

God Made from One Blood All the Families of Earth

Thomas H. Troeger

When "family values" first became a buzz word in political campaigns and popular journalism, a scholar of communications interviewed a cross section of diverse social groups about the topic. When asked if they thought that "family values" were important to the health of society, more than 90 percent of the interviewees responded in the affirmative. But further questioning revealed that the phrase "family values" meant an astonishing range of things to different groups. In some cases the "family values" of one group clashed with those of another. Variations in culture, upbringing, personal history, religious belief, and self-identity resulted in a multitude of definitions of what constitutes a "family."

"God Made from One Blood All the Families of Earth" honors the multiform nature of families. Rather than define a particular pattern as the normative "family," the first two stanzas name the way "families" function at their best, the role they play throughout our lives. The stanzas follow the life cycle, starting with "the circles of nurture that raised us from birth," followed by those "companions who join us to walk through each stage" and the members of "the intimate networks on whom we depend."

Sometimes there is a tendency to romanticize "families" and a failure to recognize the harm as well as the good they do. To counterbalance the unqualified praise of families, an affirmation often reinforced by religious piety, the third stanza pictures the accomplishments and failures of family life. The end rhyme of "trust" and "just" highlights that trust is not characteristic of our relationships simply because we are members of a family. Justice is essential to building the bonds of healthy family life.

The fourth stanza makes clear the hard work of "rebuilding" relationships when families, as in the immediately preceding lines, have "distorted their roles, mistreating their members and bruising their souls." The supplication for God's "wisdom and grace" reminds us that families need resources greater than themselves if they are to break free from destructive patterns.

Wisdom and grace relate the family—whatever form family takes—to the much larger world that God has created from "one blood." The hymn's final words echo the opening line, which is based on the King James version of Acts 17:26a: God "hath made from one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."

"One blood" reminds us that we human crea-

tures share a common biochemical origin. "One blood" affirms that despite the multitudinous forms that families take, our humanity has been fashioned by God from the same common elemental substance of the earth, and in that affirmation lies the hope of our reconciliation.

"Family" in this hymn is not a constricted circle of belonging but a venue for learning how we can more completely realize God's purposes for the whole creation. Our family home prepares us to live in the global home that we share with all the other families of earth, including those who are radically different from us: "the races and viewpoints our families exclude." The hymn gives witness to the truth that the greatest value of families is not their kinship pattern but the way they foster a life of wisdom, grace, and compassion for all of God's creation.

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God made from one blood all the families of earth,
the circles of nurture that raised us from birth,
companions who join us to walk through each stage
of childhood and youth and adulthood and age.

We turn to you, God, with our thanks and our tears
for all of the families we've known through the years,
the intimate networks on whom we depend
of parent and partner and roommate and friend.

We learn through families how our closeness and trust
increase when our actions are loving and just
yet families have also distorted their roles,
mistreating their members and bruising their souls.

Give, Lord, each family lost in conflict and storm
a sense of your wisdom and grace that transform
sharp anger to insight which strengthens the heart
and makes clear the place where rebuilding can start.

Make wide that wisdom and that grace to include
the races and viewpoints our families exclude
till peace in each home bears and nurtures the bud
of peace shared by all you have made from one blood.

—Thomas H. Troeger

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Hymn Interpretation