

READING POETRY, PRACTICING — RESURRECTION —

FORTY POEMS



EDITED BY
DANIEL B. CLENDENIN

About the Cover Art

Our cover art pictures the fresco of a Christian woman named Cerula from the San Gennaro catacomb in Naples, Italy. The fresco, which dates to the late fifth or early sixth century, was rediscovered in 1971, and subsequently restored in 2011. Cerula is dressed in elaborate (priestly?) garb. Her hands are raised in the classic position of “lifting holy hands in prayer.” Above her head is the Christian symbol of “Chi-Rho.” On either side of her head are the four gospels that are bursting into flames. She is flanked by images of Peter and Paul. Beside this fresco is another fresco, not as well preserved, of another woman named Bitalia, who is likewise depicted in the praying position, and with flaming gospel books above her. Whether Cerula was a teacher, preacher, leader, priest, deacon, or a bishop, we just don’t know, but she is clearly honored as a woman of prominence and influence. One final footnote. In 495 CE, about the time of this fresco, Pope Gelasius I wrote to the bishops of Southern Italy (an area which included Naples) a famous letter in which he complains that “divine things have undergone such contempt that women are encouraged to serve at the sacred altars, and that all tasks entrusted to the service of men are performed by a sex for which these [tasks] are not appropriate.”

**Reading Poetry, Practicing
Resurrection**

Forty Poems

Collected by Daniel B. Clendenin

journeywithjesus.net

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About Daniel B. Clendenin

After earning my PhD in religious studies from Drew University (1985), I spent ten years as a professor: six years at William Tyndale College in Michigan (1985-1991), and then four years as a visiting professor in the Department of Scientific Atheism at Moscow State University in Russia (1991-1995). In 1995 I joined InterVarsity Christian Fellowship as a campus minister at Stanford University, where for eight and a half years I worked with graduate students and faculty. In 2004 I founded the *Journey with Jesus* webzine. Every week we publish an essay based on the Revised Common Lectionary, a book review, a film review (movies from 108 countries), and some poetry. Once a month we also publish an essay called “The Eighth Day,” and a “Conversation” interview. Since 2004 we have served nearly 9 million pages to readers in 241 countries and territories.

London and New York City are our two biggest cities for readers. I have traveled in 40

countries. My wife and I have walked the 493-mile *Camino Santiago* in Spain (2012), the 458-mile pilgrimage in France called *Le Chemin du Puy* (2014), and the 350-mile *La Via di Francesco* from Florence to Assisi to Rome (2016). See www.journeywithjesus.net for my 2200 essays and reviews. My book publications: *Our Contested Story: Christian Faith in an Age of Doubt* (Digital Only, 2019, available for free download at our *JwJ* webzine).

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THEY SHOULD HAVE SENT THE POETS: INTRODUCTION

When I launched the *Journey with Jesus* “weekly webzine for the global church” in 2004, my biggest surprise was the popularity of our Poetry Page. Next to our weekly essay on the Revised Common Lectionary, our Poetry Page is the most popular destination on our website. Clearly, there are many people out there who appreciate the power of poetry to speak to us in ways that other types of language can’t. Our JwJ poetry archive contains nearly 400 poems, and bit by bit we continue to add more. This anthology collects forty of my favorites.

I now think that my surprise was a projection of my own lack of experience in reading poetry. Even though I would qualify as a literate person-I have a PhD in religion and have reviewed over 800 books for *Journey with Jesus*, until recently I never read much poetry. Only as an older adult have I started to savor the power of poetry. And I suspect that my own poetically-impaired past might not be uncommon.

On the other hand, I also have two revealing memories of encountering poetry as a child. It’s instructive to consider how for children there is something deeply evocative about the power of poetry. Young children will naturally, spontaneously, and even confidently read and write poetry, with few inhibitions or any stifling self-consciousness. This natural affinity for poetry among children seems to be something we lose as adults.

In elementary school, I remember being obsessed with a book in the library called *A Rocket in My Pocket*. Today the publisher advertises it as a “collection of contemporary folklore including over 400 jingles, chants, tall tales, riddles, and tongue twisters that children themselves have made up.” Like, “I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream.” And, “ladles and jelly spoons, I come before you to stand behind you...” I never tried to remember this book or these lines; my brain just could not forget them.

I have a similar memory about a simple poem called "The World is Mine" that I encountered in high school at a summer camp sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. In this case, I heard the poem recited aloud in a plenary session, instead of reading it in a book. The poem has been credited to Dr. Tennyson Guyer (1913–1981), a senator from Ohio, and at other times as "anonymous." One reader suggested to me that the poem was originally written by Joy Lovelet Crawford and that it fits the style of her other works.

Today upon a bus I saw a girl with golden hair;
She seemed so gay, I envied her, and wished that I were half so fair;
I watched her as she rose to leave, and saw her hobble down the aisle.
She had one leg and wore a crutch, but as she passed—a smile.
Oh, God, forgive me when I whine;
I have two legs—the world is mine.

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Later on I bought some sweets. The boy who sold them had such charm,
I thought I'd stop and talk awhile. If I were late, t'would do no harm.
And as we talked he said, "Thank you, sir, you've really been so kind.
It's nice to talk to folks like you because, you see, I'm blind".
Oh, God, forgive me when I whine;
I have two eyes—the world is mine.

Later, walking down the street, I met a boy with eyes so blue.
But he stood and watched the others play; it seemed he knew not what to do.
I paused, and then I said, "Why don't you join the others, dear?"
But he looked straight ahead without a word, and then I knew, he couldn't hear.
Oh, God, forgive me when I whine;
I have two ears—the world is mine.

Two legs to take me where I go,
Two eyes to see the sunset's glow,
Two ears to hear all I should know,

Oh, God, forgive me when I whine;
I'm blest, indeed, the world is mine.

This isn't a serious poem in a literary sense, but it made a serious impression on a teenage sports nut. The poem filled me with a sense of gratitude even as an adolescent, such that I can still recite much of it almost fifty years later.

