THE THEOLOGICAL POETICS OF GEORGE HERBERT

"God writeth, *Loved*"

Margaret Jane Turnbull

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English The University of Sydney

2002

ABSTRACT

The English poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633) is a representation of the authority of God in salvation. As the initiation, power, and continuance in the salvation process is entirely God's, so Herbert's literary authority does not derive from the past, or from himself, but from God. As Herbert, and his speakers, are written upon, so do they write and speak.

Herbert therefore gives a theological meaning to the humanistic terms and concepts of the English literary renaissance. I have chosen four critical categories as being particularly important in England and as significantly transformed by Herbert. These are "imitation", "invention", "decorum", and the Horatian dictum that poetry should "teach and delight". These categories are by no means entirely discrete.

The stylistic result of seeing literary authority as one with soteriological authority is a double layering in many poems. The speaker-level is that of experience and is dramatic; the underlying level is that of the unchanging love of God, embodied in the completed work of Christ in human history and revealed in the written Word, and is therefore static. The two levels sometimes are made to appear contradictory: this is one of the engines of Herbert's wit.

Many of the poems appear to be expressive or confessional, but this is a means to Herbert's delightful, and pastoral, didacticism. The poetic "I" is generalised, representative. Delight is provided by identification with the speaker as well as by the formal poetic features. Delight is also found in the content, which is an imitation of the experiential proof of the doctrines of grace as brought again to light in the Reformation. The poetry's faithfulness to the Bible, and the reader's prior state, together determine the effectiveness of the poetry in the reader's relationship with God.

Herbert's theological poetic, in contrast to the literary criticism of his time, provided a means of writing poetry which, without needing theories of divine inspiration, found its authority and its true authorship in God. Future poetry moved away from this achievement. Herbert's poetry, therefore, is probably a unique presentation of the authoritative love of the God whose gift is language.

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisors, Mr David Brooks and Associate Professor Anthony Miller, for their generosity of time, their willingness to share their depth of knowledge, and their acceptance of a sometimes differing point of view. Through their patient correction I have begun to learn how to write. That I have still a long way to go in that regard is no fault of theirs.

Dr Catherine Runcie has for years been unselfish mentor, example, encourager, and generous giver. Dr Barry Spurr and Dr Liam Semler have provided sources and advice. Pat Ricketts and Gudrun Butcher have shown unfailing administrative patience. Postgraduate and postdoctoral colleagues have helped with intellectual, technical, and moral support: to Ursula, to Maria, to William, and others, my heartfelt thanks. And for the long friendship, loving support, and wisdom, of Jan, Susannah, and Ann, no words can express my gratitude.

I thank Professor Sidney Gottlieb for his generosity in regard to the *George Herbert Journal*.

I am grateful to The University of Sydney for the opportunity to spend some years in the company of George Herbert, and for the provision of facilities with which to do it. Thanks also to the staff of Fisher Library, particularly Peter McNiece.

This work is dedicated to my family.

Contents

Introduction	1
Imitation	27
Invention	115
Decorum	162
"Teach and Delight" I	209
"Teach and Delight" II	242
Conclusion	286
Bibliography	290

INTRODUCTION

It is a long road. All the same, I do not know why we should not walk in it. Who are we, that our time is too short to understand George Herbert?

Rosemond Tuve [1]

Overview

The English poems of George Herbert (1593-1633) demonstrate the dependence of language and literature upon the authority of God in salvation. To Herbert, writing poetry is derived from the writing of God. The authority for one's writing is related to one's view of spiritual authority. In Herbert's understanding, to create a universe, and to re-create damaged humanity, is God's alone. As to make and to save is already accomplished by God, so to Herbert, the matter and method of a poem is already "written".

My contention is that while poetry is neither divine revelation nor systematic theology, Herbert's poetic is conditioned by and presents a parallel to the theological framework of the Reformation. Herbert criticism in the last thirty years has rediscovered the influence of the doctrines of grace. I am taking this further by seeing Herbert's very poetic, his literary principles and practice, to be a model of the completed authoring by God in Christ of the new creation. Herbert's authority to write is the work of God in Christ, which is revealed in the written Scriptures, and written on the heart by the Holy Spirit. These three types of "writing"[2] are Herbert's authority rather than, or at least well before, the other forms of authority sought by Renaissance writers such as the imitation of antiquity. Herbert was therefore different from his contemporaries, whose humanistic literary pronouncements I have used as contrast.

Others have recognized that Herbert's poetic authority was neither of his independent self nor of a human external source. Jacqueline Miller lists, as external sources of authority both human and divine, "a traditionally accepted system of belief, a fixed principle of

[1] *A Reading of George Herbert*, London, Faber and Faber, 1952, 99.
[2] I do not, here or throughout, use "writing" in the poststructuralist sense.

order, ... God, ... Fame or Nature, literary conventions or traditions ..., literary predecessors ..., or the structure of the actual or the natural." But she assumes, as some others do, that Herbert as poet is conflicted and guilty because of his submission to the authority of God and the Bible. "An external authorizing principle may threaten the writer's position, leaving him little or no space in which to function." This general possibility she applies to Herbert: "For George Herbert, the proper subject and object of poetry (divine love) must be acknowledged as the final source and author of poetry; this recognition requires a painful and often resisted surrender (to God) of the poet's claim to the creative powers and independence of his art." [3] I suggest this to be a confusion of the layer of speaker-experience with what that speaker is about to be taught. The apparent pain and resistance are a rhetorical means of demonstrating the unchanging love of God towards his error-prone loved one. The faulty speaker is not (only) autobiographical, but is the means of Herbert's didacticism. Miller's comment misunderstands the deeper purpose of Herbert's poems about poetry, which is to use the trope of human authorship to teach about the way of salvation.

The authority of God, so far from being restricting or painful, is the only means of freedom for Herbert as writer. To be first "written on" (to become a new creation in Christ) is to enable the writing of the truth. This does not mean that Herbert believed himself directly inspired. The English church in which Herbert was an ordained minister followed the Reformers in believing Divine inspiration limited to the now-closed canon of Scripture.[4] Purely poetic inspiration was associated with pagan antiquity. On the other hand, *The Temple* is not merely a metrical reproduction of Scripture passages and phrases. The situation or nature of literary authority in the case of Herbert is therefore interesting because his poetic exists somewhere in the space between autonomous creation and a writing-out of the Bible. If these are considered, with no political implications, as, respectively, "left" and "right" extremes of a continuum (although the extreme "left" position was not then thought to be possible), it is my belief that Herbert's

---

[3] *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, 5, 3, 147.

[4] Church of England, *Thirty-Nine Articles*, VI, XX, XXI, and Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F. L. Battles, ed. J. McNeill, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, 4.8.8,9.

position is close to the "right". Others have disagreed, or have not seen such a continuum at all, believing poetry to exist in a separate sphere from matters of doctrine.

Not only did Herbert relate the authorisation of his poetry to the sole "authoring" by God through Christ of the redeemed sinner, but he also saw that writing is a process which pictures the initiating work of God for mankind and upon the individual. The promise of God, "I will write [my Law] in their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33), is fulfilled in and by Christ the Word. It describes the transforming of the "stony" self-will which wishes for its own, not God's, authority, into the "fleshy", softened, heart which now desires to love and obey God. When Herbert writes about writing, he is also writing about the way of salvation. When he writes "so I did weave myself into the sense" ('Jordan' II), for example, this is not merely a witty comment about how not to write devotional poetry. It refers to the tendency in every human to substitute his or her own efforts for a gift-righteousness fully achieved by Christ. As the poet's "winding stair" of self-praising rhetoric must be abandoned for that which will truly "rime", a poetic acknowledgment of the kingship of God, so must the sinner abandon all his "fictions" of self-salvation and lean upon the work of God ('Jordan' I). Conversely, as the heart can only be re-made through the initiating writing of God (a frequent Biblical metaphor), so must the poet abandon any idea of his own authority, or, as far as possible, that of the secular past, and write as he is written upon.[5] Writing, in the English poems of George Herbert, poet of the English Reformation, is a trope for the initiating activity of a sovereign God, acting in history to restore damaged humanity.[6]

---

[5] II Corinthians 3:3: "Ye are … 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." Compare Exodus 31:18, 32:16; Deuteronomy 27:3-8 (the basis for 'The Altar'); Psalm 69:28; Hebrews 12:3; Revelation 3:12; and many other references to the believer being a writing, being written upon, or having his name written, for example, on God's hands or in heaven. The negative writing of the Law is referred to in Colossians 2:14: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us … nailing it to his cross." (King James Version, and throughout. Other versions will be specified, e.g. Geneva).

[6] This is not to say that Herbert thought the Reformation, Continental or English, had achieved an ideal state for the church: "The late Reformation never durst / Compare with ancient times and purer yeares" ('The Church Militant', ll.226-7); compare 'Church-rents and schismes'. But theologically, he stands, as much of the following work will argue, with Luther, Calvin, the early Tudor reformers, Cranmer and (usually) Hooker, and with the "Calvinist conformists" of the seventeenth century. Thus he may be placed

There are at least twenty poems in *The Temple* which refer to the writing of a poem as analogous to the work of Christ for and in the believer. "God writeth, *Loved*" ('A True Hymne'): as man does not, even in part, save himself, so the authority for writing is God's. The revelation in the written Word of the work of the incarnate Word provides authority, content and method for the human writing of poetry. This study deals with many more than the twenty poems in this trope cluster, because I have been interested to compare Herbert's attitude to writing with what was said about writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jonathan Post remarks that Herbert had to "rethink the premises of language itself", and that he based this rethinking on "the elevated authority given [by Protestantism] to the written Word of God".[7] The greatest difference between Herbert's Reformation poetics and the poetics of a humanistic Renaissance is in this matter of authority. Here and throughout I mean by "authority" not primarily civil, or earthly, authority, but literary, and spiritual, authority. In Herbert's case, the literary and the spiritual are inseparable. Herbert saw the literary as dependent upon the spiritual, and his poems, as his speakers, as therefore already "written".

Much medieval literature had been professedly dependent upon the authority of God, but this authority was mediated through Pope, councils, or ecclesiastical hierarchy and tradition. The writers of the early Renaissance turned to pagan antiquity for their authority, using the writings of ancient Greece and Rome as a model for the purification of language and so, perhaps inadvertently, validating a life-view not dependent upon the church. The Reformation used the Renaissance tools of humanistic scholarship to restore the unmediated authority of the Bible, but necessarily rejected humanism's dependence upon a pagan past, its classical ethics, and its implication of human autonomy.

Yet despite the Reformation, English writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tended to look to classical models rather than attempt, as *The Temple* attempts, to reflect the work of God in the construction of a literary work. Writers in England, having

---

with the mainstream of the reformed Tudor, Elizabethan, and Jacobean church, though the definition of that mainstream is still contentious (see *The Early Stuart Church*, ed. K. Fincham, London, Macmillan, 1993).

[7] "Substance and Style in George Herbert", *English Lyric Poetry: The Early Seventeenth Century*, London, Routledge, 1999, 142-3.

discarded medieval sources of authority, but not yet seriously considering the possibility of individual authority, validated their writing by the example and rules of classical antiquity.[8] Poetry fully "authorised" by the Bible was largely in the nature of Psalm translations and paraphrases; outside this genre, the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, the basis of an English humanistic education in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, governed the thinking of even Protestant authors. I say "even Protestant" because all Protestants, not just Puritans, supposedly accepted the unmediated authority of the Word of God over all of life's activities.[9] That is, the Reformation put an end to separate spheres of authority. Daily work and pleasure, including the writing of poetry, was no longer seen as less pleasing to God than, for instance, monastic contemplation. The corollary of this was that as Christ had died to redeem the whole person, then all activities were under his authority, not as means to salvation but as thanksgiving for it. Literary activity, therefore, could not for Herbert exist in a separate sphere, non-biblically validated and authorised.

The Reformation of course owed much to humanism. For one thing, a more accurate Biblical text was available, and for another, and relatedly, a renewed historical sense and a contextualised, grammatical approach to the study of the Bible freed the lay Bible reader from an allegorising and philosophic scholasticism, and allowed an understanding of the finished and sufficient work of Christ. Yet the humanistic Renaissance, based on the words of pagan antiquity, could not provide the same view of literary authority as the Christ-centred Reformation, based on the words and Word of God.

---

[8] Writers sometimes in practice departed from the principles which others, or even they themselves, had laid down. See John Steadman, *The Lamb and the Elephant*, San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, 1974, xxvii. My intention here is to consider general tendencies and usual practices as a means of studying how Herbert's Reformation theology contrasted with the humanistic philosophies of Renaissance poetics.

[9] Richard Hooker's answer to such as Thomas Cartwright about the extent of biblical authority suggests that the Protestant can indeed do many things not directly covered by Scriptural injunction, and still be termed Protestant. Hooker sometimes appears to propose that reason's use of nature might be as authoritative as revelation and faith. Herbert's 'Nature', 'Divinitie', and 'Miserie' contradict this view. See *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Vol. I, Book I, XIV.1-5, especially 5; but note Vol. II, Book V, XXI.5. *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker*, ed. J. Keble, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1836, 334-341, 117.

It is my argument that Herbert saw the difficulties in the uneasy marriage which had taken place in English education and writing, and that he tried to show that the initiating and sole authority of Christ in salvation may be expressed in writing, in a content and form which depend on that authority. Dependence upon humanistic tradition to authorise the poet, or upon "fictions and false hair" ('Jordan' I) to exalt the poet, are unnecessary. God "writes" a new creation: that new creation then writes, not in order to be a creator himself, but to glorify the God who has written. The already accomplished work of God in salvation provides the unchanging, already known, resolved, deepest level of Herbert's poems; the experience of the speaker provides the surface level of indecision and change. The poems, like the believer, might be said to be both already written and being written.

Literary "critics" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, who may more accurately be described as defenders of poetry, vindicators of the English tongue, writers of prefaces, or instructors in techniques of rhetoric and verse, have not been much considered in relation to Herbert's poetry. Sidney has been discussed in connection with Herbert, but more in terms of a comparison of their poems than of Sidney's defence of poetry. Although Herbert wrote no literary criticism or theory, his English poetry provides an instructive contrast with many of the precepts of the humanist critics. From Elyot and Ascham to Milton and Hobbes, even those who were most interested in glorifying England as Protestant saw literature rather in a humanistic than a theological light. Herbert, however, applies his understanding of the Reformation not only to the matter but to the manner of writing poetry. In doing so, he implicitly criticises the current thinking about poetry.

