

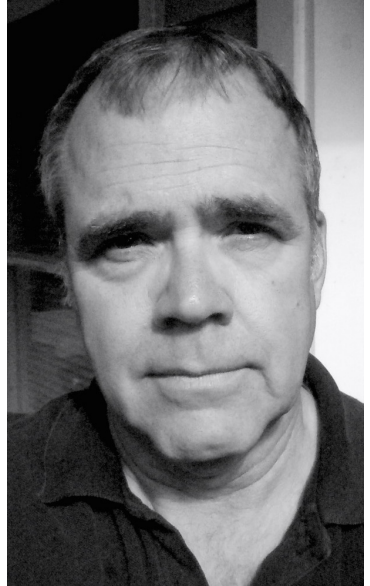
# Dying Sorrow

An Exhibition by Daniel Bonnell inspired by Kahlil Gibran



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**DANIEL BONNELL** is one of the most noted sacred artists of the 21st century. He received his BFA degree from the Atlanta College of Art and his MFA in painting from Savannah College of Art and Design. His post-graduate studies were under the renowned photographer, Ansel Adams, celebrated artist Edward Ross, as well as the renowned designer, Milton Glaser. He was the Winner of The Brother Nathan Cochran Award in Sacred Arts in 2018. His paintings are found in over 100 countries around the world - in cathedrals, churches and private collections, and in publications of over 30 languages. He is also author of *Shadow Lessons*, a book about teaching art in the inner city to at-risk high school students, and he is a contributing writer to *ArtPulse Magazine*, a magazine on contemporary art. He follows a Franciscan position of ethos that espouses a kenosis position on life. He paints primarily on grocery bag paper, expressing his belief that all real beauty finds rest on a stage of humility, as he sees each work of art as an act of devotion.



For more information, see: [bonnellart.com](http://bonnellart.com)

### Reflections on Art from Daniel Bonnell

“True beauty is received on a stage of humility; Christ born in a cave, the cross revealing power in weakness - even sacred paintings on a grocery bag.”

“The mystery of seeing is seeing the mystery.”

“All artists are only midwives that enable creativity to emerge from the Eternal.”

“If the beauty of that which is seen was created by the unseen, then how much more beautiful is that which is unseen?”

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What language shall I borrow  
to thank thee, dearest Friend,  
for this, *thy dying sorrow*,  
thy pity without end?  
O make me thine forever;  
and should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never  
outlive my love to thee.

A verse from the hymn titled "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" by Paul Gerhardt, 1656; based on a Medieval Latin poem ascribed to St. Bernard de Clairvaux; translated from the German by James W. Alexander, 1830 (Mt 27:27-31; Mk 15:16-20; Jn 19:1-5).

# WHY I DRAW AND PAINT ON GROCERY BAG PAPER

by Daniel Bonnell

In 2012, I obtained my MFA in Painting from Savannah College of Art and Design. I was 56 years old at the time. I chose to further my education by seeking to discover a new way of painting and creating. I sought to push my present methods and techniques of painting to an unknown level.

After studying the writings of the Desert Fathers, and others such as St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart, I came to realize that God is revealed through love, which becomes the highest dynamic of beauty. My further studies revealed how God uses the golden ratio of 1.618 or the law of thirds, to reveal beauty directly to the human eye.

I also found that the highest beauty always is built upon a stage of humility. Such examples are Jesus being born in a stable, the cross showing all power through weakness, etc.

After seeking new surfaces to work on, the answer seemed to be obvious, grocery bag paper. This paper is durable and strong and serves all people the world over. It carries groceries just as a donkey carries a workload. When wrinkled, it acts and appears like skin. Its texture takes on a life of its own. I then found that when I completed a painting, if I was willing to ball the piece up as if to throw it away, when unraveled, it revealed a texture and color shift that nearly always brought life to it.

Then after balling it up I discovered that soaking it, unraveling it, and ironing it, transformed each piece into a greater form of beauty. The semiotics are evident; baptism, death, resurrection and the heat of transformation. Lastly, I was able to raise the level of beauty even further by applying olive oil and frankincense to each piece as I saw fit. Many of these pieces actually retain the smell of the oils.

Thus, I seek to prove the thesis of high art being produced on a stage of humility. There is no artist signature, only a small out-of-the-way stamp of the artist.

# DISCOVERING BEAUTY

by Daniel Bonnell

It is my own conviction that all creativity has always existed and that artists merely act as mid-wives bringing forth new forms of consciousness through the birth canal of revelation. The old adage, "There is nothing new under the sun," is actually true. There is only new consciousness.

Most art that is of high value, that teaches us to pause on such a level of consciousness, is in itself a form of alchemy. The value of such art continues to grow because it takes on a life of its own, just as pressure produces a pearl or gold.

