

CONFITEOR

88. *Love Locket*

Omnia vincit amor; et nos cedamus amori.

Idem homo et saluatur ex parte et condemnatur ex parte

THIS loud and too large love I have for you
I now reduce to this small, silent space,
and set it in a locket, safe from view,
and wear it to confine you to a place.
You overran my life and skinned my soul;
my strong physique became a bag of woe;
your gravity made me a damn black hole;
you made my moil a comic video.

When rapture judges with the trumpet's blare,
and when Maitreya stirs within my breast,
when Emperors will bow to South, aware,
or when Messiah comes and gives us rest,
this locket forged on anvil from pure ire
will melt from love within, and God's desire.

The EPIGRAPH, "Love conquers all; and we must surrender to love," is from Book X of the Eclogues by Virgil (70 BCE-19 BCE). The second is from *Commentary on Psalm 118*, 20, 58 by Ambrose of Milan (340?-397); the same person is at the same time both saved and condemned. A **black hole** is often described as a space-time region so dense that gravity prevents anything, including light, from escaping, although recent theories suggest that information can be recovered. **Moil**: drudgery, trouble. Some fundamentalist Christian eschatology posits a **rapture** in which when the "dead in Christ" and those "who are alive and remain" are "caught up in the clouds" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) to be eternally united with Christ in his kingdom. In ancient Confucian thought, society would be set right by imitating the reverence of the **emperor** honoring the gods by bowing to the South where they reside. In some Buddhist eschatology, the bodhisattva **Maitreya** is regarded as the future Buddha. At the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO, is a nearly life-size Maitreya Gandharan phyllite sculpture (3d Century). In some Jewish eschatology, a **Messiah** will establish the rule of Israel to bring peace to the world. **Judges**: Judgment Day → «Postmodern Faith» is the time when the soul's deeds are measured for reward or punishment in some religions, including Judaism (Rosh Hashanah yearly, or at the end of time), Christianity (the Last Judgment), and Islam (the Day of Reckoning). The third quatrain can be compared and contrasted with Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 which concludes, "So, till the judgment that yourself arise, / you live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes." **Desire**: →Collect for Purity, p49. "It is I who teach you to desire. It is I who am the reward of all true desiring. All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." —Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), *Revelations of Divine Love*, 14th.

A LENTEN SERIES

Potluck at 6 pm, program 6:30-7:30 pm.
The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd
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WHEN EVEN EVIL WILL ORDAIN THE GOOD

Using themes from world religions to illumine our own tradition, the Reverend Vern Barnet, DMn, explores the powerful mysteries of the crucified and resurrected love of our Savior through the texts of sonnets from the "Credo" and "Confiteor" sections of his book, *Thanks for Noticing: The Interpretation of Desire*.

Vern wrote the Wednesday "Faith and Beliefs" column 1994-2012 for *The Kansas City Star* and wrote for the diocesan magazine, *Spirit*, 2015-2017. With three others, he edited the 740-page reference book, *The Essential Guide to Religious Traditions and Spirituality for Health Care Providers*. In 1989 he founded the Kansas City Interfaith Council. He has taught at area colleges, universities, and seminaries, most recently with the invitation to create a new course, "Ministry in a Pluralistic World," for Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is a happy layman with membership at St Paul's Episcopal Church Kansas City. Biographical information can be found at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vern_Barnet and cres.org/vern.



Mar 2 - The Jesus of History
or the Christ of Faith?

Mar 9 - A Paradox of Salvation
in a Velázquez painting

Mar 16 - The Gospel Theater:
A Postmodern view

Mar 23 - The Mystic Vision:
Do things fit together?

Complimentary copies of the book's second printing are given to class members at the last session, March 26, if the printing is on schedule. To learn more, visit VernBarnet.com.

CREDO

82. *Easter Morning*

καὶ ταχὺ πορευθεῖσαι εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι Ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἰδοὺ προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε: ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν... καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν.

