

80. *The Cosmic Christ*

A Meditation on Velázquez's *Christ after the Flagellation*  
 contemplated by the Christian Soul

WHO is this Christ? You, scourged, now look at me  
 and send a thill of light to guide my prayer  
 while You are twined and I think I am free,  
 attired in spotless white though You are bare?  
 An angel points the truth and guards the space,  
 an inner sweep where meaning's torque is tried,  
 and agony is mitered with spare grace;  
 the present, like a paradox, is tied.  
 The world entire is Christ, distressed, alone,  
 a way of painting all we see and know,  
 the damned, the saved enjoined with laugh and moan,  
 a metaphor chamfering loved and foe.  
 So I'll be hurt to heal, be bound to free,  
 change ache to kiss and wrench eternity.

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With the blood-stained whips of the Flagellation on the floor near Christ as he awkwardly sits on the floor, his wrists are pulled by ropes tied to a column. A ray from his head points to a kneeling child portraying the Christian Soul at whom he gazes. A Guardian Angel bids the child to regard the Savior's suffering. Now in the National Gallery in London, the painting was completed before 1630. **Thill, torque, miter, chamfer, wrench** are words from mechanical or carpentry contexts. A **thill** is one of the pair of shafts on either side of a draft animal pulling a cart. **Torque** is that which enables rotational force. A **miter** is an oblique cut in wood to join against another surface similarly cut; it is also the ancient Jewish headdress of the high priest and the hat of a Christian bishop. To **chamfer** is to cut at an angle, usually 45 degrees. To **wrench** is to twist forcibly or wrest something. **Who . . . ?**: The sonnet proposes an answer to this question → notes for «Postmodern Faith + No, Maybe I'm Rumi **drunk**». Our culture often seems fixed on fantasy. Folks enjoy and are moved by cartoons and fantasy films. Many buy costumes for comic book conventions. People adopt fantasy dress and "get into" their mythic characters. Why are "non-religious" folks, moved by, even comfortable enacting scenes from, *Batman*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and such, scoff at the stories of Christianity and other faiths, when many religious figures are excellent exemplars of how to live? Shelley can apostrophize "O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being," a therapist can place a client's long dead-and-buried father on a chair and ask the client to talk to talk about their relationship, a lover in orgasm can exclaim *O God!*, but if, for example, a Christian calls on Jesus, the creative power of imagination to approach Ultimate Reality is regarded as mere superstition. Can we each be, as suggested by James Joyce's 1916 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ch5, a "priest of the eternal imagination, transmuted the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life"? Has the Enlightenment divorced imagination from faith? ▲ This sonnet is ekphrastic.