

ELEGY

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Poet is Priest

–Allen Ginsberg, “Death to Van Gogh’s Ear”

poet priest and prostitute is the same person.
 an empty bottle is a ceremony.
 an empty city is a funeral.
 an empty church is a search.
a burning cathedral is the baptism of a people,
now congregating over phantom memories of
saints they did not know had been sowed in ash in the first place.
 the fruit of fire is a mantle under which
 holy bells no longer ring, but glasses clink.
in case god doesn’t show to his own funeral,
 tell him someone’s walking on his grave.
tell him they’re emptying the river for a christening
 or tell him they’re emptying the river as
 an offering
 a penance
 a dirge.

poet priest and prostitute is the same person
if they feed a man and suspend him in eucharist.
if they condemn a man and nail him to a cross.
the loss of innocence is an interminable sentence.
 the loss of language is sublime.
 if a letter is but a glimpse,
 if a word is but a look,
then a poem, then a prayer, then ecstasy
 is a vision.

poet priest and prostitute all sing lamentations.
poet priest and prostitute are the choir to a requiem.

what kind of saint do you want to be?
dead.

what kind of god do you want to be?
dead.

what kind of end do you want to bring?
fire.

what kind of birth do you want to give?
smoke.

what kind of gospel do you want to sing?
an elegy.