



## The poetry of George Herbert.

It is not possible to date Herbert's individual poems. However, later studies suggest that Herbert seriously began his poetic work as early as 1613, just after he graduated as a Bachelor of Arts and began to further his studies for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity at Cambridge. From years of writing and re-writing, his most widely known collection, called "The Temple," was published in 1633, within a few months of the poet's death. This 1633 edition was published by Nicholas Ferrar, Herbert's Cambridge contemporary who, later, established an Anglican religious community at Little Gidding.

Later studies disclosed "a manuscript of 'The Temple' that clearly represents a version earlier than the printed version of 1633."<sup>1</sup> This manuscript contains 79 poems. The 1633 version contains 175 poems. Though one manuscript<sup>2</sup> contains fewer poems than the other, and some poems in the 1633 version exhibit signs of heavy revision, the principle of organization is the same. This discovery confirms that Herbert worked on the collection of "The Temple" over a number of years. He may have added, revised, and deleted several things before entrusting the complete manuscript of the 1633 edition to Ferrar.

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<sup>1</sup> Wall 16.

<sup>2</sup> MS Jones B 62 in Dr. Williams' Library, Gordon Square, London.

Reviewing the life of Herbert, we see that the years 1625 - 1630 represented Herbert's years of retreat after the Parliament of 1624. At this turning point, Walton writes:

He presently betook himself to a Retreat from London, to a friend in Kent, where he liv'd very privately, and was such a lover of solitariness. . . . In this time of Retirement, he had many Conflicts with himself, Whether he should return to the painted pleasures of a Court-life, or betake himself to a study of Divinity, and enter into Sacred Orders?"<sup>3</sup>

Herbert might have spent these long years in identifying and rectifying the relationships between God and himself as well as between his ideal self and his actual self. Contemplation and reflection during these years might have led him to sketch out the ideal image of the country parson, to affirm his choice of that institution--the Church, and to assure himself that the ordinary corporate conduct of the Church's liturgical and devotional practices were an appropriate context for living out the Christian life. In other words, this period allowed him to gain a better understanding of himself and his inner conflicts. He would have had enough time to express his spiritual experiences in poetry. He, then, collected his poems into one volume and entitled it "The Temple." We can understand Herbert's theological idea behind this title from a letter to his mother in her sickness, in which he wrote:

Lastly, for those Afflictions of the Soul: consider, that God intends that to be as a sacred Temple for

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<sup>3</sup> Walton 102.



himself to dwell in, and will not allow any room there for such an in-mate as Grief; or allow that any sadness shall be his Competitor.<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen, Herbert's primary goal in life was service to God. After a period of trial in serving God through the service of the Crown, he disregarded all secular and ecclesiastical advancement and declared his loyalty to Christ. He expressed his freedom from the social value systems of his day by his choice of the position of a country parson at a place far from the centres of religious or political life in Stuart England. In the era of religious confusion and controversy, Herbert's exemplary life as a humble Christian priest became a beacon for his contemporaries. With the phrase "Less than the least of God's mercies" as his motto, he devoted his life to the proclamation of God's word. Not only did he personally practise his religious exercises faithfully, he encouraged his parishioners to do the same. This action suggests that Herbert served the continuous process of God's people's redemption in the world by building up what he saw as Christ's earthly Body--the Church.

With a sense of mission and direction, Herbert plunged all his energies and his language skills into moving his rural parish of Bemerton towards that ideal community which the Church proclaimed to be the goal of human life on earth. Thus, in giving his final form to his collection of poems, "The Temple," Herbert's central theme is the mystical Christian life on earth. From the poetry, Herbert's view of the mystical body of

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<sup>4</sup> Walton 106

Christianity means that personal relationship with God is not only individual but is always grounded in the experience of God received by the corporate community of the faithful.

As a man of the Church, Herbert became the public and visible sign of God's presence in the world. Though his poetry apparently explores the inner man's spirituality, as "a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have past betwixt God and" his "Soul,"<sup>5</sup> the poems actually carry along the ecclesiastical context of man worshipping his God. The struggle in the private relationship of the individual soul to God was also expressed in man's corporate worship. The "Perirrhanterium" of "The Church Porch" section states:

Though private prayer be a brave designe,  
Yet publick hath more promises, more love: (397-398)<sup>6</sup>

"The Temple" is divided into three main sections, namely: The Church Porch, The Church, and The Church Militant. Each of the three sections calls our attention immediately to the Church. "The Church Porch" is like the entrance into the "Church." This first section briefs the faithful with moral advice and instructions as to how to behave before entering the Church and its communion. This instructive section provides clear choices for the conduct of the believers and points out the consequences of each alternative. With authoritative voice, "The Church

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<sup>5</sup> Walton 127.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations of poetry are taken from F.E. Hutchinson ed. The Works of George Herbert (London: Oxford, 1941).



"Porch" offers prudent advice on everyday affairs. It issues a warning against all seven deadly sins.\* These instructions could be compared to the reading of the decalogue,\*\* which, in Herbert's time, was done at the beginning of every Communion service. In the same way, "The Church Porch" could be compared to the preparation of the congregation in the Communion service.

The "Church Militant" serves as the conclusion of the collection by summarizing God's history of salvation as worked out in the history of the "Church" in the world from the fall of man until the end of time when "judgement shall appear."<sup>7</sup>

Being the main part of "The Temple," "The Church" gives specific experiences of the persona who represents the life of the Church. The persona's weaknesses and joys felt in his pilgrimage through life are described along with poems about the sacraments, various parts of the physical church, days or seasons of special observance, and services for use on those occasions. In this "Church" the persona is helped to find himself, to move into deeper understanding of God, and to attain closer relationship with God. From the "Church Porch," he might proceed to "The Altar" or rush to "The Windows," from "Good Friday" he could move to "Easter," "Whitsunday" and "Trinity," after "Death," "Doomsday" and "Judgement," his soul will be warmly received in Heaven as beautifully dramatized in "Love III":

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\* The traditional capital or deadly sins: pride, covetousness, gluttony, anger, lust, envy and sloth.

\*\* That is, the Ten Commandments.

<sup>7</sup> "The Church Militant," 277.

And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?

My deare, then I will serve.

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:

So I did sit and eat. (15-18)

Initiated into "The Church" through the "Superliminare," the persona undergoes a fluctuating experience of repentance and faith. His experiences shift rapidly between Christ, the physical church, the body of Christians and the self. The persona's internal temple is metaphorically related to the external church and his heart is sanctified by Christ's sacrifice commemorated in the Eucharistic communion on Sundays, holy days, and feasts of the year.

T.S. Eliot says, "We cannot judge Herbert, or savour fully his genius and his art, by any selection to be found in an anthology; we must study "The Temple" as a whole. . . . to understand Herbert we must acquaint ourselves with all of "The Temple."<sup>9</sup> When we look at Herbert's poetry as a whole as Eliot suggested we find that the central theme of "The Temple" is the Christian life on earth, the continuous life of the Church as the centre for the lives of its individual members. Herbert's verbal Temple constantly reminds us of the actual and visible Church as the place in which all believers must live out the Christian life they participate in. Hence, "The Temple" combines the individual dimension, the corporate dimension and the meeting point where the two dimensions relate. The Church is the only place where all Christians experience God together and where their relationship with God can be genuinely explored

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<sup>9</sup> Eliot 15.

"downward in judgement and reconciliation, upward in praise and intercession, outward in love and compassion, inward in attention and growth."<sup>9</sup>

For Herbert, the Church is the institution witnessing God's unfailing love reaching out to a fallen race of men and women whose perception of God and of self has been limited by their temporal existence and fallen perceptions of the world. Extremely unsure of himself, the guest hesitates to respond to the invitation:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,  
                   Guiltie of dust and sinne.  
 But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack  
                   From my first entrance in,  
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
                   If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:

                  Love said, You shall be he.  
 I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,  
                   I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
                   Who made the eyes but I ?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame  
                   Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?  
                   My deare, then I will serve.

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<sup>9</sup> Wall 36.



You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:

So I did sit and eat.

