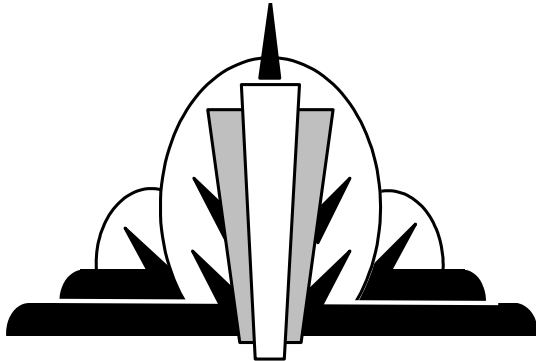


**Poems of Word  
and Worship  
by Beryl Johnson**





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## 1. The Word of God

My friend,

Sometimes I sense your anger and frustration  
And wonder what it's all about.  
Do you sometimes want to shout  
And clout the Word of God  
Into deaf and senseless unheeding ears?

My friend,

Can you by striving, stretching, straining  
Add one cubit to the measure  
Of their growth,  
Or clothe their minds  
In wisdom's brighter garb?

My friend,

There is One Hand  
That searching, sorting, sifting,  
Will pluck the grains  
Of mercy, goodness, truth and love  
And store them  
In the chambers of His heart.

My friend,

There is one living Lord  
Who in due season  
Will draw the bitter-sweet juices  
From the winepress of His living souls  
And in His kingdom drink the wine  
That comforts, cheers and gladdens  
Heart of man.

## **2. One Voice**

In the beginning  
All had one voice  
And every person  
Understood the other.  
They agreed together  
To build a tower  
To reach to God  
So they might be great  
And rule the earth.

God knew their thoughts  
And their limitations, too,  
So he sent a great wind  
To tumble down their tower  
And scatter the people  
Far and wide.  
No more could they understand  
Or speak to each other.  
All had different voices.

So, God spoke to them  
In his very own voice,  
In a young man chosen  
To be his Son:  
To help them understand  
His goodness and his love,  
But they struck him down  
In the prime of his manhood.  
So they lost God's voice.

But a few survived  
Who had come to know his voice,  
And God sent his spirit  
In a rushing, mighty wind  
And in tongues of flame  
To give them one voice again;  
To tell all the people  
The truth about God,  
His love and his goodness  
For the world he had made.

### **3. Seeking**

There are no words to express,  
And in expressing it is lost.  
Can words take wing  
And free the soul's yearning?  
Fantasy is more real warmth,  
Reality is stark cold,  
But, Lord, it is blessed to belong!

## 4. Words

So many meetings,  
Endless discussions,  
Political, religious, social issues.  
Take your choice,  
Get involved.  
Communication-participation,  
One of life's necessities.  
More often, boredom and frustration.

So many words,  
Spoken, written, recorded, shredded,  
Bound in volumes,  
Stored in archives.  
A lighted cigarette carelessly thrown away  
Can incinerate thousands in a moment.

Man (and woman's) volubility  
Ceases with debility,  
Is destroyed by death.  
The tower of Babel  
(Or should we call it babble)  
Comes crashing down.  
A few genes left scurrying around  
Repeat the process.

But who has the last word?  
I leave you to work that out.

## 5. Worship

“Why do you pay homage to the empty Churches,  
The silent choir-stalls and deserted pews,  
The pious remnant of the faithful few  
Clinging to ancient tradition and obsolete views?  
Why pay homage to all this” said my Critical Enquirer.

For the sake of the holy water  
In the baptismal font.  
By the token of the Cross  
In new life sanctified,  
Is Christ born again.

For the sake of the souls arrayed in white  
Before the Bishop kneeling,  
The laying-on of hands,  
The quickening of the spirit  
Borne anew in Christ.

For the agony of the Cross,  
The private griefs and pains  
With Christ identified,  
The cleansing and healing,  
Blessing and absolution.

For the sake of the holy sacrifice,  
The consecrated bread and wine,  
The words of the Priest softly intoned:  
*“This is my body,  
This is my blood.”*

The kneeling figures at the alter rail,  
The invisible offering,  
The Church’s body broken,  
The living sacrifice,  
All abide in Christ.