The means by which the English Renaissance authorised poetry, such as imitation, were to Herbert secular means derived from, but now divorced from, a theological basis. Therefore *The Temple* uses the terms of the literary criticism of the English Renaissance in a twofold manner. They have the accepted literary meanings, but also become analogies of God's dealings with humanity. This is particularly so with the terms, cognates of, and concepts of, "imitation", "invention", and "decorum". The aim of "profit with pleasure", that rule of "teach and delight" which was the justification of poetry for

many centuries, Herbert also has as aim and rule, but with a different approach and desired outcome. I have used these terms as chapter headings and foci, in order to demonstrate Herbert's understanding of the tropological connection between writing and the way to God, and because Herbert wished to show the antithesis between the theology of grace and the man-centred approach of contemporaries who also wrote about writing.

There were other rhetorical terms transferred from classical oratory to Renaissance discussions about poetry which I have not considered directly. Terms such as disposition or elocution, for example, have been sufficiently dealt with by means of the many studies of the unity and arrangement of Herbert's *Temple*, and of Herbert's vocabulary, syntax, and metaphor. Instead of considering the divisions of rhetoric one by one in regard to Herbert, I have considered the ruling critical ideas. The idea of imitation, for example, was not one of the divisions of oratory, but has seemed to me to have priority over them in the Renaissance. Imitation, a wide concept with moral implications, is a comprehensive mode, rather than a division of an encomiastic or forensic speech; the imitator may use oratorical divisions as part of his imitation, but it is the imitative mode itself which interested Herbert theologically and poetically. Invention, though originally the first part of the preparation of a speech upon a given topic, came to be thought of as the finding of the poetic topic itself (a process which was beginning in the sixteenth century, as we see in Sidney's sonnets, for example) and as affecting every part of the process of writing a poem. Herbert writes of invention as having this meaning *and* as having to do with finding the way to God. He also foreshadows the word's later meaning, but negatively, as the self-directed heart's creation of sinful ways. Decorum, the ruling principle from classical times to the eighteenth century, was also much written about by poetic theorists. Again Herbert shows that as biblical Christianity must transgress against classical social and religious decorum, that which seems proper for man's relations with men and with gods, so his poetry must disobey the accepted rules for literary decorum or demonstrate a new decorum; it must be appropriate for a world-view which both humbles the creature in relation to the God who does all in salvation, and dignifies the individual regardless of social rank. My final two chapters concern not a division of rhetoric but that phrase by which poetry was justified in the English Renaissance. The chapters suggest

ways in which Herbert's understanding of the balance and means of *prodesse* and *delectare* was somewhat different from that of his contemporaries. I see *The Temple* as primarily didactic rather than self-expressive, but also as providing "delight" not only in its forms but in its content. The final chapter briefly examines those aspects of English "antinomianism" which are similar to what, theologically, Herbert's speakers are delightfully teaching.

Critical review and premises

The Temple was popular in the seventeenth century with conformist and non-conformist alike.[10] The production of ten editions in forty years (and several imitators) suggests that Herbert's theological poetic was new and welcome, that "Divinitie, and Poesie" had not successfully "met" in the past.[11] The poetry of "the divine Mr. Herbert" was appreciated for its substitution of "Mount Calvary for Parnassus Hill",[12] a redemption of the "foul and overflowing stream"[13] of previous lyric poetry.

But even in the seventeenth century, and from admirers rather than detractors, there was the beginning of the legend of Herbertian sainthood, and -- not unrelatedly -- the beginning of the legend of the (anachronistically titled) "High Anglican" Herbert. Barnabas Oley, in his preface to *Herberts Remains* (1652), compared Herbert's Latin and Greek poetry, written with "water of Helicon", to *The Temple*. The latter he described as "Inspirations propheticall ... distilled from above", thus giving Herbert's poetry a status equal to Scripture.[14] Izaak Walton, wanting a ritualist and Restoration Herbert who could be righteous by his own works, created "a Saint, unspotted of the World, full of ... all the

---

[10] See Robert Ray, *The Herbert Allusion Book: Allusions to George Herbert in the Seventeenth Century*, Texts and Studies, *Studies in Philology* 83 (4) (1986), and "Herbert's Seventeenth-Century Reputation: A Summary and New Considerations", *George Herbert Journal* 9 (2) (1986): 1-16; Allan Pritchard, "Additional Seventeenth-Century Allusions to George Herbert", *George Herbert Journal* 11 (2) (1988): 37-48.

[11] "Divinitie, and Poesie, met" is the phrase of Francis Bacon, referring to Herbert in his Dedication of "Translation of Certaine Psalmes into English" [1625], in C. A. Patrides, *George Herbert: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, 57.

[12] John Legate, 1647, in Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, 9.

[13] Henry Vaughan, Preface to Part II of "Silex Scintillans", *The Complete Poetry*, ed. French Fogle, New York, Anchor (Doubleday), 1964, 259.

[14] Oley, "A Prefatory View ...", *Remains*, 1652, facsimile edition, Menston, Scolar Press, 1970, unpaged.

examples of vertuous life". Even if Herbert's various speakers, whose experiences are far from this picture of perfection, are not identifiable with "Herbert", this testimony, glorifying the works of man rather than the redemption of Christ, is arguably not that with which Herbert wanted to "teach and delight" his readers. If it is true that Walton had an ecclesiastical / political programme of his own beneath an apparently simple sincere admiration, as has been argued recently, subsequent comment which has depended upon Walton should be reassessed. [15]

Puritans and nonconformists, however, as well as many conformists, understood *The Temple* as providing what Herbert had wished, help to "any dejected poor soul".[16] They saw that Herbert's theology leant on Christ and did not lay Laudian burdens of ritual and good works upon the reader. Richard Baxter, one of many Puritans to appreciate Herbert, although finding *The Temple* poetically inferior to Cowley's works, praised Herbert's "heart-work and heaven-work" and that he spoke like a man "past jest".[17] Herbert's first readers appreciated his anti-humanist stance and his association of poetry-writing with salvation-writing. Others, if not Baxter, appreciated the association of poetry of quality and wit with biblical truth and personal Christian experience.

A surface of "jest", however, was all that Dryden's anti-Reformation attitudes could see in Herbert's supposed propensity to "torture one poor word ten thousand ways."[18] Dryden's more classical and rationalistic view of language prepared the way for a century which disapproved of a joy in the ambiguities of language. That a word could have two

---

[15] Walton, *Lives of Donne and Herbert*, ed. S. C. Roberts, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928, 113; David Novarr, *The Making of Walton's Lives*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1958, *passim*; Ilona Bell, "Herbert and Harvey: In the Shadow of the Temple", *Like Season'd Timber: Essays on George Herbert*, Seventeenth-Century Texts and Studies, ed. E. Miller and R. di Yanni, New York, Peter Lang, 1987; Daniel Doerksen, "The Laudian Interpretation of George Herbert", *Literature and History* 3 (2) (1994): 36-54; Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert: Return to the Middle Way,* Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1993, 47 and *passim*. See also Gene E. Veith's important comment on the mistaken distinction between "Anglican" and "Protestant" in Herbert criticism when referring to the early seventeenth century: *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*, London, Associated University Presses, 1985, 15-16.

[16] Walton, 110. On nonconformist reception, see Doerksen, "Laudian Interpretation", 45.

[17] Patrides, *Heritage*, 137; Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954, 19.

[18] "Mac Flecknoe", *Selected Poetry and Prose of John Dryden*, ed. Earl Miner, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1969, 193.

meanings, if not ten thousand, was related to the witty doubleness of all things in a universe which signified Christ; but this point of view largely disappeared after the early seventeenth century. Similarly, Dryden and his literary descendants disapproved of the indecorously close relationship with Christ expressed in Herbert's poems. *The Temple* fell out of critical favour in the eighteenth century, as -- relatedly -- did the doctrines of sin, inability, and grace alone. Even the evangelical revival did not bring back an appreciation of the nature of Herbert's wit. John Newton, whose doctrinal convictions were very close to those undergirding *The Temple*, as a preacher and hymnwriter himself found the seventeenth century poetic style "uncouth and obsolete", as did his friend William Cowper, who assessed *The Temple* as "gothic and uncouth".[19] John Wesley, however, found a kinship with *The Temple's* discovery of the undeserved love of God. Although he destroyed some of Herbert's poetry by making it suitable for eighteenth century singing and sensibilities, and edited out some of Herbert's "Calvinism", he also later, perhaps coming to appreciate what Herbert was attempting to demonstrate about language, published many of Herbert's poems as Herbert had written them.[20] Isaac Watts "owed a great debt to *The Temple*", and most of the admiration for Herbert in the eighteenth century was -- perhaps ironically, considering *Musae Responsoriae* -- from dissenters. George Ryley, however, the author in 1715 of the first known full-length commentary on *The Temple*, was of the established church. His commentary "probably gives a good idea of the manner in which many read and valued *The Temple* in its first eighty years", that is, "as a spiritual handbook or guide", with less attention to its literary merits (or without seeing the connection between the formal and the doctrinal). [21]

The next century saw a revival of literary interest in Herbert, particularly from Coleridge, Ruskin and Emerson. Several editions, including that by Alexander Grosart, who discovered the Williams manuscript, were produced on both sides of the Atlantic, and

---

[19] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, 286 and n. 63; see also author's comment on Herbert's passionate and intellectually tough "two-layered" poetry compared to Newton's sometimes "chaste and restrained" approach, 273.

[20] Karina Williamson, "Herbert's Reputation in the Eighteenth Century", *Philological Quarterly* 41 (1962): 769-75; Elsie A. Leach, "John Wesley's Use of George Herbert", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 16 (1953): 183-202.

[21] *George Ryley, Mr. Herbert's Temple and Church Militant Explained and Improved* (Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 199), ed. M. Boyd and C. Brown, New York, Garland, 1987, i.

support and acknowledgement of influence came from George Macdonald, Christina Rossetti, and Gerard Manley Hopkins.[22] Misunderstanding remained of Herbert's poetics and of seventeenth-century language and beliefs. The Oxford Movement dismissed *The Temple* as a crude and impoverished ancestor of an altogether dissimilar work, John Keble's *The Christian Year*, and reconstructed Herbert, through Walton, as a proto-Laudian, doctrinally moralistic and ecclesiologically high-church, a reading which prevailed until the second half of the twentieth century.[23]

The twentieth century brought the publication of the scholarly edition of F. E. Hutchinson, and the support of T. S. Eliot. Eliot's approval of Herbert was lukewarm in the 1920s, but became enthusiastic by the 1960s. Eliot brought Herbert into prominence as a "Metaphysical" poet, and praised his poetry for aesthetic reasons and for its strength of intellect. However, his sponsorship confirmed the picture of an Anglo-Catholic Herbert. Articles and chapters now praised wit and structure, but did not always make the connection between Herbert's formal choices and a theology of grace alone. *The Temple* was often seen as self-expressive rather than a means of teaching that theology. Herbert was no longer seen as a limp imitator of the more red-blooded John Donne, nor as a poet whose piety – a word usually undefined by those critics using it – was more in evidence than literary merit. However, the overdue appreciation of the toughness of his wit and the fineness of his poetic abilities meant that some thought it possible fully to understand his poetry without sympathising with, or at least attempting to understand, the motivating theology (which was also that of his first readers).

New Historicism reacted against New Criticism's attempt to weigh poetic merit while disregarding the reason for the poetry. However, the New Historicist interest in the turbulent changes in power structures in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has presented a Herbert whose poetic ability and theology are cultural productions; recent critical discussions in this mode see neither primarily poetry nor Christianity but failed

[22] Further details of critical comment are in Patrides, *Heritage*.

[23] Gene E. Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, 37; Ilona Bell, "In the Shadow of the Temple"; Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert*, both *passim*; Daniel Doerksen, "The Laudian

ambition. Herbert's God has become King James writ large; Herbert's poetry is now merely a tool for his social advancement.

Rosemond Tuve and Joseph Summers were perhaps the first in the twentieth century to achieve a balance between matters literary and doctrinal, and to point out, from somewhat different points of view, the dependence of the poetry upon the belief structure.[24] Richard Strier, a major contributor to the understanding of Herbert's poetry as the poetry of justification by faith, praised Summers for his "pioneering work in freeing Herbert from Walton and the High Church movement". He also remarked, however, that "form rather than content became Summers's focus".[25] Whether or not that is true of Summers, my position is, rather, that the formal features of *The Temple* are dependent upon the theological content.

Rosemond Tuve, in opposing William Empson's idiosyncratic reading of Herbert, found Herbert's imagery to be theologically based. However, this basis to Tuve was medieval and church-traditional. There is no question that many streams converge in the making of a body of poetry (or of English seventeenth-century theology). I would argue, however, for the primacy of the Bible in Herbert's poetry, and that this is a direct influence rather than one mediated and sometimes distorted by traditions seen as equally authoritative. I would further argue for the primacy of the Bible in, and for the doctrinal "Calvinism"[26] of, the Elizabethan, Jacobean and much of the early Caroline church.[27]

From 1954 (Rosemond Tuve, Louis Martz, Malcolm Ross) to 2000 (R. V. Young) there have been those who would find in the medieval tradition, or in a Tridentine and Baroque

---

Interpretation of Herbert"; *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne, and the English Church before Laud,* Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press, 1997, *passim.*

[24] Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1952; Summers, *George Herbert, His Religion and Art*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954.

[25] *Love Known*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, xvi.

[26] This term is not often accurately used: see my chapter "Teach and Delight", and see J. I. Packer, "John Calvin and Reformed Europe", and "Calvin the Theologian", in *Honouring the People of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J.I. Packer*, Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 1999, Vol. 4, 18-19, 142-3. Here I mean by "Calvinism" an understanding of salvation which glorifies Christ rather than man.

[27] See the work of historians and literary historians such as C. and K. George, Peter Lake, Nicholas Tyacke, Kenneth Fincham, Patrick Collinson, and John Coolidge, and of commentators on Herbert such as Lewalski, Bell, Strier, Veith, Hodgkins and Doerksen.

influence, Herbert's literary authority. Patrick Grant, Heather Asals, and Stanley Stewart are included in this category.[28] Despite the many invaluable insights, and the contagious love of Herbert's poetry, provided by these and others similarly positioned, I do not believe it is possible properly to understand Herbert's poetic on this basis, nor to discover the depth of his poems, many of which depend even in their wit and form upon the Protestant paradigm of a salvation completely of God's grace.[29] The Reformation doctrine of the imputation of righteousness was Herbert's very authority for writing. There are levels of metaphor inaccessible to the reader who ignores this. How a belief in the initiating grace of God alone pertains to Renaissance literary theories of authority and form, and how Herbert is situated in relation to these theories, is my interest in this work. My own "building" owes much to Barbara Lewalski, who shows that Herbert's poetry drew upon Biblical and Protestant writings; to Richard Strier, who convincingly argues that the "matter" of the English poems is the doctrine of justification by faith; to Chana Bloch, who demonstrates the Scriptural basis of many poems and that Herbert's speakers' experiences represent and relive the Bible; to Ilona Bell, who finds a non-imitable 'Sacrifice' and a non-Ignatian 'Thanksgiving'; and to Gene E. Veith, Daniel Doerksen, and Christopher Hodgkins, who have clarified the sixteenth and seventeenth century theological context, and Herbert's place in it. [30]

With the exception of Helen Vendler, recent major work on Herbert, variously theologically coloured, has paid attention to the essential connection between faith

---

[28] Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954; Malcolm Ross, *Poetry and Dogma*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1954; Patrick Grant, *The Transformation of Sin*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974; Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981; Stanley Stewart, *George Herbert*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1986; R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2000.