Jean-Francois Millet's paintings preceded Vincent van Gogh's art, enabling him to carry forth Millet's style, drama of composition, and life style. In fact, many of Vincent van Gogh's paintings were actually copies of Millet's. The high Renaissance painter Raphael was a young painter that would sneak into the Sistine Chapel and watch Michelangelo painting as he lay on his back. The inspiration of witnessing high art in process was one that he carried through his whole life.

Great writing, music, and theatre were by-and-large passed down as if the art took on a life of its own, as if the art was not limited to a canvas, paper, or instrument. Pastors and priests also engage in such high art. Their inspiration does not come from their own creativity but from the author of all creativity, the living God. It is only when artists, and pastors and priests, allow themselves to get out of the way of an emerging work of art, or sermon, or teaching, that the high art is born. In essence, they may only become a mid-wife or paper boy.

This series of works on grocery bag paper, depicting the narrative of the Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, are also works that I hope will be regenerated into various forms of life, sparking a new manner of seeing the cross. I hope it will enable others to recreate its essence through other forms of art. For those that are pastors and priests, perhaps it will generate sermons and writings that enable a new way of seeing the Christ being crucified, dead and rising. If the highest understanding of great art is beauty itself, then such beauty already exists from a single point of consciousness into eternity. Kahlil Gibran, the early 20th century Lebanese-American writer, poet and visual artist, once said, "Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in the mirror. But you are eternity and you are the mirror."

## Daniel Bonnell, *Two Thieves* (1-15), 2022

Mixed media on grocery bag paper

11" x 14" (framed)

Kahlil Gibran produced several drawings that embrace seeing the crucifixion within a new form of consciousness. Titled *Crucified* and *The Triangle*, they depict three figures entangled with one another, as if in a struggle of existence. Only the center figure (Jesus) is at perfect peace and rest. These drawings are void of any wooden cross or vehicle of execution. It is with this insight to viewing the cross that I chose to produce this series of drawings and mixed media works on grocery bag paper. My hope is that in producing this series I have enabled that Godly DNA that exists in all high art to be carried forward to others, to enable our understanding of beauty to be the very desire we seek in this brief life, no different than a new born baby seeking beauty and life from its mother's breast.



## Background to *Two Thieves* series

In 1919, *Twenty Drawings* by Kahlil Gibran, the early 20th century Lebanese born poet-artist, appeared in bookshops in New York. This was the first and only volume published during Gibran's life to exclusively contain a selection of his paintings. Most of his books were either prose poetry, such as the best-selling book *The Prophet* (1923), short stories or collections of aphorisms. As a result, most people today know of him as a poet and author, and are unaware that he was an exceptionally gifted visual artist. He studied at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and was tutored by the major artists of the beginning of the 20th century, such as the celebrated French sculptor Auguste Rodin.

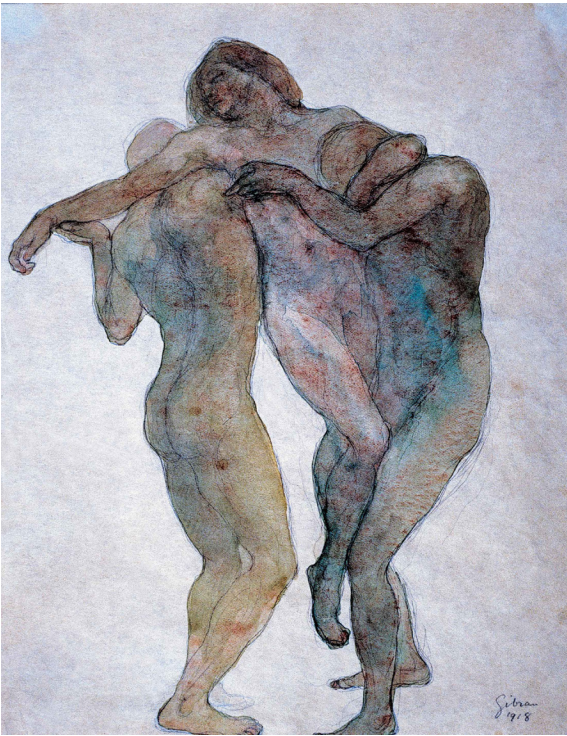
Kahlil Gibran wrote, "Art is a step from nature towards the Infinite." He saw his artistic-poetic work as epiphanies revealing God. Art served as a bridge between matter and spirit to Gibran, and therefore his art became a mystical-aesthetic experience.

*Twenty Drawings* is a collection of watercolors that represent the human form as an image and personification of Divine Beauty, an emanation of the Eternal.

