due,  
*Ginevra's* reverse side a Leonardo still life,  
While she portrays the genius's rife  
Solomonic gift of beauty through virtue.

In Wilberforce's small, sickly frame a great heart beat  
To rid the world of the scourge of trade  
In slaves; the power of Parliament he made  
To serve this noble end in a towering feat.

Vivaldi forgotten! Blessed rediscovery!  
J.S. Bach, moved profoundly by the master,  
Composing in his style, making our wealth the vaster,  
Reviving his driving rhythm and rhapsodic melody.

The courage of Niemoeller to stand  
Against Hitler will forever shine and inspire,  
Resistance where oppressors conspire,  
The action which justice and freedom demand.

Convinced that much disease is microbe borne, he persevered;  
Pasteur was scorned, and attacked with derision,  
Creating vaccines, he was threatened with prison,  
Even death, but through cures he became revered.

Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* is a fount  
Of wisdom as she holds the balance before  
A painting of *The Last Judgment* to underscore  
Weighing this life for the ultimate account.

Soul-stirred by suffering on an epic scale,  
Clara Barton plunged into the maelstrom  
Of civil war, cherished for aid and comfort from  
The Union Army's Nightingale.

Continuously in the cross-hairs of fervid racists,  
Martin Luther King, Jr. courageously persevered  
Non-violently in his rights dream until martyred,  
Seminally advancing the liberation of all races.

When law is perverted by beliefs bizarre,  
A bishop's compassion transforms a Jean Valjean,  
As Victor Hugo vivifies the tragic yet hopeful scene,  
Never has the light from candlesticks shone so far!

Emily Dickinson, unrecognized in her time,  
Breaking old forms, and many things defining,  
Widely held as a paragon of poetic opining,  
Her bravura compelling, she set a new clime.

With rare and clear vision he saw the hell  
Of war and carnage fueled by his creation,  
From which wealth he now advances every nation  
Through coveted awards bearing his name Nobel.

Marked by compassion and courage of the highest order,  
Raoul Wallenberg, a wealthy Swedish diplomat,  
Saved thousands of Hungarian Jews; after the *apparatus*  
Of the Soviets arrested him, he vanished beyond the border.

Malala Yousafzai, youthful icon of courage,  
Shot at eleven because she attended school,  
Seeks feminine education worldwide as the rule,  
Bravely undermining anti-feminist rage.

In beauty gloriously exalting the great price pearl,  
Handel's *Messiah*, with sacred texts, is as near perfection,  
Drawing believers and seekers to the Savior's reception,  
As only the highest music may offer in this world.

Out of poverty, growing deafness, his mother's death  
And father's drunkenness, the music of Beethoven,  
Profound in depth and range, titanically driven,  
Enrapturing, conveys the aura of divine breath.

With the world in peril, Churchill rose to the fore,  
Defeatism, surrender, not in his lexicon,  
His language eloquent and riveting to the host he won,  
As Britain stood alone, he gave the lion's roar.

Enduring more than a quarter century  
In a harsh prison, Nelson Mandela would mold  
His nation, and far beyond, for ages to behold,  
Toward justice, with magnanimity.

Defying stupendous odds, Wilbur and Orville Wright  
Doggedly persist, with extraordinary skill  
Mastering wing design, proved at Kill Devil Hill,  
At high risk, becoming the first in powered flight.

From early attic experiments, Marconi would astound,  
Using advances in electro-magnetism to explore  
New ventures, he successfully connected ships to shore,  
Then the race by wireless and radio, with world renown.

Relativity theories by the genius Einstein,  
His probes of light, famed energy equation,  
Unified field insight, and space-time relation,  
Ushered in the atomic age, for good or evil design.

Brilliant line of pathbreakers, of dreamer and achiever mind,  
Forerunners for Neil Armstrong and crew of Apollo Eleven  
In their epic landing on the moon, forever graven  
In heroic history as 'one giant leap for mankind'.

Late coming to faith, C. S. Lewis, a Medieval  
And Renaissance authority, by joy surprised,  
Presenting the faith profoundly, winsomely disguised;  
Christianity he merely shows without a rival.■

## *Holocaust Image*



“A group of Jews, including a small boy, is escorted from the Warsaw Ghetto by German soldiers in this April 19, 1943 photo. The picture formed part of a report from SS Gen. Stroop to his Commanding Officer, and was introduced as evidence to the War Crimes trials in Nuremberg in 1945.”

<http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2011/10/world-war-ii-the-holocaust/100170/>

**I**

I cannot forget a certain marked child.  
My mind keeps faithfully raising on its  
Screen the image of a boy long lost.  
I know him not as one knows a neighbor,  
A friend, or even shadowy stranger,  
Who in a brief interlude intersects  
Our lives. Yet his face and boyish figure  
Haunt me, they haunt me and will still haunt me  
Until this life is done, perhaps beyond.

