

You just can't trust a planet,
Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune:
they're there all right,
bright lights if not the brightest lights in the night sky.
But you just can't trust them to get you home.
They wander about all over the place,
fizzling randomly, like a firecracker gone walkabout.

Deceivers yet true
is one puzzling title Paul gives to Christians in our Epistle.
The Greek word he uses for deceiver is $\pi\lambda\alpha\nu\omicron\iota$
from which we get the word planet.

Except that deceit, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.
The track of the planets may look haphazard from earth,
but that is based on the false assumption that we are
the centre of the solar system, when we are definitely not.

From a very hot seat on the sun, the path of the planets
would not be haphazard but would seem entirely regular,
elliptical orbits like a ball on a string circling your head.
And four of the planets,
the gas giants Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune
in their part of space town are the leading ladies,
the Marias of the Sound of Music, with the faraway sun
reduced to a minor role, third nun from the left in the choir.

For instance Jupiter is the biggest planet in the solar system,
carbon neutral, giving out more heat than it receives.
1300 earths could fit into it and there'd still be room.
It's mass is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the rest of the planets put together.
Its gravity is so powerful that it holds on to 16 moons,
a veritable solar system of its own.
The nearest, Metis is 80,000 miles from its surface
the furthest, Sinope is 148 million miles from its surface,

over one and a half times our distance from the sun.
15/16 of its moons are named after Jupiter's lovers, ho, ho.
Its moon Io,
about the same distance as our moon from earth,
is the most volcanically active place in the solar system,
faraway Jupiter literally sucking magma from its core.
That's some suction: Jupiter is some deceiver.

Galileo Galilei got into terrible trouble with the Church
when he discovered the first four of Jupiter's moons,
because he'd found four heavenly bodies
which definitely did not revolve around earth.

With the obvious conclusion
we are definitely not the centre of the show.

And when you realise for the first time
that yours truly is not the centre of the show,
you have to look at everything very, very differently.

Which brings us back to those human planets
those deceivers we encounter.

Are they true deceivers?
Or is it just they are only erratic because we wrongly assume
that yours truly is the centre of the show,
the leading lady, the leading man.

If for one glorious moment we move away from me, me, me
and look at people from a different centre,
then they may seem very different people indeed;
we dare to see them as a glory rather than a threat.

The planet Jupiter, rather than being a deceiver
actually saves the earth by guzzling up or deflecting comets
that would blow us to smithereens.

Can we have a creed for Lent which asserts
I am not the centre of the universe
and see others accordingly?

For Christians that centre has to be Jesus Christ,
who himself in our Gospel centres on God
rather than sating bodily appetites,
or being the ultimate TV celebrity
or craving after being an omnipotent czar:
all the Slav kingdoms of the world I will give you
if you but bow down and worship me.
We are deceivers, Christ is true.

Can we see others as orbiting him rather than orbiting us?
Leonard Wilson Bishop of Singapore in the last World War
was brutally tortured by the Japanese.

Yet rather than seeing his torturers as fiends
attacking a bishop, the centre of the Church's universe,
he saw them with Christ beside them, redeeming them.
Christ smoothing out and banishing
the nationalistic nightmares drummed into them as children,

Christ calming and healing the hurt and the brutality,
Christ shining into their darkness.
Christ gently hammering home
that neither the kingdom of Japan
nor the kingdom of the British Empire was the true kingdom.

So the story goes, after Leonard Wilson recovered his health
and took his first confirmation in Singapore after the war
he puts his hands on the head of one of the candidates
and looked into the eyes of his former torturer.
Yet both were looking to Christ, our true centre.

This Lent, make sure that you, a deceiver yet true
that you, yes, just another planet, if a rather glorious one,
treasure those planets who cross your path,
who revolve like you around the same S-O-N,
the true centre of our universe.