I — CALLED atheist by those who love hate
 (although they claim that they alone are heirs
 to Resurrection, say I desecrate
 their own faith when I make embracing prayers) —
 see Easter glory! I'm a witness! Watch
 the promise raveling in spring's wet ground!
 in wind! in sun's bright sky! and juice's crotch!
 These tales eternal, soil and soul, astound!
 Disciples scattered, some afraid to show,
 now gathered, warmed from mourning, love from woe,
 the power of sin and death itself reversed,
 redeeming history's night of its worst.
 Through time a wonder, God or not, has stood
 when even evil will ordain the good.

The EPIGRAPHS are from Matthew 28:7 and 17: "He has been raised from the dead and is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him. . . . When they saw him, they fell prostrate before him. . . ." **Atheist**, like **God**, is a multivalent term. Here it means the denial of a Supreme Being. For many mystics **God** can mean simply Reality, as suggested by the Sanskrit term *sat* (truth, reality), the Arabic *al-Haqq* (the Muslim mystic Hallaj was killed for blasphemy when he applied the term to himself, perhaps experiencing a realization of the interconnectedness which constitutes the ultimate, unsayable Truth), the Hebrew *Yahweh* (*I am that I am* or *I will be what I will be*, understood by some to be a personification of all that was, is, and will be), the *Infinite* of Cusanus (1401-1464), akin to the *Interbeing* of Thich Nhat Hanh and the *Dharmakaya* (truth-body, reality) of other Buddhists out of which the Buddha appears, and even the *Ground of Being* of Paul Tillich. Such views are much closer to Process theology (Whitehead, Hartshorne, even Teilhard) than God as a Super-Douper Entity. **Easter** morning accounts in the four Gospels vary. Easter is the spring Christian celebration of the risen Christ after his crucifixion and death → «Intimate Commitment». John Shelby Spong writes that Matthew (and Paul) view the resurrection as "an act of lifting Jesus from death into the meaning of the living God, not as an act of resuscitating Jesus" in his 2002 *A New Christianity for a New World*, p103. The word Easter appears to derive from Old English *eastre* and related to east and the German pagan goddess Ostern; estrus from the Latin *oestrus* may be a similar formation. In the third quatrain, the usual rime pattern is replaced by couplets.

Tales: "My point . . . is not that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically, but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally." —John Dominic Crossan and Richard G Watts, *Who Is Jesus?*, 1996, p79. My 3d quatrain enables three couplets.

CREDO

86. *Interbeing*

Any universe simple enough to be understood is too simple to produce a mind capable of understanding it.

The world is one, namely many.

A LION and a butterfly are one
 when Paradox will pounce and fly in song
 as with love's pleasant arrow we are stung
 and what is right is showing what is wrong.
 We cannot see the sun except through screen
 or else our eyes will blister, burn, and blind;
 the film or veil is what reveals the scene
 as circumstance displays what's in the mind.
 The world's components make no sense, nor fit;
 injustice and dire lack too often rule.
 Yet from this mess the fire to serve is lit,
 the sacred singular discerned from dual.
 When vision clears, each nod and node reveals
 how in each jot the universe congeals.

The title comes from Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-). Hua-yen Buddhism embraces **paradox** to convey a vision of integrated, interpenetrating, interdependent totality, from which Zen arises. Nagarjuna (150?–250?) taught that "things derive their being and nature by mutual dependence and are nothing in themselves." This perspective is admirably illumined in Douglas Hofstadter, 1979 *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Gödel's incompleteness theorems are mathematical parallels to the **paradox** of the EPIGRAPH from John D Barrow, 1990 *The World Within the World*. In his *Confessions*, Jakob Boehme (1575-1624) presents a spiritual parallel to the paradox of interbeing: "And finding that in all things there was evil and good, as well in the elements as in the creatures, and that it went as well in this world with the wicked as with the virtuous, honest and godly; also that the barbarous people had the best countries in their possession, and that they had more prosperity in their ways than the virtuous, honest and godly had; I was thereupon very melancholy, perplexed and exceedingly troubled Yet when in this affliction and trouble I elevated my spirit . . . , as with a great storm or onset, wrapping up my whole heart and mind . . . whereby I might understand his will and be rid of my sadness. And then the Spirit did break through." Perhaps above all Muslim mystics, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) taught a subtle version of *wahdat al-wujūd*, unity of being or perhaps the ground of being out of which all things are manifest. An analogy might be that the hand and the nose are distinct features of a united body, but the hand is not the nose; the **E2**: from Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945) and almost sounds like William James (1842-1910). **Veil**: → «Just Try To Kiss Me». This sonnet is paired with the preceding one. To make a 4-verse hymn text (use the tune *Sursum Corda*, 10.10.10.10.), add these two lines: Injustice makes the Cross routinely real; all rent, its hidden beauty bursts to heal.