I have also enjoyed reading books like *Dr. Seuss* aloud to my three-year-old granddaughter. It's nothing short of fascinating to watch her sit so still and pay such close attention to the rhythms and rhymes of those nonsensical sentences. A cognitive neuroscientist like Maryanne Wolf might even say that poetry fires our brains in some special ways.¹

John McDargh of Boston College recalls a colleague who remarked that the inability or reluctance of adults to write poetry is a "learned disability." Young children never imagine that they *can't* write poetry. He recalls visiting his son's elementary school and being amazed at the power of the children's poetry. One kindergartner described his school as "friendly like a dog." A ten-year-old boy wrote this gem:

Raindrops shimmer down a dirty glass
And measle the window pain.
Raindrops fall, breaking into tiny china,
And run away like blood.

But sometime around young adulthood, observes McDargh, many of us "unlearn that capacity for wonder and ability to play with confidence in the field of the metaphor." Sadly, we "begin to self-censor and shut down that capacity." Aware of the grammar

police, we stop using an ordinary noun like "measles" as a creatively powerful verb. So, as adults, we do well to "welcome home that exiled inner poet of childhood."² And Jesus, of course, told us that to enter his kingdom we must become like little children.

Our wisest teachers have always commended poetry as a necessary complement to prose. I was reminded of this in the fall of 2018 when I watched an “Op-Doc” from the *New York Times* called “Earthrise.” This 24-minute film celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the historic voyage of the Apollo 8 crew of Frank Borman, Bill Anders, and James Lovell that blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center on December 21, 1968.

Apollo 8 is remembered for the first human beings to escape the orbit of the earth, the first three people to observe the earth from space, and for traveling 240,000 miles to within sixty miles of the moon’s surface—farther than anyone had ever traveled into space at that time. Beyond their remarkable feat of science and engineering, Apollo 8 is also remembered for another first—the first color photograph of the earth.

As they orbited the moon, they happened to see out of their small window the little blue marble of our earth rising above the lunar horizon. They quickly snapped a photo, and what later became known as “Earthrise” remains one of the most iconic images in history. Commenting on its haunting beauty and mystery, the mission Commander Frank Borman remarked, “they should have sent the poets.” In other words, scientific description alone, however empirically accurate, could never do justice to what they experienced in that passing view of our fragile earth—bright blue in the blackness of space, with patches of brown, swirling white clouds, and no boundaries or borders.

The Bible has been both a source and subject of some of the world’s greatest poetry. Entire books of the Bible are poetry, like the Psalms and Song of Solomon. Mary’s *Magnificat* remains a liturgical lodestar around the world two thousand years after it was written, and a prophetic critique of injustice made by ordinary people against the powerful. Her subversive poem has even been banned in places as diverse as India in 1805, Argentina in the 1970s, and Guatemala in the 1980s. Some of the church’s earliest creeds were liturgical poems, perhaps set to music, as in Colossians 1:15-20. How else could one express the inexpressible, and bring the words of heaven to earth, except through poetry?

Biblical texts have also inspired some of the world’s best poets. The earliest, most prolific, and most popular Christian poet was Ephrem of Syria

(306–373). The fifth century church historian Sozomen claims that Ephrem wrote “three hundred thousand verses,” and that his poetry was translated from Syriac into Greek in Ephrem’s own day.³ However exaggerated that claim, and despite having lost much of what he wrote, we still have over 400 of Ephrem’s hymns, poems, and sermons that he wrote in verse.

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Think of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, or John Donne’s sonnets like *The Annunciation* and *The Nativity*. Included in this collection of poetry, Seamus Heaney’s *Miracle* considers the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2 from the perspective of his friends who lowered him through the roof in the house. In *Coming to a City Near You* Carol Penner updates the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Marie Howe’s *Magdalene* reimagines the “seven devils” that were cast out of Mary in a very contemporary idiom.

In a poem about a painting on a Biblical text, Denise Levertov’s *The Servant-Girl at Emmaus (A Painting by Velázquez)* imagines the moment when a Moorish maid recognized the risen Christ while working in the kitchen, even though the male disciples had been blind to the identity of Jesus. We know from a note of hers that she had seen Velázquez’s painting in Ireland. Her poem is what’s called an *exphrasis* — a literary description that illuminates a visual work of art. Levertov’s poem is a meditation on Velázquez’s painting about Luke 24.

She listens, listens, holding
her breath. Surely that voice
is his - the one who had looked at her, once, across the crowd,
as no one ever had looked?
Had seen her? Had spoken as if to her?

Surely those hands were his,
taking the platter of bread from hers just now?
Hands he’d laid on the dying and made them well?

Surely that face — ?

The man they'd crucified for sedition and blasphemy.
The man whose body disappeared from its tomb.
The man it was rumored now some women had seen this morning, alive?

Those who had brought this stranger home to their table
don't recognize yet with whom they sit.
But she in the kitchen, absently touching the wine jug she's to take in,
a young Black servant intently listening,

swings round and sees
the light around him
and is sure.

Levertov's poem about the painting relives the numinous shock of an ordinary person at the moment when she realized that the rumors of resurrection were true.⁴

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One of the most remarkable features of good poetry is how it can be written in particular times, places, and perspectives that are far different from our own, and yet it nonetheless speaks to our universal human condition in deeply personal ways.

When a close friend of mine died while I was preparing this book, I found consolation in an unlikely place—the medieval Jewish poet, philosopher and physician Yehudah Halevi (c.1075–1141). Halevi was born and raised in Muslim Spain. Fluent in both Hebrew and Arabic, he is often cited as the greatest medieval Hebrew poet of his time. His poem that I've included in this volume begins with the haunting words that spoke so deeply to me upon the death of my friend: "Tis a fearful thing / to love what death can touch." I can imagine never forgetting that one line of poetry.

I have read all of the poems in this collection many dozens of times. I have sent them to many friends, sometimes the same poem to the same person more than once. In my multiple readings, these poems gain more rather than less power. After repeated readings, they still smell like fresh paint.

Some of these poems offer prophetic critique, while others give pastoral comfort. They speak to our life passages and spiritual practices (like going to church and praying). They evoke our better angels, like gratitude and joy in a world that is full of pain and sorrow.

They call us to conversion, and, indeed, include selections by adult converts to Christianity (Lewis, Levertov, Karr, Oliver). Their authors come from a broad array of religious perspectives---Jewish, Muslim, Agnostic, Catholic, Lutheran, Eastern Orthodox, Mennonite, Anglican, Dutch Reformed, United Church of Christ, Unitarian, and African American. The collection ends with a brief bibliography of poetry books, most of which I have reviewed for our webzine Journey with Jesus.

