

23rd June 2022

Conversation

“Conversation is the laboratory and workshop of the student.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude*

From time to time in my “Thought for the Day” I use a traditional hymn as the theme or core of my reflection. Today, I turn to a contemporary hymn, one which has rightly become a favourite of many people.

The hymn *I the Lord of Sea and Sky* originates from North America, and it came top of a poll in the Catholic journal, *The Tablet*, and seventeenth in the BBC *Songs of Praise* top twenty at the turn of this century. It was written by Daniel Schutte, who was born in 1947. While he was studying for the Roman Catholic priesthood at a Jesuit seminary, he discovered the connection between music and worship and embarked on a career as a composer of liturgical music, worship songs and hymns. He has said that music for worship “stirs my soul and speaks to my faith.”

I the Lord of Sea and Sky is certainly such a piece. Though nowadays it’s mostly sung as a congregational hymn, Schutte intended it to be sung as a “call and response”, a conversation with God, a solo voice asking “Whom shall I send?”, with the congregation responding with “Here I am, Lord” in each chorus. Here, for example, is the first verse and chorus:

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard My people cry.

All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save.

I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear My light to them? Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?

I have heard You calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if You lead me.

I will hold Your people in my heart.

It’s a great congregational hymn, and worthy of its place as a current favourite. But I like the original idea of the dialogue, the conversation, what Ralph Waldo Emerson describes as the “laboratory and workshop” of us. For only in that conversation will we take time to listen and hear the call of our God, “Whom shall I send?”, and be brave enough to offer our response, “Is that call for me? Oh, it is! Well, here I am, Lord. I *will* go. I *will* hold Your people in my heart.” That’s what conversations can do.

A prayer for today

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening, ready to continue our conversation. Amen