[29] Helen Wilcox comes close to suggesting this in " 'No More Wit Than a Christian'? The Case of Devotional Poetry", *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, ed. C. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995, 9-21. See also C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1954, 34-5, 190.

[30] Ilona Bell, "Setting Foot into Divinity", *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (3) (1977): 219-44; Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Lyric*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979; Richard Strier, *Love Known*, 1983; Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word*, Berkeley, University of California, 1985; Gene Veith, *Reformation Spirituality*, 1985, and "The Religious Wars in George Herbert Criticism", *George Herbert Journal* 11 (2) (1988): 19-35; Daniel Doerksen, "Recharting theVia Media of Spenser and Herbert", *Renaissance and Reformation* 8 (3) (1984): 215-25, and *Conforming to the Word*, 1997; Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert*, 1993.

structures and language structures. [31] Some writers (such as Rosalie Colie, Stanley Fish, Barbara Harman, and Elizabeth Clarke) have indeed connected the poetry and the theology, but with misunderstandings; others (such as Malcolm Schoenfeldt and Cristina Malcolmson) have assumed the theology to be cultural imposition or wishful thinking, merely the product of certain economic and social institutions of power; and recently, Julia Guernsey has used paediatric psychoanalysis to account for both Herbert's beliefs and his poetic forms.[32] I have chosen to study George Herbert by accepting his own presuppositions: that there is a God, and that the Bible is an authoritative, unified revelation of his dealings with mankind, whom he created and towards whom he has acted in perfect righteousness and love; that mankind has fallen; that the remedy and restoration of relationship with God lies in the work of God in Christ. Coleridge, William Empson, Jonathan Goldberg and A. D. Nuttall, to cite four of many, are evidence that it is difficult to put aside personal bias or the presuppositions of one's times in studying Herbert.[33] Perhaps it is impossible. We all create a Herbert after the image of our own background and being, a tendency related to the comment by Gene E. Veith that "the religious wars of the seventeenth century … are being re-fought" over Herbert;[34] and I would add that cultural materialism and deconstructive linguistic philosophies have joined, anachronistically, in the fray.

---

[31] Vendler opposes "the workings of [Herbert's] own mind and heart" to "the expression of certain religious beliefs": *The Poetry of George Herbert*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1975, 4.

[32] Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, Hamden, CT, Archon, 1966; Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972; Barbara Harman, *Costly Monuments*, Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1982; Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology,* 1997; Michael Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991; Cristina Malcolmson, *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic,* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999; Julia Guernsey, *The Pulse of Praise*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1999.

[33] Coleridge: ". . . the merits of [the] poems [can only be felt by] an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church", "Notes on Herbert's *Temple*", *Critical Writings*, J.M.Dent & Sons, 1907, 372; William Empson (referring to his debate in 1950 with Rosemond Tuve): "I am not myself a Christian … I claim to know … what was going on in Herbert's mind while he wrote ['The Sacrifice'], without his knowledge and against his intention", "Last Words", *Times Literary Supplement*, December 31, 1993, 11-12; compare the approaches of A. D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God,* London, Methuen, 1980, and Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and Renaissance Texts*, London, Methuen, 1986.

[34] "The Religious Wars in George Herbert Criticism: Reinterpreting Seventeenth-Century Anglicanism", *George Herbert Journal* 11 (2) (Spring 1988): 19-36.

My thesis bases itself on the premise that Herbert's theology is not a mere cultural background to, but is essential to, his poetry.[35] *The Temple* is built on the foundation of the initiating, saving authority of Christ the Word revealed through the written Word. This does not merely concern content, theological themes becoming matter for a poet who found the market in the poetry of secular love or heroism already choked. Herbert sees writing and reading as themselves metaphors for the action of God towards humanity and humanity's enabled response. "Go spell and read how I have killed your king" ('A Dialogue-Antheme: Christian. Death') is not only a witty way to present the "Go-spell" of a substitutionary crucifixion; it also demonstrates Herbert's understanding of the intimate association of God's authoring of a new creation with human writing (language, authorship, poetry, reading) as its trope. As Summers and Asals, among others, have shown, the very structures of language reflect spiritual reality to Herbert. In all his writing of poetry, he is conscious, and wishes to make us so, of being "authored", not in the sense of inspiration, but in his own relationship with God or that which he wishes his readers to have. When he reflects upon the process of writing or upon himself as poet, or uses the terms of criticism then current, he is thinking primarily of the love of God as experienced in the justifying and regenerating work of Christ. As the Bible so often uses the idea of "writing" to speak about sin, salvation, and our walk with God and before men, so does *The Temple*. This trope is presented not merely in each poem's images but in each poem's very existence. It demonstrates new life as "written" already by the authority not of the human "writer" (of words or of life) but of God.

Such a claim runs the risk of merely sounding impressive. Its substantiation, however, is a large proportion of the poems of *The Temple*, with Renaissance literary attitudes as contrast. Many poems are considered in detail. My emphasis upon theological matters is necessary, given my assumption that literature and language, so far from being separate from theology, are in fact derived from the being of God and his creating and re-creating activity. By "theology", I do not mean an ongoing human creation of ideas about God, as

---

[35] Despite its insights, Marion White Singleton's *God's Courtier* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) suffers from the assumption, taken much further by Michael Schoenfeldt, that the social milieu conditioned Herbert's view of God. The "courtier" model of relating to God implies a doubt ("he *may*

much nineteenth and twentieth century theology has been understood, but as it was understood in the seventeenth century: the study of the revealed work of God, based on the belief that such a revelation was trustworthy.

Herbert was faced with the task of finding a poetic which was neither a re-writing of the Bible (in, say, metrical paraphrases) nor the presentation of humanistic ideas about God, man and nature (as even the forms of classical and Renaissance poetry may imply) nor a new "truth" from within himself. He saw his task, I believe, as representing, with all the delights of wit and of aural and visual pleasures, a Christian learning God's ways. His praising and struggling speakers encourage by applying the word of God to contemporary experience. But this application is itself entirely within Biblical parameters. It is creative in the only way humanity can be: it is a Temple built using existing materials. There is no thought of *ex nihilo* poetic embodiment or of generating a new incarnation by means of poetic form. But there is much "creative" use of language and form to present and represent the authoring work of Christ in a believer's heart and life. Herbert's poems are not necessarily autobiographical, but they do imagine a chain of fulfilment: the love of God, revealed in the Word of God, "experienced" by the representative speaker, and coming to fruition in the reader's life.

Herbert's poetic usually involves two levels: that of the speaker, who is struggling, perhaps, with the drama of ongoing events and his own imperfections, and that of God, whose truth, accessible in the Bible, is unchanging. This tension between apparent change and actual stasis makes for a dramatic irony in many of the poems.[36] Gene E. Veith describes such a Reformation-based poetic similarly, as "marked by two balancing extremes – a deep awareness of one's sinfulness, balanced by a secure assurance of God's unconditional love." [37] The biblically-educated reader of Herbert's poems knows that there will be closure even if the speaker does not. The writer is working towards an end which the speaker cannot see, somewhat as God "works all things for the good of

---

become a temple", p. 11) which is not the certainty of the achieved gift-salvation of the Bible ("Ye are the temple", I Cor. 3:16, 6:19, II Cor. 6:16) or of Herbert's poetry ("So I did sit and eat").

[36] See Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word*, 108.

[37] *Reformation Spirituality*, 247.

those who love him, who are called by his purpose" (Romans 8:28).[38] Not only the narrative level, but the verbal ambiguities, of the poems often work in this way. "Have I no harvest but a thorn / To let me bloud …?" demands the frustrated speaker in 'The Collar'; but the very meaning given to language by the death of Christ is working against the speaker's surface intentions while it works for his deepest good. That there can be satisfactory "closure" despite limitations of human nature, human language and adverse circumstances is guaranteed only by the "bloud" of the Cross.

I will be referring to Herbert's intentions, as he certainly had them, and – unfairly to parody New Criticism – his poems did not and do not. But Herbert would have been the last to say, had he had to encounter deconstructive literary theories, that his intentions were the determinant of meaning, except insofar that they were in accord with Scripture. Nor did Herbert see the reader as the one who decides on meaning, except insofar as that reader test the poetry by Scripture.[39] "A broken altar", "lewd intentions", and "so did I weave myself into the text" are Herbert's very negative comments on his own authorial trustworthiness.

Meaning, to Herbert, starts and ends not in the human author, nor in the reader, nor in the literary artifact or its language components, but in the person of Christ, the expression and intention of God, as he is revealed in the Bible. "God has spoken" in his Son (Hebrews 1:1,2): this alone is the determinant of closure, the final reference. Herbert saw his writing not as endlessly interpretable but as bounded by Scripture. Kevin J. Vanhoozer has argued convincingly and comprehensively that all arguments about meaning, all hermeneutic theories, are at base theological.[40] Herbert, in implicitly tackling the humanistic theories of writing and interpretation then current, declares his poetic to be theological. His poems indicate that he made a conscious choice to write

[38] This is not an argument for author as God or for meaning being equated with authorial intention. It is simply a comment on how the two levels work in a fallible poetic which models itself on the infallible work of God. The analogy is of course limited.

[39] Compare 'The H. Scriptures' (II) ("lights to eternal blisse"), 'The Pearl' ("not my groveling wit / But thy silk twist", 'Discipline' ("not a word … I … own / But by … thy book"), and the "holy leaves" of 'Heaven'. Further, that every poem is based on or alludes to biblical matter indicates Herbert's desire that the Bible, not his readers' autonomous constructions, should be the hermeneutical guide.

[40] *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press (Apollos), 1998.

according to "I am thine", knowing he would be misunderstood then and by later critics, but trusting that "thou shalt answer, Lord, for me" ('The Quip'). Problems of interpretation, trustworthiness, the discovery of truth, and the slipperiness of words were known to writers and readers long before Herbert. His understanding of the cause of referential multiplicity, of rhetorical deceit and of the possibility of hermeneutical "play" would have been, according to *The Temple*, the basic desire of every human not to obey a greater authority, nor even to admit the existence of a truth outside oneself. In a word, the cause of linguistic and communicative slippage was, to Herbert, sin.

Since to Herbert neither human author nor reader nor text determine meaning, I have attempted to use Herbert's own standard, Scripture, in assessing poems or poetic principles. To treat Scripture also as an untrustworthy text, and the desire of the reader as supreme, ends with the destruction of all language. The proof of this apparently excessive statement is Jonathan Goldberg's *Voice Terminal Echo*, whose extreme individuality of syntax makes for a sometimes indecipherable argument. Such eccentric "play" with accepted forms of language itself, as well as with meaning, is the logical outcome of Empson's anti-intentional model of criticism. Goldberg's writing on Herbert deliberately disregards Herbert's "intentions" but is by no means innocent of having its own. A reader whose premises are that he alone creates meaning may read Herbert how he pleases; but let him not talk of "play" when the intent is a very serious one to impose (illogically) that reading upon others. The uncomfortable suspicion that God is not yet dead motivates the communication of such a reading, but the (experimental?) disruption of language, while logically consequent, ironically frustrates Goldberg's didactic purposes.[41]

In 'The H. Scriptures' (II), the speaker, rather than attempting by his own authority to make the Bible say what he would like it to say, finds his thoughts, life, and writing already encompassed by the writings of God: " … in ev'ry thing / Thy words do finde me out, and parallels bring, / And in another make me understood". So as Herbert sees the hermeneutic boundary to be the Scriptures and not his own reason or desire, Herbert's interpreters must, for him to be "understood", first acknowledge, down to the smallest

[41] Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo,* 1986.

allusion, Herbert's dependence upon another textual authority, the Bible, and another life-authority, Christ. Further, the ideal Herbert reader must, even with temporary suspension of disbelief, read the Bible as Herbert read it: as the Word of God, not as any other Barthesian text-space.[42] Our interpretation of Herbert cannot do his poetry justice unless it accords with that which Herbert, and his projected audience, understood as "Scripture": the authoritative, inspired and unified revelation of the redemption of mankind through Christ alone.

In summary, since comment on Herbert's poetry has been and continues to be copious, my justification for yet another study is fourfold. I have attempted to look at his poetry in the light of its authority, and to examine to what extent it agrees with or is opposed to the authorising statements of the Renaissance critics; in this regard I have found that a Reformation poetic cannot co-exist with humanist literary attitudes. I have seen that much of the lyric poetry consists of a layer of dramatic experience over a foundation of unchanging truth. I have recognised the poems about poetry to be (also) metaphors for the way to God. And I understand *The Temple* to be didactic, a delightful teaching, rather than expressive. The "experience" level is a means of generalised representation, of teaching by the delights of identification. Delight is also in the content, the gracious love of God, as well as in the formal poetic features.

Each of these propositions depends upon the basic presupposition that Herbert is a poet of the Reformation, and that the theology of the Reformation provides his authority and method as well as his content.

Herbert and Reformation Theology

George Herbert has been used as an example of the ideal churchman of the early seventeenth century. Horton Davies calls him "a high Anglican counterpart to … Richard Baxter". [43] He was of course a devoted, though not uncritical, son of the Church of

[42] " …a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash". Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", cited in Sean Burke, *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995, 125-30.

[43] *Worship and Theology in England*, Pt. II, Grand Rapids, MI, W. B. Eerdmans, 1996, 103.

