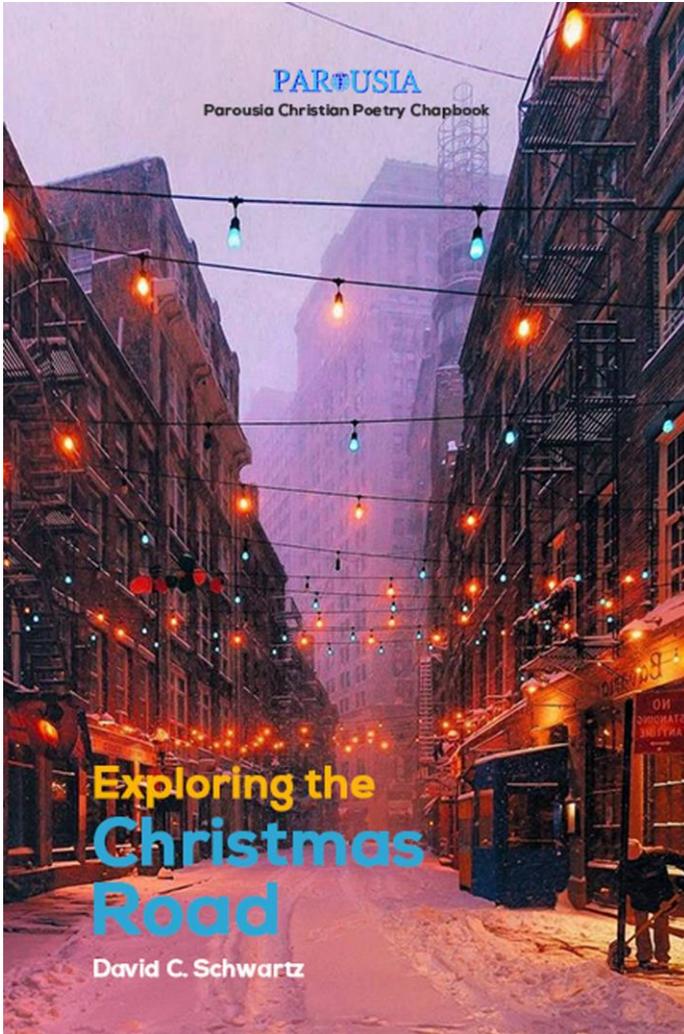


Exploring the CHRISTMAS Road | David
C. Schwartz



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A Chapbook of Original Spiritual Poems

David C. Schwartz

PAROUSIA

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Blurb

What this book, “Exploring the Christmas Road” is all about:

“This grouping of original poems attempts to provide new answers to an ever-recurrent question: how can the beauty, wonder and inspiration of Christmas more fully inform our lives today? Taken together, these works suggest that the Christmas spirit can be called forth, and called upon, every day, and in very many ways. Celebrated, here, are practical and accessible approaches to spirituality: spoken prayer; prayer-filled work; stillness/silence/solitude; charity; meditation and, above all— expressing loving kindness to all.”

What the editors of Parousia Reads say about this book:
“A remarkable piece of writing. Blessings.”

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude is hereby expressed to my wife, Paula Smith, who has saved my life in repeated health crises and has enhanced the meaning of my life in physical, emotional and spiritual ways. She not only encouraged me to write this book but: 1) co-authored with me spiritual short stories (“The Daughter of God”, “The Wind Chimes of Sant Cecelia) published in the UK and US; 2) commented usefully on other of my spiritual poems and stories published in US, UK and Canadian literary venues. Paula exemplifies the teaching that loving kindness begins with familial bonding. In keeping with that teaching, I hereby express my appreciation to our whole family for their ever available encouragement of my writing: [to Todd, Julie, Pat, Marilyn, Shawn, Katie, Xander and Charlie].

Much of the inspiration for the poems in this book came from sources available to almost everyone: the Bible; Christmas songs, stories and poetry; Christ-themed operas, operettas, hymns, carols, chantings and ballets. More directly and more personally the following people provided specific inspiration or encouragement for my writing, for this book and/or for individual poems: Rev. Angela Denton of the Unity by the Shore Church in NJ; Johnathon Sheick of Mosaic Music Therapy in Manasquan, NJ; Nancy Merlino of the Poets Corner (Ocean County Library, Brick Branch, Brick, NJ); Rabbis Shoni and Phil Labowitz of Broward County, FL; dear friends Dan Hoffman, George Kalkines and the late John Glascock.

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Special acknowledgment to my very own elf, Julie Salvi, for her support and help. Her many loving, wonderful and much appreciated daughterly gifts include editing and typing portions of this book.

