

# Longfellow – writing incorporates religion essay sample

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow incorporates religious themes into his poetical work. His religious beliefs were in favor of his Christian faith, unlike others who found all the negative aspects of Catholicism. His poetical works such as "Christus", "The Divine Tragedy" and "The Bells of San Blas" show his positivity toward the Catholic church. In Longfellow's life, he went through periods of depression as a reaction to his wives' deaths. During these times of sorrow, Longfellow turned to his faith which helped him move through the mourning process. In Longfellow's pre-poet days, he served as a priest and went to college attending a religious class. Longfellow took his religion seriously, and expressed his fealty through his work.

"Christus", although thin and disorganized, was Longfellow's attempt at a religious epic. Longfellow loosely employs the virtues of faith, hope and charity as the basis of organization. It was originally planned as a dramatizing of the process of Christianity, but he only left his mark in the first and third parts of "Christus". Before he began writing "Christus", he was in a loftier mood. This uplifting mood eventuated into this attempted religious epic. Spoken by Edith, a character in "Christus", "Yea, I believe The Inner Light, and not the Written Word, To be the rule of life.", tells that Longfellow believes that the inner religious self should be taken more seriously than writing. He believes that whatever faith is in the heart is what that person should believe in.

In Longfellow's background, he was seemed to be raised as a respectable Catholic. Longfellow never appeared to break the law, meaning he was brought up well and behaved with dignity. Even though the Wadsworth's and Longfellow's were predominantly enterprising laymen, men who are not <https://assignbuster.com/longfellow-writing-incorporates-religion-essay-sample/>

clerics, they did have faith. Longfellow's brother, Samuel Longfellow, became a priest, and Longfellow wrote a hymn for his (Samuel Longfellow's) ordination into the church. Overall, Longfellow lived the life of a Christian gentleman.

Depression was a major part of Longfellow's life. He was married twice and widowed twice. His first wife died of an infection which developed after a miscarriage. His second wife was trapped inside a burning house and was unable to escape. These two unfortunate events caused the creation of "Mezzo Cammin" and "The Cross of Snow". From "Mezzo Cammin" in line fourteen, Longfellow wrote, "The cataract of Death far thundering from the heights.", meaning that the cloudiness of death floats above in heaven. Longfellow was feeling down, saying throughout the whole poem how half of his life was wasted. Religion comes into play with the last line inferring the word heights as a synonym as heaven.

In "The Cross of Snow", lines four, eleven and twelve all mention a religious aspect. In line four, Longfellow mentions the word "halo" inferring that his lost lover was similar to an angel. In lines eleven through twelve, "cross" is mentioned as a symbol of religion and the lost lover's holiness. This poem is about a lost beloved one who died some time ago but will never be forgotten. Longfellow is reflecting on his two lost wives, and how to him they were angels. In Longfellow's point of view, they were as important to him as Jesus is to Christianity. These two pieces cause Longfellow to get involved with religious writing. Longfellow became too occupied with somber and religious subjects to be consumed by his depression.

In 1841, it seemed logical that Longfellow's writing would turn to a major poetic work of a religious nature when examining the pattern of his life. Other pieces written during his depression were "The Rainy Day", "God's Acre", "Blind Bartimeus", and Longfellow translated Tegnér's "The Children of the Lord's Supper". "The Rainy Day" is a poem on the dreariness of the narrator's life, but how he depends on fate to bring him up. In lines thirteen and fourteen, "Thy fate is the common fate of all,/ Into each life some rain must fall," explains the acceptance of the narrator during his supposed designated time of sorrow. Stanza two in "God's-Acre" insinuates how sacred the name "God's Acre" is and how the deceased are comfortable in their graves knowing that they are going toward heaven. In "Blind Bartimeus", Longfellow inserts religion throughout the whole poem. For example line four "'Tis Christ of Nazareth!" exclaims the coming of Christ. This poem tells the tale of Christ curing the blind. Longfellow shows his faith through this poem telling about a common bible story. Longfellow's recoil from several aspects of the contemporary religious scheme cause him to lose much of his professional hope for the future.

Another work of Longfellow that included his faith was entitled "The Divine Tragedy". A character in "The Divine Tragedy" named Martha says, "Lord, dost thou care not that my sister Mary hath left me thus to wait on thee alone? I pray thee, bid her help me." Longfellow shows Jesus's superiority through this character. Jesus always helped people in need, and throughout the epic, Longfellow uses characters to ask for help from Christ in order to show his divine trait and the helper of all in need. This play was composed in three acts and was based on the biblical account of Christ's life. Longfellow

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intended to be a treatment of Hebraism and Hellenism. Hebraism is the religion of Jewish people who practice based on the Old Testament and the Talmud, and Hellenism is the principle and ideals associated with classical Greek civilization. The plot of this story is drawn largely from the four gospels. For example, The Apostle's Creed, a Christian creed traditionally ascribed to the twelve apostles, was used as an epilogue in part one of "The Divine Tragedy". Also in this story, Lucifer, the devil, appears, but his evil is not portrayed as strongly as it has been previously.

Longfellow generally accepted the teaching of William Ellery Channing, man is fundamentally good, endowed by God with reason, conscience, and an intuitive awareness of the divine. When Longfellow attended Bowdoin, he established the first Unitarian Society. This group was not simply revolting against the "consociation of 'old sanctities'", as he once called the college's conservatively Congregationalist clergy, but affirming the strong personal faith that pervaded his life and writings. While attending Bowdoin, Longfellow studied classical languages, mathematics, Scripture, branches of philosophy, and briefly natural science. After graduating, he spent five and half years teaching modern language at Bowdoin, and then spent seventeen years at Harvard teaching the same. He then served as a priest at a sanctuary to hold the place inviolate because Washington had been there. His past careers has helped him move on to writing his religious themed works.

In general, Longfellow had a strong faith. Although he had no patience with theological doctrine, and probably couldn't understand it, he found the good in religion. The design of his life was then to remove all

prejudice, uncharitableness, persecution and then union of all sects into one church universal. Longfellow found the holy, pure, zeal and self-devotion along with human sympathies and endless deeds of charity in his faith, not bigotry, fanaticism nor intolerance. Although it may seem Longfellow was a bit fanatical, he was far from it. In Longfellow's way of thinking there was a difference between the simplicity of the backwoods ranter and the simplicity we find in the Parables of Jesus, as well suggested in his translation of "The Children of the Lord's Supper".

Religion appeared in several other of Longfellow's work. In "The Bells of San Blas", Longfellow depicted the picturesque devotion when the priest was lord of the land. This referred to the times when clergy members controlled all aspects of life, near medieval times. In stanza three Longfellow describes the bells as "the voice of the church". He recognizes how the bells represent the church's calling of a mass. When the bells are rung, people come to church. When they ring again, church has ended. Longfellow shows the grave importance of the bells through a partially lengthy poem. Another piece, "A Psalm of Life" was printed in magazines and "The New England Tragedies" was at first going to be named "Wenlock Christison". Longfellow continued his religious practice when writing "The Legend Beautiful", and in "King Robert of Sicily", "He entertained the Angel unawares." is a famous line adapted from St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a man who was loyal to his faith. He felt strongly about his Catholicism and because of this, it was incorporated into his poetical works. "Christus" and "The Divine Tragedy" were written to let

the people know just how he felt about religion. Considering he was pro-faith, the public responded to his writing by attending church more often and realizing how important it is to have God involved in everyday life.

Longfellow's faith induced writing helped out the religious community by attracting new members, and restoring the old ones.