England. But "high Anglican" is inappropriate. The English church was certainly his "deare Mother", his "brave rose" ('The British Church', 'Church-rents and schismes'). This does not make him a ritualist or a Laudian,[44] despite Walton's and perhaps Eliot's presentation of him. Recent literary and historical research has shown that the Church of England of the early seventeenth century, in which Herbert was a minister, was doctrinally Calvinistic.[45] His English poems indicate a Lutheran-Calvinist, biblicist grasp of the doctrines of grace. His Latin collection of epigrams *Musae Responsoriae* disagrees with the Puritan Melville on ecclesiological, not soteriological grounds; concerning the matters of authority in faith and of sin and salvation, Herbert declares himself one with Melville, sharing the same tradition.[46] Herbert's poems were congenial to conformists and non-conformists, because of the reality of the relationship with Christ representatively expressed in them. By contrast, the *Synagogue* of the true high churchman[47] Christopher Harvey, which was for quite some time printed in one volume with *The Temple*, is a case of "putting a holiness in the things", as Herbert said not to, with an emphasis on outwardness and works of ritual quite opposite to the spirit of *The Temple*.[48]

Barbara Lewalski, in her attempt to establish a "Protestant poetics", has a useful section on Herbert's doctrinal milieu.[49] I would qualify, however, her choice of William Perkins as typical of "Calvinism". The Thirty-Nine Articles and the Homilies do not support Perkins' urging of "the constant scrutiny of personal emotions", or the preparation for faith.[50] The classic "Anglican" position of Cranmer and Hooker, of Davenant and Donne, is better represented in H. R. McAdoo (at least for the early period) and C. F. Allison.[51]

---

[44] See Richard Strier, "History, Criticism, and Herbert: A Polemical Note", *Papers on Language and Literature* 17 (3) (1981): 347-52; Daniel Doerksen, "The Laudian Interpretation of Herbert"; Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society*, 1993, 149 ff; Ilona Bell, "Herbert and Harvey".

[45] See n. 26. I use "Calvinistic" to express a concept larger than, though not excluding, "predestinarian".

[46] *Musae Responsoriae*, XXXIII, *De Autem enumeratione*: Martyr, Calvin, Beza, Bucer, Whitaker are named as being on both "sides".

[47] This term is anachronistic, but convenient.

[48] *The Country Parson* (hereafter *CP*), in F. E. Hutchinson, *The Works of George Herbert*, (hereafter H), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941, 246.

[49] *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Lyric*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, 13ff.

[50] *Protestant Poetics*, 20, 21. See my chapter "Teach and Delight".

[51] McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1949; Allison, *The Rise of Moralism*, London, S.P.C.K., 1966.

Richard Strier, Gene E. Veith, Daniel Doerksen and Christopher Hodgkins, amongst others, have used the term "Reformation theology" to describe the doctrinal basis of Herbert's church and of his poetry. This is a more helpful term than "Reformed", which today may imply a particular denomination, although I have used this term at times. The term "Anglican" is anachronistic, though, again, there is no convenient substitute.[52] It too has unwanted implications of ritualism and of a "middle way" in doctrine as well as in matters ecclesiastical. Herbert's "middle way" in 'The British Church' did not refer to being partly Arminian in soteriology (a curate's-egg impossibility in practice) but to keeping a Biblical "decency and order" in ecclesiology, neither naked nor painted. Herbert's poems about church furniture, liturgy, and calendar, so misleading to Christopher Harvey,[53] are in fact not about church furnishing or ritual but are metaphors for the heart's relationship with Christ. As Christopher Hodgkins says: "[Herbert] causes the 'real' object to vanish by the poem's end."[54] 'The Church-floore', for example, is not a celebration of church furniture and architecture, nor even about the floor of the church building. Herbert's use of such tropes does not at all correlate with a Waltonian position that salvation is achieved through a carefulness about these things, but rather that such externals are – like poetry itself – an outward expression of a heart, or many hearts, thankful for what has been undeservedly done by God already. "Not in rich furniture, or fine aray" is true worship found; "all thy frame and fabric is within" ('The H. Communion', 'Sion'). Herbert's poetic is that of the spirit, not the letter. The written-on heart, stone become flesh, is the "fabric" of *The Temple*.

Reformation theology concerns authority, and writing implies authority (an "author" is still semantically present, despite Roland Barthes' desire to remove him / Him). The Reformation was not a mere cleaning-up of a few corruptions. It was a return to the entire authority of Christ in salvation, unmeritable by the sinner at any stage. The Reformation also restored the authority of the Scriptures in revealing this salvation. The biblical

[52] The term was not in use until the 1660s, and in its "High Church" sense not until the 1830s (OED); today it is mistakenly used to describe a supposed *via media* between the doctrines of grace and the doctrines of merit. No such *theological* "middle way" existed in the Elizabethan and Jacobean church.
[53] See Ilona Bell, "In the Shadow of the Temple", 1987.

revelation, said the Reformers, is accessible, and complete, without "inspired" interpretation or addition. That is, a twofold authority is involved: Christ's entire authority (origination, power) as the justification and new life of the sinner; and the Bible's entire authority (truth, reliability) in revealing this. The first aspect eliminates any human merit, and the second, any human originality in how to relate to God. Writing poetry has to do with both aspects, as Herbert makes clear in 'The Altar'. Only God in Christ ("nothing but / Thy power"; "no workmans tool") can change the bound will ("a heart of stone"); only the Bible ("thy hand") has the authority to "cut" (Hebrews 4:12). The poem is in a similar shape to Greek altar-poems,[55] implying the rescuing of poetry from its "brothels" ('The Forerunners') – not just immoral, but idolatrous, poetry is suggested by this biblical association. The position of 'The Altar' after 'Superliminare', with its classical associations, and before 'The Sacrifice', indicates that Herbert is presenting a body of poetry which implicitly criticises much of the humanistic "theory", the pagan altars of poetry, of his time.

We cannot of course know where Herbert's sympathies would have lain had he lived into the confusing Laudian, then anti-Laudian, years following his death. Nor is poetry dogmatic theology. But poetry by its very nature, formally as well as in content, by its use of language and by its similarities with or differences from its literary antecedents, reveals a particular view of God and of man. Herbert saw the purpose of language to be "to praise thy name" ('The Altar', 26). My investigation concerns literary authority: how a poet whose authority in salvation is Christ alone, revealed alone through the Bible, may write poetry, and how that poetry is situated in relation to humanistic means of literary authorisation. Herbert appears to me unique in constructing a "Temple" whose architectural principle is the entire authority of God in salvation. That is, he is supremely a poet, if not *the* poet, of the Reformation.

---

[54] *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert*, 165.

[55] Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, 1954, 140; Mary Ellen Rickey, *Utmost Art*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966; Lillian Myers, *The Dwelling Place of God*, unpublished thesis for Doctor of Philosophy degree, University of Queensland, 1999, appendix.

Herbert and the Literary Criticism of the English Renaissance

The literary criticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in England has been comprehensively surveyed by Gregory Smith, Basil Willey, J. E. Spingarn, J. W. H. Atkins, W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, Douglas Bush, O. B. Hardison, and most recently by Brian Vickers. Many others have dealt with particular authors or topics. I have tried to discern some general directions so that Herbert's poetic and its authority might be clearer by contrast. My focus is Herbert and his poetics of grace rather than Renaissance literary criticism or theory. Contemporary writings are used to illustrate a critical context or as a comparison to Herbert's approach. There are generalisations which can be made, and so I have at times referred to "the humanistic critics", but there are also differences. Sidney is not Jonson, nor Ascham Puttenham. Herbert's direction is, in the main, unlike any. However, he specifically used some terms and ideas current in literary fashion; what he did with these I have detailed in my chapters.

Writing about writing in the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century took a minor place compared to writing about theology, politics and nationhood, and discovery, and was largely in the form of defences of poetry against the charge of uselessness or godlessness, instruction on language and form, or correspondence or treatises concerning the vernacular and the related matters of metre and of rhyme. Dedications, prefaces and commendatory letters dealt with some of these issues, often in the context of nationalism: the following poetry and its language is to serve the good of England / Britain by its reworking of the Virgilian epic, for example. Herbert too has something to say about national language and national progress, but he does not claim that England's glory lies in England's literature or language. With Psalm 14, a source for 'Miserie', he believed that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people", and that righteousness is imputed to the believing sinner through the work of Christ. Only the nation consisting of individual "Aarons", covered in the robe of the perfection of Christ and exercising – as Richard Strier puts it – their priestly privileges of heart-access to the God of love, would be glorified in the eyes of God.

I have used Continental literary comment only occasionally. The English literary Renaissance is of course heavily dependent on the Italian Renaissance and to some extent on the humanism of other nations. Travel, translation, and national rivalry increased the use and influence of Continental writings. But the English writers are the most appropriate foil for the study of Herbert, despite the attempts of some modern critics to establish Roman Catholic baroque and devotional ancestors for *The Temple*. Theologically, Herbert certainly has Continental predecessors, but they are Luther and Calvin rather than Ignatius or John of the Cross. Herbert's poetry can only be accounted for by the Reformation. The writers upon whom I have mainly drawn are affected by that Reformation as well as by their non-Protestant sources. Herbert shares with these English critics certain assumptions and aspirations, on language and nation, for instance. But these commonalities help to point up his distinctiveness. Herbert saw, more clearly than his contemporaries, the contradictions inherent in writing of, and by, grace, in a genre dependent on humanism. *The Temple* testifies to the possibility of a poetic consistent with *sola fides, sola gratia, sola scriptura.*

A high medieval writer such as Dante, a Renaissance writer such as Tasso, and a Tridentine-influenced critic such as Minturno, work from a presupposition that the writer may be a sub-creator. A theory of author as initiator is naturally consequent upon a theology in which one is, in effect, co-author of one's salvation. An Italian Renaissance critic finds few problems with the possibility of living virtuously in a righteousness of one's own learnt from literary examples, or with the syncretism which makes Virgil as good a guide for living as the Bible. Sidney's *Defence* is particularly interesting (as I will show in relation to Herbert) because his use of these ideas is held in tension with a Reformation understanding of God alone as creator and re-creator; he qualifies the civic humanist "moral possibility" and the neo-Platonist "sub-creator" approaches by Luther-like concerns about a damaged will.

We do not know for certain if Herbert read any of the current debates about literature. Given his Westminster and Cambridge education and the humanistic nature of most English education at that time, it is probable that he did. No educated person in England

could escape Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, or other Latin writers on spoken and written eloquence. It is probable that he read the antique criticism, such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, available in Latin from 1498.[56] Some of his poetry suggests an acquaintance with, though not an agreement with, Plato and neo-Platonism. And Herbert's familiarity with ancient and modern poetry suggests a knowledge of the questions pertaining to it; indeed some of his poems depend on such a knowledge. As accomplished poet and Cambridge Orator, Herbert must have in some form encountered all the justifications of, and instructions on, the writing of poetry.

In general, Herbert's argument with the theorising of his contemporaries is that righteousness is in Christ and not inherently in the writer or reader. The apologies for poetry which were written in the Renaissance usually presented poetry as morally helpful. But the morality which comes from human reason is actually against the righteousness which comes from God, and glorifies man and not God.[57] Authority in salvation (man becoming right with God) is Christ's and not the sinner's. Authority to write derives from this, and language exists to glorify God. God has "written" his love in Christ: Herbert's desire is to "copie out onely that". Therefore imitation, invention, decorum, and didacticism must acquire new meanings, because the meanings given by the contemporary critics are man-centred. Imitation must be of the Word of God and present a life changed by that word. Invention can only be a "discov'ry", as in Herbert's youthful sonnet, of the beauties of Christ, the "way, truth, and life" (John 14:6), and cannot be initiatory or creative, for poetry, to Herbert, images the work of God in bringing man to himself; the poet "invents" only in the sense of finding analogies of that work and relationship. Decorum must depart from its earthly norms and represent that which is appropriate to the Christian's paradoxical combination of thankful dependency and boldness. And such a poet will teach by means of a speaker who exemplifies the reader's often rocky walk with God, and will delight by means of his content as well as

---

[56] See John Mulder, *The Temple of the Mind: Education and Taste in Seventeenth-Century England*, New York, Pegasus, 1969.

[57] See William Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes and Structures in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970, 85, on Aristotelian ethics. Luther constantly made this point, and in this respect Herbert is as Lutheran as he is Calvinist. See also Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, ch. 1 and *passim*.

his wit. That Herbert to a great extent fulfilled these requirements, and transformed poetry by writing according to the principles of grace, is my argument. Herbert's poetic is that of 'Love' (III); rather than glorifying humanity, it glorifies the God who has loved humanity, the God who has bidden the sinner not to be worthy but to be welcome.

IMITATION

1. Introduction

> ... in ev'ry thing
> Thy words do finde me out ...
> 'The H. Scriptures. II.' ll. 9-10.

"Imitation" as a concept in literary history is complex. It is not my aim to define it. This has been competently done by many.[1] My aim is to consider the English poetry of George Herbert in relation to sixteenth and seventeenth century ideas on imitation. By that means I hope to show that the Reformation theology of *The Temple* criticises Renaissance literary humanism. I wish to show, further, that when Herbert writes about writing, and reflects on ideas such as imitation, he is frequently saying something about relationship with God.

Herbert did not write prose theory. But he wrote many poems which speak of imitation, directly or indirectly. Or the poems in their very form provide a literary imitation of the incapacity of the human, and the gracious authority of the divine, in salvation. These poems do not establish their own authority by an imitation of a literary past which glorified humanity, but by being a metaphor of the "writing" of Christ. That is not to say Herbert, Cambridge Orator, was not affected, in allusion and form, by the Renaissance rediscovery of antiquity. It is to say that every poem disclaims the "authorising" of the sinful human nature, and is, instead, an imitation of some aspect of the process by which God authors (initiates and completes) the reconciliation of man and God.

In this chapter I use the term "imitation" in four interdependent ways: literature as the imitation of other literature; literature as the imitation of life; life as the imitation of literature; and literature as both being and producing an imitation of Christ. I have not made a distinction between the Greek *mimesis*, which some take to be the

[1] The list is too long to reproduce here. A recent and clear outline of the differing aspects of the term is in Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, especially pp. 5-7. See also Brian Vickers, "Rhetoric and Poetics", *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. B. Schmitt and Q. Skinner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 719-20.

representation of nature only, and the Latin *imitatio*, which some take to be the following of a pattern either in literature or in life.[2]

The second and third uses, literature and life as imitations of each other, go back to Plato and Aristotle. Plato suggested that literary imitation of visible reality was inferior, since that visible "reality" was merely an imitation of the invisible "Form". Aristotle's *Poetics* saw imitation as the representation, in epic or upon the stage, of ideal human life. The English Renaissance extended this into the belief that the model of virtue expressed on the page could eventually walk and talk in the person of the imitating reader.[3]

Herbert's view of the imitation of other literature (my first type) has been dealt with competently in respect to formal influence.[4] The second, "Aristotelian", type becomes in *The Temple* the speaker's representation of a life in Christ. This is inseparable from the third type of imitation, life imitating art, for Herbert's poetry is written so that the reader may "thrust his heart / Into these lines". The fourth use, the imitation of Christ, involves the other three aspects, but I deal with it first, because Herbert puts it first in "The Church", and his critique of this popular concept forms the basis of all else he presents.