For the sake of the tolling bell  
When day is done,  
The whispers of Evening Vespers,  
The ghosts of spirits long since gone  
*“Rest in Peace.”*

The solitary flame that burns over the altar,  
Its watch maintained by day and night.  
The light on the golden Cross reflects  
The victory over death  
*“Christ is risen.”*

All these things remind me  
That Christ dwells here!

## **6. Breakthrough**

It's in the little things  
That love sends out its warming rays.  
In the dark-soft gleam  
Of a rising dawn  
Tinting the pale pink petals to a magentian glow.  
Streaming light  
Creeping across the dank-dark shadows of the night  
Disperses the shades of gloom,  
'Til the glory of the golden sun  
Bursts through the portals of the bonded soul  
And loosening the bands,  
Raises the heart and mind  
Beyond the finite  
To the touch of the Creator's hands  
And the promise of life incarnate.

## 7. A Very Smart Lady

She looked very becoming  
As she stepped out of her car  
Wearing her yellow straw hat  
Adorned with a single pink rose,  
A tribute to the sunny morning,  
One of the first in early Spring.

None of the rest of the congregation wore hats  
As far as I could see,  
They went out of fashion a long time ago;  
Except for the teenagers  
Who unashamedly flaunted  
The latest fashion in dark hats with a brim  
Framing their innocent features,  
Enhancing their slim-line elegance.  
They could get away with anything!

The lady with a pink rose in her hat  
Always wore a hat to Church,  
An ex-headmistress of a girls' school,  
So I was told,  
Setting the standards and maintaining them.  
In winter she wore soft velours  
Worn at a slightly jaunty angle  
To give the impression of smartness not primness.  
A very smart lady,  
Wearing her smartness with a hint of pride.

I hope I never see her hatless,  
I wouldn't recognise her,  
And when her time comes  
I would like to see her coffin  
Carried down the aisle  
Covered with her hats  
As well as with flowers;  
A tribute to a very smart lady.

## **8. Meditation on an Old Pair of Shoes**

There's a hole in my sole  
That can't be repaired,  
It's too late in the day  
To mend it anyway.

I can't go to heaven  
With a hole in my sole,  
I'm not fit to be seen  
By the heavenly Queen.

But St Peter, he met me  
Outside the gate  
And gave me a new pair  
Of shoes for my feet.

And now I tread firmly  
My Maker to meet  
With no hole in my sole  
And a new pair of feet.

## **9. Mary** (a Ballad)

I loved a lady  
A long time ago,  
She was so kind and gentle  
And had a heart of gold.  
She held her son Jesus  
Cradled close in her arms,  
And she loved the Lord Jesus  
To keep him from harm.

She went to a Wedding  
With her son tall and fine,  
In the midst of celebrating  
They ran out of wine,  
She looked at her son  
To see what could be done,  
But he said to his mother  
“My time is not yet come.”

She looked at him pleading  
With eyes so pure and gentle,  
So he prayed to God his Father  
That he might hearken to her pleas,  
He bade her tell the servants  
Fill the jars up with water,  
He blessed them in his Father’s name,  
Turned the water into wine.

There came a day  
So cruel and grey  
When Jesus Christ  
Was taken away

And hung on a Cross  
For all to see,  
With a crown on his head  
And a wound in his side.

His mother nearby  
Gazed on her son,  
Her heart pierced with pain  
Like the wound in his side,  
But she now knew for sure  
That the son that she bore  
Was God come to earth,  
God with us evermore.

## **10. Shadows of the Dark**

Within the darkened Church,  
Only the flickering candle flame  
Casts a pool of light into the shadows.  
Only the old vagabond  
Seeking a bed on a hard pew,  
Or one of the devout seekers,  
Ever comes here for the night watches.

The homeless outcast dreams  
Of where he might have been  
If fate hadn't taken a hand  
And thrown him out.  
The aspiring saintly soul  
Closes the door on the world outside  
And wraps himself in his holy mantle  
And dreams of heavenly places.

## 11. Mary, the Mother of Jesus

She will sing no more,  
She of the pierced heart,  
Tho' love's harbouring arms  
Will shield her  
From life's crueller blows.

Her Love has risen and gone  
And left an empty vacuum  
Which homely duties fill  
And kindly words and gentle gestures  
Dimly touch.

All she had she gave, and willingly so,  
Her life a song,  
Knowing his presence so close,  
His life, love, laughter all shared,  
'Til he was gone and love had died.

