



Brother Antoninus

*“The ultimate, agonized sincerity  
that makes for a truly great  
personal style...”*

—THE NATION

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the crooked  
lines of god

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### About the author...

"God writes straight with crooked lines," runs the Portuguese proverb. Claudel made it famous in *The Satin Slipper*, and it has come to stand in men's minds as the epitome of that compelling obliqueness with which the divine intent governs the chaos of the human situation. *The Crooked Lines of God* invokes it well, for that same reverberating urgency troubles the lines of this poetry, as it has haunted the life of the man who wrote it.

Brother Antoninus (William Everson), was born in Sacramento, California, in 1912, and grew up in the town of Selma, where he married, earned his living as a laborer and farmer, read the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, and wrote the series of books which established him as one of the promising poets of the West. Drafted as a conscientious objector during the War, on his release he settled in the San Francisco Bay area and became identified with the anarcho-pacifist group around the poet Kenneth Rexroth. In 1948 he came into national attention with the publication of his book *The Residual Years* by New Directions. A year later he received a Guggenheim Fellowship.

His moment was brief. The early marriage had not survived the war, and after his release he met a fallen-away Catholic whose struggle back to her faith led to his own conversion. They separated to enter the Church in 1949. During a year with the Catholic Worker movement he was increasingly drawn to the monastic life, and in 1951 entered the Dominican Order as a tertiary lay brother (oblate). The ensuing years of contemplative withdrawal prepared him for his reemergence with the San Francisco Renaissance in 1957. In the past two years his public readings have taken him up and down the Coast and into the Midwest. *The Crooked Lines of God* contains the poetry of his conversion, his integration into the Church, and his progress in the religious life.

Christmas 1959—

LA2

To Fr. Louis,  
With affection and gratitude for a good friend.

In Domino,

Jim Heiney

the  
crooked Lines  
of God

Poems 1949-1954

By Brother Antoninus

Contemporary Poets Series

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CUM PERMISSU SUPERIORUM

Some of these poems have previously appeared in *The Catholic Worker*,  
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**from the publisher...**

The University of Detroit *Contemporary Poets Series* has one objective: to publish the best of contemporary poetry in the spirit of the Christian tradition, as well as outstanding studies of today's poets and their work. Anthologies and literary studies will be included in projected volumes in the series.

*The Crooked Lines of God* was printed by Brother Antoninus at the Albertus Magnus Press, St. Albert's College, the Dominican House of Studies for the Province of the West, and was bound by Perry Davis of Belmont. It is the first volume of the University of Detroit Press, and initiates its Contemporary Poets Series.

*The jacket photograph is by Harry Redl, San Francisco.*



**“Religious art** is the measure of human depth and sincerity; any triviality, any weakness cries aloud.” Against this dictum of Henry Adams the poetry of Brother Antoninus stands in intense approximation. There is no triviality here, and if his weaknesses cry aloud, it is the anguish of the Spirit and the Flesh as they grope together, seeking resolution from the cleavage that has split them apart in the fallen nature of man. An early disciple of Robinson Jeffers, he inherited the latter’s violent preoccupation with a humanity tortured by original sin, but he has long since worked through his master’s idiom to achieve an individual style grounded upon the centrality of the Christian ethos, and purged in the vision of a humanity corrupted to its depths but redeemed and transfigured in the blaze of supernatural grace. This vision he translates into the contemporary attitude, using the powerful nature imagery of the American West to contain and adapt his Biblical episodes into modern perspectives. Begun in the world and completed in the cloister, his book, like his life, serves witness to the human search in its most stark and troubled manifestations.

*“Probably the most profoundly moving and durable of the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance . . . His work has a gnarled, even tortured honesty, a rugged unliterary diction, a relentless probing and searching, which are not just engaging, but almost overwhelming . . . Anything less like the verse of the fashionable quarterlies would be hard to imagine.”*

—EVERGREEN REVIEW

*“He probes, with what surpassing pity, the soul’s terrible wounds . . . His massive investigation of the Ecstasy and the Anguish of the life wholly given to God is of incalculable value to our age . . . Sin and hell, those unfashionable concepts, are back in fashion again, and it is the great gift of Brother Antoninus to limn them in ancient power . . . Like Whitman and Jeffers, he is most impressive in a sustained passage in which the interlaced long and short lines crash and subside with the intolerable power of the sea.”*

—THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY WINDOW

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