("Love III")

This dramatic poem also contains didactic elements concerned with Herbert's priestly ministry. Herbert wants to rectify man's concept that his salvation has already been achieved through God's reconciling action in Jesus Christ. There is no reason for the "slack, unkinde, ungratefull" guest to shrink at God's first invitation. What is asked of him is his cooperation to let go of himself--the offertory act of one's life to the God who will make that life new--and "sit and eat." Once the guest lets go of himself, the God of pure forgiveness, by Christ's sacrifice, heals his sense of guilt and grants him the promise of heaven.

Though "Love III" seems to address an individual, the implication carries the same invitation to a much wider audience. Right after "Discipline," Herbert puts "The Invitation," which is immediately followed by "The Banquet."

Come ye hither All, whose love

Is your dove,

And exalts you to the skie:

Here is love, which having breath

ev'n in death,

After death can never die.

Lord I have invited all,

And I shall

Still invite, still call to thee:

For it seems but just and right

In my sight,



Where is All, there All should be.

("The Invitation," 25-36)

Herbert meant to extend "The Invitation" to "all" to experience God's love by partaking in "The Banquet" so that each individual will be incorporated into the life of the Church which is the mystical body of Christ--"By whom all things were made: Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven . . ."<sup>\*</sup>

The purpose of the invitation to join the "one Catholick"<sup>\*\*</sup> and Apostolick Church"<sup>\*\*\*</sup> is further elaborated in the first three stanzas of "The Banquet":

Welcome sweet and sacred cheer,  
                                     Welcome deare;  
 With me, in me, live and dwell:  
 For thy neatnesse passeth sight,  
                                     Thy delight  
 Passeth tongue to taste or tell.

O what sweetnesse from the bowl  
                                     Fills my soul,  
 Such as is, and makes divine!  
 Is some starre (fled from the sphere)  
                                     Melted there,  
 As we sugar melt in wine?

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\* The Nicene Creed.

\*\* Catholic means universal.

\*\*\* The Nicene Creed.

Or hath sweetnesse in the bread  
   Made a head  
 To subdue the smell of sinne;  
 Flowers, and gummes, and powders giving  
   All their living,  
 Lest the Enemy should winne?

("The Banquet," 1-18).

For Anglicans, the process when "sweetnesse from the bowl / Fills my soul, / Such as is, and makes divine!" (7-9) is regularly expressed in the official administration of the Communion. For Herbert, Communion renews and represents Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross while the individual members offer themselves as part of the redeemer's Mystical Body. Therefore, if the faithful is to "With me, in me, live and dwell" (2), he has to be "Melted there, / As we sugar melt in wine" (10-11).

Living in communion with God:

Doubtlesse, neither starre nor flower  
   Hath the power

Such a sweetnesse to impart:

Onely God, who gives perfumes,

Flesh assumes,

And with it perfumes my heart.

("The Banquet," 19-24).

In other words, living in communion with God implies the sacrifice of self, prayer to God, mystical experience with the divine, acceptance of forgiveness through Christ, and participation in the Church.



Having been so familiar with God's Word, Herbert could not but share the excellence of living His Word with every one else. His chief concern in life is, therefore, the proclamation of the precious possession he has--the Word of God as recorded in the Bible. Like all other Anglican leaders of his time, Herbert held firm to the supreme importance of the Scriptures. Thus, nearly every one of Herbert's poems echoes one or other biblical passage. Biblical analogues can be found for each section of "The Temple." The prescriptive language of Proverbs and other biblical parallels are echoed along with the detailed prescriptions for living out the Christian life in "The Church Porch." Here are some testimonies:

Abstain wholly, or wed. Thy bounteous Lord  
 Allows thee choice of paths: take no by-ways;  
 But gladly welcome what he doth afford;  
 Not grudging, that thy lust hath bounds and staves.  
 Contenance hath his joy: weigh both; and so  
 If rottenness have more, let Heaven go. (13-18)

The above lines echo the didactic message of Proverbs 12:4

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones."

St. Paul's instruction in his Epistle to the Philippians 3: 19 which reads, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things", is more gently written as a reminder as:

Yet, if thou sinne in wine or wantonnesse,  
 Boast not thereof; nor make thy shame thy glorie.

(49-50)

Similar parallelism abounds in other places like the "dirt"

in "Look on meat, think it dirt, then eat a bit;" (131) parallel with "As for the earth, out of it cometh bread" in Job 28:5.

"Take star for money; . . ." (171) parallels with "a treasure in the heavens" in Luke 12:33.

"As gunnes destroy, so may a little sling," (352) echoes David slaughtering Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:50.

The instruction to . . .

Give to all something; to a good poore man,  
Till thou change names, and be where he began, (377-378)  
subtly echo Mark 10:31: "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first."

The assurance of "alms giving" in

Let thy alms go before, and keep heav'ns gate  
Open for thee; or both may come too late, (383-384)  
repeats Acts 10:4: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

Judge not the preacher; for he is thy Judge:  
If thou mislike him, thou conceiv'st him not.  
God calleth preaching folly. . . . (427-429)  
becomes another version of 1 Corinthians 1:21 which says:  
For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

"An earthen pot" in "To pick out treasures from an earthen pot," (430) repeats 2 Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."



And "thunder" in "The jews refused thunder; and we, folly," (449) echoes "thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount" in Exodus 19:16.

"The Church" section contains an extensive and rich collection of lyrics. The Song of Solomon and the Psalms are two prominent examples of the dialogue form Herbert imitated. Since daily reading of Psalms, the Song of Solomon and other biblical passages from the Book of Common Prayer was so regularly practised by Herbert and the Englishmen of his time, most educated Church goers were quite familiar with all allusions from the Bible. Right from the start of this section, the first two lines of "The Altar" reads:

A broken A L T A R , Lord, thy fervant reares,  
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:

This erection of an altar is an allusion to Deuteronomy 27:2ff. and 2 Corinthians 3:3. In Deuteronomy, Moses commanded:

"when ye be gone over Jordan, . . . there shalt thou build an altar unto the Lord thy God, an altar of stones: . . . thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon . . . thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice...thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law."

Herbert knew this commandment too, since Canon 82 prescribed the decalogue to be inscribed on an altar piece and the priest had to read it aloud at the beginning of every communion service. However, Herbert breaks that stone altar by splitting the spelling of the word " A L T A R " and makes a new one, this time, under the instruction of St. Paul in the second Epistle to the Corinthians 3:3 which reads, " the epistle of Christ. . . , written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the

living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." And, Herbert cements his fleshy tables of heart with "teares."

Not only do we find that the influence of the Bible is all-pervasive throughout Herbert's poems in "The Church" section, we find that "The Church Militant," while recounting the history of the Church, is also full of narrative accounts and biblical allusions from the Old Testament. Herbert testifies to this claim early in "The Church Militant." He combines the images of the Church as "Spouse" from Isaiah 61:10, "a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" as well as from the Book of Revelation 22:16-17, "I Jesus have sent mine angel . . . in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, . . . and the Spirit and the bride say, Come." He expresses the image of God's care for his church by referring to the vineyard of Genesis 9:20, "And Noah . . . planted a vineyard" with the tradition of Israel as a vine as cited by the Psalmist in Psalm 80:8 which says, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it." Thus, Herbert writes:

Early didst thou arise to plant this vine,  
Which might the more indeare it to be thine.  
Spices come from the East; so did thy Spouse,  
Trimme as the light, sweet as the laden boughs  
Of Noahs shadie vine, chaste as the dove; (11-15)

After a few more lines, Herbert identifies that, after the flood, Noah's ark landed at the place where Abraham started his journey toward Egypt (Genesis 8:4, 11:31, and 12:10). He also identifies the Promised Land "Canaan" with the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 37:1, I Samuel 5:1) which was finally to be



"fixt" in the wall of the Temple at Jerusalem by Solomon (2 Chronicles 3:1). To express his identification he writes:

Where th' Ark did rest, there Abraham began  
To bring the other Ark from Canaan.  
Moses pursu'd this: but King Solomon  
Finish'd and fixt the old religion. (19-22)

Through the study of the Bible, Christians learn how God led his people to salvation. They see how God's promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New. This understanding affirms their faith and sustains their hope. They realize how God kept his word; what people are supposed to do and what they are to expect in this world. Central to the poetry of George Herbert is the fact that his life was formed by the Scriptures and this is reflected in nearly every poem. In Herbert's work, "The Temple" there are two poems named "The H. Scripture I" and "The H. Scripture II." The sentiments expressed in the opening lines of "The H. Scripture I" show that the Bible is the font of Herbert's spirituality:

Oh Book! infinite sweetnesse! let my heart  
Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,  
Precious for any grief in any part;  
To cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain. (1-4)

The Scriptures are a "masse / Of strange delights," the "well / That washes what it shows," "joyes handsell" and even heaven, for "heav'n lies flat in thee" (6-7, 9-10, and 13).