But content now  
Knowing in the awakening,  
The rose-scent and dew-brushed petals  
Of the eternal Morn,  
And Love expectantly awaiting.

*Written in Zimbabwe in the early hours of the morning. Afterwards, I went out into the garden. A single pink rose was blooming, its petals brushed with dew.*

## 12. A Woman at Prayer

She sat alone  
Motionless,  
Her face raised towards the light,  
Eyelids closed,  
Only her lips moved  
Framing silent words.  
The palms of her hands lay outwards  
In supplication,  
The light played on her face;  
Shining embers emanating  
From her whole being,  
Outlined by the golden aura  
Not seen by human eyes.  
The hidden splendour  
Within an earthly frame  
Of love unbound and free,  
Singing its ceaseless song,  
Adoring the Creator.

Love's appeal,  
Love's response,  
Golden threads  
Vibrating in the silent air.

### **13. Lord of the Hills**

He had to go,  
To leave behind  
The anguished eyes,  
The outstretched hands,  
The imploring misery  
Of the unhealed,  
To the only place  
Where he could be alone  
With the One Person he called his Father  
Who was more, much more to him  
Than the one who had always sheltered him,  
The one he called father by name.

Out there,  
In the silence of the hills  
Undisturbed by grazing sheep,  
His spirit was free,  
Free to embrace  
And to be embraced by  
The One who called him  
“My beloved son”;  
Their meeting place  
Part of a vast natural arena  
Where the hills met the horizon  
And strong penetrating winds  
Scoured and invigorated,  
Restoring him body and soul.  
Later, beneath the sheltering rocks,  
He would find a quiet place  
For silent communion  
Of unspoken words  
Where love and hope became a reality.



As the stars began to fade  
And light to infringe upon the shadowy peaks,  
He knew it was time to go back;  
Time to return to the insistent clamour  
Of a self-seeking hungry world,  
Restored once more to his life-giving purpose,  
Strengthened by nature's creative forces,  
At peace within.  
Lord of the hills,  
Lord of all creation.

#### **14. Rhapsody in Prayer**

Make me a melody,  
Titillate my senses,  
Instil in me ecstasy,  
Ravage my soul.

Make me endure  
The naked flame,  
The exquisite torture  
Of unrequited passion.

Make me to dance  
In gay abandon,  
Gathering garlands  
To place at your feet.

Make me a casket  
Of the world's tears,  
A fountain of healing,  
A pathway of peace,  
The sacrifice complete.

## 15. The Man Born Blind

Awakening to the light of day  
He could hear voices,  
Feel hands touching him,  
Holding him.  
See nothing but vague shapes,  
Indistinct images,  
Prismatic light  
Crossing the shutters  
Of his sightless, staring eyes.

All his days  
Stumbling and fumbling,  
Seeking direction from familiar noises,  
Clinging to unknown objects.  
His was a bleak world  
Of outer unfathomable darkness,  
Inner, unrelated reality,  
Like the unexplored territory  
Of a lunar landscape.

Came a day -  
A stranger  
Led him by the hand  
Out of the City  
To a well-known watering place.  
He heard the scrape of soil,  
The spitting and the kneading,  
And felt the healing salve against his eyes.

“Go and wash in the pool,”  
The stranger said.  
Eager hands thrust him forward,  
Digging deeply into the water  
He cleansed his hands and face.

Lifting his eyes from the pool,  
He sees for the first time  
Clear cut images coming into focus,  
A kaleidoscope of colours  
Undreamed of  
Emerging before his eyes;  
Until his gaze is transfixed  
By the light in the eyes of a stranger.

## 16. The Church in the Trees

Like as if in a dream,  
I found myself  
In a complex of streets and lanes  
Dividing and sub-dividing in circular patterns.  
Houses jostled each other for position,  
Small neat houses, tidy bungalows,  
Blocks of flats looming darkly like sentinels  
Protecting the lives within.

In amazement I read the names of the streets,  
Such names as Cedar, Lilac, Acacia,  
Magnolia, Pine and Birch.  
What daring vision had inspired the designer  
To create in his imagination  
A garden Paradise  
From the common clay of a housing estate,  
Or was there some subtler thought within?

Within the heart of this garden Paradise  
A Community Centre stands  
Where folk can meet to share a pint,  
To have a quiet smoke and a chat,  
A place where friendships are made  
And troubles shared,  
Where children run and sing and shout  
Within a place of safety.