## II

The boy is one of millions of Jews forced  
From their homes; rumors are rife: are they now  
Headed for pleasant prospects as some are  
Desperate to believe—or certain death?  
Though mortal danger awaited the Jews,  
Deception enhanced their masters' control.  
The boy wears a cap—it sets him apart;  
In happier circumstances an artist  
Might well paint him, using the simple but  
Distinctive title: 'Boy wearing a cap'.  
It's not now the depth of winter, yet there  
Is evidently a chill in the air;  
People are bundled; the boy wears a coat,  
Knee-length socks and—is he wearing a tie?  
The light strikes his cap and the head of the  
Woman—his mother?—beside him; the two  
Are in the forefront of the photo, so  
Symbolic of the Jews' travail it is  
A source book's sole scene under 'Holocaust'.<sup>[1]</sup>  
The boy's cap, coat and socks appear to trace  
Him from a home above average means;  
Coming dire tests would be the more drastic.

## III

He should be playing, as children the world  
Round are wont to do, first tries at soccer,  
Other games with friends, or with that childlike  
Gift of invention, playing some game alone,  
Imagining in him a star is born.  
School, a field trip, are his normal places  
If the boy were treated as a human;  
He's a mere lad, but is not too young for  
Home chores, for early signs of giftedness,  
With promise in art, music, speech or science  
That may in time astound and bless the world,  
And at eventide happily gathered  
With his family for strength and blessing.

## IV

In an instant it is clear to all who  
See him that none of the accustomed passages  
Of childhood and youth will henceforth be his.  
What's this! Appallingly his arms are raised—  
Universal sign of no resistance to powers that be,  
What shame on the all-powerful police state  
To coerce a small boy into submission  
As if he were a threat to the Third Reich!—



In obvious obedience to shouts  
And commands of brutes driving and herding  
A mélange of Jews: men, women, aged,  
Infirm, babes-in-arms, youth, children like the  
Boy so deeply printed in my mind's eye,  
These are judged as a plague, Untermenschen,<sup>[2]</sup>  
Root of all evils afflicting the Nazi state.  
Any trying to escape risk instant death;  
They are corralled like brigands, thus the guards  
Are armed and ready; in time the exhausted,  
Sick and feeble will be shot where they fall.

## V

Likely the boy's mother is beside him,  
She too is raising a hand, her head is turned  
Toward a guard whose rifle is pointed  
At the boy; fear appears to trump anger.  
David's fight with Goliath was easy By this struggle;  
David could draw upon  
The whole-hearted support of his fellow  
Israelites—the defeat of a mighty  
Armed warrior of the feared Philistines  
Would resound far and wide to their glory;  
Among Gentiles this small boy found no friend,  
Only silence, or abetment for their  
Tormentors, and his people were utterly  
Distraught, thus of little comfort to him;  
He was where brutality and terror  
Ruled from the Fuehrer to his least minions.  
Questions of Jews' will to resist evil  
Are cheap criticism from secure havens.  
The uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto,  
Sustained for thirty-three days with small arms  
Against hopeless odds, shows profound courage;<sup>[3]</sup>  
Resistance to terror often mirrors  
The best opportunity for success.  
Stopping tyranny early demands great  
Vigilance but little blood; full grown, the  
Cost of its overthrow is measureless.

## VI

Sinister portent of a growing menace,  
The infamous Nuremberg Laws fell on  
All German Jews like a scourge, constricting  
Their livelihoods and lives still more and more,  
Dehumanizing, spirit-debasing,  
Sapping their wills and hope near to breaking:  
Nearly all professions were forbidden Jews,

Severe curbs on education, food, clothing,  
With access to theaters, concert halls, parks  
Denied them, forced to wear a yellow star,  
Faith-practice restricted, fraught with peril;  
Even Jewish holders of the coveted Iron  
Cross From the Great War found it availed them nothing,  
They were often vilified and attacked,  
Emigration more stymied and costly,  
Suicides rose sharply as hope was waning;  
Jews, Jews married to Gentiles, those with partial  
Jewish lineage, were caught in a grim vise  
Ever tightening, taking freedom and life.  
Then came an explosion heard round the world.

## VII

Kristallnacht, 'night of broken glass,' surpassed  
All previous pogroms in Jews beaten,  
Seized and sent to concentration camps, and  
The number of Jews killed, their synagogues  
Desecrated and burned, businesses and  
Homes robbed and ravaged while police stood by,  
The Nazis spread terror and havoc, death  
And destruction, across the whole nation.  
Wanton as it was, this massive pogrom  
Was unleashed by Nazi leaders using  
The cause célèbre of a minor official's  
Stark assassination in the German  
Embassy in Paris by a young Jew  
Over Nazi treatment of his family.  
Outrage was piled on outrage when insurance  
Payments were confiscated by the state,  
And a billion-marks-fine levied on Jews!  
Appalled as were many in other nations,  
Outrage evoked by these atrocities  
Was soon muted; no nation raised its  
Immigration quotas for beleaguered Jews;  
Hitler surely observed that concern for  
The Jews did not rise to action  
In America, as elsewhere, and believed  
He could get away with mass murder;  
Kristallnacht, ominous cataract of mayhem,  
Was prelude to the Nazis' genocide of Jews.