In the mystery of the Trinity, the Word or Son of God is incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," (John 1:14). Christ, the incarnation of God established the Church, his mystical spouse through whom he distributes the graces of salvation, earned by his life,

death on the Cross and Resurrection. As God is present in Christ, so, in turn, Christ is present in the Church. Therefore Herbert understood well that the Church is the living extension of the Word of God. In using biblical narrative and allusions, Herbert's framework is often the Church, in its structure, life, teaching and celebrations. Indeed the very title of his major collection of poetry, "The Church," portrays this. God, who had repeatedly saved Israel now re-creates a new Israel, the Church, which he purifies, nourishes and sustains. The Church means the whole assembly of the church community, but it also means Herbert himself and individual members of the Church. Herbert's poems reflect that the process of salvation is neither finished nor static but a continuous process to the end of time. Moreover, Scripture is the living language, where man still hears God speak to him in his daily life. Herbert concludes "The H. Scriptures II" thus:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,  
 And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing  
 Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring,  
 And in another make me understood.

Starres are poore books, & oftentimes do misse:

This book of starres lights to eternall blisse.

(9-14)

Christians recall the sacred events of Scripture in their liturgies. They believe that in the celebration of the Holy Communion God is present, offering the graces of the past event to themselves as well. Herbert's poems in "The Church" fully illustrate this principle. After the introductory poem, "The Altar," the long poem "The Sacrifice," immediately proclaims the central, redeeming event in the salvation of all mankind,



Christ's death on the Cross. It is almost startling that Christ Himself is present, speaking to the congregation and inviting their consideration and response:

Oh all ye, who passe by, whose eyes and minde  
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blinde;  
To me, who took eyes that I might you finde:

Was ever grief like mine? (1-4)

A long lament follows, detailing the special love which His people have rejected, causing the need for the suffering of the Saviour:

Mine own Apostle, who the bag did beare,  
Though he had all I had, did not forbear  
To sell me also, and to put me there:

Was ever grief like mine ? (13-16)

Even His dearest friends and disciples have betrayed Him and fled:

All my Disciples flie; fear puts a barre  
Betwixt my friends and me. They leave the starre,  
That brought the wise men of the East from farre.

Was ever grief like mine ? (49-52)

The Christian's deeply personal response to "The Sacrifice" immediately follows in the poem "The Thanksgiving":

Oh King of grief! (a title strange, yet true,  
To thee of all kings onely due)

Oh King of wounds! how shall I grieve for thee,

Who in all grief preventest me ?

Shall I weep bloud ? why, thou hast wept such store

That all thy body was one doore.

Shall I be scourged, flouted, boxed, sold ?

'Tis but to tell the tale is told. (1-8)



The Christian continues, resolving to show his gratitude by a reformed life and by returning love for love, knowing full well, however, that his response will be inadequate:

Thy art of love, which I'll turn back on thee:

O my deare Saviour, Victorie!

Then for thy passion--I will do for that--

Alas, my God, I know not what. (47-50)

As if a single poem could not sufficiently express gratitude and repentance, several others continue the meditation on "The Sacrifice": "The Reprisall," "The Agonie," "The Sinner," "Good Friday," "Redemption." The final stanza of "The Agonie" reads:

Who knows not Love, let him assay

And taste that juice, which on the crosse a pike

Did set again abroach; then let him say

If ever he did taste the like.

Love is that liquour sweet and most divine,

Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine. (13-18)

In the Church Calendar, the New Testament episodes of salvation are especially recalled in festivals from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, on Whitsunday\* and on Trinity Sunday.\*\*

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\* Whitsunday occurs fifty days after Easter. It is the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles.\* See Acts chapter 2.

\*\* Trinity Sunday is the Sunday after Whitsunday. It celebrates the Christian doctrine of three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit in one God.

Herbert's poems in the first part of "The Church" are framed by poems on each of these great feasts. Then, quite strikingly, intervening poems elaborate and reflect on the mystery as it is experienced by Church and Christian members. We have seen how several poems contemplate the mystery of Christ's sacrifice in this way. The poem "Easter" and "Easter Wings" are next in the sequence. The mode of suffering, sorrow, repentance, gratitude suddenly changes as the Paschal\* victory is proclaimed in the poem, "Easter":

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise  
 Without delays,  
 Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise  
 With him mayst rise:  
 That, as his death calcined thee to dust,  
 His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.

(1-6)

The Easter story is recalled, and liturgically re-enacted so that the Christian may participate with Christ in his death and rising. The poem "Easter Wings," one of Herbert's pattern poems, prays:

O let me rise  
 As larks, harmoniously,  
 And sing this day thy victories:

Then shall the fall further the flight in me. (7-10)

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\* The Paschal event is the celebration of the resurrection of Christ from death.

Between the two Easter poems and Whitsunday, several poems stress the Christian's sharing through Word and Sacrament in the paschal mystery of the dying and rising of Christ. Thus there are two poems on Holy Scripture, two on Holy Baptism, and one on Holy Communion.

There are also poems on the basic aspects of human life: "Nature," "Sinne," and "Affliction," as well as others on the Christian life: "Repentance," "Faith," and "Prayer I." "Prayer I" is a particularly lovely sonnet, beautiful in every line, and ending in a verse of haiku-like\* quality:

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,  
 Gods breath in man returning to his birth,  
 The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
 The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;  
 Engine against th' Almightye, sinners towre,  
 Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
 The six-daies world transposing in an houre,  
 A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;  
 Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,  
 Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,  
 Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,  
 The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,  
 Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud,  
 The land of spices; something understood.

With a creative touch, Herbert's poem "Whitsunday"

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\* A Japanese lyric poem that often simply points to a thing or pairing things in nature that has moved the poet.



recapitulates the event of Pentecost\* and simultaneously the pentecostal experience of the Christian. Its opening imagery of the Dove-Spirit and of the mother bird, "Hatching" and caring for its young, are truly biblical:<sup>10</sup>

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,  
And spread thy golden wings in me;  
Hatching my tender heart so long,

Till it get wing, and flie away with thee. (1-4)

Pentecost is the traditional birthday of the Church. It was on this day, after receiving the Holy Spirit, that the Apostles of Jesus, began their work of evangelization, baptizing the first Christian people.<sup>11</sup> The poems following Whitsunday reflect on various church activities: "Praise I," "Mattens," "Even-song." Others celebrate the Church by concentrating on the symbolism of physical features of the church building: "Church-lock and key," "The Church-floore," "The Windows."

The poem "Trinitie Sunday," celebrating the mystery of the Three Persons in One God, plays with the concept three. There are three stanzas, each of three lines and devoted to one of the three divine Persons. The lines are three-fold statements about the Person, and in the final stanza each line itself presents a pattern of three.<sup>12</sup>

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\* Pentecost is another name for Whitsunday.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark 1:10, Matthew 3:16, and Luke 3:21-22.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:1-42.

<sup>12</sup> See p. 121.

