

## A Letter to Evangelicals

### Dear Believers,

Believe less and reflect more. This is really all I want to say.  
But of course, I'll go on—like any sermon  
foretelling, telling, and reminding.  
Take your cue from the Reformation—  
everyone going their own way because they could.  
We can take Wycliff and Luther seriously  
in a way that the peasants could not.  
Reform, revisit, revise—all good advice—  
And this: *keep doing it*. Don't stop  
on a dime of certainty. Don't stop  
with a dollop of comfort, the common slop  
that puts the mind to sleep,  
clearing the stage for the dream sequence—  
always crowded with devils.

Reinterpret everything. Have a meant  
you can enjoy without delusion or denial.

### On St. Thomas à Kempis

*"I had rather feel compunction of heart for my sins than only know the definition of  
compunction." -The Imitation of Christ*

Tom needed other things  
to think about,  
to feel; more functions  
to attend  
where locusts  
were not on the menu.

Imagining perfection  
to flatter eternity  
with a soft-shoe dance  
before falling into the pit  
onto the brass section  
is no class act.

## **Wages Declined**

*Rom 3:20-23*

No one who ever died  
learned how they felt about it,  
but of course by all means do  
whatever makes you feel inside  
a comfortable, warm  
and soupy satisfaction.

But watch it doesn't grow  
into an impaction  
not only difficult to feel  
good about but also  
likely to impede movements  
mental and logistical.

Tactics always enters  
with us through the narrow gate  
that's meant to operate  
between the outer and the inner  
lives, and tactics makes the case  
more for survival than revival:

Offered the deadly wage,  
accept tactical advice:  
Decline. No payment need be due.  
You need not sadly turn the page.  
You simply worked and lived for nothing  
you could name, though it was priceless.

## **Bible Studies With Congressmen At Breakfast**

### **1.**

#### ***In the beginning***

The less said about God the better.  
What in *unapproachable* do you not understand?  
*Holy* means wholly wrapped in yourself—  
not like a megalomaniac  
but complete—having an unamendable constitution:  
not needing dabs, touches, or adjustment,  
unlike our lesser laws, where what's meant  
is always up for grabs.

2.

*His Own Interpreter*

The only deeper meaning is a wriggler you dug up:  
the deeper message, like a deeper worm,  
will slip out, bristling with residue—  
maybe from the stew of minerals around a vent.  
(You'll burn your hand in that event.)  
These fellows have survived the worst—  
the asteroid in sixty-five  
which burst upon the scene  
before any primate had rehearsed  
his hermeneutics. The humble homily  
of earthworms is to eat the stubborn Earth,  
our lovely home, and make good loam.

3.

*O.T.*

Too much in a rush to the Gospels  
and the Covenant That Counts,  
you've missed the humdrum counts  
and genealogies, acacia, gopherwood,  
hyssop, elegant life in the Ergs,  
and hard-headed advice  
about taking what you can and whooping  
over spoils while dashing baby heads  
of potential avengers. You've missed  
the righteous rationales like Saul's Big Plan,  
and—buried in the sand—mercy and justice,  
tipping vengeance from the other pan.

4.

*The Old, Old Story*

So we do this again: You ready with the big reveal;  
us wondering if the writer had just swallowed  
another bowl of sour Greek soup—  
not so much about what it means  
as why we're asking. Let's not wait.  
You know Atilla never comes.  
Please skip the Syriac in fine print today.  
We staffers who study in the Capitol  
this early hour do not turn out at 8 a.m.  
for doughnuts and Deuteronomy,  
or even a peak experience of the Great I AM.  
Thanks. But save that for astronomy.  
We want to peck higher and get a peek at power.

5.

*Fetal Flip*

So love's the text. May I slip out?  
I'd rather not be loved too much.  
Just call me a clanging cymbal.  
Better that than a symbol angling  
to become a holy homunculus.  
The love that spreads among us  
so warmly in your little klatsch  
sweeps the nation, making ash  
of simple human conversation.

6.