INTRODUCTION AND DEDICATION

This grouping of original poems attempts to provide new answers to an ever-recurrent question: how can the beauty, wonder and inspiration of Christmas more fully inform our lives today? Taken together, these works suggest that the Christmas spirit can be called forth, and called upon, every day, and in very many ways. Celebrated, here, are practical and accessible approaches to spirituality: spoken prayer; prayer-filled work; stillness/silence/solitude; charity; meditation and, above all— expressing loving kindness to all.

In these poems, spiritual inspiration comes from diverse sources: from 'prophets, preachers and Sunday school teachers' of course, but also from our parents, spouses, kids, coworkers and other humans. Most especially, the holy light and pure tones of God, experienced in nature, are thrilling to our souls.

The people I write about are, at least sometimes, 'transformed, transfixed, transcendent' in Divine Love. These poems remind us that Christmas helps them: to achieve reunion with God, family and all humanity—especially those in need of assistance; to find courage; to affirm unique, new purposes; to see, to hear and to negotiate with a loving God.

We are all everyday people, of course: working hard to attain a good life for ourselves and our families; involved most intensely with the things that concern our loved ones. The Christmas spirit gives perspective and broader meaning to our work, makes sacred our family life and community involvements. On our pathways to Christmas, we work in holiness, we are bathed in light, warmed by love, open to co-creating a better world, in partnership with God.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED, WITH PROFOUND LOVE AND GRATITUDE, TO MY BELOVED WIFE, BUSINESS PARTNER AND FREQUENT COAUTHOR...PAULA SMITH.

The Christmas Road

There's a hush and a whisper that say everything there is to say.

There's a knowing and a glowing that lights your way, makes you want to pray.

There are everyday miracles and accessible wonders, vibrant lives and restful slumbers:

and love, always love, perfect love - - on the Christmas Road.

Peace, always peace, perfect peace,

it's there in every step we take, together on SPIRIT's Road.

As we travel towards Christmas, we are honored, uplifted . . . and gifted with wisdom and grace.

When we walk together, in that holy space,

we see the beauty, sense the Divine, on every human face.

The silence is very special; solitude brings no fear;

and when friendship comes, it is deep, intense, sincere.

The people that you walk with, the people that you love, they are precious companions, on loan from above.

As a child you think they're permanent, always and ever there:

as an adult you know that change is constant and everywhere.

You know what will happen to your loved ones someday:

Indeed none of us is here to stay - - as we are.

But now comes the best part to lighten your load,

there is God, always God, a perfect God on the Christmas Road.

Transformed, Transfixed, Transcendent in God's Love

I am transformed, transfixed, transcendent in Your love.
I've been refined, redefined, made resplendent,
I'm enabled, ennobled, incandescent.
Yes, I am transformed, transfixed, transcendent in Your
love.

Lord, in your love my life was changed just wondrously.
I got a knowing beyond mere faith;
My spirit growing by Your grace;
And at last I've found my place, in Your love.

I feel awe and healed of flaw, in Your love.
I am calm, feel safe from harm, in Your love.
I can do what's demanded of me, indeed, I do it joyously.
Hallelujah, I'm transformed, transfixed, transcendent in
Your love!

The Christmas story, tale of glory, instructs us from above.
It teaches that there's nothing stronger than a happy, holy
love.

Instruction, when it's perfect, still leaves some great
mystery.

The child asks: "which part of me is God and which part of
God is me"?

And the answer is:

We are transformed, transfixed, transcendent by His love.
We've been refined, redefined, made resplendent,

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We are enabled, ennobled, incandescent,
We are transformed, transfixed, transcendent in His love.

Reunion

All the people of the world, he had a name for them....

He never gave to charity, said it just made some folks "lazy".
He never tutored a neighbor's child 'cause they were "dumb"
or just plain "crazy".

He sneered that elders were really "lame" as if these seniors
were somehow to blame
For their frailties - - or his indifference.

People in wheelchairs he always ignored, they made him
uneasy.
Now love can overcome that, but such love just made him
queasy.
He had read the Sermon on the Mount.
But thought his cold sins wouldn't count.

His self-imposed distance from his fellow man
Was not seen as a rejection of God's holy plan.
Thus to be unconnected was to be protected
From the dangers of strangers whose names he selected:
"Other", "lesser", "inferior".

By treating his fellows as annoyingly dense,
He built all around him an impenetrable fence.
Now that is a strategy from Satan descended, because
Loved ones are but strangers that you have befriended.

The people of his world were neither dull nor dim.
Yes, all the people of his world, they had names for him.

Mean, cold, a hoarder of gold, a miser, a misery, a mystery, a
mess

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Horrible, a loser, a zero more or less.

