



*Psalm* by Wislawa Szymborska

Oh, the leaky boundaries of man-made states!  
How many clouds float past them with impunity,  
how much desert sand shifts from one land to another;  
how many mountain pebbles tumble onto foreign soil in provocative hops!  
Need I mention every single bird that flies in the face of frontiers, or alights on the roadblock at  
the border?  
A humble robin --- still, its tail resides abroad, while its beak stays home.  
If that weren't enough, it won't stop bobbing!  
Among innumerable insects I'll single out only the ant between the border guard's left and  
right boots blithely ignoring the questions "Where from?" and "Where to?"  
Oh, to register in detail, at a glance, the chaos prevailing on every continent!  
Isn't that a privet on the far bank smuggling its hundred-thousandth leaf across the river?  
And who but the octopus, with impudent long arms, would disrupt the sacred bounds of  
territorial waters?  
And how can we talk of order overall when the very placement of the stars leaves us doubting  
just what shines for whom?  
Not to speak of the fog's reprehensible drifting!  
And dust blowing all over the steppes as if they hadn't been partitioned!  
And the voices coasting on obliging airwaves, that conspiratorial squeaking, those  
indecipherable mutters!  
Only what is human can truly be foreign.  
The rest is mixed vegetation, subversive moles, and wind.

In 1967, the Beatles were asked to come up with a song with a universally appealing message to be shared on a new television program called *Our World*, the world's first satellite broadcast of its kind, linking 25 countries and 400 million people. The song was to be debuted live on June 25th, but as the date rapidly approached, the band had written nothing. Across the pond in San Francisco, more than 100,000 flower children flocked to the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco. Inspired by the hippie's message of peace and love, their protest of the increasing militarization in Vietnam and the pressures to conform to social norms, the Beatles put their heads together to create an anthem appropriate for the Summer of Love.

The resulting song was *All You Need is Love*, performed in a studio surrounded by flowers and balloons, a swaying audience holding up signs with the song's title scrawled in a dozen different languages.

Everyone in the band agreed *All You Need is Love* was John's song, with ad-libbed ideas from Paul and Ringo to tie in older songs like "She Loves You." While the Beatles were not openly political at that time, the positive response to *All You Need is Love* aligned them with the

burgeoning peace movement. Lennon famously became more outspoken, especially after leaving the band in 1970. Perhaps no other song better expressed the longing for unity and peace better than the song *Imagine*, released in the midst of the intractable violence of the Vietnam War.

Lennon's anti-war efforts earned him national attention, specifically from President Nixon, sworn into office only six months after the summer of love. With support from Senator Strom Thurman, Nixon launched a four-year "strategic countermeasure" to deport the former Beatle. The deportation order attempted to silence Lennon's influential activism which Nixon called "propaganda." Nixon believed it could cost him not only reelection but would threaten the military prowess of the United States.

Lennon doubled down on his outspoken politics. According to journalist Jade Wright, when asked whether songs like *Give Peace a Chance* and *Power to the People* were in fact propaganda songs, he answered, "Sure. So was *All You Need Is Love*. I'm a revolutionary artist. My art is dedicated to change."<sup>14</sup>

In March of 1973, Lennon was given a deportation order while his wife, artist Yoko Ono, was granted permanent residence. In response, on April 1, taking full advantage of April Fool's Day, the couple held a press conference at the New York City Bar Association, where they announced the formation of a conceptual country called Nutopia, waving two white handkerchiefs representing surrender and peace, as a flag.

Surprising lawyers and delighting the public, Lennon and Ono solemnly read the following statement on live television.

We announce the birth of a conceptual country, NUTOPIA.

Citizenship of the country can be obtained by declaration of your awareness of NUTOPIA.

NUTOPIA has no land, no boundaries, no passports, only people.

NUTOPIA has no laws other than cosmic.

All people of NUTOPIA are ambassadors of the country.

As two ambassadors of NUTOPIA, we ask for diplomatic immunity and recognition in the United Nations of our country and our people.

Their NUTOPIA skit apparently worked -- As the Nixon administration became more deeply embroiled in the Watergate scandal, interest was lost in pursuing the deportation order and in 1975 a green card was finally granted. Interestingly, Leon Wildes, Lennon's immigration attorney, in arguing for Lennon's case for deferred deportation, helped set the precedent for President Obama's DACA, or deferred action for childhood arrivals policy. Beyond this contemporary legal twist, Lennon and Ono set forth an inventive approach to interfacing with the power of an oppressive administration. The NUTOPIA performance questioned the legitimacy of American nationalism while proclaiming a somewhat absurd vision of his "Imagined" world, telling a very different story than the Nixon administration was telling about America.

While Lennon sang:

Imagine there's no countries-  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion too.