Daniel B. Clendenin
Palo Alto, California, 2020

I. Mystery and Love

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge---that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:18-19.

Primary Wonder

Denise Levertov

Days pass when I forget the mystery.
Problems insoluble and problems offering
their own ignored solutions
jostle for my attention, they crowd its antechamber
along with a host of diversions, my courtiers, wearing
their colored clothes; cap and bells.

And then

once more the quiet mystery
is present to me, the throng's clamor
recedes: the mystery
that there is anything, anything at all,
let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything,
rather than void: and that, O Lord,
Creator, Hallowed One, You still,
hour by hour sustain it.

Denise Levertov (1923–1997) was born in England to a Welsh mother and a Russian Hasidic father, who converted to Christianity and became an Anglican priest. After moving to the United States in 1948, she taught at Brandeis, MIT, Tufts, Stanford, and the University of Washington. It was at Stanford, where she taught for eleven years (1982–1993), and where her papers are now housed, that Levertov converted to Christianity at the age of sixty. Her little book *The Stream and the Sapphire* collects thirty-eight poems that trace her “slow movement from agnosticism to Christian faith.” Levertov published nearly fifty volumes of poetry, prose, and translations. See Paul A. Lacey and Anne Dewey (editors), with an Introduction by Eavan Boland, *The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov* (New York: New Directions, 2013), 1063pp.

Footnote to All Prayers

C.S. Lewis

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou,
And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme
Worshiping with frail images a folk-lore dream,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed unskillfully, beyond desert;
And all men are idolaters, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word.
Take not, O Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in thy great
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at both Oxford and Cambridge universities. His thirty books have been translated into over thirty languages. His book *Surprised By Joy* (1955) describes his Christian conversion in 1931. His best known works include *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, and *The Problem of Pain*. Like Philip Larkin (see below), in 2013, on the 50th anniversary of his death, Lewis was honored with a memorial stone in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

God's Grandeur

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Much of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) is characterized by darkness and despair, reflecting his lifelong interior struggles. After converting to Catholicism, which estranged him from his Anglican family, Hopkins burned much of his poetry, and even stopped writing for seven years. After ordination as a Jesuit priest, an assignment in Ireland left him feeling isolated and melancholy, but somewhere in his darkness, Hopkins experienced God's light. He moved beyond self-reproach to divine compassion. Since Hopkins never gave permission for their publication, his poems, edited by his friend Robert Bridges, did not appear in print until 1918. See Paul Mariani, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life* (New York: Viking, 2008), 512pp.

I Thank You God...

e.e. cummings

i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894–1962) was an American painter and poet, whose works include nearly 3,000 poems, two autobiographical novels, four plays, and numerous essays. Cummings was famous for his idiosyncratic spelling, punctuation, syntax, spacing, capitalization, and line breaks. A graduate of Harvard University, he taught at his alma mater for a few years in the 1950s. This poem was originally published in his book *XAIPE: Seventy-One Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950). For a short biography see Susan Cheever, *E.E. Cummings: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2014). Also, George Firmage, editor, *The Complete Poems: 1904-1962* by E. E. Cummings.

Gift

Czeslaw Milosz

A day so happy.
Fog lifted early. I worked in the garden.
Hummingbirds were stopping over the honeysuckle flowers.
There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess.
I knew no one worth my envying him.
Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.
To think that once I was the same man did not embarrass me.
In my body I felt no pain.
When straightening up, I saw blue sea and sails.

Czeslaw Milosz (1911–2004) was a Polish writer, translator, and diplomat. He was born and raised in what is now Lithuania. In 1951 he defected to the west, and from 1961 to 1998 was a professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Milosz won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980.

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or His own gifts. Who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

John Milton (1608–1674) was an English historian, poet, and statesman, best known for his poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), perhaps the greatest epic poem in the English language. It tells the story of Satan's rebellion and the fall of Adam and Eve. Its sequel, *Paradise Regained*, describes how one greater than Adam, Jesus, conquered Satan. Milton was born to a wealthy family, and after studies at Cambridge he returned to his father's home to write. By the year 1652, at the age of forty-four, Milton was completely blind.

Let Your God Love You

Edwina Gateley

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.

Let your God—
Love you.

Edwina Gateley was born in England. In 1979 she spent three months of prayer and discernment in a hermitage in the Sahara Desert, after which she moved to the United States. From 1981 to 1982 she lived for nine months in prayer and solitude in a hermitage in Illinois. In 1983 she spent over a year on the streets of Chicago walking with the homeless and women involved in prostitution. In 1983 Edwina founded Genesis House, a house of hospitality for women involved in prostitution. Numerous individuals, including the Mayor of Chicago, the late Joseph Bernardin, and Bill

Clinton, have publicly commended her ministry. She has also been featured on CBS's "60 Minutes" and "48 Hours." See edwinagateley.com.

Love (III)

George Herbert

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lacked anything.

“A guest,” I answered, “worthy to be here”:
 Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 “Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”
 “My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
 So I did sit and eat.

Simone Weil called *Love (III)* "the most beautiful poem in the world," and described how it was instrumental in her Christian conversion. George Herbert (1593–1633) was the public orator at Cambridge University, and hailed from an aristocratic family. At the age of thirty-six he shocked his friends when he became the rector at Bemerton, a small village near Salisbury, where he spent the rest of his short life before dying of tuberculosis. None of Herbert's poems had been published when he died, but upon his deathbed he gave them to his friend Nicholas Ferrar, asking them to be published only if they might help “any dejected poor soul.” His “little book,” as he called it, contained “a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master: in whose service I have found perfect

freedom.” See Helen Wilcox, editor, *George Herbert: 100 Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 174pp; and John Drury, *Music at Midnight; The Life and Poetry of George Herbert* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 396pp.

God's Love for Us

Juliana of Norwich

The love of God most High for our soul is so wonderful that it surpasses all knowledge. No created being can fully know the greatness, the sweetness, the tenderness, of the love that our Maker has for us. By his Grace and help therefore let us in spirit stand in awe and gaze, eternally marvelling at the supreme, surpassing, single-minded, incalculable love that God, Who is all goodness, has for us.

Juliana of Norwich (1342–1416) is best remembered for having written the first book composed by a woman in English, *A Revelation of Love*. How her manuscript ever survived is part mystery and part miracle. We know very little about her life. We're not sure if she ever married. We don't know anything about her education. Her basic message was both simple and radical. In one vision Jesus spoke to her, "Lo, how I love thee." And so, she advises us, "the greatest honor we can give almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love." See Amy Frykholm, *Julian of Norwich, A Contemplative Biography* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 147pp.