The three main sections of this chapter deal with Herbert's writing of God's "writing", his theological poetics of imitation. The first concentrates on Herbert's contradiction of the meritorious imitation of Christ; the second considers Herbert's relation to the language and nationalism aspects of imitative virtue; and the third studies "The Church Militant" as an imitation of the circumnavigating sovereignty of God, and in contrast to nationalistic epics of the time. Throughout, the four aspects of

---

[2] One reason of several for not making too fine a distinction between these terms is that "imitation" in the New Testament is always of a human model, yet always a form of *mimeo*.

[3] Ruth Wallerstein's caution about the English Renaissance's "chaotic inconsistency between theory and practice", about "terms ... which shifted from one school of thought to another and from time to time", must be kept in mind, as must her remark about "the blinding limitations in our point of view". These limitations have not been removed in the fifty years of ideological theory since she wrote; perhaps they have been increased. *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Poetic*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1950, 4, 8-9.

[4] For example, Mary Ellen Rickey, *Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966.

"imitation" mentioned above are visible in varying degrees, and *The Temple* is considered as a work in which the literary and the theological merge.

Inevitably there is some overlap of material with other chapters, particularly "Teach and Delight". "Imitation" was a generous concept affecting every rhetorical and moral aspect of writing, and of which "Invention" and "Decorum" could be considered branches. The third use (literature influencing life) I consider both here and in "Teach and Delight", since another of my aims is to depict Herbert's writing as representatively didactic: the poetic speaker "is" the generalised or personalised reader, who encounters the loving authority of Christ in various ways. There is only a fine distinction between writing a poetic imitation (in form and content) of the saving love of Christ, and teaching (by form and content) about the need for, and the mode of, salvation in Christ.[5]

Herbert as Protestant poet [6] was more perceptive, perhaps, than many of his Protestant contemporaries, in that he saw the opposition between humanistic literary theory[7] and writing which glorifies the authority of God alone. The problem was not only the imitation of ancient paganism, although Herbert saw that a literary "baptism", the solution of Augustine and other church fathers, was an unsatisfactory syncretism.[8] Herbert describes ancient poetry in "The Church Militant":

> [Sinne] became a poet, and would serve
> His pills of sublimate in that conserve.
> . . .

---

[5] Jonathan Post remarks: "With such a poem [as 'Aaron'] it is difficult to know precisely where to draw the line between form and content." "Substance and Style in George Herbert", *English Lyric Poetry: The Early Seventeenth Century*, London, Routledge, 1999, 139.

[6] The claim for a school of "Protestant poetics" has irritated Thomas P. Roche: "I stated at the beginning of this review [of A. Raspa's *The Emotive Image: Jesuit Poetics in the English Renaissance*, 1983] that I wanted a Jesuit poetics no more than I wanted a Freudian poetics ... I want a Protestant poetics even less. I am willing to grant that wherever five or six poets ... are gathered together within the covers of a book they may be Protestant or even Jesuit, but that each such covin should have its own poetics strains my credulity and sometimes my temper in view of the overwhelming assertion of the *dulce et utile* justification of poetry for over eighteen hundred years ..." *George Herbert Journal* 9 (1) (Fall 1985): 51-57. Yet there are peculiarly Protestant problems in the areas of authority (for the writer) and capacity (for the reader) which undermine a simple Horatian *dulce et utile* reading of, say, "Hearken unto a Verser, who may chance / Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure" ('The Church-Porch'). Herbert came closer than Donne, Sidney, Spenser, or Milton to solving these problems. "Christian humanism" may be even less adequate a term than "Protestant poetics".

[7] Renaissance writers on poetry were largely interested in defending poetry or in educating other writers, so this term is anachronistic, but convenient.

[8] See Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, and Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982.

> But all was glorious cheating, brave deceit,
> When some poore truths were shuffled for a bait
> To credit him, and to discredit those
> Who after him should braver truths disclose. (ll. 131-2, 135-8)

"Some poore truths" there may be in the literature of antiquity, but their use, their imitation, glorifies man, not Christ. Even a Christianised tragic or epic heroism implies a belief in inherent virtue, or at least a natural capability of pleasing God. It is impossible consistently to maintain a Pauline doctrine of death in sin and necessary regeneration simultaneously with a belief in heroic capability as expressed in classical literature. Catholicism had developed a theology of merit which sat more comfortably with the heroic poetry or the hortatory prose of antiquity than did the Reformation's emphasis on *sola fides, sola scriptura*.[9] The Reformation restricted the imitation of Christ to the New Testament use, a model of living for those who are already justified by faith.

To write poetry at all implies an imitation in the broadest sense. Herbert wrote Latin poetry, a field of learning necessarily imitative. His English poems do not guiltily deny themselves, as has been suggested.[10] Poetry to Herbert was "that which while I use / I am with thee" ('The Quidditie', 69). Not only does this testimonial give poetry a status almost akin to faith and repentance, but the word "use" implies a transformation, not an entire rejection, of an imitative genre. To deny literary history, pagan or not, is to deny one's being as a writer. Herbert could not begin again to use language as if from an unfallen Eden. But he could not accept the imitative mode's anthropocentrism; nor use imitation as a self-vaunting device; nor expect to reproduce virtuous readers by their imitation of fictional examples; nor imitate and outdo the passion of Christ by life or literary artifact.

---

[9] Alistair McGrath, in *Justitia Dei*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, argues that early Catholicism did not have this theology of merit. However, it may also be argued that the earliest martyrs, monks, and anchorites were the "Christian" substitute for the military and nationalistic heroes of antiquity. Certainly the later literature about them (such as Jacobus Voragine's *The Golden Legend*) has that flavour.

[10] For example, Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972; Barbara Harman, *Costly Monuments*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982; A. D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God,* London, Methuen, 1980; Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo*, New York, Methuen, 1986; Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

Herbert also faced the problem of deciding how much to imitate his contemporaries. Much of "The Church" is in short lyric form, because of the connection between that form and love, the love of God being arguably the theme of "The Church". But the love which was being imitated in the many contemporary "Songs and Sonnets" sequences was secular, and Herbert went so far as to describe this use as the imitation of dust and brothels ('Love' (I) and (II); 'The Forerunners'). "How then may I imitate *thee*" ('The Thanksgiving') in poetry as well as in life, when the very form speaks of earthly love and earthly authorship? It has been popular in the past to depict Herbert as a pale shadow of Sidney and Donne. I suggest, so far from this being the case, there is a rejection in "The Church" of the use of wit to glorify either earthly love or the vanity of the author, and there is much about such poetry being inferior. That is, it is the poetry of earthly love which is the pale shadow. "How hath man parcel'd out thy glorious name / And thrown it on the dust ...!" ('Love' (I)) implies that contemporary love poetry, however clever and beautiful, is an unworthy and mistaken use of language. Herbert's suggestion that poetry is wasted on mortal love reverses the belief, which 'Love' (I) and (II) themselves consider to be widespread, that aesthetics and theology do not mix. Herbert uses many new poetic structures, and even his seventeen sonnets are rather different in their pattern of argument from those of his contemporaries. This may be to avoid any implication that poetry about God is a poor imitation of the lively, intellectually tough, attractive poetry about secular love.

Herbert reflects not only upon Sidney's poetry, but upon his defence of poetry, and upon other writers influencing and influenced by this defence, particularly in the matter of an imitation which is virtuous and which produces virtue. Virtue (civic morality, goodness seen by men, the practice of the classical aspects of character such as temperance) is not the same as holiness (that without which "no-one shall see the Lord", that for whose lack in mankind Christ died). Yet several writers in the English Renaissance, including Sidney, sometimes merged these ideas, thus implying a possible salvation-by-literature. This implication is criticised by Herbert in several poems. Yet there are times in *The Temple* when Herbert, too, speaks like a civic humanist, apparently uncritically alluding to the praise of virtue in ancient poetry. In discussing 'Constancie' I suggest that Herbert is biblical rather than classical, and dismisses the idea of inherent human virtue.

England required virtue, in several senses, by means of literary imitation, in order to compete with the literary dominance of an Italy whose written works were seen to be based in theological error and moral decay. Spenser's attempt to "overgo Ariosto", for example, was similar to Virgil's attempted overgoing of Homer, in the desire to glorify a "new" language and literature. Yet Spenser and his contemporaries had more at stake than national glory. The Protestant cause was for universal truth as well as national justification, though it is hard sometimes to see this in the writings of the English Protestants from John Bale onwards, so tangled are the ideas of "Reformation" and "England as the new Israel". Herbert also entered the field of "nationalistic" imitation, not by imitating and Anglicising ancient epic, but by writing of his "brave rose", the Church of England, and of the English language with its capabilities of equivocal representation. I have referred to "The Church Militant" as an anti-epic, for its imitative representation opposes any attempt to Christianise earthly glory, and aims to magnify the sovereignty of God.

The nationalistic emphasis of the English literary critics is seen in even apparently technical disputes over the use of classical metres. Virgil had achieved national literary glory despite Latin being unlike Greek in having more words which are trochaic than dactylic. So, it was hoped, might the very iambic English be forced into hexameters.[11] Herbert's refusal of this path implies more than his understanding of the awkwardness of a metrical imitation of antiquity, however. The very ideas which inform epic did not seem to Herbert to sit comfortably with the doctrines of inability and grace. Herbert certainly had a vision for the nation as well as for the individual. But it was not the humanist vision of eloquence persuading to civic virtue. If England were to be a new Israel rather than a new Rome, neither hexametrical heroism nor Ciceronian eloquence would create a citizen after God's heart. The lyric was more appropriate for the message of God's love, listened to when stony hearts were broken by their failed attempts at Ulyssean virtue or Pharisaic righteousness. Herbert's love of English people, language and church appears in several poems. But glory without grace is never suggested, even by form. The rather negative question of the absence of

[11] See the Spenser-Harvey correspondence in G. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, London, Oxford University Press, 1904, and the Campion-Daniel dispute, Vol. II; compare Sidney's "Englishing" of classical metres, and his "Debate on Versification", in *[The Old] Arcadia*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985 / 94. Also see Robin Sowerby, *The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry*, London, Longman, 1997, 39.

epic from the Cambridge Orator's output is answered by the theological rationale of Herbert's poetry: a new creation, national or personal, is not made by humanistic imitation.

To Herbert, the authoring of life and the authoring of writing were indivisible. God alone creates spiritual life or literary truth. The Reformers did not of course suppose that lack of regeneration precluded the writing of a correct sentence or even a beautiful poem, only that the work of Christ alone was acceptable to God. Herbert saw that writing is acceptable as a work of praise, or effective in the lives of others, only in so far as it is based on the finished work of Christ ('The Altar').

The humanist literary critics[12] also associated life and writing, but there was a crucial difference between their approach and Herbert's. Thomas Wilson is one of many who believed that "in seeking the excellency of [eloquence], the sooner [a man] draweth to perfection [and] the nigher he cometh to God." [13] Roger Ascham said that the "most proper in wordes, most apte in sentence, most plaine and pure in uttering the same" were "soch Authors as be fullest of good matter and right judgment", and "contrariwise ... who so ever be found fonde in judgment of matter, be commonlie fonde or rude in uttereing their mynde: for Stoikes, Anabaptists, and Friers, with Epicures, Libertines, and Monkes ... are no fonder or pernicious in their opinions than they be rude and barbarous in their writings." But the authority, for Ascham as for most humanists, was pagan antiquity. His qualification that "without ... all the trewe doctrine of God's Holy Bible, [Plato, Aristotle, Tullie] be but fine edge tools in a mad man's hand" is negated by his urging their moral imitation. Indeed, to present pagan authors as "tools", having argued the inseparability of life and literature, of matter and style, is to be self-contradictory.

Ascham's association of life and line is biblical (Matthew 12:32-37, for instance) but he extends his theory to its reverse: good expression implies truth of belief. "[I]n the Greeke and Latin tong, the two onelie learned tonges, we finde alwayes wisdom and

[12] Again, there were of course no schools of "literary criticism", although the activity had been practised since Plato. I use the term to include defences of poetry and any judgments upon or instruction in writing.

[13] From *The Arte of Rhetorique*, in Brian Vickers (ed.), *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, 76.

eloquence, good matter and good utterance, never or seldom asonder. ...Ye know not what hurt ye do to learning, that care not for wordes but for matter, and so make a devorse betwixt the tong and the hart."[14] Herbert, however, is concerned about words becoming more than matter, and stands (in this at least) more with Pico della Mirandola who, in his correspondence with the humanist Ermolao Barbaro, pointed out the danger of "tong" becoming more than "hart" (as in 'A True Hymne' and 'The Forerunners', for example).[15] Beauty of language may co-exist with "brothels", a reference not just to immorality of poetic matter, but to the Old Testament metaphor for idolatry, which includes the exaltation of the human. Eventually, though, "thou wilt ... hurt thyself" ('The Forerunners'); the imitation of pagan antiquity, and the love of secularity, will bring a deterioration of language. To make the word more than the matter is, in the end, to destroy the word.

Imitation was an authorising technique.[16] Renaissance imitation implied that one's authority was found either in a (probably) pagan past and its language, or in one's own transformation of those materials, or both. Such imitation cannot authorise a poetic representation of Christ's prior love. A Reformation poet cannot simultaneously glorify human and divine authorisation. Herbert did not compartmentalise: he did not have a soteriology of grace (implying God's initiation) and an anthropocentric literary theory of imitation (implying human capability). His theology controlled his poetics, so that, in life as in poetry,

> not my groveling wit,
> But thy silk twist let down from heav'n to me,
> Doth both conduct and teach me, how by it
> To climbe to thee.
> ('The Pearl', ll. 37-40)

"To climbe to thee" can, in a reformed theology, only be by "thy silk twist" of the prior, redeeming grace of God, revealed in the Word of God. The production of a God-pleasing life in the reader cannot be by an imitation produced by a human "groveling wit". To present a credible imitation of life to arouse pity and fear is insufficient to produce regenerate Christians. To suggest in one's writing an ideal

[14] From *The Scholemaster*, in Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, 5-7. "Wisdom" and "good matter" could only, to Ascham the Protestant, refer to biblically revealed truth.

