

Eternal Father, Strong to Save

The Story and Scriptures for “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”

Background:

In America, "Eternal Father" is often called the "Navy Hymn," because it is sung at the U. S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland (Ref. 1). 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. President Roosevelt previously served as Secretary of the Navy (Ref. 1).

The U.S. Navy Band played “Eternal Father” in 1963 as U.S. President John Kennedy's body was carried up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to lie in state. Kennedy was a PT (Patrol Torpedo) boat commander in World War II (Refs. 1, 2).

“Eternal Father” 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 U.S. Navy during World War II in the Pacific Theater (Ref. 3).

Text Author:

William Whiting (1825-1878) was an Anglican clergyman and resided on the English coast near the ocean. At the age of thirty-five he felt his life spared by God when a violent storm in the Mediterranean nearly claimed the ship he was traveling on. The storm instilled his belief in God’s command over the rage and calm of the sea (Ref. 3).

When Whiting was headmaster at Winchester College Chorister’s School some years later, the memory of his voyage allowed Whiting to provide comfort to one of the boys he taught (Ref. 4). One day, a student confided that he was about to embark on a journey to America – “a voyage fraught with danger at that time.” (Ref. 4). “A sympathetic Whiting described his own frightening experience, and he and the other boys prayed for the terrified student. And then Whiting told him, ‘Before you depart, I will give you something to anchor your faith.’ ” (Ref. 4).

Whiting wrote a poem describing God's power even over the mighty oceans. (Refs. 3 and 4). That poem, written in 1860, became the original text for the hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save."

Tune Composer:

John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876) composed the tune in 1861. Dykes fittingly named the tune "Melita" after a location associated with a Biblical shipwreck. Melita was the island where the Apostle Paul was shipwrecked (Acts 27:41-28:1). Today we know it as the isle of Malta (Ref. 3).

John B. Dykes was born in Hull, England (Ref. 5). By age 10, he was the assistant organist at St. John's Church, Hull, where his grandfather was vicar. He studied at Wakefield and St. Catharine's College, earning a B.A. in Classics in 1847. Dykes co-founded the Cambridge University Musical Society. 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 (Ref. 5). John Dykes' famous tunes include Nicaea ("Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!") and Melita ("Eternal Father, Strong to Save").

Biblical References:

Verse 1 (see page 4) refers to God the Father forbidding the waters to flood the earth as described in Psalm 104 (Psalm 104:5-9). Verse 2 refers to Jesus' miracles of stilling a storm and walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Psalm 65:7, Matthew 8:23-27, Matthew 14:22-33). Verse 3 references the Holy Spirit's role in the creation of the earth in the Book of Genesis (Genesis 1:1-2). Verse 4 refers to Psalm 107 (Psalm 107:23-32).

Links:

Take now the time to sing this hymn using a hymnal or the attached original lyrics and score, or by listening and singing along with a recording or soundtrack such as the ones below:

1. "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" – Easington Lane Independent Methodist Church, Houghton Le Spring, UK (includes lyrics for projection – all 4 verses – with stormy seascape video of Roker Lighthouse, Sunderland, UK).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDjwUzUnNpU>

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2. Eternal Father, Strong to Save (The Navy Hymn) - U.S. Navy Band Sea Chanters (singing Verse 1). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic8zMkYwnq8>
3. U.S. Naval Academy Glee Club - U.S.S. Arizona Memorial – (singing verses 1 and 4 of “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQOzUqdOVDU>
4. “Eternal Father Strong to Save” - Prague Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus (singing verse 1), arrangement by Hans Zimmer (from Crimson Tide). Dramatic storm video footage - Marine Nationale de France.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dlXmuYuAYc>

Music:

The www.Navy.mil website provided the attached lyrics for “*Eternal Father* -- The ‘Navy Hymn’ ” (Ref. 6). The ChoralWiki website provided the PDF score (Ref. 7).

References:

1. <http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/e/t/eternalf.htm>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PT_boat
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_Father,_Strong_to_Save
4. <http://www.alliedmerchantnavy.com/mnctp/messages/faith-community/documents/NavyHymn101verses.pdf>
5. http://www3.cpd1.org/wiki/index.php/John_Bacchus_Dykes
6. http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=172
7. http://www2.cpd1.org/wiki/index.php/Eternal_Father,_strong_to_save_%28John_Bacchus_Dykes%29

Mr. Whitney V. Myers is a church music composer, arranger, and pianist; a devotion and Bible Study writer; and a retired program manager and satellite communications engineer. Mr. Myers has published over 30 choral arrangements, hymns, and songs on the www.whitneytunes.com website. Mr. Myers is a graduate of Gettysburg College (B.A.), George Washington University (M.S.), and the University of Maryland (MBA, with honors).

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Original Lyrics for “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”

Verse 1:

**Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st 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.**

Eternal Father, Strong to Save

(The "Navy Hymn")

1. E - ter - nal Fa - ther, strong to save, Whose arm hath bound the
2. O Christ! - Whose voice the wa - ters heard And hushed their rag - ing
3. Most Ho - ly Spir - it! Who didst brood Up - on the cha - os
4. O Trin - i - ty of love and pow'r! Our breth - ren shield in

4
rest - less wave, Who bidd'st the might - y o - cean deep Its
at Thy word, Who walk - ed'st on the foam - ing deep, And
dark and rude, And bid its an - gry tu - mult cease, And
dan - ger's hour; From rock and tem - pest, fire and foe, Pro -

7
own ap - point - ed lim - its keep; Oh, hear us when we
calm a - midst its rage didst sleep; Oh, hear us when we
give, for wild con - fu - sion, peace; Oh, hear us when we
tect them where - so - e'er they go; Thus ev - er - more shall

10
cry to Thee, For those in per - il on the sea.
cry to Thee, For those in per - il on the sea.
cry to Thee, For those in per - il on the sea.
rise to Thee Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

Words: William Whiting (1860)
(Gen. 1:2; Job 38:8-11; Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-35)

Music: John Bacchus Dykes ("Melita", 1861; 88.88.88)