84. *Postmodern Faith: What is Truth?*

MY God, is this a dagger that I see?
 Am I observing actors in a play?
 Is this a dream or film of tragedy?
 or just computer games where I'm to slay
 with it? Perhaps I'm high on LSD
 or wearing VR glasses that display
 an archetype if not a snickernee.
 Is this *getik*, *menok*, or Judgment Day?
 Oh no, no dagger but Christ's cross, that tree
 which bares illusions in one Truth, one *Yea!*
 It tears and it repairs reality
 and wakes us to attend and watch and pray.
 I know the Gospel is a pious tale,
 but who grabs facts when worship cannot fail?

Pilate put the title question to Jesus; John 18:38. Perhaps anticipated by the ancient Jain teaching of *anekantavada*, the doctrine of multiple viewpoints, Jean-François Lyotard described *Postmodernism* as “incredulity toward meta-narratives” such as theological systems or myths regarded as literal reality. But in the 1957 *Opus Posthumous: Poems, Plays, Prose*, p 163, Wallace Stevens wrote of incredulity, “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction, and that you believe it willingly.” Or in a Pragmatic vein, W H Auden wrote, “It is as meaningless to ask whether one believes or disbelieves in Aphrodite or Ares as to ask whether one believes in a character in a novel; one can only say that one finds them true or untrue to life. To believe in Aphrodite and Ares merely means that one believes that the poetic myths about them do justice to the forces of sex and aggression as human beings experience them in nature and in their own lives.” Indeed, the client following a therapist’s suggestion to “place your deceased father in this chair and tell him how you feel” may be in practice little different from the person who prays. Religion is more about commitment than certainty. Perhaps Vico (1710) anticipated Postmodernism with his *Verum factum* principle which holds that truth is not observed but constructed. The first line derives from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, 2, 1, “Is this a dagger which I see before me?” An exquisite example of the problem of distinguishing *dream* from reality is portrayed in the *Illustration to the Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff* by Qiao Zhongchang (Northern Song Dynasty, 960-1127) at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO. *LSD* is a psychedelic or entheogenic drug. *VR* is an abbreviation for Virtual Reality. *Getik* (the ordinary world) and *menok* (a heavenly realm, perhaps akin to Plato’s realm of ideals or forms, or similar to some understandings of archetypes as in the New Testament’s Hebrews.) are key terms from pre-Islamic Iranian thought reinterpreted for the epistemology of Suhrawardi (1155-1191), “Sheikh al-Ishraq,” the Master of Illumination. *Judgment Day* → «Love Locket». The Christian *Gospel* includes the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, a figure paralleled in other religious traditions. A *snickersnee* is a large knife that can be used for fighting. *Tree*: → «Barren Golgotha». *Facts*: “We are poor passing facts” — Robert Lowell in “Epilogue,” *Day by Day*, 1977. This sonnet uses only three end-rimes.

79. *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*

οἱ δὲ ἠγνόουν τὸ ῥῆμα
 At illi ignorabant verbum

He comes to us as One unknown

. . . gleaming in the Unseen. I gazed at it continually,
 until the time came when I had wholly become that light.