[15] Quirinius Breen, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1) (Jan. 1952): 413-26. Compare John Jewel's "Oration Against Rhetoric", in Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2000, 161-72. An ironical intention has been argued for both.

world that might partly keep this one from corruption is doomed by the "infected will". To speak and write with perfect eloquence, thus being an author of moral standing and producing readers of moral standing, implies an inherent virtue entirely at odds with a dependence upon God's grace and the need for Christ's "authoring" work. Ben Jonson was no friend of Calvin's teachings, yet saw the impossibility of imitative perfection, of the life as of the work: "Never no imitator grew up to his Author; likenesse is alwayes on this side truth".[17] Herbert saw not only this difficulty, but also that the attempt at such imitation replaces Christ. The authoritative redeeming and resurrecting action of Christ is always pre-emptive:

> I got me flowers to straw thy way;
> I brought me boughs off many a tree:
> But though wast up by break of day,
> And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.
> ('Easter', 41, ll. 19-22.)

To Herbert, literary authority was not in a separate sphere from Christ's authority. What was done with words was no different from what was done in any other part of life: words were for the glory of God, yet could not be so without the work of Christ. Poetry received its authority to exist, to delight, to influence, to speak about God, from the authorising new creation which was the poet's redemption, and from the Word of God. 'The Altar' suggests that the work, like the heart, was one "whose parts are as thy hand did frame".

Renaissance imitation of other writers did not preclude an idea of autonomous authority. Assimilating the sweetness of ancient pollen gave weight of authority to the digesting, contextualising "bee" who would produce a new and sweeter food.[18] Herbert, however, rejected both types of authorisation. God authorised Herbert's poetry by authorising – re-creating, re-writing – Herbert, and Herbert could then present, particularly in "The Church", an imitation of the re-written Christian. This process depended upon Herbert's assimilation of the Word of God, "sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 119:103). Authority in *The Temple* is found neither in the

---

[16] See Greene, *The Light in Troy*; Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*; and Sowerby, *Legacy*, all *passim*.
[17] *Timber, or Discoveries* [1641], in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925-53, Vol. VIII, 590.
[18] The "bee" analogy, possibly originating with Seneca, is used by many Renaissance writers, for example Ben Jonson (Brian Vickers, ed., *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 24, 94) to illustrate an authorising, transforming imitation. Jonathan Swift was to compare the bee's external sources with the spider's intrinsic resources as a comment on "ancient" and "modern" literary and theological

imitation of the ancients nor inherently in the poet. By adhering to the Bible and by recognising the idolatrous nature of the laurel wreath, Herbert came close to solving a problem unsolved by "Christian humanism". Allegorising Apollo in the service of Christ did not overcome the suggestion of extra-Scriptural wisdom. Nor was divine inbreathing a solution, for if a poet is inspired by the Holy Spirit, he is writing Scripture, and if he is not writing Scripture, then the source of his authority is himself. Invocations to metaphoric Muses merely compounded the problem, causing even Sidney a certain uneasiness and even Milton a certain inconsistency.

Herbert was an imitative debtor to Petrarch for certain forms and that a body of vernacular lyrics could be acceptable at all, and was similarly pulled between his own fame, church authority, and a rebirth of ancient values for their own sake.[19] Herbert was debtor, however, also to the Reformation. The justified poet, so far from falling silent because everything has been accomplished already in Christ, is given new being and speech. Only in Christ has he something to say and the authority with which to say it. The Reformation, by removing theological merit and classical capability, may seem to compound the problem of poetic authority. In fact, the poet who sees writing as a metaphor for the activity of a loving God, and who knows his task to be to present himself, his speaker, and his poem as an imitation of an activity of love already accomplished, is completely "authorised". His words are situated in the Word incarnate and the Word written. This authority is exclusive. Herbert's conclusions were therefore different from those of Petrarch, who eventually decided that "the pages of Plato and Cicero [were] compatible with those of Christ" and sought "in ancient texts the authorisation his scholastic contemporaries denied him."[20] Herbert's authorisation lay in being "Secretarie of thy praise" ('Providence'), in being, and imitating in his speakers, a work of God both already written and being written, yet still a true writing self:

> Yet to be thine, doth me restore ...
> Since thou in death wast none of thine,
> Yet then as mine didst me restore.
> ('Clasping of hands', ll. 4, 17-18)

---

authority in "The Battle of the Books", *The Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, Oxford, World's Classics, 1986, 110-13.

[19] See Marjorie Boyle's thoughtful raising of these and related issues in *Petrarch's Genius*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, esp. ch. 1.

[20] "Had not Homer and Ennius prophesied his advent?" *Petrarch's Genius*, 156.

Herbert saw, as Petrarch did not, the damaging extent of sin, which made humanistic imitation a negative activity. To the Protestant writer, the inevitable imitation of Adam made useless the moral imitation of Virgil.[21] Romans 1:21-32 shows the works imitative of Augustan Rome to be not noble and beautiful but degrading and destructive. Herbert's 'Miserie' describes the reality of the natural man, supposedly inclined to virtue, and supposedly able to recognize, write, and imitate goodness. Like Paul ("O wretched man that I am"), he includes himself; but also like Paul, he elsewhere shows a way out: "the receit shall be / My Saviours bloud" ('Conscience').

The imitative classicism of the Renaissance implied a detaching of writing from church authority, a validating of secularism, paving the way for the authoritative creativity of the individual. The poet whose imitation was of "thy praise alone" ('Praise' III) must reject these implications. This meant ploughing a difficult new field whose crop -- and it was short-lived in the subsequent history of poetry -- was a "poetics of grace". The Reformation poet may not imply an abstract truth available to paganism, but nor may he imply personal and extra-Scriptural inspiration. For Herbert, at least in his English poetry, imitation may not reflect a pagan or a Papal past, nor authorise (create) new life (making "many Cyruses"[22]). He must not write by the authority of the past, nor assume an authority which could create new life.

That which could create new life was the Bible: "Thou art ... health thriving till it make / A full eternitie" ('The H. Scriptures' I). "Bibles laid open" ('Sinne' I) describes an advantage not available to Petrarch.[23] The particular way in which *The Temple* is an imitation of the Bible, not a metrical paraphrase or transliteration, is well described in Chana Bloch's *Spelling the Word*:

> *The Temple* incorporates the words of Scripture in much the same way that the New Testament sums up the old ... Herbert succeeds in making [the Scriptures] speak with his own voice. ...[T]he heart of Herbert's poetry is ...the believer confronting, assimilating, and speaking the Word of God in his human and fallible existence. When "thy words" are made "my words"

[21] Romans 5:12-21. Article IX of The Thirty-Nine Articles (*BCP*) cautions, as does Calvin in *Institutes* 2. 1. 6, about the idea of sin as the imitation ("following") of Adam, as it implies a mere Pelagian choice, not an inevitability. The corollary is that the righteousness of Christ then comes to us by our imitation also. Calvin calls this "sacrilege". In John 8:39-44, Jesus shows the paternal model for the self-righteous to be not merely Adam, but the devil.

[22] Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. Jan van Dorsten, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, 24.

[23] The movement which Petrarch started, however, towards a better understanding of the words and contexts of ancient documents, was instrumental in recovering an accurate text of the Bible.

> ... when they are taken off the page and admitted to the heart, they do not obliterate the self but rather free it to fulfil its high purpose -- as God's own creature.[24]

The Temple not only balances the love of language, a heritage of the Renaissance, with the love of God, from whom all language is; it also balances the "human and fallible existence" of the speaking subject with the Divine, perfect and unchangeable existence of the truth as it is in Christ. The space, or tension, between these describe the mode of Herbert's imitation.

Herbert, I believe uniquely, found a way of preserving the desire for creative activity ("My soul would stirre ... And never want / Some fruit for him that dressed me", 'Employment' (II)) which is part of the image of God in the human, without usurping the regenerative activity of God. He comes closer than other poets of the time to solving the problem of writing as a Christian (that is, with a derived authority) without resorting to the "capability" implied by imitation. If his poetry is an imitation, in the sense of a representation, it is of the grace of God in counting sinners righteous. God's imputed righteousness "allow[s] them bright", "them" being those who have "no reall light" in themselves ('Faith'). Herbert's imitative representation is of one who is "Loved".

---

[24] Berkeley, California University Press, 1985, 2, 5, 7, 45. Scholars have by no means come to an end of identifying even the verbal allusions to Scripture in *The Temple*, to say nothing of the conceptual assimilation.

2. Literary imitation and life

> But how then shall I imitate thee, and
> Copie thy fair, though bloudie hand?

In these lines from 'The Thanksgiving' (35), Herbert describes Christ's redeeming death as writing, and the attempt to imitate this work under the metaphor of literary imitation. This poem criticizes the idea that the person who would gain the favour of God must, and is able to, imitate Christ in His life and passion. By implication, it also criticizes the moral justification of literary imitation. "Never was grief like mine" ('The Sacrifice', l. 252) suggests what 'The Thanksgiving' makes explicit: there can be no imitation of the redeeming grief of Christ, nor any attempted equality of suffering even as thanksgiving. The Atonement was "once for all". The Christian poet-speaker of 'The Thanksgiving' would like to imitate the life and work of Christ in two ways, in his own life and in his writing. The first he cannot do, as the dashes indicate: "As for thy passion--". The second can only be within the bounds of what is already written: his "wit" will "never move" unless it speaks of "thy love" found within "thy book" (ll. 43-46).

In *The Temple* as a whole, Herbert subjects the four types of imitation to a comparison with "thy fair, though bloudie hand". First, literary imitation of past literary models may be helpful, but not their underlying philosophies, such as the belief that man is the "author" of life in his capability and goodness. Even if the heathen gods are rejected, man, not Christ, is still the centre. Second, imitation in the sense of Aristotle's *Poetics,* a representation on the stage or page of character and situation, is possible in regard to Christ only by the "representative speaker" technique of "The Church": the stumbling, rebellious or thankful speaker dramatises his experiences, while the poem works at the same time to demonstrate the unchanging, undeserved, everlastingly secure love of God. This is Herbert's two-level (and didactic) technique of simultaneously conveying the "truth" of life and the truth of God. Christ himself cannot be represented otherwise in poetry, or not in poetry which does more than metrically transcribe the Bible. "How then

shall I imitate thee?", then, also has the sense of "how then shall I represent thee?"[26] Third, Herbert criticizes the Renaissance belief that worthy models of the past may be copied not only in literature but in life, so that the moral status of the reader is transformed by reading about examples to follow and errors to avoid. For one thing, the only ultimately worthwhile model, however impossible of emulation, is Christ; for another, Herbert finds in himself and his readers an inability to do other than civil good. Moral change for man-pleasing or other selfish motives is possible, but God-pleasing perfection of life is not, and to attempt such is to rival Christ, an amusing "threatening" which appears in several poems. Fourth, and particularly dealt with in 'The Thanksgiving', the imitation of Christ is not a way of being one's own saviour by righteousness of life; nor is it possible as a thanksgiving by the saved soul. The thankful Christian, whose vows in 'The Thanksgiving' do have a serious side, despite their comically threatening expression, finds he can never live a life of repayment, nor is such necessary. 'The Reprisall' indicates that both these senses of imitating Christ are intended. Both display an inadequate view of the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the greatness and finality of the work of Christ. Only the continual recognition of these things paradoxically provides victory, as the last stanza of 'The Reprisall' indicates.

'The Thanksgiving' links literary and life imitation. This link is maintained throughout *The Temple*, particularly in Herbert's poems about writing. They are a special case of Herbert's fourfold criticism of imitation and of his two-level representation of what seems to be and what is, for the speaker in these poems is a poet. That is, his own attempted "doing", his capability or otherwise, is his writing, a writing "for" God. His literary imitation is his life imitation. In them he answers, to some extent, the question "how then shall I imitate … thy fair, though bloudie hand?"

---

[26] William Nestrick puts it nicely: "There is no human equivalent to Christ's Passion, although ['The Thanksgiving'] begins passioning in grief as if there were. The Passion is not dissolved in sweet poetry nor directly imitated." Nestrick sees a "fusion of literary imitation and *imitatio Christi*" in this poem. "'Mine and Thine' in *The Temple*", *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980, 118.

Literary imitation in the Renaissance presupposed the worthiness of the life of the ancients, in fact (Alexander, Cicero) or in fiction (Odysseus, Aeneas);[27] the worthiness of the writing of ancient authors; the intimate connection between such lives and such writing; and the potential for the modern reader, writer, or person wishing for a morally worthy life, to write, or live, in the best possible way by means of such imitation. The life worthy of emulation was made known to posterity through a writer whose style and language was itself imitable because of its worthy subject. To "copie" a "fair ... hand" was, at the lowest level, to make one's handwriting as close to one's beautiful model as possible, and at the highest, to write in such a way that one's reader, through one's excellent style, would be himself spurred to imitation of the virtues of the original subject.

Many writers believed that the fairer the hand, the truer the matter. Francis Bacon found this belief to be eventually self-defeating: "Men began to hunt more after words than matter". But Roger Ascham held that in Greek and Latin "all writers, either in religion or any sect of philosophy, whosoever be found fond in judgment of matter be commonly found as rude in uttering their minds". To Ben Jonson, "language most shewes a man"; the poet was "to instruct to life, as well as purity of language", and poetry was "a teacher of things divine, no less than human".[28] Such a theory implies the existence of inherent virtue. The Medieval church, though preaching a universal Fall, had still implied a possibility of pleasing God through one's own works. The classical idea of civic *virtus* was adapted to suggest a moral capacity to please God.[29] A certain syncretistic and insufficiently critical adoption of the Greek and Roman ideas of human capability led to a confusion of the human estimate of "the good man" with the righteous demands of the God of the Bible; this confusion remained in the literary critics of Herbert's time.

To confuse a human view of morality with the righteousness of God is to think of the ancient poets as presenting an imitation of the holiness of God. Richard Hooker, in his

---

[27] The superiority of the fictional to the factual example is argued by Sidney (*Defence*, 30-32).

[28] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Book I, ed. Michael Kiernan, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2000, 21-23; Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, in Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 142; Jonson, *Timber*, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, vol. VIII, 1925-32, repr. corr. 1974, 625; Dedicatory Epistle to "Volpone", *Ben Jonson: Five Plays*, World's Classics, 1988, 223ff.

[29] Aquinas: "The Philosopher says [two references given here to Aristotle] that virtuous deeds deserve praise"; then, "Man is justified by virtue". *Summa Theologica*, tr. English Dominican Fathers, rev. D. J. Sullivan, ed. Wm. Benton, Chicago, Britannica, 1952, XXI.2, LV.4.

1585 sermon on justification, pointed out that if a theory of inherent virtue is held, it is necessary to lower God's demands to the standards of human compromise.

