

## Christian Verse and Prose – a Selection

### **Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)** **Love Came Down at Christmas** *(from Ovid)*

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love Divine,  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and Angels gave the sign.  
Worship we the Godhead,  
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,  
Worship we our Jesus,  
But wherewith for sacred sign?  
Love shall be our token,  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.

### **In the Bleak Midwinter – a carol by** **Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)** *(from Mark)*

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.  
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim, worship night and day,  
Breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom angels fall before,  
The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;  
But His mother only, in her maiden bliss,  
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

## **These from Fr Emmanuel:**

Let me mention the book: **“Going on Faith: Writing as a Spiritual Quest”**  
**edited by William Zinsser.**

In the Introduction, he writes: *“I always write to affirm . . . my pleasure us to bear witness to [holy] lives....[This involves] a pilgrimage [that] has often put me in the presence of a sacramental moment. Angels have caught me unawares in many parts of the world.”*

One of the contributors in Jaroslav Pelikan, the Orthodox historian and theologian, whose chapter is called, “Writing as a Means of Grace.” He writes: “A spiritual quest means precisely that: . . .starting where we are with what we have and with what we have found, to [search] for it again. In St Augustine’s beautiful term, it is ‘fides quaerens intellectum’—faith in search of understanding—so that, having found understanding, faith can search yet again. Over and over.”

If anyone would like a copy, I could order some for our bookstore or our library.

## Other Favourites of Fr Emmanuel

**Thomas Merton, *Precious Thoughts*** (selected and edited by Fiona Gardner; Darton, Longman & Todd, 2011) **(1915-1968)**

"Really I am sure that if we are patient something good will come up. You must realise that it is the ordinary way of God's dealings with us that our ideas do not work out speedily and efficiently as we would like them to. The reason for this is not only the loving wisdom of God, but also the fact that our acts have to fit into a great complex pattern that we cannot possibly understand. I have learned over the years that Providence is always a whole lot wiser than any of us, and that there are always not only good reasons but the very best reasons for the delays and blocks that often seem to us so frustrating and absurd." (from Merton's *Precious Thoughts* (selected and edited by Fiona Gardner; Darton, Longman & Todd, 2011))

### **R.S. Thomas (1913-2000), "The Bright Field"**

I have seen the sun break through  
to illuminate a small field  
for a while, and gone my way  
for a while, and gone my way  
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl  
of great price, the one field that had  
the treasure in it. I realize now  
that I must give all that I have  
to possess it. Life is not hurrying  
on to a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning  
aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

### **John Milton (1608-1674), *Paradise Lost* XII [ *The Banishment* ]**

So spake our mother Eve, and Adam heard  
Well pleased, but answered not; for now too nigh  
The Archangel stood, and from the other hill

To their fixed station, all in bright array  
The Cherubim descended, on the ground  
Gliding meteorous, as evening mist  
Risen from a rive o'er the marish glides,  
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel  
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,  
The brandished sword of God before them blazed  
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,  
And vapour as the Libyan air adust,  
Began to parch that temperate clime; whereat  
In either hand the hastening Angel caught  
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate  
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast  
To the subjected plain; then disappeared.  
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate  
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.  
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 1892), "Crossing the Bar"**

Sunset and evening star,  
    And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
    When I put out to sea,  
  
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
    Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
    Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
    And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
    When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place  
    The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
    When I have crossed the bar.

**Alice Meynell (1847-1922), "The Unknown God"**

One of the crowd went up,  
And knelt before the Paten and the Cup,  
Received the Lord, returned in peace and prayed  
Close to my side. Then in my heart I said:

"O Christ, in this man's life—  
This stranger who is Thine—in all his strife,  
All his felicity, his good and ill,  
In the assaulted stronghold of his will,

"I do confess Thee here,  
Alive within this life; I know Thee near  
Within this lonely conscience, closed away  
Within this brother's solitary day.

"Christ in his unknown heart,  
His intellect unknown—this love, this art,  
This battle and this peace, this destiny  
That I shall never know, look upon me!

"Christ in his numbered breath,  
Christ in his beat heart and in his death,  
Christ in his mystery! From that secret place  
And from that separate dwelling, give me grace!"

### **Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), "Peace"**

My soul, there is a country  
    Far beyond the stars,  
Where stands a winged sentry  
    All skilful in the wars.  
There above noise and danger,  
    Sweet peace sits crown'd with smiles,  
And one born in a manger  
    Commands the beauteous files.  
He is thy gracious friend  
    And (O my soul awake!)  
Did in pure love descend  
    To die here for thy sake.  
If thou canst get but thither,  
    There grows the flower of peace,  
The rose that cannot wither,  
    The fortress, and thy ease.  
Leave then thy foolish ranges;  
    For non can thee secure  
But one, who never changes,  
    Thy God, thy life, thy cure.

