

## **“Rise Up, O Man Of God”**

Back in the 1980's I first heard the moving hymn by William P. Merrill (1867-1954): “Rise Up O Man of God.” Years later, when I lived in Prague, I sang it in an Anglican church that I attended. The lyrics, I believe, are quite provocative and relevant today for the evangelical church in Argentina:

Rise up, O men of God!  
Have done with lesser things.  
Give heart and mind and soul and strength  
to serve the King of kings.

Rise up, O men of God!  
The kingdom tarries long.  
Bring in the day of brotherhood  
and end the night of wrong.

Rise up, O men of God!  
The church for you doth wait,  
her strength unequal to her task;  
rise up, and make her great!

Lift high the cross of Christ!  
Tread where his feet have trod.  
As brothers of the Son of Man,  
rise up, O men of God!

You can listen to a modern, remake of the hymn by Phil Keagy at  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8nx\\_VAtQ7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8nx_VAtQ7o)

Or, if you prefer, a classic version with full chorus and pipe organ at  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLtX7h107-s>.

I am particularly interested in the first stanza:

Rise up, O men of God!  
Have done with lesser things.  
*Give heart and mind and soul and strength*  
To serve the King of kings.

This stanza alludes to Mark 21:30 (“heart and mind and soul and strength”). In response to the question, “What is the most important commandment of all?,” Jesus answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” He cited the famous *Shema* from the Old Testament (Deut 6:5).

The *Shema* teaches that all areas of life, every activity, and every moment are subject to God's rule. Nothing, no one, no place or time is exempt. There is no secular realm. There are no “God-free zones.” God's reign is absolute and exclusive, requiring complete loyalty and total devotion.

Nothing can be held back or directed to something or someone else. This kind of love for God forbids any form of idolatry. Anything other than devotion to God, therefore, is a “lesser thing.”

Further, the love that God expects originates in the “heart” (our motivational center), extends to the “soul” (our being and body, as well our mental capacities and gifts), and is expressed “with all your strength,” which literally means resources and was often translated by Jewish scholars as money. Yet, our resources include all that God provides to us: capability, time, assets, as well as physical strength and mental competency.

The stanza also declares: “Have done with lesser things.” What qualifies as “lesser things” in this time and place? Consider the three dimensions the *Shema* refers to: heart, soul/mind, and resources. Let’s ask ourselves some probing questions about the “lesser things” that often define our lives.

Heart: What are we living and dying for? What do we love most of all? What gives is meaning and identity and satisfaction? Who or what controls our use of time, intellectual attention, physical passions, or spending habits?

Soul: What captivates our imagination and motivates us? Are our resources focused upon our race, clan, gang, team, social class, or nation? Is our lifestyle defined by loyalty to a non-biblical religion, cultural myth, pagan worldview or political ideology?

Strength: How are we using our God-given capabilities and assets? Do we love God with our mind? Do we serve God with our time? Do we honor God with our money? Does our identity and fulfillment derive from work? Are we addicted to something or someone?

I suspect that our answers include: my time is organized around sports, family, pleasure, and work (in other words, myself); my money is spent on consumer items, lifestyle, and social status; my mind is focused on Facebook and other forms of chatter; my passions are often directed to dubious pleasures; I pay too much attention to whatever popular media tells me; and I allow other narratives to define my identity other than the story of God.

In terms of the *Shema* what areas of our life, activity, or time are not subject to God’s rule? Do we operate as “Sunday” Christians, while the rest of the week is functionally secular? Do we tolerate “God-free zones” in our heart, mind, or spending habits? Have we misdirected our love for God to idolatry in any form?

How, then, could we “rise up” today within our churches and culture?

What would it mean for us to give God all our “heart and mind and soul and strength” and to make His church good and “great” in Buenos Aires?

It is well worth our time to ponder this hymn and the questions it implies.

Rise up, O men of God!