Of the rest of the poems which celebrate feasts of the liturgical year, the poem "Sunday" recapitulates them all. Herbert finds in this day of each week a bright light, a foretaste of heaven:

O Day most calm, most bright,  
 The fruit of this, the next worlds bud,  
 Th' indorsement of supreme delight,  
 Writ by a friend, and with his blood;  
 The couch of time; cares balm and bay:  
 The week were dark, but for thy light:  
 Thy torch doth show the way. (1-8)

It is also the day of Easter renewal:

This day my Saviour rose,  
 And did inclose this light for his:  
 That, as each beast his manger knows,  
 Men might not of his fodder misse.  
 Christ hath took in this piece of ground,  
 And made a garden there for those  
 Who want herbs for their wound. (36-42)

Many other of his poems could be discussed to show Herbert's habitual use of Scripture and the re-presentation of its mysteries in liturgical prayer. Another striking feature is Herbert's personal mode of prayer which, whether or not quoting or alluding to Scripture, is nevertheless in Scriptural idiom. Thus several poems are virtual psalms, in tone and even in structure. Some poems, like "The Temper I," are like the psalms of praise. The opening lines of this beautiful poem read:

How should I praise thee, Lord! how should my rymes  
 Gladly engrave thy love in steel,  
 If what my soul doth feel sometimes,  
 My soul might ever feel! (1-4)

In this poem, as in Psalms 139, the God who is represented abides everywhere and can be worshipped everywhere, from highest heaven to hell below:

Whether I flie with angels, fall with dust,  
 Thy hands made both, and I am there:  
 Thy power and love, my love and trust  
 Make one place ev're where. (24-27)

In "Antiphon I," the structure of some of the psalms, probably used in the ancient temple liturgies, is consciously or unconsciously imitated. The poem is antiphonal,\* with a chorus, or the community, responding to the verses, which may have been sung by a cantor:

Cho. Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,  
My God and King.

Vers. The heav'ns are not too high,  
 His praise may thither flie:  
 The earth is not too low,  
 His praises there may grow.

Cho. Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,  
My God and King.

Vers. The church with psalms must shout,  
 No doore can keep them out:  
 But above all, the heart

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\* sung or chanted in alternation.



Must bear the longest part.

Cho. Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,  
My God and King.

Students of the Psalter usually point out that about half of the psalms are psalms of praise. It may be surprising to learn that the rest, Psalms of petition, are usually called "lament psalms." The label is apt and significant. In the psalms, man before God, creature in presence of Creator, child with parent, prays openly and honestly. Every grief, joy, experience of life is honestly spoken of to the God who knows all anyway. The structure of the typical lament psalm becomes a fascinating process of receiving God's help, healing, consolation. It usually begins with the pouring out of the heart its deep wounds, complaints, frustrations. These are honestly stated; others may be blamed, and even God chided for not having come earlier to the rescue. But after the lament there follows a cry for help, a cry that is filled with the confidence that God can and will help. By the end of the psalm God has clearly intervened and saved, for the prayer ends expressing such trust. The singer may even thank God for having delivered him. The classic lament Psalm is Psalm 22, beginning with: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

George Herbert skilfully uses the structure of the lament psalm in several of his poems. His "Affliction" poems are of this type. In "Affliction IV," the poet begins in the sorry state of being "Broken in pieces." His bitter lament pours out over three stanzas. Then, in the fourth comes the cry, "Oh help, my God!"

Broken in pieces all asunder,  
 Lord, hunt me not,  
 A thing forgot,  
 Once a poore creature, now a wonder,  
 A wonder tortur'd in the space  
 Betwixt this world and that of grace.

My thoughts are all a case of knives,  
 Wounding my heart  
 With scatter'd smart,  
 As watering pots give flowers their lives.  
 Nothing their furie can controll,  
 While they do wound and pink my soul.

All my attendants are at strife,  
 Quitting their place  
 Unto my face:  
 Nothing performs the task of life:  
 The elements are let loose to fight,  
 And while I live, trie out their right.

Oh help, my God! let not their plot

Kill them and me,  
 And also thee,

Who art my life: dissolve the knot,  
 As the sunne scatters by his light  
 All the rebellions of the night.

By the end of the poem the powers of grief have given way and even made to do the work of praising God. He is lifted up to heaven and even God:

Then shall those powers, which work for grief,  
   Enter thy pay,  
   And day by day  
 Labour thy praise, and my relief;  
   With care and courage building me,  
   Till I reach heav'n and much more, thee.

This sampling of the use of Sacred Scripture in the poems of George Herbert hints also at the source and guide of his religious practices, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. As a faithful church-goer from childhood, Herbert must have sung or said its psalms and joined in its liturgies. He would have imbibed the theology and spirituality expressed in both the prayers and the instructive elements of the Prayer Book. Moreover, the poems reflect a careful orthodoxy, while, nevertheless being nuanced by traits which later Anglicans might describe as the Anglican middle way. Since the Thirty-Nine Articles are printed in the Book of Common Prayer, Herbert must have known them well. His theology corresponds to these, but without losing the precious heritage of primitive tradition.

The poem "To all Angels and Saints" is probably a meditation for the Feast of All Saints, located in the church calendar of the Prayer Book on November 1. Herbert's theology about saints clearly appears here. Article 22 of the Articles of Religion rules out "invocation of Saints" along with "the Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well as of Images and Reliques," as practices not grounded in Scripture. In his poem Herbert accepts this and



explains why he may not call upon the saints:

But now, alas, I dare not; for our King,  
Whom we do all joyntly adore and praise,

Bids no such thing: (16-18)

Before he states this position, in earlier verses, he has already given high praise to angels and saints. The poem opens:

Oh glorious spirits, who after all your bands  
See the smooth face of God without a frown

Or strict commands;

Where ev'ry one is king, and hath his crown,

If not upon his head, yet in his hands: (1-5)

Herbert's words to Mary, mother of Jesus, are remarkably beautiful and praising, though he avoids the traditional Mariolatry\* of the Roman Church:

My vows to thee most gladly, Blessed Maid,  
And Mother of my God, in my distresse.

Thou art the holy mine, whence came the gold,  
The great restorative for all decay

In young and old;

Thou art the cabinet where the jewell lay:

Chiefly to thee would I my soul unfold: (9-15)

An obvious concern in the Articles of Religion is the theology of the Eucharist. Article 25 of the Thirty-Nine Articles names "The Lord's Supper" as one of two sacraments in the Anglican Church. The other is Baptism, the sacrament of initiation into the Church. About these the Article states :

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\* The worship of Mary.

"The Sacraments were not ordained to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should onely use them." One presumes that these words are partly polemical, aimed at avoiding such practices as adoration of the sacred species, carrying them in processions, and even reserving them after the service. The teaching on The Lord's Supper is elaborated in Article 28. This Article explains that in receiving the Bread and Wine in the sacrament, Christ is truly received, but the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper only in a heavenly and spiritual manner. The notion of Transubstantiation (the substantial change of bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ) is denied. Furthermore, the sacred elements are not to be "reserved, carried about, lifted up or worshipped." In the Anglican Communion liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, while many of the features of the older Mass are retained, the Holy Communion, that is the partaking of the blessed bread and wine, takes place at once following the consecration prayer. Celebrant and ministers receive first and then the other faithful receive communion. If any consecrated bread or wine remains, it is treated carefully and reverently, but is consumed by the minister or some of the faithful after the service. It is not reserved for later use or for adoration. Thus there is an emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the eating of the Bread and Wine, rather than a belief in the static, substantial presence. There is faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but without intellectual analysis.

George Herbert's poems, "The Holy Communion" and "The Banquet" may now be studied. There is no doubt about Herbert's belief in the presence of Christ in the Holy Communion. Indeed





As this poem develops, Herbert's concern is less to know the intellectual explanation than to be assured of union with God. So he ends:

My God, give mee all Thee. (48)

Indeed, Herbert seems to find theological argumentation tedious, as if it were a stumbling block to his direct contemplation of Christ. This sentiment is well summarized in "Divinitie":

Just so the other heav'n they also serve,

Divinities transcendent skie:

Which with the edge of wit they cut and carve.

Reason triumphs, and faith lies by.

Could not that Wisdome, which first broacht the wine,

Have thicken'd it with definitions?

And jagg'd his seamlesse coat, had that been fine,

With curious questions and divisions?

But all the doctrine, which he taught and gave,

Was cleare as heav'n, from whence it came.

