Meditation XVII from

Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions

by John Donne

_Nunc lento sonitu dicunt, morieris._

(Now this bell tolling softly for another, says to me, Thou must die.)

Perchance he for whom this bell\(^1\) tolls may be so ill as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me and see my state may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic,\(^2\) universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingrafted into the body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated. God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God’s hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another.

As therefore the bell that rings a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness. There was a contention as far as a suit (in which piety and dignity, religion and estimation, were mingled) which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him that thinks it doth; and though it intermit\(^3\) again, yet from that minute that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? but who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

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\(^1\) the bell Donne refers to is the death knell.

\(^2\) embracing all people and things; this is not a reference to the Roman Catholic church.

\(^3\) cease for a period of time.
Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions is a 1624 prose work by the English theologian and writer John Donne, Dean of St. Paulâ€™s Cathedral in London. It is a series of reflections that were written as Donne recovered from a serious illness. The work consists of twenty-three parts ('devotions') describing each stage of the sickness. Each part is further divided into a Meditation, an Expostulation (or objection), and a Prayer. The most famous part of the Devotions is number XVII (17), containing these lines: No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe.

Meditation XVII

Lyrics. 6.8K. Meditation IV Lyrics. Devotions upon Emergent Occasions is a 1624 prose work by the English writer John Donne, who dedicated it to the future King Charles I. It is a series of reflections that were written as Donne recovered from a serious illness, believed to be either typhus or relapsing fever. (Donne does not clearly identify the disease in his text.) He describes this as a "preternatural birth, in returning to life, from this sickness".[1] The work consists of twenty-three parts ('devotions') describing each stage of the sickness. Meditation XVII is perhaps the best-known part of the work. It forms part of Devotion XVII (subtitled "Now, this bell tolling for another, says to me, thou must die."[3]), in which the patient prepares himself to die,[4] and contains the following passage