Memorial Day, May 26, 2008

The Story Behind
Eternal Father Strong to Save

Words: William Whiting, 1860. He wrote the lyrics as a poem for a student about to sail for America.

Tune: John B. Dykes, in 1861. Dykes fittingly named the tune after a locale associated with a Biblical shipwreck. Melita was the island the Apostle Paul reached after his ship went down (Acts 28:1); today we know it as the isle of Malta.

In America, "Eternal Father" is often called the "Navy Hymn," because it is sung at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. It is also sung on ships of the British Royal Navy and has been translated into French. It was the favorite hymn of U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and was sung at his funeral in Hyde Park, New York, in April 1945. The Navy Band played it in 1963 as U.S. President John Kennedy's body was carried up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to lie in state. Roosevelt served as Secretary of the Navy, and Kennedy was a PT boat commander in World War II. The hymn was played by the Navy Band and the Coast Guard Band during the funeral of U.S. former President Ronald Reagan. The hymn was also played at the Memorial Ceremony in Norfolk, VA for the USS *Cole* (DDG-67) after the bombing of the ship in October 2000. It was performed by the U.S. Navy Sea Chanters at the State Funeral of U.S. former President Gerald R. Ford, who had served in the Navy during World War II in the Pacific Theater.

William Whiting (1825-1878) was born in Kensington, England, and educated at Chapham and Winchester. Because of his musical ability, he became master of Winchester College Choristers' School. While best known for *Eternal Father*, Whiting also published two poetry collections: *Rural Thoughts* (1851) and *Edgar Thorpe, or the Warfare of Life* (1867). He died at Winchester.

John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876) was born in Hull, England, and by age 10 was the assistant organist at St. John's Church, Hull, where his grandfather was vicar. He studied at Wakefield and St. Catherine's College, earning a B.A. in Classics in 1847. He cofounded the Cambridge University Musical Society. He was ordained as curate of Malton in 1847. For a short time, he was canon of Durham Cathedral, then precentor (1849-1862). In 1862 he became vicar of St. Oswald's, Durham. He published sermons and articles on religion but is best known for over 300 hymn tunes he composed. He died in Sussex at age 53.

Biblical References

The first verse refers to God the Father's forbidding the waters to flood the earth as described in Psalm 104 (Psalm 104:5-9). The second verse refers to Jesus' miracles of stilling a storm and walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:23-27, Matthew 14:22-33). The third verse references the Holy Spirit's role in the creation of the earth in the Book of Genesis (Genesis 1:1), while the final verse is a reference to Psalm 107 (Psalm 107:23-32).

Source: **http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/e/t/eternalf.htm**
Source: **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_Father,_Strong_to_Save**

Link to U.S. Navy Sea Chanters singing verse 1, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save"
< http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bnm-4kSLKdI>

Verse 1: Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidst the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

Verse 2: O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walked'st on the foaming deep,
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

Verse 3: Most Holy Spirit! Who didst brood
Upon the chaos dark and rude,
And bid its angry tumult cease,
And give, for wild confusion, peace;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

Verse 4: O Trinity of love and power!
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

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26 May 2008