The Revival

Henry Vaughan

Unfold! Unfold! Take in His light,
Who makes thy cares more short than night.
The joys which with His day-star rise
He deals to all but drowsy eyes;
And, what the men of this world miss
Some drops and dews of future bliss.

Hark! How His winds have chang'd their note!
And with warm whispers call thee out;
The frosts are past, the storms are gone,
And backward life at last comes on.
The lofty groves in express joys
Reply unto the turtle's voice;
And here in dust and dirt, O here
The lilies of His love appear!

Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), a Welsh poet and physician, was born in Llananfraid, where he lived for most of his life and was eventually buried. Vaughan studied at Oxford, but never took a degree, and then moved to London, where he studied law for two years. He underwent a spiritual awakening that he credited to the poetry of "the blessed man, Mr. George Herbert." Vaughan was married twice and fathered eight children.

The Journey Prayer

Anonymous

God, bless to me this day,
God, bless to me this night;
Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,
Each day and hour of my life;
Bless, O bless, Thou God of grace,
Each day and hour of my life.

God, bless the pathway on which I go,
God, bless the earth that is beneath my sole;
Bless, O God, and give to me Thy love,
O God of gods, bless my rest and my repose;
Bless, O God, and give to me Thy love,
And bless, O God of gods, my repose.

The Love and Affection of the Angels

Anonymous

The love and affection of the angels be to you,
The love and affection of the saints be to you,
The love and affection of heaven be to you,
To guard you and to cherish you.

These two poems originally come from the *Carmina Gadelica III*, 179, 207. They also appear in Esther de Waal, editor, *The Celtic Vision* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1988, 2001), pages 90, 166. For sixty years the folklorist Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) traversed Scotland's Outer Hebrides isles collecting and translating the traditions of its Gaelic-Catholic people. His eventual trove contained a little of everything — ballads, prayers, proverbs, hymns, charms, incantations, runes, poems, tales and songs. His labor of love was published in six volumes across seventy years as *Carmina Gadelica* ("Hymns of the Gael"), *Hymns and Incantations, With Illustrative Notes on Words, Rites, and Customs, Dying and Obsolete: Orally Collected*

in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Carmichael published the first two volumes in 1900. His daughter Ella continued the project. Volumes 3 and 4 were published by his grandson, James Watson, in 1940–1941. Volumes 5 and 6 were published by Angus Matheson in 1954 and 1971.

II. The Stumbling Block

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this age? For we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1

Corinthians 1:20, 23.

BC:AD

U.A. Fanthorpe

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.

Ursula Askham Fanthorpe (1929-2009) graduated from Oxford University, where she studied English literature. She was a school teacher at Cheltenham Ladies' College for sixteen years, after which she worked as a receptionist and hospital clerk at a psychiatric hospital in order to devote herself to poetry. In 1994 she was the first woman ever nominated for Professor of Poetry at Oxford. She became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1988 and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2001. Fanthorpe published nine volumes of poetry during her life. The most comprehensive single volume is U.A. Fanthorpe, *New and Collected Poems* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2010), 508pp.

Credo

Daniel Berrigan

I can only tell you what I believe; I believe:
I cannot be saved by foreign policies.
I cannot be saved by the sexual revolution.
I cannot be saved by the gross national product.
I cannot be saved by nuclear deterrents.
I cannot be saved by aldermen, priests, artists,
plumbers, city planners, social engineers,
nor by the Vatican,
nor by the World Buddhist Association,
nor by Hitler, nor by Joan of Arc,
nor by angels and archangels,
nor by powers and dominions,
I can be saved only by Jesus Christ.

Daniel Berrigan (1921-2016) was a Jesuit priest, playwright, author of over fifty books, university professor, and peace activist. For a time, he and his brother Philip were on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list for their protests of the Vietnam war. Both men spent significant time in jail for their Gospel action. This credo is part of a longer poem called "A Meditation on Jesus Christ" that he contributed as a Foreword to a book by David Kirk, editor, *Quotations from Chairman Jesus* (Springfield: Templegate, 1969). For more on Berrigan, see his books *And the Risen Bread; Selected Poems, 1957-1997* (1998), 417pp; and *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (2009), 285pp; and the biography by Jim Forest, *At Play in the Lion's Den* (2017).

Advent Credo

Allan Boesak

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with

faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

From Allan Boesak, *Walking on Thorns; The Call to Christian Obedience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). This “Credo” is adapted from a prayer by Boesak that was originally published in *Gathered for Life: Official Report, VI Assembly, World Council of Churches*, edited by David Gill (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983). Boesak (born 1946) is a South African pastor and theologian in the Dutch Reformed Church, a politician, and a leading activist in his country’s anti-apartheid movement.

Miracle

Seamus Heaney

Not the one who takes up his bed and walks
But the ones who have known him all along
And carry him in —

Their shoulders numb, the ache and stoop deeplocked
In their backs, the stretcher handles
Slippery with sweat. And no let up

Until he's strapped on tight, made tiltable
and raised to the tiled roof, then lowered for healing.
Be mindful of them as they stand and wait

For the burn of the paid out ropes to cool,
Their slight lightheadedness and incredulity
To pass, those who had known him all along.

Seamus Heaney (1939–2013) won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. Born in Northern Ireland, he was the oldest of nine children. Until his teenage years Heaney lived on his small family farm. He later lived in Belfast (1957–1972), and taught at Berkeley, Harvard, and Oxford. This poem considers the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2 from the perspective of the friends. It's taken from his book *Human Chain* (2010), poems that Heaney wrote after he suffered a stroke in 2005 and that concentrate on suffering and mortality. See Seamus Heaney, *100 Poems* (London: Faber, 2018).

Magdalene—The Seven Devils Marie Howe

*"Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven devils had been cast out" —
Luke 8:2.*

The first was that I was very busy.

The second — I was different from you: whatever happened to you could not happen to me, not like that.

The third — I worried.

The fourth — envy, disguised as compassion.

The fifth was that I refused to consider the quality of life of the aphid,

The aphid disgusted me. But I couldn't stop thinking about it.

The mosquito too — its face. And the ant — its bifurcated body.