At least those beams of truth, which onely save,

Surpasse in brightnesse any flame.

Love God, and love your neighbour. Watch and pray.

Do as ye would be done unto.

O dark instructions; ev'n as dark as day!

Who can these Gordian knots undo?

But he doth bid us take his blood for wine.

Bid what he please; yet I am sure,

To take and taste what he doth there designe,  
Is all that saves, and not obscure.

Then burn thy Epicycles, foolish man;  
Break all thy spheres, and save thy head.  
Faith needs no staffe of flesh, but stoutly can  
To heav'n alone both go, and leade. (5-28)

Another central theme running through Herbert's poetry is that of letting go of oneself and allowing God to act. The idea of putting oneself under the complete control of God is identical with giving up one's free will. Obviously, such an idea sounds ridiculous, for freedom of the individual should be one of the most precious possessions man ever has. But, after exercising all the freedom he thinks he has, man realizes that he is actually very limited. The Bible records how men, for centuries, after experiencing their own helplessness and limitation, turned to God so that God could take control of them totally. The Psalmist, for example, prayed in Psalm 119:108 : "Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgements." Throughout the Bible, men experienced that there was greater security and freedom under the yoke of God. They learnt to entrust themselves to God's providence as Psalm 37:3-5 says:

Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in  
the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight  
thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the  
desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD;  
trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Herbert must have experienced the same sentiment of men in the Bible as represented in the above Psalm so intensely that he expressed it in many of his poems.

Though, as a poet, his "wits"<sup>\*</sup> and "their words and posies windows" are so fine, in "The Posie", Herbert echoes Jacob's and St. Paul's<sup>\*\*</sup> realization of their nothingness in the eyes of God with a similar phrase which reads, "Lesse then the least of all God's mercies".

Let wits contest,

And with their words and posies windows fill:

Lesse then the least

Of all thy mercies, is my posie still. (1-4)

In spite of the fact that he continues to "delight" on his "ring," by his "picture," in his "book," and to let God's Will take over his "wit" in the "invention" and "comparisons," Herbert repeats his motto:

This on my ring,

This by my picture, in my book I write:

Whether I sing,

Or say, or dictate, this is my delight.

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\* Derived from ingegno (an Italian word for talent, genius, giftedness, and understanding).

\*\* (a) In Genesis 32:10, Jacob says, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant;"

(b) In the Epistle to the Ephesians 3:8, St. Paul says, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, . . ."



Invention rest,

Comparisons go play, with use thy will:

Lesse then the least

Of all God's mercies, is my posie still. (5-12)

Herbert's sense of man's lowliness in the eyes of God, which, consequently, causes man to submit to God's commandment is expressed early in "The Church Porch" section. He suggests that man should live by rule as "houses are built by rule"(135). He reasons that since man is like "a shop of rules, a well truss'd pack" (141) of "parcell"\* (142), so man should "stuffe" his "minde with solid braverie"(208). With commercial imagery, Herbert proposes that we should "get a good stock"(293) of "all thy goods and ground"(283). Then "Let thy minde still be bent, still plotting where, / And when, and how the businesse may be done"(387-388). After that we should "Slight not the smallest losse, whether it be / In love or honour: . . ." (343-344). He asks us to "Shine like the sunne in every corner:"(345) and to "Scorn no mans love, though of a mean degree; / Love is a present for a mightie king" (340-350). He asks us to do all these and to "Submit to love" (284) for "He that loves Gods abode, and to combine / With saints on earth, shall one day with them shine" (437-438).

Herbert realizes that his call for his own and the whole of mankind's submission to God is not without difficulty. St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans 7:18-20, says:

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\* A legal term meaning a piece of property.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth  
no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how  
to perform that which is good I find not. For the good  
that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not,  
that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more  
I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Herbert, in his poetry indicates the two opposite forces of  
goodness and evil fighting inside us. Though he has "been tenant  
long to a rich Lord" ("Redemption" 1), and "is shop of rules, a  
well truss'd pack" ("The Church Porch" 141), he admits that "All  
worldly thoughts are but theeves met together" ("The Church  
Porch" 424). The images of "shop," and "tenant" contrast sharply  
with the image of "theeves." As God's "tenant" with possession  
of a "shop," man is afraid of the thought of the "theeves" who  
"met together" inside himself.

In spite of the assurance expressed in "The Starre" which  
says:

Yet, if thou wilt from thence depart,  
Take a bad lodging in my heart;  
For thou canst make a debter,  
And make it better. (5-8)

Herbert was aware of man's inclination to surrender to the  
negative forces inherent in him. The evil tendency in man, like  
the "theeves," lurks under man's willingness to submit to God.  
The evil inclination "surveys," "knoweth" its prey "long before"  
with "Both their full-ey'd aspects, and secret glances." He  
describes "the quick piercing minde" passing "from doore to  
doore" penetrating and unlocking man's submission to God in  
"Vanietie I":



The fleet Astronomer can bore  
 And thred the spheres with his quick-piercing minde:  
 He views their stations, walks from doore to doore,  
 Surveys, as if he had design'd.  
 To make a purchase there: he sees their dances,  
 And knoweth long before

Both their full-ey'd aspects, and secret glances. (1-7)

Herbert continues to elaborate on the difficulty of submitting oneself and being at one with God. Man likes to take control of himself and, by so doing, to become like God, controlling his own soul and, thus, rejecting God. In "Confession," the poet tries to hide himself:

. . . within my heart I made  
 Closets, and in them many a chest;  
 And, like a master in my trade,

In those chests, boxes; in each box, a till: (2-6).

Through "all this long pretence"(16) in "Jordan II," Herbert describes how man subtly excludes God from entering into his life by constructing artificial walls. The persona of the poem pretends to be sincere with his "plain intention." He says he "sought out" the appropriate "words" and tries to "trim invention." He cunningly admits that his witty\* mind "began to burnish, sprout, and swell, curling with metaphors," and his sense is being blurred with superfluous words. He claims that his brain is running with "thousands of notions" and he has to hurry to implement those ideas. But, he "was not quick enough" to do the things as good as he wants, and, nothing is done.

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\* Gifted with ingegno



. . . I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;  
 My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,  
 Curling with metaphors a plain intention,  
 Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.  
 Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,  
 Off'ring their service, if I were not sped:  
 I often blotted what I had begunne;

This was not quick enough, and that was dead. (3-10)

As he tries to excuse himself for his pretentious motives, he cannot run too far away from the reality because:

Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,

Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head. (11-12)

Herbert reiterates the reasons why man finds it hard to surrender himself to God in "Good Friday" saying "My heart hath store, write there, where in / One box doth lie both ink and sinne:" (23-24). With understanding tone, in "Dotage," he describes the "casks" of false "pleasures" preventing man from going to God:

False glozing pleasures, casks of happinesse,

Foolish night-fires, womens and childrens wishes,

Chases in Arras, gilded emptinesse,

Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career,

Embroider'd lyes, nothing between two dishes;

These are the pleasures here. (1-6)

Reading between the lines of the quoted "Dotage" above, we can feel that Herbert is hinting that man begins his degradation process once he refuses to submit himself to God. The sickening images of "casks," and "foolish night-fires," and the illusory images of "shadows," and "dreams" are replacing the concrete image of "solid braverie" ("The Church Porch," 208). Also in "The

Sinner," the "quarries of pil'd vanities" that have been "treasur'd" is transformed to be not "quintessence" but "dregs" (2,5,and9). These poems seem to emphasize that without God, a sense of total decay and revulsion can be felt in everything. When man excludes himself from God, man's "house" becomes "but a dungeon." As Herbert writes in "Grace": "If still the sunne should hide his face,/ Thy house would but a dungeon prove,"(5-6). Since sin "locks" the ears against God, and "bindes" God's hands of grace ("Church-lock and key," 1-2), man degrades himself and becomes "close, rerserv'd" -- "In his poore cabinet of bone / Sinnes have their box apart" ("Ungratefulnesse,"25, and 28-29). Man's "house and home" become a "dumbe inclosure" ("Mortification," 20 and 23), and "A narrow cupboard for griefs and doubts" ("Grief," 11).