## VIII

The dreaded knock often came in the middle of the  
Night—nefarious deeds bear not the light—  
The sickening scene was repeated countless times  
In the land of Goethe, Bach, Beethoven

And Handel, later all across Europe.  
(To counter resistance, Hitler ordered the notorious  
'Nacht und Nebel,' the Night and Fog Decree—  
Prisoners disappearing without a trace.)<sup>[4]</sup>  
Nazi toughs have summarily ousted  
These decent folk from their loved and last refuge,  
Their homes violated, they are forced out  
Carrying the clothes on their backs, a few  
Cherished photos and other treasures,  
Some food, clothing, items thrown in a suitcase,  
And little else; they have reason for panic.

### **IX**

Where is the boy's father? Had he a store  
Boycotted into ruin, and now scrounging  
To meet his family's necessities?  
Was he a teacher forced into factory work?  
A lawyer trying to help fellow Jews  
When the dreaded SS struck his own home?  
Did the husband-father arrive to find  
His family gone, his home ransacked and empty,  
The neighbors missing, the eerie silence  
Broken only by a dog's forlorn wail?  
No chance to escape, would he be taken  
To a different ghetto, and like many,  
Never to see his family again?  
He would need the tongue of Jeremiah  
His heart-rending anguish truly to share.

### **X**

The boy, perhaps eight, fights to hold back tears;  
The wonder, if his father is missing  
At their time of grave peril, and his  
Whole world is collapsing, is that this lad  
Has not yielded to despair, though his eyes  
Reveal a wrenching fear, not of nature's  
Rampaging fury all people rightly dread,  
Nor of bodily pain, common to young and old,  
But fear of cruelty unlimited, the sine qua non  
Of tyrants, which the Creator intended  
None should have to fear, now all too real for him;  
Far worse—horrendous treatment—was coming that  
Would burn Dante's Inferno into their lives.

### **XI**

The non-descript crowd reaches a railway  
Siding, abandoned by all to a bitter fate  
(Swedish envoy Raoul Wallenberg later saved tens of

Thousands of Jews in Hungary from death trains),  
Able-bodied, old and young, the sick and infirm, were  
Shoved into freight cars, commonly called  
'Forty and Eights' because they were made to carry forty men  
Or eight horses or cattle; but to save on transport,  
Often far more than forty were packed in,  
Leaving little but standing room, the door slammed  
Shut and locked. With no food or water save  
What they had brought, and suffering stifling heat,  
Or frigid winter days and nights, with no sanitation,  
And the stench of human wastes, for days and nights  
That must have seemed interminable, they  
Endured claustrophobic conditions locked  
In clattering, or idle, rail cars, desperately  
Thirsty and hungry, the sick untended,  
Bound they knew not where, with despair  
Mounting. It is not surprising that  
Some did not survive this hellish ordeal.

## **XII**

Yet leaving a transport brought no relief;  
Inhumanity continued full bore  
In the ghettos which were designed to inflict  
Suffering, and to exacerbate many  
Of the most destructive human instincts.  
The boy in the iconic photo may have been  
Ghettoized while the killing apparatus underwent  
Experimentation and expansion, as Auschwitz-  
Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor and other death  
Factories began to implement the planned genocide.  
Under the Nazis, ghetto life was barbaric at best:  
Even swine are fattened for killing, but here it was  
Slow death by starvation, many wracked by disease  
Without drugs, and forced labor took a harsh toll;  
They commonly felt abandoned by man and God,  
Helpless, their cries unheard, their souls  
Cauterized by anguish too deep for tears,  
Their lives ever wretched by over-crowding,  
Hunger, and death-lists that pitted Jew against Jew;  
Prisoned, trapped, and marked for the impending  
Diabolical 'Final Solution'—  
They were in the Nazi 'kingdom of death'.<sup>[5]</sup>

## **XIII**

If Auschwitz became the destination  
Of mother and son of this  
Holocaust Image, with customary cruelty and indifference  
A Death's Head SS officer likely separated them,

While inmates played incongruous tunes from  
The Merry Widow and Tales of Hoffman,<sup>[6]</sup>  
Sending the mother for forced labor, and  
The boy, probably judged unfit for work,  
Would be sent directly to the gas chamber;  
If the mother too was sent for gassing  
She was made to strip, head shaved (a Jewess'  
Hair had worth—to these ghouls she was worthless),  
Forced with others by police with whips, clubs  
Or guns to their last breathing place on earth,  
With a final deception of 'showers'  
Quickly turned to deadly cyanide fumes.  
Death was not so quick: the ghastly, screaming,  
Futile struggle with several thousand of the  
Damned to breathe, and claw their way out,  
Variously took ten to thirty minutes—  
Then deathly silence. Lackeys removed rings,  
Searched body cavities for precious stones,  
And yanked gold from the teeth of corpses<sup>[7]</sup>  
Before the bodies were hauled to ovens.