Ok the first was that I was so busy.

The second that I might make the wrong choice,
because I had decided to take that plane that day,
that flight, before noon, so as to arrive early
and, I shouldn't have wanted that.

The third was that if I walked past the certain place on the street
the house would blow up.

The fourth was that I was made of guts and blood with a thin layer
of skin lightly thrown over the whole thing.

The fifth was that the dead seemed more alive to me than the living

The sixth — if I touched my right arm I had to touch my left arm, and if I
touched the left arm a little harder than I'd first touched the right then I had
to retouch the left and then touch the right again so it would be even.

The seventh — I knew I was breathing the expelled breath of everything
that
was alive and I couldn't stand it,

I wanted a sieve, a mask, a, I hate this word — cheesecloth —<
to breathe through that would trap it — whatever was inside everyone else
that
entered me when I breathed in

No. That was the first one.

The second was that I was so busy. I had no time. How had this happened?
How had our lives gotten like this?

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The third was that I couldn't eat food if I really saw it — distinct, separate
from me in a bowl or on a plate.

Ok. The first was that I could never get to the end of the list.

The second was that the laundry was never finally done.

The third was that no one knew me, although they thought they did.
And that if people thought of me as little as I thought of them then what
was
love?

The fourth was I didn't belong to anyone. I wouldn't allow myself to belong
to anyone.

The fifth was that I knew none of us could ever know what we didn't know.

The sixth was that I projected onto others what I myself was feeling.

The seventh was the way my mother looked when she was dying—her
mouth wrenched
into an O so as to take in as much air... The sound she made — the
gurgling sound — so
loud we had to speak louder to hear each other over it.

And that I couldn't stop hearing it—years later—
grocery shopping, crossing the street —

No, not the sound — it was her body's hunger
finally evident.
—what our mother had hidden all her life.

For months I dreamt of knucklebones and roots,
the slabs of sidewalk pushed up like crooked teeth by what grew
underneath.

The underneath —that was the first devil.
It was always with me.
And that I didn't think you — if I told you — would understand any of this
—

Marie Howe (born 1950) is the author of *Magdalene* (2017), which was long-listed for the National Book Award; *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* (2009), which was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; and *The Good Thief* (1988), which was selected for the 1987 National Poetry Series. Her many honors and awards include the 2015 Academy of American Poets Fellowship, and grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Bunting Institute, and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2018, she was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She teaches at New York University, Columbia University, and Sarah Lawrence College.

Coming to a City Near You

Carol Penner

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
Jesus comes to the gate, to the synagogue,
to houses prepared for wedding parties,
to the pools where people wait to be healed,
to the temple where lambs are sold,
to gardens, beautiful in the moonlight.
He comes to the governor's palace.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you,
to new subdivisions and trailer parks,
to penthouses and basement apartments,
to the factory, the hospital and the Cineplex,
to the big box outlet centre and to churches,
with the same old same old message,
unchanged from the beginning of time.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you
with his Good News and...
Hope erupts! Joy springs forth!
The very stones cry out,
"Hosanna in the highest,
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
The crowds jostle and push,
they can't get close enough!
People running alongside flinging down their coats before him!
Jesus, the parade marshal, waving, smiling.
The paparazzi elbow for room,
looking for that perfect picture for the headline,
"The Man Who Would Be King."

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you
and gets the red carpet treatment.
Children waving real palm branches from the florist,

silk palm branches from Wal-mart,
palms made from green construction paper.
Hosannas ringing in churches, chapels, cathedrals,
in monasteries, basilicas and tent-meetings.
King Jesus, honored in a thousand hymns
in Canada, Cameroon, Calcutta and Canberra.
We LOVE this great big powerful capital K King Jesus
coming in glory and splendor and majesty
and awe and power and might.

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Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
Kingly, he takes a towel and washes feet.
With majesty, he serves bread and wine.
With honour, he prays all night.
With power, he puts on chains.
Jesus, King of all creation, appears in state
in the eyes of the prisoner, the AIDS orphan, the crack addict,
asking for one cup of cold water,
one coat shared with someone who has none,
one heart, yours,
and a second mile.
Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
Can you see him?

Carol Penner earned her PhD at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, in 1999. She served for many years as a Mennonite pastor, and currently teaches practical theology at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. See her website leadingworship.com.

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Christ Has No Body

Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) was born in Spain. She entered a Carmelite convent when she was eighteen, and across her long life earned a reputation as a mystic, reformer, and writer who experienced divine visions. She founded a convent and wrote the book *The Way of Perfection* for her nuns. Other books by her include her *Autobiography* and *The Interior Castle*. This poem is regularly attributed to Teresa, even though it doesn't appear in her writings. For a biography on this important saint, see *Teresa of Avila* (New York: Continuum, 2004) by Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford.

The Peace Prayer of Saint Francis

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in self-forgetting that we find;
And it is in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

We do not know the author of this classic prayer, and it was not until the 1920s that it was even ascribed to Saint Francis. By one account the prayer was found in 1915 in Normandy, written on the back of a card of Saint Francis. It certainly reflects his longing to be an instrument of reconciliation and redemption in our violent world. On Saint Francis, see Augustine Thompson, *Francis of Assisi; A New Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 299pp.

III. Conversion

“The time has come,” said Jesus. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15.

Holy Sonnet XIV

John Donne

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

John Donne (1572–1631) was born into a prominent Catholic family but converted to the Anglican Church at the age of twenty-two. He began three years of studies at Oxford University when he was eleven, then moved to Cambridge University for another three years. As a Catholic he refused to take the Oath of Supremacy and swear allegiance to the monarch as the head of the Anglican Church, so he never earned a degree. From 1601 to 1614 Donne was a member of Parliament. In 1615 he became an Anglican priest, and in 1621 the dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, a post he held until his death in 1631.

Disgraceland

Mary Karr

Before my first communion at 40, I clung
to doubt as Satan spider-like stalked
the orb of dark surrounding Eden
for a wormhole into paradise.

God has first formed me in the womb
small as a bite of burger.
Once my lungs were done
He sailed a soul like a lit arrow

To inflame me. Maybe that piercing
Made my howl at birth,
Or the masked creatures
Whose scalpel cut a lightning bolt to free me—

I was hoisted by the heels and swatted, fed
And hauled through rooms. Time-lapse photos show
My fingers grew past crayon outlines,
my feet came to fill spike heels.