On Sundays, all traces of man's social needs  
Are cleared away.  
The Hall prepared for solemn Eucharist  
Awaits the coming of the living Christ  
In bread and wine.

On Fridays, too, the children meet  
And in accents sweet  
Promise to follow and obey.

But the loving heart of Jesus  
Is never far away  
From the discarded beer cans,  
The littered tables, the discordant sounds  
That form the backcloth  
Of the crowded smoke-filled rooms.  
It is to those who deny, ignore or mock him  
That he most surely comes.

It was in ordinary people's homes  
And in the market place  
Where he most loved to be  
When once he was on earth.  
He is always ready to give a welcome  
To those in need,  
Even if at the present time they pay no heed  
And pass him by.

He is hidden in the flowers  
Of shrubs and trees,  
In the scent of lilac and rose,  
In the wind that hears  
The whispered prayers  
Of the faithful in Willingdon Trees.  
Ah, blessed Lord, how good to know  
A garden Paradise blossoms here.

Willingdon Trees, Eastbourne 1985

## 17. The Angels of Christmas

A white covering of snow  
Lies in the fields,  
And on the mountain passes  
The little tents spring up  
Where the refugee families  
Huddle together, frozen and hungry,  
Fearing that nobody cares.  
The Angels of Christmas  
Are silent above  
Watching over the people  
With compassion and love.

The children are crying,  
Their mothers so desperate,  
In a place so cruel,  
So windswept and outcast.  
Far in the distance  
Sounds of shooting and killing,  
The men who are fighting  
Will never come home.  
The Angels of Christmas  
Are weeping above  
As a mother holds close  
Her baby of love.  
Can no-one hear  
The cries of the children,  
Lying sick and wounded,  
Does no-one care?

Remember the Christ-child  
Born in a stable,  
That winter's night so long ago.

He came to show us  
How much God cares for us,  
To teach us God's way  
To have love for each other,  
For the poor, the outcast,  
The hungry, the homeless.  
The Angels of Christmas  
Sang songs at his birth,  
"Glory to God in the highest,  
Peace, goodwill to all on earth."

## **18. From Whence Comes Freedom**

Don't tell me what to think!  
You can speak to me of your views,  
You can dominate me with your policies,  
You can challenge me,  
You can even try to change my way of thinking,  
But I am not yours to command.

Do not fence me in  
With outworn family traditions,  
Pride of place and status,  
Precarious social structures,  
Man-made obelisks,  
My thoughts will rebel against such as these.

Do not enslave my thoughts  
With creed, doctrine and dogma,  
Religious conventions and abstentions.  
They are the outmoded expressions  
Of those encapsulated  
Within the social-cultural heritage  
Of times gone past.

Do not afflict my conscience  
With pangs of guilt  
By unfeeling sensitivity  
And flawed judgements  
On controversial issues.  
I can only suffer in silence!



One came,  
Who walked in truth and beauty,  
To set us free  
From earthbound rigours and deprivations,  
With thoughts of peace and love and joy.  
Who gave us the freedom to choose  
To follow good or evil,  
To create or destroy.

These thoughts in the mind of the Creator,  
From whence I came  
And to whom I return,  
Are a part of the whole pattern of creation  
In which nothing is lost, nothing is wasted.  
To God be the glory,  
“In Excelsis Deo.”

## 19. Crucifixion

There is a kind of suffering  
Too great for any to understand,  
Like that of the Son of God  
Who died alone on the Cross.

There is a kind of sorrow  
Too deep for tears  
Like that of the gentle mother of Christ  
Who stood at the foot of the Cross.

The boisterous soldiers had their fun  
Shouting their mocking jests,  
They did not know that every word  
Was a wound in the quivering flesh.

The upright men of that ancient Church  
Were scornfully standing by,  
“He only brought it on himself”, they said,  
By calling himself the Son of God.

And you, proud Christian, where do you stand  
When it comes to the crucial test,  
Are you only human as all the rest,  
Or are you a friend of the Son of God?

## 20. The Silence of the Lambs

Lying in bed,  
I hear the lambs screaming,  
Their terror draws me.  
I creep across the yard,  
The shaded light  
Behind the half-open door  
Heightens the darkness of the night  
Jarring ragged nerve ends.  
Crouching, I peer round the door,  
A huddle of fattened lambs  
Are penned in a corner.  
Above from the ceiling,  
Cleaved and shorn carcasses  
Swing from the hooks,  
The blood of innocent Spring lambs  
Runs in pools and rivulets  
On the pitted stone floor.