> Our very virtues may be snares unto us. ... If our hands did never offer violence to our brethren, a bloody thought doth prove us murderous before him: if we had never opened our mouths to utter any scandalous, offensive, or hurtful word, the cry of our secret cogitations is heard before God. ... [I]n the good things which we do, how many defects are there intermingled! ... Cut off then all those things wherein we have regarded our own glory, those things which we do to please men, or to satisfy our own liking, ... not sincerely and purely for the love of God; and a small score will serve for our righteous deeds. ... We are never better affected unto God then when we pray; yet ... how little reverence do we show ...! How little remorse ...! ... The best things we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned. ... We see how far we are from the perfect righteousness of the law. ... "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5.20). [30]

Herbert went further still: our righteous deeds constitute not "a small score", but represent far less than "the many hundredth" of the heart. And even this holiness cannot stand before God. Even the regenerate heart has

> ... quarries of pil'd vanities,
> But shreds of holinesse, that dare not venture
> To shewe their face, since crosse to thy decrees ...
> In so much dregs the quintessence is small:
> The spirit and good extract of my heart
> Comes to about the many hundred part.
>
> ('The Sinner', 38, ll.5-7, 9-11)

Late medieval Catholicism, particularly through Aristotelian Thomism, had assumed that "good extract" to represent the power of the human will and reason to achieve acceptance with God.[31] Catholic *imitatio Christi*, as a means of acceptance with God, can be seen as a continuation of the Classical belief in inherent virtue, and a parallel to the development of a literary imitation which closely connected stylistically good writing with morally

---

[30] *A Learned Discourse on Justification,* in *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr Richard Hooker*, ed. John Keble, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Vol. III, Part II, 1836, 612-13, 658.

[31] "It is of the very notion of the will, according to the Philosopher, to tend to that which is good according to reason. ... Virtue, as Tully says, ... is 'a habit like a second nature in accord with reason'". "Man is perfected by virtue". *Summa Theologica*, LV.4, LXII.1.

good life, eloquence with virtue, [32] and the recreation of antiquity with a possibility of reversing present deterioration. In this connection lies a large part of the reason for the lack of discomfort with classical materials by "Christian humanist" writers. Even Protestant writers, such as Spenser and Sidney, seem at the one time to hold and to discard a belief in the goodness of the heart and undamaged capacity. Later writers, as Isabel Rivers has said, were to perceive this inconsistency. John Owen saw that Aristotle, not the Bible, was the imitative model for such thinking. "[L]et but the Scripture express what it is to be religious, and there will be no contesting about the difference between grace and moral virtue". And John Bunyan dismissed the imitation of Christ as meritorious righteousness: "it is blasphemy for any to presume to imitate him."[33]

Writing and life are connected in much of Herbert's poetry, but from the Reformation standpoint that the Fall destroyed moral capability in terms of pleasing God. The writer's imitation is not a meritorious work. The reader's life-imitation, of any written example of virtue or even of Christ, cannot achieve salvation. Only Christ, and man placed into Christ, not imitating Christ in his saving life and death, is the "writer", the "hand", in Herbert's poems. In using the word "hand", Herbert is implying a connection between literary and soteriological activity. The speaker can copy neither the "hand"-writing of Christ's "fair" life, nor the nail-pierced "hand", a synecdoche for Christ's crucified body and punishment-bearing death. The darkly ambiguous wit of "bloudie hand" refers to the writing in blood which is the only writing possible on a stony heart, cancelling "the deed that stood against us". [34] "Remember that thou once didst write in stone", pleads Herbert's persona in 'The Sinner' (38); and following this, 'Good Friday' (38) associates Christ's blood, the sinner's blood, and ink:

> Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write
> Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight;
> My heart hath store, write there, where in

---

[32] "Virtue" may be variously understood, according to derivation and changing use, as masculine strength, civic and national spirit and achievement, and moral goodness. This makes no difference to the argument and is itself a suggestion of the association between Catholicism's "merit" and classical Roman attitudes.

[33] Owen, first pub. c. 1670, *Works*, Goold edn., 1850-53, Vol. XIII, 436; Bunyan, c. 1684, *Works*, Offor edn, Vol. II, 339; both cited in Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 141-2.

[34] Colossians 2:14: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us … nailing it to his cross." Compare II Corinthians 3:7: "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stone" and 3:2,3: "Ye are … the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." Compare also Ezekiel 11:19,20: "… I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes … and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

One box doth lie both ink and sinne. (ll. 21-24)

Christ's hand, bloody from being nailed to the Cross, is the hand which writes our salvation. The writer therefore cannot claim his own authority: sin is in the heart, mixed with the "ink". Only identification with Christ and his redemptive blood can write "thy sorrows". Nor can the speaker be even an imitator, a copier, of such "fair" writing. Despite the popularity of such works as Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*,[35] the soteriologically Lutheran and Calvinist consensus of the Elizabethan / Jacobean church was against such imitation. The believer, once justified by the imputation of the perfect life and propitiatory death of Christ, may, indeed must, imitate Christ, however falteringly. What 'The Thanksgiving' is showing is the foolishness and impossibility of imitating Christ in the sense of being one's own saviour by a life so holy it will be acceptable to God on its own merits.

A number of writers have sufficiently confuted Louis Martz's contention that the forms, and therefore the theology, of Jesuit and other Roman Catholic meditation were a primary influence upon Herbert. [36] I wish to build on this by showing how Herbert comforts his readers and praises his God by presenting a salvation entirely "written" beforehand, and in doing so, connects saving and literary authority. The first poems of "The Church" establish the uniqueness of Christ's "authoring" sacrifice, and the consequent impossibility of any attempt at meritorious imitation.

Herbert's Passion poems do not present an imitation of the suffering of Christ in the sense that we might meditate on them and so be acceptable to God by our own imitation. On the contrary, 'The Sacrifice', and the poems following it, work to destroy any such idea, by the irony of having a speaker who tries and fails to do just that, and by a Christ who commands that no-one is to imitate his saving work: "Onely let others say, when I am

---

[35] The influence of this work can perhaps be traced in Herbert in, for example, expressing the voice of Christ. Kempis' section on "The Priest" is almost quoted by Herbert in 'The Priesthood'. But Herbert's poetry specifically opposes such ideas as "your sorrow … atones and cleanses your soul". *The Imitation of Christ*, tr. Betty Knott, London, Fontana, 1967, 238, 75.

[36] Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954 / 62; Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, 147-150, 171; Bell, " 'Setting Foot Into Divinity': George Herbert and the English Reformation", *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (3) (Sept. 1977): 219-44; Strier, *Love Known*, xvi and *passim*, and "A Polemical Note", *Papers on Language and Literature* 17 (3) (1981): 347-52; Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1993, *passim*.

dead, / Never was grief like mine" ('The Sacrifice', ll. 251-2). The whole thrust of 'The Thanksgiving' (35), as Ilona Bell has convincingly shown, [37] is to ridicule any attempt at reproducing, by meditation on the Cross, by the Eucharist, or by good works, the "perfect sacrifice once offered":

> 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? (ll. 1-4)

"All grief" has gone before: this is the primary meaning of "preventest". The passion, the suffering, of Christ, is perfect, achieved, inimitable. It cannot be added to by human self-denial or suffering, and the imaginative identification with Christ's physical agony recommended by Ignatius but absent from the New Testament epistles is actually being condemned by Herbert in 'The Thanksgiving'. Herbert's method, though against the imitation of Christ's redeeming work, is, in a sense, imitative of the foolishness of every person's desire to deserve his salvation. His speaker is representatively imitative of all such attempts. But what the speaker is saying is not all the poem says; for Herbert's imitation is, as so often, double. The apparent frustration with which it ends deceives the reader into forgetting that there *is* a thanksgiving, however inadequate. That is, the existence of the poem points to the prior, achieved salvation. "The art of love" is only God's, and is the true "Victorie" which includes the speaker in its triumph, could he but see it and give up trying to be another Christ.

Despite having been "prevented", pre-empted, the speaker in 'The Thanksgiving' develops a mock-querulous tone in attempting to preserve his pride. This theme, and tone, is taken up in several other poems, particularly those in which Herbert uses the amusing figure of military belligerence towards God, such as 'The Reprisall' (really Part II of 'The Thanksgiving'), and 'The Holdfast'. The "threatenings" and attempted "conquests" are ludicrous not only because they pit puny man against omnipotent God, but because the competition concerns who can love the most. This is strange matter for revenge and

---

[37] "Setting Foot Into Divinity". Compare *The Book of Common Prayer* (hereafter BCP), Prayer before Communion: "...who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world ..."

victory; and it is comic irony, for the reader knows what the speaker does not: the conclusion is pre-written.

> Surely I will revenge me on thy love,
> And try who will victorious prove. (ll. 17-18)

The atmosphere is more that of the struttings of the tournament, and that between impossibly-matched opponents, than of a serious battle. Herbert develops the risibility of the situation further, and thereby further demolishes meritorious imitation, as his protagonist splutters out in lines 19 to 28 the details of that wonderful "Surely". The first check comes with a dash, and that dash implies the impossibility of "writing" one's own salvation:

> As for thy passion -- but of that anon,
> When with the other I have done. (ll. 29-30)

The Council of Trent had put into its decrees just such a priority: the passion of Christ as an assistance or gap-filler after the sinner had sufficiently "worked"; "a perfect act of charity ...by a well-disposed sinner".[38] The Church in England under Charles was also showing signs of returning to a theology of voluntaristic moralism (see below, "Teach and Delight", II). Herbert may have had this in mind. But he certainly knew the tendency in his own and every man's heart to wish to contribute to one's own salvation, as expressed with less laughter in 'Dialogue' :

> Sweetest Saviour, if my soul
> Were but worth the having,
> Quickly then would I controll
> Any thought of waving.
> But when all my care and pains
> Cannot give the name of gains
> To thy wretch so full of stains,
> What delight or hope remains?
> . . .

---

[38] Trent VI. v-vi. *New Advent Catholic Encyclopaedia Online*. See also entries "Justification (Trent)" and "Double justice" in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Washington, DC, 1967. Trent also anathematized those who taught that one could not prepare oneself, by one's own unregenerate will, for justification, or that good works did not increase justification in the sight of God, or that sin could be remitted for Christ's sake alone. See "On Justification", C. Tr. v. 797 ff, Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd Edn., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, 370-1.

But as I can see no merit,
    Leading to this favour:
So the way to fit me for it
    Is beyond my savour … (ll. 1-8, 16-20)

And again, the hurt pride is checked by a pregnant dash, as Christ describes his inimitable suffering, and the speaker stops his rationalistic argument ("I can *see* no …") and yields his whole being ("heart" implies will as well as emotions):

That as I did freely part
With my glorie and desert,
Left all joyes to feel all smart -- --
    Ah! no more: thou breaks't my heart. (ll. 29-32)

The dash, here double, again indicates the impossibility of "writing" any worth for oneself, while it also interrupts the gentle voice of Christ rebuking his "child" (l. 9). There can be "no more" like Christ, and there need be "no more" attempts to make oneself accepted by God or to author one's own salvation, really a writing of one's own law.

"The Reprisall' (36) continues the theme that there can be no imitation or overgoing of "thy mighty passion".

    I have considered it, and finde
There is no dealing with thy mighty passion:
    For though I die for thee, I am behinde:
My sinnes deserve the condemnation.

    O make me innocent, that I
May give a disentangled state and free:
    And yet thy wounds still my attempts defie,
For by thy death I die for thee. (ll. 1-8)

The speaker is continuing the semi-ironic wish to be like Christ in his saving activity: "O make *me* [also] innocent, that *I* [also] may [present to God as an offering] a disentangled state and free". Yet he is already innocent. But it is the innocence of Another. He has been authored, written, into innocence, by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. And so "I die for thee" is given another meaning, that of Romans 6:2,6,7: "we are dead to sin … crucified with him …[therefore] freed from [the penalty of] sin": "innocent"

completely. "I die for thee" not imitatively, but only "by thy death", which has shown me the gravity of my sin and the justice of my sentence, and has fulfilled my just death inclusively in Christ's.

The poem works as a witty meditation on Romans 5 and 6, and on the propensity of the prideful human to dislike the thought that he deserves nothing (but condemnation) and yet is given everything (that is good). This is the true end of the conquest, as expressed in lines 14-16:

> ... though I can do nought
> Against thee, in thee I will overcome
> The man, who once against thee fought.

To attempt to imitate is in fact to be "against thee", for it is to set up human authority as a rival. Only "in thee" is the "conquest". The true battle is shown to be against "the man", against -- to change from Herbert's present military metaphor to his earlier one -- the "authoring" independent self, whose desire to imitate Christ has been shown to be a rivalry. Christ alone is the Author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9, 12:2); but "in Christ" the old person of sin ("the man") is "written" as righteous. The imputation of the righteousness of Christ is not a fictitious legal transfer but a change of position for the sinner. He is still a sinner and at no stage writes his own acceptance with God. He once attempted to do so (a state Herbert describes as "against thee fought") but is graciously included now, and seen by God, in Christ.[39]

Imitation involved knowledge. "Good sweete Autors", pleaded Gabriel Harvey in 1592, "infourme your selves before you undertake to instruct other ... the world was ever full inough of fools, but never so full of Asses in print."[40] Only "reading", said Bacon, "maketh a full man"; and this fulness is necessary before "writing [can make] an exact

---

[39] G. W. H. Lampe relates righteous standing with God to the concept of "in Christ", a frequent theme in Herbert's poetry: "[T]he imputation of Christ's righteousness is not a sort of legal fiction or artificial transaction. [It] rests upon a real and effective change in the status of the sinner. Christ has taken him into union with himself, so that ... being in the right with God is conferred on him in actual fact. ... 'In Christ' he is vindicated and accepted although he is still a sinner." *Reconciliation in Christ*, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1956, 64 and *passim*.

[40] Harvey, *Four Letters*, in Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. II, 238.

man".[41] From Horace to Swift, the bee, rather than the spider, was the preferred metaphor for the writer; to gather from many sources rather than to find the source in oneself meant less likelihood of straying from the truth. The gathered pollen of the past was transformed, by the writer's knowledge-based invention, into the sweet usefulness of the honey of application to the present. This was the standard Renaissance model of imitation.[42] It has implications of humility and industry, and is based on an attitude which was unquestioned until the rise of inductive and empirical science, and then of Romanticism's glorification of individuality. Herbert comments on seventeenth century epistemological arguments about what to know, and how to find it out, in "The Agonie' (37), which suggests a different, and prior, "knowing": the knowledge of Christ.

> Philosophers have measured mountains,
> Fathomed the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
> Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced fountains:
> But there are two vast, spacious things,
> The which to measure it doth more behove:
> Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love. (ll.1-6)

The theory of literary imitation required knowledge of the ancient authors; empiricism demanded knowledge of nature's processes.[43] It was long before it was suggested that one's preconceptions might colour one's supposedly neutral perceptions, for a new scientist as well as for an Aristotelian. 'The Agonie' redirects the search for knowledge, providing a third and infinitely superior method and goal.