They called him many other names but, in the end,
No one he knew would call him friend.

And then, as Christmastime came.....

All the people of the world, they felt a rush of love.
They wanted to give, they wanted to live a life of giving.
They wanted to love, they wanted to have lives of sweet
forgiving.
Their smiles, their songs, their joyous community
Made him want to be a part of their common humanity.

And all the people of the world, they had a name for this:
Reunion, together, forever, in God's name, family, bliss.
Amen.

One Path to Christmas: Prayerful Action

On vacation, and in meditation, prayer as pure
communication can be sublime.

Watching for God in the silence and, at last, getting a sign,
propels us toward the heavens, toward the holy, toward the
light.

It makes our hopes take wing and makes our wings take
flight,
above the Christmas Road.

But the rest of the time when most people strive,
just to make a living and keep hope alive...

Then our prayers must be linked to purposive deeds
meeting the families' needs, sowing the communities' seeds.

We pray for strength, to labor in holiness.

We pray that our joys be more and our sorrows less.

And so we go to work, with God, to make all that come true:
Co-creating this world, with God, is what we learn to do...
on the Christmas Road.

The earliest pilgrims had a shining star, to lead them on the
Christmas road.

They looked heavenward, saw the star, were guided by the
light that glowed.

Today our paths are differently lit than the way the stars once
showed.

But wherever you are when you're working with and thinking
of God, that place is the Christmas Road.

Praying at Christmas

Christmas helps us find our place...
A pew in church, a state of grace,
Enjoying the warmth of the fireplace,
And of family and our faiths.

It is fun to pray at Christmas,
To honor babies and visions high.
I like to pray every day,
But at Christmas I remember why.

A Wind-Chime for the Delight of God

I suddenly wanted to be a wind-chime, for the delight of
God.

The sun on the tropical beach at Christmas was very bright,

But the breeze was rather slight,

So I realized that I would have to hold myself lightly,

And I did.

I was as delighted by God's desire to be delighted

As by the sounds that came through me and by our pleasure
in the music

That we made, with His wind.

Keeping The Spirit in Christmas

How do we maintain the Christmas Spirit? We could start by pausing to pray.

We don't have to try to be eloquent, our hearts tell us what to say:

"Do one more act of kindness, wear a friendly smile for all,
Give one more dollar to charity, take one less trip to the mall.

Give your gifts in God's name, recall why it is that He came.

Teach your kids that 'what gift did you bring me' is not the real name of the game.

The Night Before the Night Before Christmas

It was the night before the night before Christmas.
My wife and I were reminiscing as the Yule log glowed.
Our shopping and wrapping were finished.
In sweet silence, our memories flowed.

Our first Christmas together there was terrible weather,
freezing cold, snow and hail, quite a storm.
But we were just married and though terribly harried,
We found loving ways to stay warm.

I remembered that our second Christmas was a blessed one.
Our first-born baby had only just come.
We were so much in love, but when push came to shove,
We were tired, we were happy, we were numb.

As past Christmases were registered in our mind's eye,
In Christmas stories our lives flashed by...
We bought the cribs and the bibs and the baby books,
And the blankets and the mobiles, too.
His one thousand outfits had just the right looks...
and all of his stuff was new.

The rocking horse and playpen didn't come cheap.
Nor did anything else that we wanted to keep
for our next baby, also a boy.
Santa brought, but we paid for, everything needed for our
new pride and joy.

Both of the kids required jeans and braces, bikes and drums,
and all the guitars, camps and trips cost us tidy sums.

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After the proms came college tuition,
We took out the loans of our own volition.

Christ and Moses were always with us, we're an interfaith
couple,
And though we didn't get rich, we were never in trouble.
We worked, we prayed, we held on tight,
And then there came this special night.

She said "the boys won't be home from college until
tomorrow noon.
I knew that they'd become fine men but it happened way too
soon."
I said "they're truly great and so are you: presents from
above"
We held each other, and prayed to God, grateful for our love.

The Cross and The Star

A golden, antique cross and a silver 6-point star share space on my sister's necklace now. More than jewelry, objects of precious sentiment, they are visible protectors of her person. That they draw attention to her smooth skin and great beauty is secondary but pleasing. Together, they clink and clank all day in metallic conversation.

I rather think that they tell her, and each other,
About the jingle/jangle joys of everyday life.
They know much about life...and about love,
about the embeddedness of self within the bosom of family;
about the tinkling intimations of Oneness experienced
between and among the generations and about the
unutterable
rapture of loving Oneness between a family and God...
on the Pathway to Christmas.