The centrepiece  
On the overloaded table,  
Leg of mutton  
With a paper white frill.

Scenes from a TV screen,  
Shriek of diving bombers,  
Screaming children  
Running in all directions,  
The searing flames of napalm bombs  
Exposing the raw flesh.

Blood of the innocent  
Shed for the many.

A man stretched on a wooden Cross  
Silently screaming,  
Monstrous hammering of iron nails  
Into hands  
Stretched along a wooden beam,  
Into feet  
Pinioned on an upright bar.

Blood slowly oozing  
From hands and feet.

One sacrificial lamb  
To die for all.

## **21. A Prayer**

Grant Lord, thy blessings on this day  
That all I do, or think, or say  
May be in accordance  
With your perfect will.

May your divine love  
Protect us all life through,  
And grant that we may dwell on day  
Amongst the spirits in Heaven above.

Lord Jesus Christ  
Forgive our sins  
And draw us nearer You  
And so nearer each other.

## 22. Feast of Fools

Why sit and eat with the scum of the earth,  
The enraged traditionalists cried.  
“Because they have need of me,” Jesus replied,  
“I am the Way the Truth and the Life.”

He took some bread and tore it apart  
To share with all who were there,  
And more than was given at the start  
Was gathered from all that was left.

“Can you drink with me, this cup of mine?”  
“We will” his tablemates cried,  
“You will indeed,” Jesus replied,  
“It is my life’s blood, yours and mine.”

He took the cup and said to His friends,  
“I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine  
`Til I drink it new in the Kingdom of God,  
I am the fruit of the vine.”

( response to the Satanic Banquet July 1989)

## 23. Candles in the Dark

“Say a prayer for me.”

Men and women with bowed heads,  
Remembering their loved ones.  
Flaming candles  
Shimmering in the darkness;  
Each one representing a living soul  
Bearing the prayers of the loved one.  
A sacrificial offering,  
Incense at the altar,  
Burning glory,  
A pathway of light.  
Away from the doom-ridden streets,  
The collapsed buildings,  
The shell-shattered roadways.

Keep the candles burning,  
Keep the memories alive,  
When one flickers and dies  
A living soul has departed,  
A dream has been extinguished.

The memory, the flame, the offering  
Will always outlive the darkness.  
Where they have gone  
There will be no need of light,  
For there is no darkness,  
Only perfect day  
And peace with God.

## 24. In Later Years

Call up the sun,  
When days are dark  
And gloomy thoughts invade your soul.  
Warm yourself with images  
Of laughing sunlight  
Playing on the faces of children,  
Of lovers folded in each others arms  
On the golden sands,  
Plump figures in deck-chairs,  
Their wrinkled faces soaking up the sun.  
And with these thoughts,  
You can face the winter days,  
The cold, the wet and the dark  
With equilibrium,  
Knowing in the ceaseless round  
Of evolving days and nights,  
The waxing and waning of your spirit,  
That the sun will surely rise again  
To shed its splendour  
Within your castle walls,  
Until time ceases  
And thoughts and images are no more.  
Even though the light burns low  
In the evening of your soul,  
There is a sun  
That will not go away  
Unless you close the doors.

(written for my mother when in The Hollies Care Home)

## 25. The Three Dawns

The first dawning  
Was when earth invaded space  
And spun in rhythmic cycle  
Caught between the burning light of the sun  
And the reflected light of the moon.  
And by whose ingenuity were they so placed  
At the very first dawning?

The second dawning  
Was heralded by a shining star,  
A sign proclaiming the birth  
Of a Saviour of the world  
Who, living, raised human nature  
To a higher plane,  
Whose sacrificial death stands as a memorial,  
And for whom his followers claim  
Immortality.

The third dawning  
Is hidden in the mists of time.  
Will there be peace upon earth  
And tolerance among the races and nations?  
Or will it all end in holocaust,  
When there will be morning no more  
And evening no more?



## 26. Time

If for some moments  
I try to escape from time,  
To dream my own dreams  
And wander down familiar paths of happiness,  
Time catches up on me.

Who created time?  
Who placed the planets in their ceaseless round  
Each with their gravitational pull  
To separate the darkness from the light  
Giving times of rhythmic sleep and play?