#### **XIV**

While the 'Image's' boyish picture has been seen  
By millions, no name has yet come to light;  
Holocaust authorities believe him to be Polish,  
Unknown by name yet known the world over.  
Might the capped boy have opened new vistas  
In astronomy, enriched our music heritage,  
Gifted humanity with inspired writing,  
Or merely been a person decent, honest and  
Caring, on whom the whole world depends?<sup>[8]</sup>

#### **XV**

Never are humans so vile as when they  
Treat a little one cruelly; surely those who  
Knowingly mistreat a defenseless child  
Face a judgment beyond imagining;  
Better for such persons not to be born.  
Rachel is still weeping for her children,  
And not Rachel alone, the anguish weighs  
On the hearts of all who know that the boy  
With the cap, with hands raised, is our brother  
And our son. How much I owe him and all  
Whom he represents only God can say.  
Where did I fail him and millions like him?  
Silence in the face of hate gives free rein  
To evil men and makes us complicit;

Widespread indignation wields great power;  
In failure to advocate asylum for Jews,  
Was not my silence touched with damnation?  
At the Great Assize, what will I say when  
The Judge of All asks what I did to succor them?

## XVI

A thousand years will not suffice to right  
The horrendous crimes against a people  
Essentially because of their Abrahamic lineage.  
The crimes are not against the Jews (and  
Gypsies, Poles, Slavs, Jehovah's Witnesses) only;  
They strike at the human race, bound as one  
As surely as the same blood runs through all men.  
Where any are treated inhumanely,  
And injustice blights body, mind and spirit,  
In the name of a holy and just God  
Let us overcome evil with good, and undermine  
Oppression, striving to bring life and freedom.  
A new holocaust can be prevented—  
Seeing all bearing the divine image,  
And treating all with dignity and worth;  
No one can speak and act for the whole world,  
But we are responsible for showing  
The reconciling way in our own world.■

---

1 In the 1994 World Book Encyclopedia (and one of only two Holocaust photos in the 2001 edition). Both editions cite it as a photo in the Jerusalem Yad Vashem Archives.

2 Subhumans, as Nazis considered Jews and Slavic peoples, who in Hitler's view had no right to live, except as slaves of the master race.

3 Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Himmler* (New York: Paperback Library, Inc., 1968), 151.

4 Under this decree, suspected saboteurs and others would vanish without a trace into the night and fog. Himmler instructed the Gestapo: "An effective and lasting deterrent can be achieved only by the death penalty or by taking measures which will leave the family and the population uncertain as to the fate of the offender." To this day it is not known how many thousands disappeared as a result of this draconian decree, which Hitler issued on December 7, 1941. (www.TheHistoryPlace—WW II in Europe)

5 Apt phrase of Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975). Chapter Seven title: "The Annihilation Camps: Kingdom of Death".

6 William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1960), 970.

7 Jews had been encouraged to bring all their valuables with them for the promised "resettlement." The valuables confiscated from the dead were sent to the Reichsbank, where by a secret agreement between Himmler and the bank's president, Dr. Walther Funk, they were deposited in an account for the SS. (Ibid., 973)

8 A wider assumption on a popular Russian saying: "No village can exist without one righteous person—or a town, or a nation

## *This Cup*

*“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”* Matthew 26:39

On a mission heaven-sent, amid acclaim and rejection,  
The eternal plan keenly rising in His reflection,  
Urged to shun Samaritans and call down fire  
Upon them with compassion He countered such ire,  
For the Savior has come the despised to redeem,  
Showing divine love for the least an ever flowing stream,  
Prophetically heralded by the inspired observant,  
Reaching its zenith in Isaiah’s ‘Suffering Servant’;  
Cognizant of the cost of His Messianic mission,  
And committed from eternity to the divine commission,  
The Redeemer set His face like flint for Jerusalem,  
Undeterred by the sense He would surely be condemned,  
Fully knowing the opposition arrayed against Him,  
Facing the incalculable burden of man’s depravity and isn;  
Killing Jesus was the determined plan of Temple authorities,  
Rome’s self-serving Procurator had only Roman priorities,  
All marshalled by demonic forces from the depths of hell,  
By earthly reasoning the encounter could not go well;  
In this time of greatest need Jesus’ disciples failed the Lord,  
Denying and one betraying, Him in deed and word.