Herbert was a good and exemplary Anglican priest. He knew that since the time of creation, so the Bible says, man had tried to prove himself great, to "be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Herbert, being familiar with all biblical narratives, was aware that though men had wronged God through numerous arrogant deeds, God was always the first to take the initiative and reach out to men, offering reconciliation and making new covenants\* with them. Throughout the process of salvation, many prophets have successively recorded how God repeatedly tried to call men to repent and live in union with him. Through Isaiah 44:21-22, for example, God says:

Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O

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\* The promises made by God to man, as recorded in the Bible.



Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Later in the New Testament, John records in his Gospel 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Again, the Nicene Creed repeats: "Jesus Christ . . . Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven . . . And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate."\*

Firm in his Anglicanism, Herbert's constant realization of the faith he professed is reflected in many poems. For Herbert perceives God as his loving friend: "while I bustled, I might heare a friend / Whisper," ("Jordan II," 15-16), forgiveness and reunification with God is always welcomed. After darting out with arrogance, man experiences the sense of emptiness and he realizes the fact, as expressed in "Longing," that he is actually "more free" in the bosom of God. Assured of God's love and mercy, the persona compares God's role to that of a mother and claims men to be "infants" who expect that "all pitie flows" from God:

From thee all pitie flows  
Mothers are kinde, because thou art,  
And dost dispose  
To them a part:

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\* The Roman procurator of Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea who condemned Jesus to be crucified.



Their infants, them; and they suck thee

More free. (13-18)

When man has turned God "out of doore" ("Sepulchre" 7), he experiences what he calls in "Confession": "this same grief!" (2). This "grief" which "knows all, and enters when he will" (6) is, later, seen:

As Gods afflictions into man,  
When he a torture hath design'd.

They are too subtill for the subt'llest hearts;  
And fall, like rheumes, upon the tendrest parts. (9-12)

In the absence of God, Herbert describes in "Affliction IV" that man is "broken in pieces all asunder" (1). Man undergoes a sense of vacuum which "tortur'd" him "in the space" that lies "Betwixt this world and that of grace" (5-6). Now he wants to return to a union with God. Therefore, he asks God to "tame" and "captivate" the "strong holds" of his "heart" ("Nature," 4 and 6). Because God "hath the privie key, / Op'ning the souls most subtile rooms" ("The Holy Communion" 46-47), he requests God to "take these barres . . . away" ("The Search" 49). Then he says, in "Love unknown": "I fled / Unto my house" (46-47). He says God has "the key" to this "house", for he claims, "I had giv'n the key to none, but one:" (55).

Herbert does not simplify the process of man's reunification with God. From his personal experiences, he warns that if man wants to re-enter the house of God, he must be prepared to let his imperfect house be destroyed and he will have no more claim over his house. Herbert explains that since God's "Architecture meets with sinne" ("Sion" 11), the "little frame" of the heart

is broken "all to pieces" by "a great affliction" which God sends, then, the heart which is now in "parcels" desires to reconstruct the "broken heart" into one "whole". The new being which emerges from this reconstruction is not the same any more. When God's house is rebuilt, "a braver Palace then before" ("The World," 20) is made. The whole progression of man's breaking away from his union with God, his realization of the break, his search of the "pieces" and his finding of "the corner" where he "sat down" to "spell" his "graved" "parcels," and the experience of his "ease" and the perception of his new being after the reunification is touchingly narrated in "JESU":

JESU is in my heart, his sacred name  
 Is deeply carved there: but th'other week  
 A great affliction broke the little frame,  
 Ev'n all to pieces: which I went to seek:  
 And first I found the corner, where was J,  
 After, where E S, and next where U was graved.  
 When I had got these parcels, instantly  
 I sat me down to spell them, and perceived  
 That to my broken heart he was I ease you,  
 An to my whole is JESU.

In some of Herbert's poems, the poet is pictured as a person waiting outside the house of God, wanting to be let in. The poems portraying a waiting outsider seem to indicate that if man really wants to get in he must humbly petition for admission. In "Whitsunday," Herbert says that God "didst then / Keep open house, richly attended, / Feasting all comers by twelve chosen men" (6-8), but now "Thou shutt'st the doore, and keep'st within; / Scarce a good joy creeps through the chink:" (21-22). God



seems to shut his door in retaliation against man's rejection to him earlier. He seems to be forcing man to realize that man's selfishness must be surrendered in exchange for the admission. In "Holy Baptisme II," "A narrow way and little gate / Is all the passage" to God (2-3). Man must keep "Perpetual knockings at thy doore," till there are "Tears sullyng thy transparent rooms" ("Gratefulnesse" 13-14). Though man "Dares to assault thee, and besiege thy doore" ("The Storm" 12), still he has to cry in "Longing": "Is all lockt ? hath a sinners plea / No key ?" (47-48).

After man's total surrender is accomplished, he is allowed to reunite with God. Now all poisonous imagery is transformed into the rich and harmonious image of a cask of treasure, a box of sweets, a garden of flowers, or a palace in which a feast is laid out. In "The Familie," the poet says, "Lord, the house and familie are thine" (5). The house . . . "where thou dwellest all is neat . . .

First Peace and Silence all disputes controll,

Then Order plaies the soul;

And giving all things their set forms and houres,

Makes of wilde woods sweet walks and bowres (8-12).

Once in the house controlled by "Peace and Silence" and "Order," the poet feels that the house becomes an "open house" in which God is "Feasting all comers" ("Whitsunday" 7-8). The image of the feast here seems to reflect the joy of reconciliation with God which Herbert felt. He keeps the image of the feast with the image of richness in "Ungratefulnesse" in which God has "rare cabinets full of treassure" (7), in "Providence" in which God's "cupboard serves the world: the meat is set, / Where all may reach" (49-50), and in "Home" in which Heaven is a "hive of sweetnesse" (20).



The transformation from bitter, poisonous things into a feast indicates the change of heart purified from closed, selfish motives into a heart opened to God's presence. Man's affliction is transformed into happiness once he surrenders himself to God, just as the bitterness is changed into sweetness in the "sweet sacrifice" ("The Sacrifice" 19). The moment of surrender gives the poet a memorable experience. In "The Glance," as God "look upon" him, the poet is scared and helpless for he "did lie / Weltring in sinne." Yet he feels that "a sugred strange delight" is "Passing," refreshing, consoling, and "overrunne" his heart, and he takes it in:

When first thy sweet and gracious eye  
 Vouchsaf'd ev'n in the midst of youth and night  
 To look upon me, who before did lie

Weltring in sinne;

I felt a sugred strange delight,  
 Passing all cordials made by any art,  
 Bedew, embalme, and overrunne my heart,

And take it in. (1-8)

From the above lines we can observe that the complicated intellectual faculty of man gives way to the senses. The persona reports what he experiences from the "overrunne. . . heart," not from the mind. That is why his intellectual faculty finds it "strange" and cannot quite comprehend it since it passes beyond "art." Here, the reasoning power of man seems to, mysteriously, surrender to the sensory perception of God. This is a characteristic of Herbert's faith. No matter how complicated or sophisticated human intellect is, it can never explain God sufficiently. To be in touch with God, as recorded in Matthew's

Gospel 18:3, one needs a simple and childlike faith: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

In his relationship with God, Herbert often takes the role of a child. In "The Collar," he surrenders to God's control when he says, "I heard one calling, Child ! / And I reply'd, My Lord" (35-36). In other poems he seeks to take refuge in God as a child searching for parent protection. In "The Temper I," he says, "O let me, when thy roof my soul hath hid, / O let me roost and nestle there" (17-18), and in "Content" he wants to "sweetly sleep," lying "warm" like a child in "bed" ( 3 and 20). In "Trinitie Sunday," Herbert's childlike simplicity of his faith is expressed with ordinary words in a simple and straightforward manner when he cites the origin of his being, God's enduring love for him, and his prayer for consistent loyalty:

Lord, who hast form'd me out of mud,  
 And hast redeem'd me through thy blood,  
 And sanctifi'd me to do good;

Purge all my sinnes done heretofore:  
 For I confesse my heavie score,  
 And I will strive to sinne no more.

