FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Vesper: Contemporary American Poems of Religion and Spirituality

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The editors' previous collections, American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement and Like Thunder: Poets Respond to Violence in America, have flirted with the dispirited and disquieting. In this new anthology, they offer what they see as the third book of a series, one that "might offer a sense of peace, of closure, of redemption." With more than fifty poets in the compilation, Pulitzer Prize winners Stephen Dunn and Carolyn Kizer, and NEA Director Dana Gioia among them, the book boasts an eclectic mix of institutional religion and homegrown spirituality without ever privileging a particular viewpoint.

Both SuÃ¡rez and Van Cleave are accomplished poets in their own right with several poetry collections between them. In their Editors' Note, they explain their aesthetic in selecting these poems by quoting Mircea Eliade, "a Romanian American anthropologist of religion" who claimed that "the best way to understand world religions is to examine their cosmologies, meaning their views of both how the world came into being and how it operates on a daily basis."

This approach becomes clear when comparing Bruce Bond's "Host," which stems from his father's transplant, to Gaylord Brewer's "Christ, the End," which causes readers to question the way that Christ remembers the events of his death. With foreknowledge, where does the end begin? Then there is Nicole Cooley's poem, "Resurrection," a chronicle of the faith that is created in families, a predestination of misery, genetic, fated, overwhelming:

"and the history of the women in this family unfolds-
scissors, table knives, razor blades skimming our wrists,
the wire to bite in the hospital driving lightning up the spine,
the solitude we refuse to call loneliness, the sickness
that rises again and again in our throats, the vinegar
to keep ourselves thin. My great-grandmother knows our story,

the story of the sisters who will follow her into the next world."

The book does not shy from a faith that is damaged. Its editors sought to include a variety of religions. Linda Pastan speaks to Judaism in the fable-like "A Short History of Judaic Thought in the Twentieth Century" and Charles Harper Webb writes a very funny take on Buddhism in "Identifying with the Buddha," helping to break up a little of the book's earnestness. Carolyn Kizer's astonishingly prescient poem "Dixit Insipiens" will cause readers to look on the situation in the Middle East with new eyes.

Certainly, this volume may come to many purposes whether it be comfort, exploration, or confirmation of belief. It also provides a historical document, charting the place of religion in American culture as the country and its artists move from the twentieth century to the troubling twenty-first.