

### BENDÍGAME\*

*For the chaplains of the Rio Grande valley,  
to whose work this is a footnote*

The forty voices rise as one  
in morning prayer.  
They sing the old songs,  
worn smooth as burnished coins.  
The copper faces are *centavos*  
that have crossed the river  
to find their worth.  
In the light of benediction  
they glow bright as gold.

I was brought to this valley  
to teach the wise of death,  
recite theories like *milagros*  
of lesser force.  
It is enough.

At the table to the side  
an old woman folds back the years.  
Her tears find the furrows  
that lead to her breast:  
the grave of her infant son.  
Like rain in the desert,  
they water the flower of her grief.

In the dim light their eyes meet mine,  
reaching as an open hand, their ears  
a bridge across the borders  
of our lives.

A pale ghost,  
I am the echo of the dead.

In their buried wisdom  
they teach us how to mourn.

—Robert A. Neimeyer, PH.D.

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\*Spanish—petition for a blessing