Who fixed the seas in their appointed place,  
Gave movement, the ebb and flow of tides  
And kept the rivers in their courses?  
Who gave all living things their seasons  
Of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter?

I only know that without time  
And place and order in my life on earth,  
All would be disorder, dismay and chaos;  
And perhaps it is a kind of preparation  
For eternity that is without time.

## **27. Thoughts on the Millenium Dome**

(a Christian perspective)

And will he come again  
In glory,  
To celebrate 2000 years  
Since he was risen from the dead?  
Our God who created earth and heaven  
And dwells within the Universe.  
And will the Holy City\* still find a place  
In the hearts and minds of those  
Who explore the new Millenium Dome  
And wonder what their world is all about?

No structures made by human hands,  
No miracles of Science,  
No brazen images of the human form,  
No earthly aspect of man's faith,  
Can convey God's love contained  
In humankind's destiny.

Outside the Dome  
In Greenwich Park  
A simple re-enactment  
Of Christ's Death and Passion,  
As once took place  
Outside the City wall,  
Will surely say it all.

As the Players leave  
And the stage darkens,  
Only the Cross remains,  
A stark reminder of our sinful world.

\*The Holy City - the New Jerusalem (Rev 21,2)

## **28. A Time to Remember**

When the carnage was over  
And the bomb-scarred battlefields were silent  
And the devastated earth had reclaimed  
The Spirits of the vanquished heroes;  
In the Summertime that followed  
Wild red poppies flowered in abundance  
On the fields of Flanders,  
Scattered over the scorched grassland  
Like so many drops of blood,  
A salient momento of the sacrifice  
Of a nation's call to duty.  
So many lives spent in winning freedom  
For those who were to follow on.

After the Armistice was signed  
Red poppies became the symbol  
Of those who lost their lives  
In serving the needs of their fellow Countrymen,  
Their fellow human beings,  
The sign of sacrifice and love.  
As the years go by  
We remember them  
With a single red poppy in our lapels,  
Thanksgiving in our hearts  
And a prayer for Peace in our Time.

## **29. Memories in a Garden (Gesthemane)**

It was quiet and still in the garden,  
A Paschal moon hung in the sky,  
A slight breeze rustled the silvery leaves  
Of the old tree standing nearby.

It recalled that night so long ago,  
A night of haunting agony,  
A solitary figure bowed down to the ground  
While his companions slept close by.

Many new trees have grown up around  
Since that night so long ago,  
Many have knelt on that hallowed ground  
And sought to enter His presence there.

But only the old olive tree  
Sheltering the awesome reality,  
Knew the cost of unspoken fears  
And saw the blood, the sweat and the tears.

*In the Garden of Gesthemane, guarded with love by the  
Franciscans, there are still eight venerable olive trees,  
witnesses of the painful agony of the Redeemer.  
(March 1991)*

### **30. The Journey of Life**

If I could only spend all day  
And kneel and pray,  
What wondrous words I would essay  
My Lord's commands to portray.

But I must needs press on  
My allotted tasks to fulfil,  
And trust that in the doing of them  
I may be doing your will.

And wheresoever I may go  
And whomsoever I may meet,  
May ask a blessing from on high,  
Or shed a sacrificial tear.

For all our days we journey on,  
Sharing our lot with friend or foe,  
Sometimes climb the dizzy heights,  
Or plumb the depths below.

If our estate be high or low  
Or merely in the plain between  
It matters not, so long as we  
Have God beside us on the scene.

### *Author's Profile*

*I started writing poetry in 1973 when we were living in Cumbria. To discover this gift was a surprise and a delight. I joined the Cambridge Poetry Group in 1989. We write poems on a monthly theme and sharing ideas and reading our poems aloud with other poets I have found very beneficial. I won a National Poetry Award in 1984 and have had many poems published in Anthologies and Magazines. I am happily married with three children and six grandchildren. I am also a Licensed lay Minister and assist the Clergy. This Collection of poems contains ideas inspired by the study of Scripture and reflects various aspects of Church life, to which I personally owe a great deal.*

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*All proceeds from the sale of this Collection will go towards "Franciscan Aid", the Charitable Trust of the Third Order SSF, to relieve poverty and to advance the education of deprived people from Third World Countries.*

*Beryl Johnson*

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