Jesus’ prelude to Golgotha, Gethsemane’s crucible—  
Prostrate, praying thrice for this cup to pass if possible,  
If He died in *this* way, might not rejection,  
A.M. Fairbairn conjectured, mean greater condemnation?  
Even so, with pure conviction His Father’s will was paramount,  
For all time setting the way for us and our account.

Human suffering runs the gamut and is variously viewed,  
The agony endured by Christ was of another magnitude,  
Bearing the sins of the race, which only God can know,  
Is a burden of the soul unknown in any man’s woe,  
Never a metaphor more pregnant with suffering beyond the pale,  
Nor a more perfect storm blowing a cleansing gale,  
A deep sense of His affliction by a Durer depiction  
We gain, but His burden is beyond our comprehension;  
Though scourged and crucified for our transgression,  
The Savior was maligned as deserving God’s affliction,  
Suffering exceeding what we can share or even know,  
Enduring misery far greater than a Dantean *Inferno*.

He cried in torment from the Messianic Twenty-Second Psalm,  
(Was He abandoned, or only imagining the qualm?),  
“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”  
Never has the cry of dereliction expressed such agony;

In direst anguish Christ perceived Himself by God bereft,  
On the Cross, in His depths of agony, the Rock was cleft.<sup>[1]</sup>  
*This* cup, for our sake and God’s, He would drain,  
Suffering as no other for our timely and eternal gain,  
The Savior gave Himself in a once-for-all sacrifice,  
Making atonement for our sins at infinite proce;  
For grace upon grace, all glory to our Blessed Redeemer,  
My all I owe to the Savior, now and forever.■

---

1 Earlier generations frequently sang Augustus M. Toplady’s hymn “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.”



## *The Angelus*

There I stood, with pulse rising,  
Before an icon of humility  
And thanksgiving, Millet's *The Angelus*,  
Masterpiece in Paris' Musee d'Orsay,  
Whose pale copy had caught my heart long since  
As a school boy, well chosen by someone  
With appreciation for the spirit,  
And placed on a classroom wall far from the  
Small church tower in Chailly-en-Biene,  
Barely seen on the distant horizon  
At dusk, sounding summons to the faithful.  
Listen! Do you not hear the bell tolling  
Across the wide tilled field, across the world,  
For prayer? High and low would hear the call.  
How will workers respond to the clear toll,  
This venerated summons? How will we?  
Were they mindful of the Master's command  
To seek foremost the divine will and reign?  
Before storing their harvest from rich earth,  
Ere they sup, before they rest, they commune  
With the One whose goodness sustains their lives,  
And make a common field a holy ground.

Gabriel had been that honored bearer  
Of heaven's blessed news that through Mary,  
A young virgin peasant, the Messiah would  
Be born, God's own Son, Incarnate, God-Man,  
Who will be Israel's king forever.

The art's realism has not stopped conjecture;  
Gambetta, greatly admiring the work,  
Saw the couple as a farmer and his  
Maid-servant, while Salvador Dali held  
That the scene is not a prayer ritual,  
But parents praying and mourning over  
Their dead infant; at his insistence the  
Louvre, its first State conservers, detected  
The basket at the farmers' feet, filled with  
Potatoes, overpaints a child's coffin.  
Preferring the country, the artist left  
Paris where he studied art, moving to  
Barbizon, village in the famed forest  
Of Fontainebleau. He was born a peasant,  
He gladly said, and "would die a peasant."

Millet was moved by his parents' piety,  
And remembered often seeing them and  
His grandmother at prayer in the fields.  
The art portrays a peasant and his wife,  
Responding in reverence to the call  
To pray, standing in a field as sacred  
To them as the church sounding the blest call,  
Simple tools of potato harvesting,  
A pitchfork now stuck straight up in the ground,  
Ready for more digging, or to take home,  
A potato basket and a 'barrow,  
Tinted sky reflecting the setting sun,  
Their toil rewarded with a good harvest,  
Pausing at day's end to give thanks to God,  
With whom they have companied in their labor  
And cares. Gratitude defines who we are,  
Preparing the way to serve God and man,  
From food for family and those in need,  
To sharing in the greatest gifts in time,  
Incarnation, the Passion of our Lord  
For us sinners, and Christ's Resurrection,  
Which Christ will share with all who live in Him.

The Catholic Church traces the Angelus  
To the twelfth century, evolving from  
A recitation of three 'Hail Mary's,'  
With indulgences, to its present form  
With morning, noon and eve recitations.

Others find a shift in the Angelus,  
Emphasizing the great transcendent truths  
Shown the world in Christian revelation;  
Prayer themes were set by the events' time---  
Morn's prayer lifted up Resurrection,  
Prayer at noon centered on Christ's Passion;  
Saint Bonaventure taught that Gabriel's  
Annunciation to Mary happened  
In the evening, hence day's close became  
Angelus' time to mark Incarnation.

