
This Is My Song

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral*
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*This is my song, Oh God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my sacred shrine.
But other hearts in other lands are beating,
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.*

*My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine.
But other lands have sunlight too and clover,
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
Oh hear my song, oh God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine.*

This month, my favorite song is Lloyd Stone's simple poetry, in the song above. He wrote the verses in 1934, between the two world wars, and meant them to be sung to the tune "Finlandia," by Jean Sibelius. (Read the words again, and try to hum them!) The hymn is not printed in every hymnal; but it is in *The New Century Hymnal* at #591. There, the editors note that the hymn can be associated with Psalm 82:8, "Arise, O God, and rule the earth, For you shall take all nations for your own."

What if we could all sing with such double intention: pride and thanks for our own country combined with appreciation and honor that "other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine?"

The poet here sings of a harmonic tension that rings through modern civilizations: the tension between the local and the global. All of us have local attachments. They are where we learn and love. We honor the sacred shrines there. But each of us, one day, begins to realize that we need global and worldwide relationships, too. God, and God's world, is always larger than we thought!

Most community traditions carry this tension easily. Consider the birth of a child, for instance. "Our new baby is the most beautiful child in the world," we exclaim. We know that the statement is both true and misleading, at the same time. It is certainly true for our local family (until the next baby arrives), but we have no intention of conducting a global contest for most beautiful child.

The tension between local and global also exists in the best religious traditions. For instance, the phrase "God's chosen people" is used in both Jewish and Christian communities; and the doctrine of "election" suggests that God chooses people. Lloyd Stone's poetry acknowledges that God does choose people and lands; but that choice is not exclusive! God can choose two people at the same time. Because God has chosen one people does not mean that God rejects another people! Because God has chosen *you*, does not mean necessarily that God has rejected *me*.

This tension between local and global will always exist in the healthiest religious traditions. It is the source of occasional disharmony; local and global threaten to separate from one another. But I believe this tension can be resolved, like the harmony in any great song resolves itself. Sometimes, two notes sounding together in a song strikes us as discordant; but, later, what sounds unusual is exactly what gives our song its identity.

"Lift every voice and sing," wrote James Weldon Johnson; and his song, too, has also become one of the great hymns of our time. May each of our great religious traditions, around the world, lift their particular voices. It is not disharmony. God, the great conductor, can draw out the best melodies from every tribe and nation. God can blend them together in a harmony of peace and truth. I hope we can join God in this endeavor.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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