Eventually, I lurched out to kiss the wrong mouths,
get stewed, and sulk around. Christ always stood
to one side with a glass of water.
I swatted the sap away.

When my thirst got great enough
to ask, a stream welled up inside;
some jade wave buoyed me forward;
and I found myself upright

In the instant, with a garden
inside my own ribs aflourish. There, the arbor leafs.
The vines push out plump grapes.

You are loved, someone said. Take that
and eat it.

Mary Karr (born 1955) is the Jesse Truesdell Peck Professor of English Literature at Syracuse University. She is the author of five poetry collections and three best-selling memoirs that describe growing up in East Texas with a psychotic mother. Her tale led to her "nervous breakthrough" and baptism into the Catholic church in 1996. Therapy helped, but she says that it was the gospel that started to "rewrite the story of my life in the present, and I began to feel like somebody snatched out of the fire, salvaged, saved."

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.
So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.
Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees

every thousand years.
Listen to carrion — put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy

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a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?
Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go.
Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

Wendell Berry was born in 1934 to a family that had farmed Kentucky land for five generations. After studies and travels took him to the University of Kentucky, Stanford, France, Italy, and the Bronx, in 1965 he bought a farm near his birth place. He's been tilling the earth and churning out books ever since then. Over fifty volumes of poetry, novels, essays, and short stories have earned him numerous awards. This poem comes from Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), which collects 266

poems that were previously published in eleven different books from 1964 to 2010, including all eleven of his *Mad Farmer* poems.

Marked by Ashes

Walter Brueggemann

Ruler of the Night, Guarantor of the day...

This day — a gift from you.

This day — like none other you have ever given, or we have ever received.

This Wednesday dazzles us with gift and newness and possibility.

This Wednesday burdens us with the tasks of the day, for we are already
halfway home

halfway back to committees and memos,
halfway back to calls and appointments,
halfway on to next Sunday,
halfway back, half frazzled, half expectant,
half turned toward you, half rather not.

This Wednesday is a long way from Ash Wednesday,

but all our Wednesdays are marked by ashes —

we begin this day with that taste of ash in our mouth:

of failed hope and broken promises,

of forgotten children and frightened women,

we ourselves are ashes to ashes, dust to dust;

we can taste our mortality as we roll the ash around on our tongues.

We are able to ponder our ashness with

some confidence, only because our every Wednesday of ashes
anticipates your Easter victory over that dry, flaky taste of death.

On this Wednesday, we submit our ashen way to you —
you Easter parade of newness.

Before the sun sets, take our Wednesday and Easter us,

Easter us to joy and energy and courage and freedom;

Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth.

Come here and Easter our Wednesday with

mercy and justice and peace and generosity.

We pray as we wait for the Risen One who comes soon.

Walter Brueggemann (b. 1933), an Old Testament scholar and ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, has combined the best of critical scholarship with love for the local church in service to the kingdom of God. Now a professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, Brueggemann has authored over seventy books. This prayer for Ash Wednesday is taken from his book *Prayers for a Privileged People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), pp. 27-28.

The Layers

Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned campsites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.

Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,

when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."
Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations

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is already written.
I am not done with my changes.

The American poet Stanley Kunitz (1905-2006), whose many honors included a National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize, says that he wrote *The Layers* "in my late seventies to conclude a collection of sixty years of my poetry... Through the years I had endured the loss of several of my dearest friends, including Theodore Roethke, Mark Rothko, and —

most recently — Robert Lowell. I felt I was near the end of a phase in my life and in my work. The poem began with two lines that came to me in a dream, spoken out of a dark cloud: 'Live in the layers, / not on the litter.'"

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The Journey

Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting their bad advice —
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.

"Mend my life!"

each voice cried.

But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do

the only thing you could do —
determined to save
the only life you could save.

From Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (1994). With over thirty books to her credit, *The New York Times* described Mary Oliver (1935-2019) as "far and away, America's best-selling poet." Her numerous awards include the National Book Award (1992) and the Pulitzer Prize (1984). See Mary Oliver, *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 455pp.

Now I Become Myself

May Sarton

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
“Hurry, you will be dead before—“
(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)
Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!
The black shadow on the paper
Is my hand; the shadow of a word
As thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent,
Falls but does not exhaust the root,
So all the poem is, can give,
Grows in me to become the song,
Made so and rooted so by love.
Now there is time and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I love
All of myself and do not move.
I, the pursued, who madly ran,
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

Eleanor Marie Sarton (1912-1995) was born in Belgium but moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1916 when her father took a part-time position at Harvard. After high school she studied theater and acting in New York City. Her novel *Mrs. Steven Hears the Mermaids Singing* (1965) announced her gay identity, although she resisted the label of a gay writer because she thought that it narrowed the broader focus of her work. In the 1980s Sarton's poetry readings attracted standing room only crowds, although her early critical acclaim was later eclipsed by sometimes harsh reviews. By the time she died in 1995 she had published 53 books—19 novels, 17 collections of poetry, 15 works of non-fiction, and 2 children's books.

The Way It Is

William Stafford

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

William Stafford (1914–1993) was a poet and pacifist. In 1970 he was appointed Poet Laureate of the United States. He kept a daily journal for 50 years, and composed nearly 22,000 poems, of which some 3,000 were published. Stafford died of a heart attack in Lake Oswego, Oregon, on August 28, 1993, having written a poem that morning containing the lines, "'You don't have to / prove anything,' my mother said. 'Just be ready / for what God sends.'"

Antilamentation

Dorianne Laux

Regret nothing. Not the cruel novels you read
to the end just to find out who killed the cook.
Not the insipid movies that made you cry in the dark,
in spite of your intelligence, your sophistication.
Not the lover you left quivering in a hotel parking lot,
the one you beat to the punchline, the door, or the one
who left you in your red dress and shoes, the ones
that crimped your toes, don't regret those.
Not the nights you called god names and cursed
your mother, sunk like a dog in the livingroom couch,
chewing your nails and crushed by loneliness.
You were meant to inhale those smoky nights
over a bottle of flat beer, to sweep stuck onion rings
across the dirty restaurant floor, to wear the frayed
coat with its loose buttons, its pockets full of struck matches.
You've walked those streets a thousand times and still
you end up here. Regret none of it, not one
of the wasted days you wanted to know nothing,
when the lights from the carnival rides
were the only stars you believed in, loving them
for their uselessness, not wanting to be saved.
You've traveled this far on the back of every mistake,
ridden in dark-eyed and morose but calm as a house
after the TV set has been pitched out the upstairs
window. Harmless as a broken ax. Emptied
of expectation. Relax. Don't bother remembering
any of it. Let's stop here, under the lit sign
on the corner, and watch all the people walk by.