### **Thomas Ken (1637-1711), "Glory to thee, my God, this night"**

Glory to thee, my God, this night  
For all the blessings of the light;  
Keep me, O keep me, King of Kings,  
Beneath thy own almighty wings.

Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son,  
The ill that I this day have done,  
That with the world, myself, and tee  
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

Teach me to live, that I may dread  
Thy grave as little as my bed;  
Teach me to die, that so I may  
Rise glorious at the awful day.

O may my soul on thee repose,  
And with sweet sleep mine eyelids lose,  
Sleep that may me more vigorous make  
To serve my god when I awake.

When in the night I sleepless lie,  
My soul with heavenly thoughts supply;  
Let no ill dreams disturb my rest,  
No powers of darkness me molest.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise him, all creatures here below,  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

## **Fr Gregory's Contributions**

### **John Donne (1572-1631)**

#### **No Man is an Island**

No man is an island,  
Entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less.  
As well as if a promontory were.

As well as if a manor of thy friend's  
Or of thine own were:  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind,  
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;  
It tolls for thee.

## **Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)**

### **Children**

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of Children.

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit,  
not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His  
might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

### **“The Wounded Surgeon” East Coker (IV) T. S. Eliot (1914-1965)**

The wounded surgeon plies the steel That questions the distempered part; Beneath  
the bleeding hands we feel The sharp compassion of the healer's art Resolving the  
enigma of the fever chart.

Our only health is the disease If we obey the dying nurse Whose constant care is not  
to please But to remind of our, and Adam's curse, And that, to be restored, our  
sickness must grow worse.

The whole earth is our hospital Endowed by the ruined millionaire, Wherein, if we do  
well, we shall Die of the absolute paternal care That will not leave us, but prevents us  
everywhere.

The chill ascends from feet to knees, The fever sings in mental wires. If to be  
warmed, then I must freeze And quake in frigid purgatorial fires Of which the flame is  
roses, and the smoke is briars.

The dripping blood our only drink, The bloody flesh our only food: In spite of which  
we like to think

That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood— Again, in spite of that, we call this  
Friday good.

#### ***Also***

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring  
will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

# The Second Coming

BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

*(Not a Christian but his work is an antidote in his own time to sentimentalism masquerading as Christian piety).*

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(1865 – 1939)

## Poems by George Herbert (1593-1633)

### Love

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.

## Prayer

PRAYER the Church's banquet, angels' age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;

Engine against the Almighty, sinner's tower,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-days' world transposing in an hour,  
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;  
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,  
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,  
Heaven in ordinary, man well dressed,  
The Milky Way, the bird of Paradise,  
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices; something understood.

### **Thomas Traherne (1636-1674)**

In my opinion (Fr Gregory), Traherne is one of our finest English Christian poets. His verse upholds the Orthodox view of creation and does not separate that from salvation, enabling us to recognise and discover the Divine Beauty in all its grandeur and glory as God's handiwork.

Here is a link to some of best remembered verses and insights:

[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/354767.Thomas\\_Traherne](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/354767.Thomas_Traherne)

## **Anamaria sent Fr Gregory an email with this suggested list ...**

- The Idiot by Fyodor Dostoyevsky taught me love is humble.
- Persuasion by Jane Austen taught me love is patient.
- Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare taught me love is true.
- The Lady of Shalott by Alfred Tennyson taught me love is brave.
- Fratii Jderi by Vasile Alecsandri taught me love is for both friend and foe.
- Both Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows taught me love is self-sacrificial.
- Till We Have Faces by C. S. Lewis taught me love is a hidden beauty.
- The Golden Key by George MacDonald taught me love is mysterious (just because I can't remember the plot well enough, but it's a beautiful one) ,,,,

### ***She also says of the animation “Finding Nemo” ....***

**On Finding Nemo:** this animation has been the reason why I chose animation 16 years ago. I have watched it 30 times or more :) so I do recommend it if you haven't seen it. The reason why it's still my favourite animation is that it talks about how love gives the most afeared the courage to battle the impossible. Merlin, a scared little clown fish loses his only son and he has to battle an ocean of peril to find him.

*That's all for now and thanks everyone! (Fr Gregory 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020)*