

A LITURGY FOR

# the Tolling of the Passing Bell

JOHN DONNE (1572–1631)

MODERN RENDERING BY PHILIP YANCEY

O eternal and most gracious God,

you have spoken to us in many ways:

first in the voice of nature,

    which speaks to our hearts,

and then in your Word,

    which speaks to our ears.

Yet you have also spoken

in the speech of speechless creatures,

such as Balaam's ass; and in the speech

of unbelievers, such as in Pilate's confession;

and even in the devil himself, who recognized

and addressed your Son.

I humbly attend to your voice

in the sound

of this sad passing bell.

First, I thank you that in this sound

I can hear your instruction,

    that I should use another man's

    condition to consider my own.

Frankly, this bell that tolls

for another's approaching death

may take me in too, even before

it finishes ringing.

As the wages of sin, death is due me;  
as the end of sickness, it belongs to me.  
Though in view of my disobedience I may  
fear death, in view of your mercy  
I need not be afraid.

Therefore I surrender my soul to you,  
which I know you will accept,  
whether I live or die.

Into your hands I commit my spirit,  
said David, placing himself  
under your protection,  
and your blessed Son echoed those words  
when he delivered up his soul on the cross.

Now I too surrender myself  
into your hands,  
submitting to your will,  
for life or for death,  
in your own time.

I am prepared by your correction,  
mellowed by your discipline,  
and conformed to your will  
by your Spirit.

Having received your pardon for my soul,  
and asking no reprieve for my body, I boldly  
shift my prayers toward the one whose bell  
has inspired this devotion.

Lay hold upon his soul, O God,  
and in however few minutes  
it remains in his body,  
let the power of your Spirit perfect  
his account before he passes away.  
Present his sins to him in such  
a way that he may not doubt your forgiveness  
but instead dwell upon your infinite mercy.

Let him discern his faults, yes,  
but wrap himself up in the merits  
of your Son Christ Jesus.

Breathe inward comforts  
to his heart, and afford him the strength  
to give an outward testimony, so that  
all about him may derive comfort from it,  
seeing that even though his body  
is going the way of all flesh, yet his soul  
is going the way of all saints.

When your Son cried out upon the cross,  
*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*  
he spoke not only for himself  
but for the church and its afflicted members  
who in deep distress might fear your forsaking.

This patient, O most blessed God,  
is one of them.

On his behalf, and in his name, hear your Son  
crying to you, *My God, my God, why have you  
forsaken me?* and don't forsake him.

With your left hand lay his body in the grave  
(if that be your will), and with your right hand  
receive his soul into your kingdom.

And unite him and us  
in one communion  
of saints.