Dorianne Laux (born 1952) has published five collections of poetry. She teaches poetry in the Program in Creative Writing at North Carolina State University and is a founding faculty member of Pacific University's Low Residency MFA Program.

The Place Where We Are Right

Yehuda Amichai

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

Yehuda Amichai (1924 –2000) was Israel’s greatest modern poet. Beginning with his first book of poetry in 1955, across his long career he won dozens of prizes, honors, and awards. His poetry has been translated into forty languages. Born in Germany, Amichai moved to Israel in 1935. He also spent time at Yale (where his archives reside), Berkeley, and New York University as a visiting scholar. For the largest English language collection of Amichai’s poetry, see Robert Alter, editor, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 576pp.

IV. Practicing Resurrection

Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2.

O Comforting Fire of Spirit

Hildegard of Bingen

O comforting fire of Spirit,
Life, within the very Life of all Creation.
Holy you are in giving life to All.

Holy you are in anointing
those who are not whole;
Holy you are in cleansing
a festering wound.

O sacred breath,
O fire of love,
O sweetest taste in my breast
which fills my heart
with a fine aroma of virtues.

O most pure fountain
through whom it is known
that God has united strangers
and inquired after the lost.

O breastplate of life
and hope of uniting
all members as One,
O sword-belt of honor,
enfold those who offer blessing.

Care for those
who are imprisoned by the enemy
and dissolve the bonds of those
whom Divinity wishes to save.

O mightiest path which penetrates All,
from the height to every Earthly abyss,

you compose All, you unite All.

Through you clouds stream, ether flies,
stones gain moisture,
waters become streams,
and the earth exudes Life.

You always draw out knowledge,
bringing joy through Wisdom's inspiration.

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Therefore, praise be to you
who are the sound of praise
and the greatest prize of Life,
who are hope and richest honor <
bequeathing the reward of Light.

In an age when life expectancy was around forty, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) lived a remarkably long and productive life. Carmen Butcher describes her as an "Über-multitasking *Frau*" and "polymath." The Benedictine abbess founded two convents, conducted four preaching tours, penned at least 400 letters, wrote music and a morality play, supervised illuminated manuscripts, cared for her fellow sisters, and wrote three major theological tomes based upon her famous visions. All this despite her pronounced feelings of self-doubt, the lack of formal schooling, chronic illnesses, and the subservient roles assigned to women by a male-dominated church and culture. See Carmen Butcher, *Hildegard of Bingen; A Spiritual Reader* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2007).

49

Church Going

Philip Larkin

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new -
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches will fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some

Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who

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Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation—marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these—for which was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,

Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

In a 2003 poll conducted by the Poetry Book Society and the Poetry Library, the British poet Philip Larkin (1922-1985) was voted Britain's favorite poet of the last fifty years. On December 2, 2016, the thirty-first anniversary of his death, he was memorialized with a floor stone in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, taking his place among the likes of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Handel, Dickens, and many others. In 1984 he was elected to the Board of the British Library. He declined to succeed Sir John Betjeman as Poet Laureate, being unwilling to accept the media attention associated with the position.

Churchgoing

Marilyn Nelson

The Lutherans sit stolidly in rows;
only their children feel the holy ghost
that makes them jerk and bobble and almost
destroys the pious atmosphere for those
whose reverence bows their backs as if in work.
The congregation sits, or stands to sing,
or chants the dusty creeds automaton.
Their voices drone like engines, on and on,
and they remain untouched by everything;
confession, praise, or likewise, giving thanks.
The organ that they saved years to afford
repeats the Sunday rhythms song by song,
slow lips recite the credo, smother yawns,
and ask forgiveness for being so bored.

I, too, am wavering on the edge of sleep,
and ask myself again why I have come
to probe the ruins of this dying cult.
I come bearing the cancer of my doubt
as superstitious suffering women come
to touch the magic hem of a saint's robe.

Yet this has served two centuries of men
as more than superstitious cant; they died
believing simply. Women, satisfied
that this was truth, were racked and burned with them
for empty words we moderns merely chant.

We sing a spiritual as the last song,
and we are moved by a peculiar grace
that settles a new aura on the place.
This simple melody, though sung all wrong,
captures exactly what I think is faith.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
That slaves should suffer in his agony!
That Christian, slave-owning hypocrisy
nevertheless was by these slaves ignored
as they pitied the poor body of Christ!
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble,
that they believe most, who so much have lost.
To be a Christian one must bear a cross.

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I think belief is given to the simple
as recompense for what they do not know.

I sit alone, tormented in my heart
by fighting angels, one group black, one white.
The victory is uncertain, but tonight
I'll lie awake again, and try to start
finding the black way back to what we've lost.

The African-American poet and translator Marilyn Nelson (born 1946) earned her B.A. from the University of California, Davis, an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. The recipient of numerous awards, since 1978 she has taught at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, where she is a professor emeritus of English. From 2001 to 2006 Nelson was the Poet Laureate of the State of Connecticut. This poem comes from her book *For the Body* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

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If Prayer Would Do It

Stephen Levine

If prayer would do it
I'd pray.

If reading esteemed thinkers would do it
I'd be halfway through the Patriarchs.

If discourse would do it
I'd be sitting with His Holiness
every moment he was free.

If contemplation would do it
I'd have translated the Periodic Table
to hermit poems, converting
matter to spirit.

If even fighting would do it
I'd already be a black belt.

If anything other than love could do it
I'd have done it already
and left the hardest for last.

Stephen Levine (1937–2016) was an American poet and author. He was born in Albany, New York, attended the University of Miami, and eventually moved to San Francisco, where he worked with Elisabeth Kubler Ross with the sick and dying in a program that used meditation as a form of treatment. He is best known for his work on grief. He is also one of a generation of pioneering teachers who, along with Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg, made the teachings of Theravada Buddhism more widely available to students in the West.

First They Came

Martin Niemoeller

First they came for the Communists,
- but I was not a communist so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists,
- but I was neither, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Jews,
- but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out.
And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me.

