



The Cathedral
Balsam, North Carolina
Photo by Dan Hardison

The Cathedral

George W. Jones

The love of God
constrains His child
to conceive that the mountains
have walled Sherwood
into a vast cathedral
with the arch of the firmament
its dome.

The mountain
squarely west
becomes the high altar
of the cathedral.

The trees
holding half their leaves
are bright red gold,
the corn is ruddy gold,
and the warm light
filtered through autumn haze
is pale glowing gold.

Fallen leaves
carpeting the temple
and raked into a hundred mounds
by a hundred thurifers
make incense.

And the smoke rises thick
before the mighty altar
and dims the great cathedral
as it climbs, spirals, weaves
upward and upward
into the celestial dome.

The earth smells of ripeness –
ripe harvest,
ripe apples,
ripe fodder –
spicy and sweet.

The last warmth
of the aging year
is tenderly caressing.

The day is breathless.
There is neither speech
nor language
but nature is very clear,
“Be still. Know God
in the work of His hands.”

The sinking sun all day long
veiled by golden haze
at last becomes visible,
then portentous,
as the huge disk
above the mountain altar
sinks lower, lower
to the altar throne
and into the far-flung monstrance
of golden sunset clouds.

All the daylong
the heavenly dome
and all its roof
has declared His glory.

And then day is done
and the shadows of the evening
as the vanguards of night
steal across the sky.

The sun,
through the haze of incense
the color of blood,
even His precious blood,
is the symbol of the Host
in benediction.

The gates of heaven
seem open very wide
to man below.

O Jesus,
now the day is done,
with Thy tenderest blessings
of calm and sweet repose,
put Thy weary people to bed
like little children all.

The great altar is dark
and it is night.