Enrich my heart, mouth, hands in me,  
 With faith, with hope, with charitie;  
 That I may runne, rise, rest with thee.

In the tradition of Anglicanism, preaching had always been considered as significant as the Scriptures. Anglican leaders



treasured preaching as part of their ministry so highly that priests were provided with Books of Homilies, and pulpit was given equal importance with the lectern. In the priestly life of Herbert, he tirelessly took every occasion to explain the Scriptures and all religious practices to the faithful in his care. In other words, he was so imbued with Anglican spirituality that his earnest desire to explain, to reveal, to instruct expressed itself in every possible manner and occasion, many times, unconsciously. This instinctive expression of his faith can be observed in many of his poems.

It is not easy to make something unknown or abstract known and understood. For Herbert, the priest, his vocation was to save the souls of the people by guiding them to encounter Jesus Christ, who describes himself, as recorded by the Gospel of St. John 14:6, saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Getting people to the true meaning of "the way, the truth, and the life" seems to be Herbert's single poetic purpose. He makes use of all available materials around him as the means to help people to reach God.

Herbert, for example, tries to echo how God's great love endures by utilizing many techniques in "Redemption":

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,  
 Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,  
 And make a suit unto him, to afford  
 A new small-rented lease, and cancell th' old.  
 In heaven at his manour I him sought:  
 They told me there, that he was lately gone  
 About some land, which he had dearly bought  
 Long since on earth, to take possession.



I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,  
 Sought him accordingly in great resorts;  
 In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:  
 At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth  
 Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,  
 Who straight, your suit is granted, said, & died.

Firstly, he repeats the theme which has been familiar to the people: Christ dying for sinners. In the contrast to man's proud rebellion against God's merciful love, he depicts the "tenant" as taking pride and rebelling before "knowing his great birth" and "straight return'd" in time to hear the final and forgiving words of the "rich Lord", "Your suit is granted."

Secondly, Herbert makes the rhythm and tone of the poem echo passages from the Scriptures. He assembles many familiar Gospel characters and their activities and re-models them into the new personae of a new parable, yet, conveying the same message of perfect love. Some images in "Redemption" reflect biblical images. The word "tenant" in the first line immediately reminds us of the Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard (Matthew 21:33-39). Line 4 which reads: "A new small-rented lease, and cancell th' old" shadows the teaching of Jesus Christ about the New Truths and Old (Matthew 13:52). The clause "that he was lately gone" (6), the phrases "to take possession" (8) and "his great birth" (9) echo the Parable of the Talents\* (Luke 19:12-27). Line 7 which reads, "About some land, which he had dearly bought", line 10 which reads, "Sought him accordingly

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\* Talents were gold coins.

in great resorts;" and the clause "which he had dearly bought" (7), all recall the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, the Parable of the Pearl and the Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:44-50). The last two lines of the poem: "Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied, / Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died" are a clear parallel to the crucifixion scene of Christ as recorded by the Gospel of Luke 23:26-43. Here special attention should be given to the final word of Herbert's "Lord" in comparison to one of Christ's words on the Cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The last technique which Herbert employs in order to guide the people to their God is the use of images which would have been homely and familiar to English people of the seventeenth century. "Tenant," "rich Lord," "manor," "land," and "possession" are all images taken from legal terminology concerning property. The images of trade are words like; "afford," "small-rented lease," and "bought." Herbert suggests the imagery of legal action through the phrases like; "a suit", "to take possession," and in the saying "Your suit is granted." In fact the environment of the "cities" is described in such a realistic way that readers of the poem would agree that "theeves and murderers" are expected more in the city than in the country, and, "ragged noise and mirth" are not any surprise in places like "theatres, gardens, parks, and courts."

Not only was Herbert's preaching intended to attract his audience by the techniques described above, his preaching through poetry aimed to captivate everyone by his natural talent as a good story-teller. Going through the same poem, "Redemption," we can observe that the whole essence of a profound parable is that it should be short, well-structured,



smoothly and clearly narrated, and touchingly effective. The first quatrain of this sonnet clearly and concisely gives the necessary explanation. It introduces and strongly defines the conflict in an orderly way.

The next scene and progressive development of dramatic sense is immediately set in the first line of the second quatrain. Then appropriate indirect speech and the neatly-turned flow of the story is skilfully presented along with a logical connection showing the difference between the distant heavenly "manour" and the amount of time spent "Long since on earth."

The third quatrain briefly describes the royalty of the "Lord" and the continued venture of the persona in the places he "sought" the "Lord." The last line sums up the effort made, and, while introducing the concluding part, immediately contrasts "a ragged noise" with the "great birth" in the first line.

With the direct speech which contrasts with earlier narrative, the last line of the sonnet suddenly shocks readers with its high dramatic content, with the surprised grant of the suit, and with the unexpected death of the "Lord."

Herbert's gifts of story-telling always make his poems interesting. As we examine "Redemption," we are fascinated by the shocking, dramatic, unexpected, and twisted turn of content narrated in such a gentle and stylish form. This quality of the poem enables us to read it again and again without feeling bored, however well we might know it. Deeper analysis of Herbert's poetry reveals that, through the precision of his premises, his capacity to conjure up appropriate imagery, and the tone of argument, Herbert conveys not only his emotion to his readers but also the root of that emotion. In "Affliction I," Herbert cites how his upbringing had nurtured him in such a way



that when he was "wrapped in" clerical life, he felt "betrayed" and there was a civil war between God's call of love and worldly ambition fighting within him. Here is how he describes his tortured emotion and the root of such emotion:

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took

The way that takes the town;

Thou didst betray me to a lingring book,

And wrap me in a gown. (36-40)

Herbert's feeling conveyed through imagery intertwines beautifully with his well-structured, precise and logical argument, and readers unconsciously enjoy absorbing the thought and feeling of Herbert's poetry at the same time.

Through his poetry, Herbert brings religious ideas from the mind to the experience of the heart. In this way, Herbert's belief is effectively transmitted to his audience. In his poem "Death," the different meanings of death before and after the death of Christ are simply, clearly, and touchingly presented. In the first three stanzas, the personified death is described with imagery of a corpse and ugliness. At this point death is "nothing but bones," yet his "mouth was open," but he could not "sing." Here Herbert suggests the contrast of a dead open mouth which could not sing with a live open mouth which could sing or say something. The contrast compels the readers to compare the difference. The horror of "Flesh being turn'd to dust, and bones to sticks" "after the losse of life and sense" in the second verse introduces the complete despair of the remains which "The shells of fledge souls left behinde."

Going through these stanzas, readers can see as well as feel the awful picture of a dead body and a skeleton, "the sad effect of sadder grones," the sense of "dry dust, which sheds no

tears, but may extort." It is impossible for dry dust to shed tears, but the line taps our imagination of the painful frustration and strain of recalling what, once, was possible for the same body.

Death, thou wast once an uncouth hideous thing,

Nothing but bones,

The sad effect of sadder grones:

Thy mouth was open, but thou couldst not sing.

For we consider'd thee as at some six

Or ten yeares hence,

After the losse of life and sense,

Flesh being turn'd to dust, and bones to sticks.

We look on this side of thee, shooting short;

Where we did finde

The shells of fledge souls left behinde,

Dry dust, which sheds no tears, but may extort.

Suddenly, we come across the unexpected again when the whole tragedy is reversed once "our Saviours death did put some blood into thy face." The message of the Nicene Creed which says: "And I look for the Resurrection of the dead" is here transmitted. That is to say that in "death" we become alive, "grown fair and full of grace" and "Much in request, much sought for as a good."

But since our Saviours death did put some bloud

Into thy face;

Thou art grown fair and full of grace,

Much in request, much sought for as a good.



Together with the resurrected body, "we do now behold thee gay and glad." Glorious vision of "dooms-day" is then pleasantly presented. On that day death will be transfused into life of beautiful people and the risen "soul" will be well-dressed and radiant. That is the day when the solemn promise of "the Life of the World to come" in the Nicene Creed comes to pass.