Where life, work and prayer naturally  
Blend, like light, rain and soil, the soul can  
Turn a field or forest, hill or hovel  
Into a shrine, as these simple folk have.

*The Angelus* takes prayer beyond mere  
Recitation, helpful as that may be;  
It touches ritual but rises above ritual,

Far removed from the proud Pharisee's  
Desire to be seen praying, no slightest  
Hint of parading piety, and no eyes  
But heaven's beholding them, they bow in  
Deep reverence to the Lord, leaving the  
World an image as near pure devotion  
Through generations of glad adoration  
As may be given to us in this life.

As daylight fades, a greater light descends;  
Earnest toil and childlike trust become the  
Path of Emmanuel's ineffable  
Peace and goodwill in our sad, troubled world.  
From his own labors Millet knew the joy  
Of God's bounty by sun, rain and good earth,  
And on this canvas captures the essence  
Of the heart---no, the whole persona---poured  
Out in humble thanksgiving, self-yielding  
Oneness with their Maker and Redeemer;  
Ah! do we not see another Presence?  
Not by simple sight but by the soul's sure  
Sense; these lowly folk by their faithful and  
Whole-hearted devotion lead us to God.■

### *Stillness of the Winter Wood*

The stillness of the winter wood,  
Harbinger of soon falling snow,  
Engenders thoughts that winter should---  
Life hidden now, with spring will grow.■

## *Atonement: Mystery and Reality*

Long heralded, the coming of a Savior,  
Now an open secret for humankind,  
Revealing the grace and heart of God's mind  
To offer the repentant heaven's favor.

It is not in us to undo wrong,  
The wrong which stains and warps the soul,  
Corrupts God's image and scorns life's goal,  
That drains life's joy, and steals our song.

How vain the boast of mastering evil,  
How empty the hope of cures man-made,  
The debt is deeper than any has repaid---  
Apart from One who battled the devil,

And won---at infinite cost, for us mortals,  
Salvation of which the angels only dream,  
Reversing the ages' dark, disastrous scene,  
So opened for man high heaven's portals.

It was for me---the bitter tree,  
For all, He suffered in our place,  
Yet through time no tongue can tell or thought  
trace  
The travail of His soul that sets us free.

Atonement rests on grace alone,  
Beyond all logic, a mystery baffling reason,  
But reason gives way to a glorious season  
For love, all loves surpassing, to atone.

So man must plead for mercy divine,  
No claim of worthiness to bring,  
All human goodness does hollow ring,  
Where God's love alone restores God's design.

Received by humble trust, a gift,  
For faith itself, to willing hearts, is offered,  
By the God whose conquering love is proffered,  
That heals our self-righteous and ruinous rift.

To the Father, Son, and Spirit, all praise!  
Our shame and unpayable debt redeemed,  
Forgiven, made whole, set free, life-streamed,  
To strive for God's will in all our ways.

Still, sinners all we remain, yet more,  
For now our sin is against the Holy Cross---  
Its light, and unfailing love, and loss,  
As though the Christ need die as before.

If heaven marks where we are impure,  
Can any stand? But grace is there,  
To lift the fallen, whose cry is a prayer---  
On divine grace our hope and peace are sure.■

### *The Light of That Holy Night*

Like a pall, shades of darkness descend upon the land,  
Civilians targeted, and masses left to suffer and die,  
Will evil, taking a thousand forms, forever stand?  
Aleppo in horror becomes a modern Shanghai.

In this dark world an everlasting light now is shining,  
Those “who walked in darkness have seen a great light,”  
Revealing divine love and the life God is designing,  
Glorious beyond conception will be that brilliant sight.

Generation after generation buoyed by hope  
That through David’s line would come the Messiah;  
Where the epochal event? Micah pointed with a trope:  
From Bethlehem would arise Israel’s greatest desire.  
This night was a beginning that began long, long before,  
Before the Word created the worlds in eternity,  
Grace-impelled, then and now, to redeem and restore  
His children beloved, His straying, lost humanity.

In time and beyond time, ancient while ever new,  
Many generations pass before the promise is fulfilled,  
Exposing the Deceiver, delivering with the true,  
There is nothing so sure as the Savior God has willed.

Before the foundation of the world God planned  
To rescue His weak and fallible creatures,  
With mercy and kindness divine love outran  
All satanic schemes to destroy man’s godly features.

How vulnerable is all life on earth,  
So subjected His son by the Almighty for our sake,  
Sharing our weakness while showing human worth,

Christ's nativity leads to heaven's highest stake.  
The sovereign Lord came as a child, God's own Son,  
Confounding the world, far from trappings of royalty,  
In a stable arrived the Messiah of holy vision,  
Born of a peasant girl and inspiring wide fidelity.

No room in the inn for the Savior to be born,  
Mary will lay her new born infant in a cattle manger,  
Ah, but there's room in His heart for the world's forlorn,  
A place of warmth and welcome for the lowly and the stranger.