Prophets and Preachers and Sunday School Teachers

Prophets and preachers and Sunday school teachers...
you'll meet a lot of these on SPIRIT's Road.
Most know the Bible inside out.
That it means what it says they have no doubt.
But they're not primarily focused on the past;
they're trying to discern the values that last,
And teach those values to us and our kids.

Prophets and preachers and Sunday school teachers,
Pandas and larks and all kinds of creatures,
All of them bathed in light, warmed by love,
On all of the Pathways to Christmas.

Today is Elf Day, Be Good to Yourself Day

On the Sunday before Christmas, Pastor Williams rose to preach.

The congregation was attentive as he had the gift of speech. He said "I have my list of church members here and I've checked it more than twice, And I know that most of you have not been very nice...."

There was a collective intake, and a lengthy holding of breath, To be singled out as a sinner, would be a fate much worse than death.

"You are busy preparing for Christmas, you are trying to be good little elves But friends, you aren't being good ... to yourselves."

The whole church exhaled, and smiled broadly, we were all very much relieved, The pastor wouldn't speak of us personally, that's what we believed, But that's not exactly the way it was going to be. He looked down and said "now, let's just see... I'll start with a lady, sweet Marcella McGhee."

Marcella blushed. She was a saint, but Pastor Williams near made her faint, "Marcella" he said "I'd be surprised if you weren't baking your Christmas pies. Brandied peach and double rum plum, I sure hope you are saving me some. Marcella nodded happily. "But in the meantime, before

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Christmas dinner

Nibbling and tipping is not a winner

Not so much for you and your family but for all of us who
Just happen to stop by and never refuse a piece of pie.

"It's bad for our waistlines", the pastor said, patting his ample
paunch.

He looked down at the papers in his hand

Then called out "Teddy McVay, how's your old man?"

"Fine, sir" said Ted. "I'm sorry he's not here but he's frazzled
to a feather.

The store is so busy and this very cold weather..."

"Oh now, lad, I don't want to be a bore, but your dad does
work much too hard at the store.

Faith, we don't want him exhausted, we don't want to lose
his heavenly voice.

Tell him to be here for Christmas service. Tell him I said he's
got no choice."

Teddy nodded but looked nervous, having nothing more to
say,

The pastor said: "My Father will be here too, Christmas is his
birthday".

Then the pastor left off from individual teaching and resumed
his wonderful communal preaching.

He warned of credit card debts and bowl game bets.

He said: "Do yourself a favor, don't outdo your neighbor".

He told us to take it easy, avoid anger and wrath, smile a lot,
have a hot bath.

His message was useful. I know it helped me. I put massage
oils for everyone,

Under the tree. In our home... along the Christmas Road.

An Interfaith Prayer at Christmas

The road that leads through Christmas
Did not start or end with Christ.
New ways, new faiths, new practices
Can take us to new heights.
If that sentiment offends you
I beg you to forgive.
But as conditions change, religions change, that's how we
humans live.

So, let us love all people, make neighbors into friends,
To God and men alike, let's ask forgiveness, make amends.
Some think Christ did all that hard work for us, all we need
do is believe,
That will be fine when we're always kind and when all folks
are relieved
Of illness and poverty. Until then, let's speak clearly and not
in Babel code,
We work to enlarge human goodness, that's the lesson of the
Christmas Road.

An Everyday Prophet

The prophets of old often were told by God to invoke His name.

That was never asked of me when I was called to prophecy.
He thought-spoke my name when He came to me.

I answered simply, "Hincini", as did the ancients, "Here I am".

He told me that He wanted me to prevent a form of human injury.

I just said "I agree", instantly.

He didn't tell me how, how long or why I had to do the task.
Nor did I then have any need to ask.

It was unspoken but perfectly clear,

That I'd do anything and I'd go anywhere:

That joyously to this work I'd be wed, I knew how to do it, I
also knew I'd be led.

God said "good, now you are my prophet".

I cried out "oh, no, I'm not worthy of that".

He asked "do you think that the work I require of you,
changing careers,

Is less important than that of all the Biblical seers? "I told
Him I did and He was so kind. He said "go read the Bible
and if that doesn't Change your mind, we'll call you
something else".

So that night I did it. I read Prophets straight through,

Comparing my assignment to what they had to do,

And about midnight I did see the light,

Realizing that as always, the Lord had been right.

And every day since, my life has been vital.
I just love the work and I'm more used to the title.
Now I can say it: "I am a prophet of God".
You know that no longer sounds so odd.
On SPIRIT'S Road.



Biography

David C. Schwartz, 81 years young, is: a Ph.D. [MIT'65], Professor Emeritus of Health and Urban Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. 33 of David's poems, short stories, and professional essays have been published in US literary journals, UK magazines and Canadian anthologies in recent years.

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