*Tree of Big Data*

The tree knew everything. It had to,  
with branch outlets in everybody's business  
and filtering the skies and sea.  
Making lateral moves, it rose  
in a heady canopy of commons,  
commerce, communion, and commotion.  
Now we're getting somewhere.  
Who would notice if we took a byte?

7.

*Subdue and dominate to the last square inch*

After the last tree was buried,  
arboreal sentiments were discontinued.  
*Wooden* became a term of aversion  
and leaves of any kind faintly obscene—  
so much so that books were pulped;  
sent to the microbial primordium  
for future empires of the imagination,  
the bipeds lying down to sleep  
and disappear in dreams of climbing.

8.

*January 6, 2021*

Why craft a clever panegyric  
of delicious irony for a mob  
whose law is clubs and ropes;  
whose faith a blinkered certainty  
that standing your ground  
is the ground of being?

9.

*Mount Earnest*

*“Would some power the giftie gie us . . .” –R.Burns*

Crowding Everest, Parnassus,  
Horeb, and the heights  
of other follies, elbowing  
their ways to summits, limits  
never reached before;  
enduring for the sake of spite,  
name-recognition, or the show  
that must go on over corpses,  
they edit selfies, add a track,  
and watch themselves as others see them—  
coiffure with lice combed out,  
fuchsia blouse with matching pumps:  
Influencer of Likes, opining  
that with motivation  
any fan, of course, could do the same,  
the breathless Feat;  
achieve such airless eminence,  
become a Star, or climb  
to squat upon a barricade,  
open fire, gain immorality.

Who rushes to repair injustice?  
Who throngs to scale the dismal summits  
of Greed, the switchbacks of Inequity,  
and the stony Mount Indifference?

**10.**

***Slipping out: A Back-slider's Lay***

On this occasion, others may decide  
the latest way and truth and life.  
I'll let the matter slide.

Laylo, Laylo, Lay.

Let others aim and carefully equip  
their mortal souls for strife.  
Just let me slide and dip.

Laylo, Laylo, Lay.

And as I gently slip into the grit  
that mirror-polishes the Earth,  
may sparrows land and sit.

Laylo, Laylo, Lay.

**11.**

***The Remains of Thonis***

Go down to that proud people. Prophecy.  
Not all the godly effigies and votives  
that temple mound or sea receive, or motives  
thronging your hearts stop death: for you shall die,  
dismembered by the holy Nile and thrown  
upon the narrow shelf between the sea  
and black alluvium. No surgery  
returns you to yourself. None can atone.  
We have received your homely, brittle gift:  
little amulet of wounded eyes;  
hawk's hop and flapping wings to seize from death  
beloved memories. The waters fall and lift  
again the scuttled barque that prophesies  
to you who floated hopes upon a breath.

*Mina ran to the river ahead of us,  
her bare legs splashing. Where none should go  
she went, laughing and waving a reed.  
What a bald priest decreed  
or fat old Greek  
sopping oil with his loaf  
she did not care to know.  
Nor did any of us, watching her.*

*Soon enough, the waters would be gone,  
the feasts and tiresome ceremonials begin,  
and where she stood,  
waving a reed, calling to me,  
become a ditch in the sea-floor.*

**12.**  
***The Secret***

The body, given and returned—  
habits seated, then unlearned—  
cities gridded, then ungrounded—  
reigns established, then unfounded:  
given, taken, and returned,  
from flame to flame, the secret burned.

All coherent, settled, wise—  
cultivated, gained as prize—  
swept from horror and defeat—  
built, and final, and complete:  
given, unbidden and unearned,  
into flames again returned.

A thousand to the thousandth names  
consumed and given by the flames—  
a thousand to the thousandth more  
through open hearts forever pour  
torrential love, and hearts consume.  
Receive this secret and make room.

**13.**  
***Three short trips***

Patriot to Chauvinist.  
Idealist to Doctrinaire.  
Believer to a Fist.

And a fourth—  
Unbroken circle to a tipping square.