This poem is ascribed to the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemoeller (1892–1984), who protested Hitler's anti-Semitic measures in person to the fuhrer, was arrested, and then imprisoned for eight years at Sachsenhausen and Dachau (1937–1945). The poem describes the passivity of German intellectuals as the Nazis purged group after group of targeted people. The poem comes in many slightly different versions, and its exact origin is the subject of debate. The single best biography of Niemoeller is by Matthew Hockenos, *Then They Came for Me: Martin Niemoeller, The Pastor Who Defied the Nazis* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 322pp.

A Brief for the Defense

Jack Gilbert (1925–2012)

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies
are not starving someplace, they are starving
somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils.
But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants.
Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would not
be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not
be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women
at the fountain are laughing together between
the suffering they have known and the awfulness
in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody
in the village is very sick. There is laughter
every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta,
and the women laugh in the cages of Bombay.
If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction,
we lessen the importance of their deprivation.
We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless
furnace of this world. To make injustice the only
measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.
If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down,
we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.
We must admit there will be music despite everything.
We stand at the prow again of a small ship
anchored late at night in the tiny port
looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront
is three shuttered cafés and one naked light burning.
To hear the faint sound of oars in the silence as a rowboat
comes slowly out and then goes back is truly worth
all the years of sorrow that are to come.

Jack Gilbert (1925-2012) grew up in Pittsburgh, and earned a master's degree from San Francisco State University in 1963. His first book, *Views*

of Jeopardy (Yale University Press, 1962), won the Yale Younger Poets Series prize and was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. In 1964 he won a Guggenheim Fellowship and moved to Europe, touring fifteen countries and lecturing for the US State Department. It was twenty years until his next book, *Monolithos* (1984), which won the Stanley Kunitz Prize and the American Poetry Review Prize. “A Brief for the Defense” comes from Jack Gilbert, *Refusing Heaven* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

'Tis a Fearful Thing

Jehudah Halevi

Tis a fearful thing
to love what death can touch.

A fearful thing
to love, to hope, to dream, to be –

to be,
And oh, to lose.

A thing for fools, this,

And a holy thing, a holy thing
to love.

For your life has lived in me,
your laugh once lifted me,
your word was gift to me.

To remember this brings painful joy.

'Tis a human thing, love,
a holy thing, to love
what death has touched.

The Jewish poet, philosopher and physician Yehudah Halevi (c.1075–1141) was born and raised in Muslim Spain. Fluent in both Hebrew and Arabic, he is often cited as the greatest medieval Hebrew poet of his time. We know virtually nothing about Halevi's life, except that he died soon after moving to Israel in the spring of 1141.

Otherwise

Jane Kenyon

I got out of bed
on two strong legs.
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.

At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

Jane Kenyon (1947-1995) was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan. During her life she published four books of poetry— *Constance* (1993), *Let Evening Come* (1990), *The Boat of Quiet Hours* (1986), and *From Room to Room* (1978)—and a book of translation, *Twenty Poems of Anna Akhmatova* (1985). In December 1993 she and her husband, the poet Donald Hall, were

the subject of an Emmy Award-winning Bill Moyers documentary, "A Life Together." At the time of her death from leukemia, in April 1995, Kenyon was New Hampshire's poet laureate. A fifth collection of Kenyon's poetry, *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems*, was published in 1996.

Prayer

Christian Wiman

For all
the pain

passed down
the genes

or latent
in the very grain

of being;
for the lordless

mornings,
the smear

of spirit
words intuit

and inter;
for all

the nightfall
neverness

inking
into me

even now,
my prayer

is that a mind
blurred

by anxiety
or despair

might find
here

a trace
of peace.

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Christian Wiman (born 1966) was the editor of *Poetry*, the oldest American magazine of verse, from 2003 until 2013. He is currently Professor of the Practice of Religion and Literature at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. This poem comes from *Once in the West: Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), one of his four books of poetry.

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Benediction

Nicholas Samaras

For what we are given.
For being mindful of what we are given.

For those who grieve and those who celebrate. <
For those who remain grateful in the face of everything.

For the assembly of words that links us together.
For individual speech that becomes speech shared.

For the transformations a written page may effect in us.
For those who pay attention.

For the teachers who gave us the chrysalis of language.
For the comrades of the heart who left us signposts.

For the parent who gave us the one ethic of discipline.
For ourselves who may take discipline to heart, and not resent it.

For the second chance that is the writing down.
For those who know that half of poetry is silence.

For the language of breath, and the breath that is prayer.
For those who wake to light, and know the depths of sacrament.

For this common meal, and us who bow our heads and partake.
For those who remember that "so be it" is also written

Amen.

Nicholas Samaras (born 1954) is a poet and essayist. He earned an MFA from Columbia University, and a PhD from the University of Denver. Samaras is the son of the Greek Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Samaras. Born in England, he later lived in Greece and Massachusetts. His first book of poetry, *Hands of the Saddlemaker*, won the Yale Series of Younger Poets

Award. This poem is taken from Jay Hopler and Kimberly Johnson, editors, *Before the Door of God; An Anthology of Devotional Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 425pp.

A Future Not Our Own

Ken Utener

In memory of Oscar Romero (1917–1980)

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession
brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one
day will grow. We water the seeds already planted
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of
liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's
grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the
difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, was assassinated on March 24, 1980, while celebrating Mass in a small chapel in a cancer hospital where he lived. This prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener (1937-2004), drafted for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden in 1979 for a celebration of departed priests. As a reflection on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Romero, Bishop Untener included it in a reflection titled "The Mystery of the Romero Prayer." The mystery is that the words of the prayer are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ See Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (2007), and *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (2018).

² John McDargh, “Imagining the Real: The Art of Poetry and the Art of Pastoral Attending,” *Pastoral Psychology* (March 15, 2011) 60:451.

³ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III.16.

⁴ David Curzon’s book collects over 150 modern poems that are based on the four gospels: *The Gospels in Our Image; An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Poetry Based on Biblical Texts* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995). The book is a companion volume to Curzon's earlier work *Modern Poems on the Bible: An Anthology* (1993) that collects 170 poems based upon the Hebrew Bible. See too Robert Atwan and Laurance Wieder, editors, *Chapters into Verse: Poetry in English Inspired by the Bible*, 2 Volumes (New York: Oxford, 1993).