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Professor Stewart

AML 2020

1/24/2019

Emily Dickinson's *Poem 236: How We Worship*

As someone who has attended church all of my life, Emily Dickinson's poem 236 could not be more relatable. I went to Sunday school every week, but I was still not sure of what was before me, so it's relieving to hear someone with similar thoughts. Her unstructured outlook on faith has me once again analyzing the flaws in organized religion and understanding that my faith is more of a personal relationship rather than a location to gather with others of the same "faith". This speaks to me on a personal level because I oftentimes don't want to attend church, and I would much rather sleep in and pray or worship on my own schedule and not early in the morning.

Although Dickinson speaks from her experience in the church from many years ago, her words remind me of my relatively recent upbringing in the Christian church. From my experience, many churches are much more focused on aesthetics than principles, creating a phony environment for worship. Many churches have amazing and beautiful cathedrals that costs millions of dollars to create, but I don't believe that's necessary at all. The money that is used towards these purposes can be used for much more beneficial things such as helping the homeless or creating shelter for those in need. These flashy elements could distract a person from the true purpose of attending church. Many priests and pastors emphasize so heavily on giving an offering of money every week -- which isn't necessarily wrong -- but this may cause people to think that their faith or acceptance to heaven is bought. Any place of worship should be a

Commented [PC1]:
An interview with author Matthew:

How does it feel to be published?

M.A.: My career plans are to be a Biology major. I was enrolled at FAU but the out-of-state tuition was expensive. I have financial aid, but I am definitely interested in scholarships. Getting published has inspired me to visit the Career Center at PBSC and see about getting scholarships with my writing.

What was your process for writing this reader response?

M.A.: It took a couple hours. I jotted down ideas that correlated with my own life, then took a separate document and picked those that went together the best. By the end, I changed a couple things around. I moved the part about cathedrals to the top as I felt it was the most interesting thing.

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PROF DIRECTIONS: Reading Response essays should be two-to-three full pages in MLA format and should be about one aspect of just one of the reading selections covered prior to the assignment.

Students should focus on just one idea brought up by the text; do not write a full review, summarize a short story, or paraphrase a poem.

You should explain how and why this particular element of the text affected you personally. For example, you may write about why you really disliked Mary Jane in *Huckleberry Finn*, or how *Defender of the Faith* made you consider how we are all frustrated by conflicting loyalties.

You may not write a line-by-line interpretation of *The Waste Land*, retell the entire plot of *The Dark Knight Returns*, or provide a full literary review of *Recitatif*.

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A. gives no generalized summaries. In fact, there's barely more than introductory mentions of Dickinson's work. A. stays wholly concerned about his "response" to the text as directed.

welcoming sanctuary for anyone and everyone, yet those establishments that are ornately decorated leave people feeling obligated to dress to impress, an expectation that is unrealistic for many. If someone's Sunday Best is merely jeans and a t-shirt, they shouldn't feel unworthy of attending service or feel as if others will judge them due to their attire. Church is a place to worship God, not a place to worry about others. After all, only God can judge.

Furthermore, one set place to gather and worship shouldn't be necessary at all.

Dickinson defining her 'church' in her own terms made me feel more dignified to push to do the same. I have found that it's much more comfortable to express my spirituality wherever I'm feeling connected, just as she did. It doesn't matter if I am in my bedroom or in my car, because it is my own personal relationship, just as I would have with someone in my family. It shouldn't matter if a person is alone or if they are gathered with family and friends at home or at a park. Above all, it's nice to be comfortable and cozy in a relaxing environment.

Aside from the physical aspects, organized religions can also sometimes create distorted ideas of what faith really is. The texts that religions are based on are open to interpretation and there are so many different translations to these religious books that many people are left to question which one is the right one to follow. It might be easier to figure out if all Christians read the Bible and decided for themselves. In addition to making independent decisions, reading the Bible, Quran, Torah, etc., could help one feel more connected to his or her higher power by cutting out the middleman. This creates a more intimate relationship and allows the person to speak more freely as their heart desired.

Organized religion may make it hard for a person to know what to believe and also it can affect the way that person expresses their beliefs. Structured practices could make some feel pressured to prove their faith to others, regardless of how strongly they feel internally. It's

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Notice how A. does not drift. He remains focused on what he shares with Dickinson's philosophy on church and religion throughout every paragraph.

shocking how something as simple as missing a Sunday service or not knowing The Lord's Prayer could have someone receiving backlash over how dedicated they are to their worship/faith. People act as if it's impossible to be faithful outside of the church walls. These attitudes can also leave people feeling like -- as long as they abide by the rituals -- they're in good faith and nothing more is necessary when the reality of it is that one's faith is a lifestyle.

In conclusion, *Poem 236* generated deep thought within me on organized religions. Dickinson's words resurfaced memories from when I was a young, skeptical Christian and reassured me that I'm on the right path in my spiritual journey. In the end, I'm content with my beliefs and I agree totally with what Dickinson is stating in this poem.