Nixon painted a dark picture of a nation whose Christian moral values were under the dangerous influences of foreign communism. His solution was to seed a new resurgence of a Christian nationalism that would recover America's past triumph from its present crisis—blaming the media (CBS was the target at the time) for sheltering the voices of the “Silent Majority” of Americans who agreed in favor of the “noisy minority” of protesters.

Catholic lay theologian Daniel Callahan put it this way in an article in National Catholic Reporter: “What the underclasses—students, blacks, jaded intellectuals—seek in revolution, the overclasses seek in a return to the old sources. The former want to create new gods, labeled freedom, self-fulfillment, liberation, while the latter are willing to propitiate and invoke the old ones: law, order, discipline.”

Nixon's communicator in chief of this strategy was none other than the Reverend Billy Graham. Graham, now 98, is perhaps the most well-known American evangelical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Graham saw Washington influence as the final frontier of his religious “crusades” after securing a base with wealthy and powerful Hollywood and corporate executives.

With President Nixon, he finally found the national stage he sought. In the new book *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, Kevin Kruse calls Graham “a constant presence and trusted advisor” and cites the words of biographer Marshall Frady, “something like an extra officer of Nixon's Cabinet, the administration's own Pastor-without-Portfolio.”

In his first White House public appearance at Nixon's Inauguration in 1969, Graham delivered a sermon-like prayer, warning that the religious “pillars of our society” had “eroded in an increasingly materialistic and permissive society,” and the nation was “now reaping a whirlwind of crime, division, and rebellion.”

Graham's theological influence could soon be seen permeating Nixon's communications, extending beyond the social and into an economic world view that praised individualism and blasted “entitlements” in the form of welfare, student loans and social security. The disgust for “handouts” has a deeply conservative religious origin—that government support for the student, the poor person, the elderly, the disabled, the immigrant and the refugee weakens individual character, creates dependency and interrupts God's preference for those who “help themselves.” Success and wealth, particularly evident in the “self-made,” were the visible markers of “the saved.”

Fast forwarding to today, Paula White, the President's spiritual advisor, with direct ties to Billy Graham, is a Florida mega church pastor that is best known as a preacher of the prosperity gospel, or "name it and claim it." This theology believes a divine hand is at work in the global marketplace, and proclaims that poverty and misfortune are simply the product of distorted thinking and inadequate religious devotion, not the product of globalization, racism or lack of education, and can be overcome by the saving power of prayer. "Name it and claim it" has a simple message: get saved, and get rich.

Today, as it has been in the past, religion will be manipulated to be an expression of a rampant individualism which detests the poor, the immigrant and the elder. It will be used as a clarion call for white supremacy and Christian nationalism, to rally a crusade against Islam and to roll back the advances made by women, gays, and minorities.

Or, it can be, and it must be, something else.

Our task is to articulate, again and again, even more boldly and loudly, what our Unitarian Universalist faith means and what it calls us to do at this very critical moment of history. Since our faith's beginning, Universalist theology has called us to proclaim a message of love and hope. Universalism, evolving from a different time of very similar fear, fire and brimstone of the American Great Awakenings, claims that we are all worthy and deserving of love—both human and divine. In Christian terms, we are all saved or no one is saved. Since we are not individually responsible for our own salvation, we bear the collective responsibility not for one another's salvation but for one another's wellbeing. In our lives, we continue to be saved, not by a divine hand but by the beauty of the world and the generous hands of our friends, family and neighbors. Universalism proclaims no special blessing is deserved by any one group or sect, and honors no savior but the one we discover in ourselves and in one another, no hell but the one we create on this earth.

In these times, Universalism remains a radical theology—and a demanding one. A prophet of Universalism in his time, Forrest Church, preached these words of caution to those who dare to follow this spiritual path:

Taken seriously, no theology is more challenging—morally, spiritually, or intellectually: to love your enemy as yourself; to see your tears in another's eyes; to respect and even embrace otherness, rather than merely to tolerate or, even worse, dismiss it. None of this comes naturally to us. We are weaned on the rational presumption that if two people disagree, only one can be right.

Yet as even approximating the Universalist ideal remains devilishly difficult in actual practice...

we also must remember that only a respect for the worth and dignity of every human being and a shared commitment to the interdependent web of being—each among Unitarian Universalism's guiding principles—present a saving alternative to the perils of division in an ever more fractious world.

Today let us make it perfectly clear that we are a self-governed congregation that is dedicated to upholding religious values of love, inclusion and respect and carrying these values with us into the public square.

Let us be bold: our faith fosters a greater love for humankind, a love without borders or walls, a love which expands our hearts and motivates us to act for justice.

I send you off with the words of one of our Universalist founders, John Murray:

You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not Hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach kindness and everlasting love.

In short: All you need is love

May it be so, and amen.