Gibran, who grew up in a Maronite Catholic family in Lebanon, saw Jesus as the "perfect man," having the highest level of proximity with God. He believed Jesus was therefore unequalled in aesthetic and spiritual beauty, providing unwavering proof of the absolute presence of God among humanity. In Gibran's opinion, the crucifixion was the highest expression of the greatness of Christ, an event that signified freedom from matter, the sole cause of suffering, and man's longing for the Infinite. Two works in *Twenty Drawings* were titled by Gibran as *Crucified* and *The Triangle*. Each are wash drawings that portray two human figures holding onto a third figure. The works demonstrate in exemplary fashion how the traditional image of Christ between the two thieves may also be used in a symbolic sense, as a sacred disposition - as there are no explicit religious elements such as the cross, blood or nails to be seen here.

In the Preface to Gibran's *Twenty Drawings*, Alice Raphael, a noted early 20th writer and translator, writes; "The . . . crucifixion in this series of drawings shows at once how the symbol of the Christ between the two thieves can be used either to express the complete religious and mythological conception, as it would have been used by the Primitives in some large fresco, and how the same idea can be conveyed on a small sheet of paper by one who understands the inner meaning and is able to put it forth as a representation of the conflict of every self-conscious being. In this drawing a man rests upon the shoulders of two companions. There are no religious accessories either of halo or stigmata with which to associate or localize the conception and yet the story of the crucifixion is completely portrayed."

*The Triangle* by Kahlil Gibran

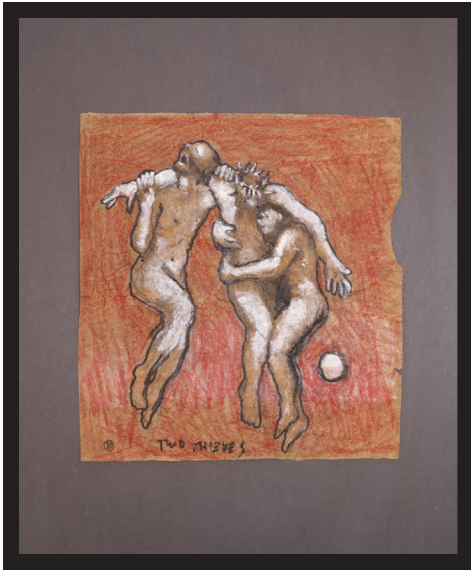


*Crucified* by Kahlil Gibran





Daniel Bonnell, *Two Thieves* (1-15), 2022











## Daniel Bonnell, *Pieta Meditation*, 2022

Mixed media on grocery bag paper

14" x 17" (framed)

There is nothing to sell or promote here except an attempt at beauty for those who seek it like myself. When two forces of beauty combine together to form a third dynamic we begin to enter the realm of mystery and wonder. Consider a sunset (the sun and atmosphere) or the first steps of a child (innocence and risk). Now consider Michelangelo's *La Pietà* and the symbol of life - water. The third element can only be formed in how you understand beauty beyond symbolism. What do you see?



Michelangelo Buonarroti, *La Pietà*,  
1498 -1499, marble



## Daniel Bonnell, *First Moment of the Resurrection*, 2022

Mixed media on grocery bag paper

14" x 17" (framed)

Down through the centuries artists have avoided a lot of religious symbolism and representation for sacred moments such as the Transfiguration, the Reunion of Jesus back to the Father (Ascension), as well as the Resurrection. Perhaps they were simply too much to comprehend and too spiritual to represent? Or maybe the artists themselves felt the subject matter was too open-ended to conceive? Perhaps as artists we make things too difficult for ourselves?

This drawing-painting on a grocery bag simply seeks to ask the question, "What was it like to be the Son of God in a half divine and half flesh dimension?" Therefore, the point of the piece is not to produce a glorious "Handel's *Messiah*"-type visual representation. Its singular purpose is to pause and reflect, think and meditate, on what it might have been like for the Christ during those first moments following the Resurrection.



# CURATORS

*Dying Sorrow* is curated by *ArtSpirit* and CARAVAN



The Arts Initiative of the Episcopal Church in Wyoming

***ArtSpirit*** is the arts initiative of the Episcopal Church in Wyoming. *ArtSpirit* explores and nurtures the relationship between spirituality and the arts, by developing, curating, coordinating and hosting artistic initiatives to stimulate discussion, dialogue and education, as well as spiritual exploration, toward enhancing our experience and understanding of both the Transcendent and of each other.



*Transformation through the Arts*

**CARAVAN**, an international arts NGO/non-profit, is recognized as a global leader in using the arts to further our quest for a more harmonious future, both with each other and with the earth. CARAVAN's mission is based on the belief that the arts can be one of the most effective mediums to heal our world and to creatively foster peace, harmony, wholeness and health in all its forms. For more information on CARAVAN, see: [www.oncaravan.org](http://www.oncaravan.org)