

Emily Dickinson

(1830-1886)

#1207 (c.1872)

He preached upon "Breadth" till it argued him narrow –  
The Broad are too broad to define  
And of "Truth" until it proclaimed him a Liar –  
The Truth never flaunted a Sign –

Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence  
As Gold the Pyrites would shun –  
What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus  
To meet so enabled a Man!

#### ANALYSIS

"Brought up by a strict Puritan father, Miss Dickinson, despite her rebellion against some of the excesses of Calvinism, probably resented the highly intellectualized and at times snobbish liberal religion which was replacing it. The pretentious 'modern' preacher, talking at length about virtues which perhaps could better be practiced than defined, gets his 'comeuppance' in this ironic poem. The final lines gibe at the figure conjured up at the start of the poem, first by comparing mock gold (pyrites) with gold (here, as elsewhere in Miss Dickinson's poetry, a symbol of integrity) and then by imagining how Christ would feel upon confronting him." [Compare Hawthorne's satire of liberal Unitarianism, "The Celestial Railroad."]

James E. Miller, Jr.  
*The Literature of the United States* II, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition  
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 202