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by Robert Cooperman

Congregation was scandalized
to sit in Miss Jezzy's brothel,
us with the town's one piano.
She charged them for my playing,
parishioners taking a collection,
less at the bank than expected,
but not polite to accuse
a dead preacher of theft,
though I knew him for a rascal
under his black Jesus-suit.

They wept while I played;
then Sprockett recited Scripture
and some fitting poems.
Mary took it harder than his widow,
who had to know of
his "Redemption Sessions,"
even if the rest of his flock
was innocent as sheared lambs.

Still, he had an angel side:
rescued Manion's party winter of '68.
Preacher never grabbed the credit,
a man to crow up his own holiness.

Like most, he was part angel, part devil.
Damn if I know which half won in the end.