No earthly throne was augured that holy night,  
But the Savior's Advent heaven rejoices to ordain,  
Poor shepherds were drawn to this glorious sight,  
This child in humble hearts shall forever reign.

By the Law and Prophets the foundation was prepared,  
Israel's pinnacle of hopes was set upon the Advent  
Of Messiah as her summit of leaders had declared,  
While against Him all the forces of evil were bent.

Far beyond the Israelites the longing was stirring,  
The epic journey of Wise Men to find the King-Deliverer  
Proved plans divine and human hopes were converging,  
The wise of the world all follow their endeavor.

The morning stars in overture had sung creation's story,  
A host of angels now proclaim the message of the ages,  
That Christ has come to fulfill God's glory,  
Bringing life, light and peace only hoped for by sages.

What a light was shining that holy night!  
To quench it many try in ways subtle or explicit,  
The light that shines the brightest is His light,  
Still it shines, and the darkness never overcomes it.

Emmanuel---the Redeemer's sublime heraldic name,  
God with us for courage and comfort---thrilling news,  
Opening to every believer the best of heaven's fame,  
Not merely for a favored few but to all, Gentiles and Jews.

Salvation full and without price---the Savior is here!  
Redemption offered to low and high---to all!  
Let joy be unconfined! Abandon your fear!  
God assures in Christ the Lord none shall fall!

Rejoicing in joy enduring, gift unspeakable,  
May 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' be ev'rywhere resounding,  
For blessings beyond human merit, and indescribable,  
Let the world adore Him with deeds and praise abounding.

O may the light of that holy night  
Shine through us with His love and grace,  
Overcoming darkness with the power of His might,  
'Til Eternal Day dawns with the glory of His face.■

### *Raid at Harpers Ferry*

John Brown was a man of outsize passion,  
On fire with a burning zeal and compassion  
To end vile bondage and set slaves free,  
Reason futile, he would force the issue for history.

Where light a torch to start a firestorm  
When passions were feverish and past reform?  
At the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah,  
A blow of no-return was struck forevermore.

The scheme was to seize a cache of arms,  
For armed insurrection against the gravest harms;  
The military resisted, not without reason,  
Brown's rebellion was widely held to be treason.

A town with the ferry-founder's name Harper,  
Would signal the world of divisions sharper  
Than generally perceived and the prelude to war civil,  
To save the union, and end a monstrous evil.

Ill-fated it was, and unwise it may have been,  
The 'peculiar institution' would not yield an easy win;  
The rebellion was put down by one Robert E. Lee,  
But it foreshadowed emancipation by war and decree.

Attacked from all side—slave advocated construed  
Him a prime danger, as terrorists would later be viewed,  
Proponents of compromise feared his fanaticism,  
Some abolitionists worried their cause was doomed by cataclysm.

Militant abolitionist, Brown aided blacks, slave and free,  
His anti-slavery bloodshed led to the uprising plot fatefully;  
A hanging high, the tragic end of his descendance,  
And a mournful ballad became his chief remembrance.  
A dark cloud of rage and fear descended  
Upon slave-holders for what the act portended;  
The raid and its threat fed a frenzy for secession,  
Wielders of chairs and the lash would soon opt for insurrection.

Contempt and outrage have been visited upon Brown,  
Whereas violence in other plots have brought renown;  
Apart from a firebrand, might the scourge have endured  
Another century before freedom from bondage was secured?

The raid is commonly seen and reproached as John Brown's folly,  
Ill-conceived, Brown's plan deserves its melancholy;  
We may leave John Brown's actions to a Judge omniscient,  
Yet praise and honor his obsession magnificent.■



## *We All Stand on Shoulders*

All praise to the Wright brothers and Marconi and Edison,  
To Madame Curie and Pasteur, experimental perseverers,  
Relentless in pursuing truth, the false to jettison,  
But all were indebted to scientific predecessors.

Stradivarius, brilliantly rising from obscurity,  
Crafter of violins singularly *extraordinaire*,  
Still these wonder workers, searching with perspicacity,  
From trailblazers learned early and late, much as they share.

Karl Barth is widely viewed as a precedent-setting potter,  
Renowned in his time, molding a theology grand,  
Yet Barth is unthinkable without Adolf Schlatter,  
And others, who prepared a place to stand.

That Shakespeare drew on Holinshed's *Chronicles*  
And Plutarch's *Lives* is well known and commonly accepted,  
With neologisms, wit and puns, creating classic spectacles,  
Attaining the world pinnacle as playwright, and so respected.

Between the older Haydn and the young prodigy Mozart  
A long and warm friendship benefited both titans,  
And adds to their stature as each other's counterpart;  
Thus is it ever with music that inspires and heightens.

In some part of the craft all artists have their precursors,  
More subtle with Picasso, more clear with Titian,  
Some as apprentices, others gained from professors,  
The paths are traceable though often hidden in rendition.