For we do now behold thee gay and glad,  
 As at dooms-day;  
 When souls shall wear their new array,  
 And all thy bones with beautie shall be clad.

The last stanza of the poem exploits the traditional idea juxtaposing death and sleep. Herbert reminds us to be constantly "honest, faithful" and, with "trust," by "making" our nightly sleep in remembrance of eternal rest.

Therefore we can go die as sleep, and trust  
 Half that we have  
 Unto an honest faithful grave;  
 Making our pillows either down, or dust.

The first line provides the effect of relaxation. He is making a practical suggestion which is that being prepared for death is a vital part of living a Christian life. Herbert continues to preach by using an extremely familiar imagery, for the phrase "half that we have" indicates the relationship of our own body and soul--the very essence of our being.

Through familiar imagery in his poetry, Herbert's preaching touches his audience's heart and mind. He admits that his zeal flagged sometimes. In "Church-lock and key," he

expresses the "chilnesse" of his "faint demands" with the image of "cold hands" angrily forcing "the fire" before he proceeds to suggest that man should "lay" all his "desire, sinnes" and "coldnesse" to God's will.

But as cold hands are angrie with the fire,

And mend it still;

So I do lay the want of my desire,

Not on my sinnes, or coldnesse, but thy will. (5-8)

With familiar images of a carpenter and his work, Herbert compares "God's afflictions" torturing man's heart with the carpenter piercing "the tendrest parts" of the "timber."

No scrue, no piercer can

Into a piece of timber work and winde,

As Gods afflictions into man,

When he a torture hath design'd.

They are too subtil for the subt'llest hearts;

And fall, like rheumes, upon the tendrest parts.

("Confession," 7-12)

Simpler, shorter, more familiar, yet stronger images than discussed can be found in Herbert's poetry too. His audience would immediately feel the effect of the following words in their daily life:

My throat, my soul is hoarse;

My heart is wither'd like a ground

Which thou dost curse.

My thoughts turn round,

And make me giddie; Lord, I fall,

Yet call. ("Longing," 7-12)



Herbert tries to attract his audience's attention in a variety of ways, including the way which the sense of seeing may be appealed to. In "The Altar" and "Easter-wings," for example, Herbert incorporates the meanings of altar and Easter with the shapes of an altar and two wings. In "Paradise," the way God prunes his tree is represented by the cutting off of the initial letter of the rhyme word:

I blesse thee, Lord, because I GROW  
 Among thy trees, which in a ROW  
 To thee both fruit and order OW. (1-3)

Herbert's poetry also appeals to his audience's emotion through the sense of hearing. In "The Thanksgiving," the persona has a lively discussion with God. Throughout the poem, he vehemently offers an equivalent to every gift he received as if he were standing proudly before the throne of God:

If thou shalt give me wit, it shall appeare,  
 If thou hast giv'n it me, 'tis here.  
 Nay, I will reade thy book, and never move  
 Till I have found therein thy love,  
 Thy art of love, which I'le turn back on thee:  
 O my deare Saviour, Victorie !

The blunt argument goes on in a very lively way until he falters and, at the climax of the poem, realizes his true self. Before the face of God, his nothingness makes him lower his voice almost to a whisper and he says:

Then for thy passion--I will do for that--  
 Alas, my God, I know not what.

After keeping the audience's heart and mind in militant mood almost throughout the poem, the dramatic dying away of the sound in the last line gives a thrilling sense of satisfaction to the audience. That utmost simplicity of acknowledging one's own nothingness expressed at the end of the poem concludes the cathartic effect, the purging of emotion, of the drama. Such a soul-searching ending can be found in at least two other poems. In "Dialogue," after citing and attempting to compete with all the sufferings of the Saviour, he surrenders and cries:

Ah! no more: thou break'st my heart.

In "Miserie," he admits the whole folly and wickedness he blamed on others to be his own with the expression:

My God, I mean my self.

If any conclusion is to be drawn at this point, we simply have to say that Herbert showed himself a good and exemplary priest as well as a great preacher. His life was so holy that his spirituality was reflected not only in his daily life, but in his works and his poetry. His preaching might have been so captivating that elements of his sermons poured out into his poetry and conversely his poems are so touching and full of spirituality that they became his sermons. In other words, in the same way that Herbert was faithful to the spirit of Anglicanism and was an effective preacher, so his poetry continues to preach in a way that is equally effective.



## Conclusion

We understand Herbert's faith and his society through his poetry and writings. Struggling for personal identity, Herbert lived in the period when national stability and religious identity were at stake. Amidst domestic social changes and political upheavals, England was surrounded by continental religious ideologies very different from its own. The new "Via Media" in England was striving for a unique identity between Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Puritanism. After the fierce storms of religious turmoil, Herbert's poetry became an expression of the identity, spirituality, and practices of Anglicanism.

Herbert's poetry shows that the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Common Prayer, the Articles of Religion, the Canon law, and the Book of Homilies, were all formative influences on his Anglican spirituality. Through personal religious experiences Herbert reflects man's need for and dependence on God. He explains how God's graces have been constantly showered upon man throughout the history of salvation and how God's Words are actively living and calling for man's complete spiritual dedication. From his poems, we learn how Herbert tries to testify that man is like "the apple of" God's "eye,"<sup>1</sup> that man is to be aware and conscious of his being as an incorporated part of one mystical body of Christ and he is to witness his faith through various practices prescribed by the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 32:10

In his poetry, Herbert emphatically expresses his realization of God's unfailing love, his faith in Anglican spirituality, and his appreciation for the Anglican Church. In a time of religious upheaval, he finds the true source of Christian life in his Mother Church. This is expressed in his poem, "The British Church":

I joy, deare Mother, when I view  
 Thy perfect lineaments and hue  
                                   Both sweet and bright.  
 Beautie in thee takes up her place,  
 And dates her letters from thy face,  
                                   When she doth write.

A fine aspect in fit aray,  
 Neither too mean, not yet too gay,  
                                   Shows who is best.  
 Outlandish looks may not compare:  
 For all they either paintd are,  
                                   Or else undrest.

She on the hills, which wantonly  
 Allureth all in hope to be  
                                   By her preferr'd,  
 Hath kiss'd so long her painted shrines,  
 That ev'n her face by kissing shines,  
                                   For her reward.



She in the valley is so shie  
Of dressing, that her hair doth lie

About her eares:

While she avoids her neighbours pride,  
She wholly goes on th' other side,

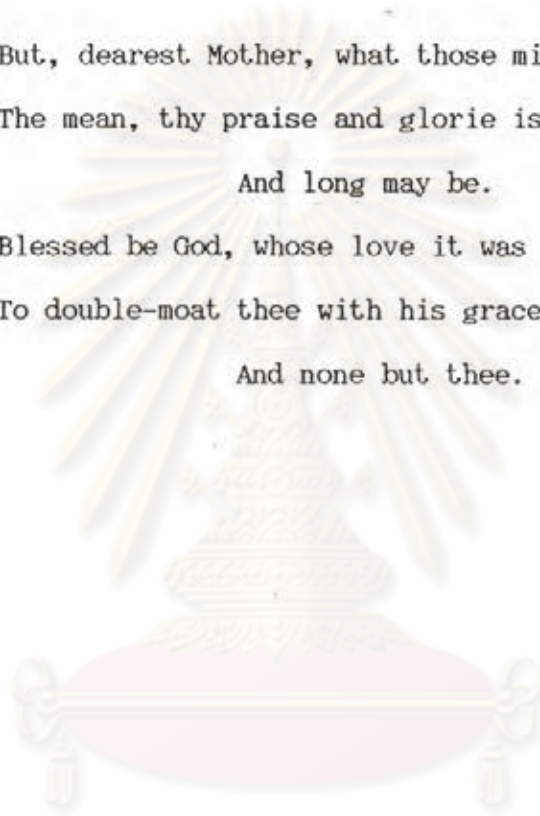
And nothing wears.

But, dearest Mother, what those misse,  
The mean, thy praise and glorie is,

And long may be.

Blessed be God, whose love it was  
To double-moat thee with his grace,

And none but thee.



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