THE chapel light is one bare candle, walled,
 and darkness sponges any warmth in sight
 except a sheen that from the void is hauled
 into my heart and makes all shadows right.
 Hangs Christ beyond the Eucharistic rail,
 but all I see is icon gold ablaze,
 the flame is amplified like rain in hail,
 or when eternity is found in days.
 Not Jesus; only shimmer can I see.
 The painting pigment hides who I would serve,
 as Peter, John, and others knew no Tree
 until His love and theirs would them preserve.
 Now brighter than the sheen I join the shine:
 the shadow, mask, and veil of the divine.

The first EPIGRAPH, in Greek and Latin, is from Mark 9:32: But they did not understand what he said. **E2:** Albert Schweitzer, 1906 *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, 1910/11 *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, tr W. Montgomery, p401. Schweitzer concludes, “He comes to us as One unknown He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: ‘Follow thou me!’ and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.” Marcus Borg distinguishes the pre-Easter from the Post-Easter Jesus. **E3:** Abu’l-Hosain al-Nuri, quoted in Huston Smith’s 2001 *Why Religion Matters*, p266. *Sheen, alaze, shimmer, shine*: “Before Jesus leads His disciples into suffering, humiliation, disgrace, and disdain, He summons them and shows Himself to them as the Lord in God’s glory.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Back to the Cross” in *Meditations on the Cross*, ed Manfred Weber, tr Douglas W Stott, 1998, p3; see Matt 17:1-9. The *void* is a Buddhist term for undifferentiated reality, which, when perceived fully, generates compassion; *nothing* → «Seasoning». *Tree*: → «Barren Golgotha». *Veil*: → «Just Try To Kiss Me». *Shadow*: “Flare up like a flame and make big shadows I can move in.” —Rilke (Barrows-Macy), *Book of Hours*, p88. Former KC Star art director Tom Dolphens “wrote” the icon.

CREDO

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.

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 inspiring this ekphrastic sonnet 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, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life"? Has the Enlightenment divorced imagination from faith?

CREDO

85. *Theodicy 9/11*

Liberal religion is symbolizing a totality of facts under the term God which orthodoxy, with a truer moral instinct, could comprehend under no less than two terms, God and the devil.

Why is it like this if there is supposed to be a God?

○ JOB! How terrified of "God" am I!
You had the guts to plead your righteous case
though all God did was whirlwind-speak, thereby
blinding logic, showing power takes its place.
Are the gorgeous summer days and whirling cage
we call "tornado" from one untouched Source?
By failing to restrain the World Trade rage,
is God a terrorist of untold force?
Injustice has its sway, disparity
rules those whom we should respect, cruelty seethes
while we're asleep. O Singularity!
are you fixed or in process, one who breathes?
Teach how, with even every faith blasphemed,
the terror of this tale can be redeemed.

The first EPIGRAPH is from Reinhold Niebuhr, 1926 April 22 *Christian Century*. **E2**: from Denis Johnson, New York, 2002 June 17. **Theodicy** is the theological study of the problem of evil in a world created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God. One example of evil is the **World Trade Center** and other terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, now referred to as **9/11**. **Job** is the main character in the eponymous biblical book which deals with undeserved suffering. In his play, *J.B.*, Archibald MacLeish puts the problem this way: "If God is God he is not good. If God is good, he is not God." In the Biblical story, God responds to the desire to understand, to see justice, by speaking out of a **whirlwind**, an effective rhetorical device which fails to address Job's complaint. An excellent, short exploration of theodicy is Al Treadwell, 1997 *If God is God, Then Why?: Letters from Oklahoma City*; the Christian author in this slim book rejects all explanations but does offer a response to the problem. The **Singularity** is the Big Bang which began universe. **Untouched** is a reference to Aristotle's description of God as the unmoved mover, an idea important to later theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. **God**: "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth."—Gandhi: 4th paragraph in "Farewell," *An Autobiography*, 1927-1929/1940. **Untold** has a double meaning: not to relate and not to enumerate (as in the teller at the bank). This sonnet is paired with the next. **Disparity**: "So distribution should undo excess, and each man have enough." King Lear, 4.1.80-81. **Breath**: →«Poetic Failure».