While primitive beginnings were Abe Lincoln's experience,  
With Blackstone perhaps, and scripture, gleaned by firelight,  
The Founding Fathers and the Spirit spawned his tow'ring prescience  
In saving a nation and freeing slaves through an epic fight.

Above all is the Mind and Heart of the universe,  
Who alone created *ex nihilo* all that is,  
Always in advance wherever man may traverse,  
Every gift is from above, and we are His.■

## *The Prodigal*

The rebel urge comes freely, legion is its name,  
From common folk to those who run with fame,  
Paths wiser and beneficent are shunned with disdain,  
As offering little pleasure and less personal gain.

My hubris troubled him who loved me most purely,  
The love that loves in freedom loves most truly;  
A caring sibling might have saved me much folly,  
Instead my brother dealt me a double volley  
Of selfishness and self-righteous, sinister pride,  
Yet the choice was mine, and I brushed all demurs aside.

Little concerned that my youthful and careless leaving  
Was cause for the onset of long and deep bereaving;  
Scant thought of my sire's warm embrace and choked farewell,  
Swept up by license and lust with a hint of hell.  
How blithely did I leave my father's home,  
But how blessedly, ever-loving, did my father not  
Leave me; I sensed his presence when I had come  
Where I found myself amid the sties and noisome rot.

In the far country the will weakens and roots easily sever,  
No bridges are built, and the best are merely clever;  
The self-centered, morally loose, are a sorry lot for friends,  
Defrauding the simple and controlling others, their chief ends;  
A life of hedonism is mired in narcissism,  
Alluring yet vacuous, and sliding toward fatalism.

As rich in things and poor in soul I had started,  
Foolish and vain, my inheritance and I were soon parted,

From a heritage reaching back to a Call divine,  
The nadir for an heir of Abraham is tending swine.

So low had I fallen, I saw clearly from my descent  
The only way up, inspired by the Spirit, is to repent;  
Remembrance stirred my mind's awakening  
As my father's son to cease my self-deceiving,  
Even servants in my father's house had honor and bread  
While I had neither, but was treated as the dead.

A sense of my father's enduring love became my anchor,  
A blessed hope that I would be accepted without rancor;  
Though I had come to see that my sin was manifold---  
Against heaven and my father, scorning love still not fully told,

And rehearsed again and again my confession fervent,  
Unworthy to be a son, let me be a servant.  
From the age-old self-made pit of rebellion I arose,  
Unsure of my reception, but determined to leave my woes.

Far off---how often had he scanned the horizon!---  
My father saw me, and running, embraced his errant son  
With a kiss and joy overflowing, cutting short my confession,  
Beyond all blessings is my father's compassion;  
How great is his rejoicing! A lost son is found,  
A son dead is alive---let the celebration resound!

Though consequences remain, the record finds  
Forgiveness is offered repentant sinners of all kinds;  
Alleluia for the God of grace who welcomes the prodigal  
Home again, and lavishes his love with a madrigal,  
A ring, a robe and sandals, a royal feast, a high celebration,  
That revels with blest music and dancing!---and unbounded  
Elation, except for my elder brother's refusal to join in,  
Deeply grieving my father with other, unconfessed sin.  
Is not this ancient story also a common story,  
Lives often weak and sordid, yet made for glory?  
Do not our hearts reveal the prodigal there?  
With passion send the good news to all, and everywhere,  
Compassion---in glorious assurance---is blazoned over the race,  
Returning prodigals find mercy with the God of grace!■

## *Tea Becomes a Sacrament*

In a large but inauspicious church building  
On mainland Hong Kong, worshippers gathered  
To hear the Word proclaimed by a stranger  
From a far-away land; language was no barrier  
And faith leaped a vast ocean and cultural chasm,  
Bonding hearts as faith is wont to do.

Given a warm welcome, the minister was gladly received,  
For these believers are paragons of hospitality,  
Many were passionate to follow the Master,  
And eager to build relationships across the world;  
The invitations included tea at a woman's home,  
Home turned out to be a houseboat across the  
Busy inner harbor, with a backdrop of gleaming  
Skyscrapers rising majestically on Hong Kong Island;  
In contrast, her live-in craft was small and frail,  
Uneasily taking the waves of heavy channel traffic,  
Appearing no match for any storm at sea.

We clambered up rickety slats to the second level---  
As we sat on the wood flooring, the host served steaming tea;  
With a poor fisherwoman offering her loving best,  
She had a radiance found only in the company of the Son;  
Lifted by prayer and shared faith, I felt an unseen Presence,  
And tea was transformed into a blessed sacrament.

I have no name, no other remembrance of this disciple,  
Yet I am sure we shall meet again, perhaps  
Sharing together in the marriage feast of the Lamb.■

Poems and Booklet © 2018 James A. Langley