The Renaissance interest in quantified knowledge, of the physical and human environment and history, was associated with the idea that secular man could control his world if he had sufficient knowledge about it. Herbert has in mind not only the new "measure" of inductive science but the centuries of Aristotelian definition. Herbert departs from the realm of the bee, not to any spiderish inwardness but to a quite different

---

[41] Francis Bacon, "Of Studies", in *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985, 153.

[42] "The third requisite in our Poet, or Maker, is Imitation, to bee able to convert the ... Riches of an other Poet, to his owne use ... Not to imitate servilely ... but to draw forth out of the best, and choisest flowers, with the Bee, and turne all into Honey." Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, in Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson,Vol. VIII, 638-9.

basis for the knowledge required of the poet. This poem is also an apology for Herbert's own poetry. Its source and authority is not the humanly-based measurement of abstractions, such as Aquinas's definitions of sin and love which make use of pagan philosophers. It is a Person. In other poems such as 'Vanitie' (88) and 'The Pearl' (85) Herbert also deals with the foolishness of accumulating earthly knowledge while neglecting the heavenly. Here, that more-desired knowledge is specified as being available only in a person, Christ.

> Who would know Sinne, let him repair
> Unto Mount Olivet; there shall he see
> A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
> His skinne, his garments bloudie be.
> Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain
> To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein. (ll. 7-12)

It is a shocking cause and effect, and forces abstract speculation on "Sinne" to become personal. To "repair / Unto Mount Olivet [and] see / A man ..." is not, however, the imitative meditation which Martz suggests is the basis for the first poems of "The Church". The emphasis here and in the next stanza is on Christ, not on the imitating sinner.

There is an imitation here, however. The poetic imitation of the result of sin is a reminder of, and an exemplification of, Sidney's argument that a poetic picture will "strike, pierce, and possess the sight of the soul" far more effectively than can the equivalent scholastic proposition. Herbert would depart, though, from Sidney's proposal that "a feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example".[44] Because this is a depiction of a true event, and that event a representative punishment, by the third stanza the reader may enter into the experience ("taste") -- not by Ignatian meditation, but savingly and sacramentally. This entering in is opposed to the "measurement" described in the first stanza. The arrogance of man's knowledge of the world, so often a distraction from the true purpose of thinking, has here become narrowed down to the measuring individual as he stands before God, himself measured and condemned by the Law yet released by the

---

[43] See John Boyd, *The Function of Mimesis and Its Decline*, New York, Fordham Press, 1980.

Sin-bearer. The only definition of sin is at the Cross. Aquinas used Aristotle and Cicero to define sin; Christ is barely mentioned.[45] Herbert is not interested in impersonal definition, which can become just another "measurement" by all-controlling humanity. Such imitative knowledge as "philosophers" can provide is useless when it comes to the moral and personal, to relationship with God. Scholasticism, the imitation of pagan antiquity not merely to organise and categorise, but to define, theology, is criticised also in 'Divinitie'(134):

> As men, for fear the starres should sleep and nod,
> And trip at night, have spheres suppli'd;
> ...
> 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? (ll. 1-12)

The "wine" is the shed blood of the Cross; 'Divinitie' goes on to say, as does 'The Agonie', "he doth bid us take his bloud for wine" (l. 21).[46] The "broacht" wine is the shed blood of the Cross; the "coat" is that divided by the soldiers at the Cross. "Definition" is an activity which must start with the Cross, which implies knowing the judgment and love of God before anything else can be known. Just so does 'The Agonie' bring back all knowing and all defining, and all imitation, to the matters of sin and love, themselves only known by the death of Christ:

> Who knows not Love, let him assay
> And taste that juice, which on the crosse a pike

---

[44] *A Defence of Poetry*, 32, 36.

[45] *Summa Theologica*, Qs. LXXI to LXXXIX; Benton, Vol. II, 102-204.

[46] Coleridge disliked, or misunderstood, line 21: "Nay, the contrary: take wine to be blood, and the blood of a man who died 1800 years ago. This is the faith which even the Church of England demands … [it] implies Transubstantiation." His son's marginal comment is that "I can hardly persuade myself he would have re-written this just as it stands"; he goes on to quote the Book of Common Prayer, suggesting that its anti-transubstantiative emphasis was Coleridge's true belief at the time. *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakspeare* [sic] *and Some other Old Poets and Dramatists*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1907 / 11, 373-4.

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. (ll. 13-18)

Love as blood (to Christ) and as wine (to me) is not only a Eucharistic reference, but applies to the purpose of the death of Christ: I may have the sweetness of freedom, reconciliation with God, and life, because of Christ's "bloud". Here the meditative imitation which might be suggested by "let him repair / Unto Mount Olivet [and] see" and "let him assay / And taste" is destroyed as a meritorious activity.[47] "The like" is impossible. This 'Agonie' is unique. And the knowledge which a writer or reader must have is first an experiential one, but one based on an historical event. He must "see" and then "taste" before sin and love can be understood.

Scholasticism's propositions concerned the knowledge of God; humanism's eloquence concerned the moral improvement of man.[48] Herbert's emphasis in 'The Agonie' and 'Divinitie' is on neither knowledge nor rhetorical persuasion but on relationship, on knowing a Person in faith and trust and being known by that Person in such a way as to be changed. "Faith needs no staffe of flesh" ('Divinitie', l. 27) of Aristotelian philosophy ("reason triumphs", l. 7) or eloquent phrasing (the point demonstrated by the curtness of "Watch and pray", l. 17). Only faith in the authoring Christ can bring a man to heaven (l. 28).

So from the very beginning of "The Church" the idea of imitation, of past literary or moral glory, or of Christ, is eliminated as means of "self-authoring". "Thy fair, though bloudie hand" has done all the necessary writing. Herbert continues the "already-written" theme in 'The Sinner' and 'Good Friday' (38). In these, the authority, and effect, of the writing of the work of Christ exceed any humanistic imitative theory, as such writing

---

[47] Compare Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 84-5 and *passim*.

[48] See Hanna Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963): 497-514; compare Steven Ozment, "Humanism, Scholasticism, and the Intellectual Origins of the Reformation", *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History*, ed. F. Church and T. George, Leiden, Brill, 1979; James Tracy, "Humanism and the Reformation", *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. S. Ozment, St. Louis, Centre for Reformation Studies, 1982; P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1961, and *Collected Essays*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

works directly with the materials of the heart. The sonnet 'The Sinner' is that personal response which 'The Agonie', by its demonstration of the limitations of Aristotelian definition or Baconian discovery, sought to produce:

> The spirit and good extract of my heart
> Come to about the many hundred part.
> Yet Lord restore thine image, heare my call:
> And though my hard heart scarce to thee can grone,
> Remember that thou once didst write in stone. (ll. 10-14)

The speaker is reminding God -- and the fact that he can do so indicates an access already achieved -- that as the Law was written on stone, the human heart should be no challenge. The stony heart can be the writing surface not now for the Law but for "thine image" by the Holy Spirit. Calvin said "When his Spirit is taken away, our hearts harden into stones";[49] but he did not extend the metaphor, as Herbert did, here and in 'Good Friday', to the writing of God on that stone / heart, and with blood.

As in many poems, the speaker is pleading for what he knows, or we know, will be granted. "Restore thine image" refers to the damage done not so much to reason as to a relationship. Yet the relationship exists, has been restored, or there could be no such poem. Herbert's frequent combination of true sorrow and a delightful wit is perhaps uniquely his, and depends entirely on the Reformation confidence in an achieved salvation, a secure love. The image which on the surface refers to God's writing of the Law is in fact referring to the further writing of that Law on the heart which occurred with Christ's life, death and resurrection applied to the believer. Once the Law was extraneous, impossible to "imitate"; now, it is written on the heart, making the will co-operative. Love has enabled the sinner to want to obey. He now agrees with God's righteous standards. Yet he still may not look to himself for an imitation of the Law, for perfect obedience is Christ's alone. The speaker / reader will always be a sinner. Even his "shreds of holinesse" are "crosse to thy decrees" and "dare not venture / To shew their face" (ll. 6-7). Only in Christ can the sinner ever be said to have fulfilled the Law. But the poem is

---

[49] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F. L. Battles, ed. J. McNeill, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, 2. 4. 3.

written from that position, for it does show its face to God: it is addressed to God, and wittily too.

Herbert presents a mimesis of the believer caught in the tension between "this world" (experience, change, subjectivity, a constantly blotted and altered writing) "and that of grace" (a finished salvation, a demonstrated love, an objective, unchanging Saviour who *has* written) ('Affliction' IV, 89, ll. 5-6). Herbert's poetic is one of gentle irony: the speaker-experience is contradicted by the achieved situation. "I am all ague" ('The Sinner', l. 1) is a subjective feeling, occurring when the evidence of salvation is sought in the heart, which Herbert describes again as stone : "quarries of piled vanities", l. 5. Only in the fact that "thou once didst write" is there comfort. There can be no imitation of what is written already; the heart is not a suitable writing surface for the self, only for God. "Write there ... thy bloudie fight", the speaker of 'Good Friday' asks God (ll. 22-3). Christ's "bloudie fight" can never be imitated (repeated). It has been written in blood, by Christ, and can be imitated (represented) only in the sense of imputation. The written-on sinner is seen by the grace of God as if *he* has fought and won. He cannot himself do the imitative writing, turning himself into an epic, because the poem -- the passion of Christ – has been written already, by Christ's blood / ink. My blood (my life) is both a writing material and that which prevents me from being the writer of mimetic epic or an imitative life-writer, for from Adam I inherit rebellion. What it can write, creatively, is sin.

Claudine Raynaud has pointed out the connection between 'Good Friday', 'Sepulchre', 'Obedience', and 'A True Hymne', all of which use this cluster of "writing" metaphors. I do not agree, however, with her comment about "God writeth, *Loved*" in 'A True Hymne', that "the already written is also paradoxically in some way the product of a contrite heart".[50] This reverses all that Herbert says in *The Temple* about God's achieved writing and of man *not* being the author, and also puts Herbert's "literary theory" on one plane only, that of changing and untrustworthy human experience. 'Good Friday' asks that this not happen, that the Lord be the sole writer: "write there". God must write

[50] "Blood, Ink, and Sin: Writing Sacrifice in *The Temple*", *QWERTY* 7 (1997): 39-47.

himself, in two senses, on the heart. His sorrows, his victorious fight, must fill the heart, not the speaker's own achievements, so

> That when sinne spies so many foes,
> Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes,
> All come to lodge there, sinne may say,
> No room for me, and flie away. (ll. 25-28)

Sin will not be vanquished in the personal experience (though it has been vanquished in fact) if the speaker is the writer. The speaker cannot write his own life in imitation of Christ, as a living mimesis of a hero. Although this poem is entitled 'Good Friday', it is not, despite line 26, an Ignatian entering-in to the sufferings of Christ, which is in a sense becoming a little Christ oneself.[51] If meritorious "writing" of this kind were suggested, the true "writer" would be the sinner. Herbert knows what would happen in that case:

> Sinne being gone, oh fill the place,
> And keep possession with thy grace;
> Lest sinne take courage and return,
> And all the writings blot or burn. (ll. 29-32)

If the "writings" that may be destroyed are those which will be presented instead of the speaker's own, as in 'Judgment' (187), the legal writings of an unbreakable testament or promise, then Herbert is suggesting a possible loss of salvation. "Sinne", or the sinner, in that case, is stronger than God: the Arminian position, ultimately. But those writings, the work of Christ in the New Covenant, are indestructible. Here both the context, and the two levels of Herbert's poetic, must be remembered. 'Good Friday' has happened: "It is finished". Sin cannot "blot or burn" in any final sense. Herbert has not suddenly become Arminian in theology for the sake of a completed metaphor. This is a request which must be granted, because its basis is "thy whips … thy woes", not "my heart". "All the writings" refers to the present level of sanctification, not to an unchangeable justification. The "drama" level of the writer / reader, his sanctification process, has many vicissitudes, and may even be temporarily blotted or burnt; it will not be complete and secure until the speaker is in Heaven and has become indestructibly like his perfect copy-model. The "stasis" level refers not to the imperfect copy, but to "thy sorrows", which are the

guarantee of salvation -- and, again, are the achieved basis on which this poem, addressed to Christ, may be written.

The connection between imitative theories and life in Herbert's poetry is foregrounded in 'Jordan' (I) (56). After a cluster of poems about the death of Christ, its cause, and our responses to it, Herbert reflects on the process of writing poetry whose imitative subject is real life (seen) and real truth (unseen), and in so doing considers current theories.

> Who sayes that fictions onely and false hair
> Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?
> Is all good structure in a winding stair?
> May no lines passe, except they do their dutie
> Not to a true, but painted chair? (ll. 1-5)

"Who sayes"? The Renaissance critics "said". Some of the Italian critics implied that it was not poetry unless it was "a winding stair" to truth. Classical literature and its imitation became, in the words of Baxter Hathaway, even "a substitute for theology -- an as-if second world that decorated experiential mundanities beautifully. ... Truth was not truth for Speroni ... until it was made marvellous through eloquence. [For Fracastoro], it is beauty and not theology that provides the truth and the marvel".[52] The English critics followed, with reservations. Apologists for poetry were defensive not only against theological criticisms but against the suspicion, perhaps their own, that statesmanship and similes do not mix: in a word, Plato. "Now Plato's name is laid upon me", says Sidney, as if all his earlier arguments were but practice skirmishes. A poet cannot be a liar, in Sidney's argument (which itself looks a little sophistical reflected in the clear waters of 'Jordan' (I)), because he "nothing affirms". Poets weave no "circles about your imagination" because they write an imitation only of "what should or should not be". [53] This argument throws back the interpretation upon the reader:

> Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines,
> Catching the sense at two removes? (ll. 9-10)

---

[51] See the comments of St. Bernard and of Louis de Blois on meditation in Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 16, 19. Such self-salvation is contradicted throughout *The Temple*. See also R.V.Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, London, D.S. Brewer, 2000, *passim*.

[52] *Marvels and Commonplaces*, New York, Random House, 1968, 135.

[53] *Defence*, 57, 52-3.

But Herbert then joins forces with Sidney against such as Stephen Gosson:

> Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:
> Riddle who list …
> I envie no mans nightingale or spring;
> Nor let them punish me with loss of rime,
> Who plainly say, *My God, My King*. (ll. 11-15)

If those disparagers who would "punish" poets by removing their licence to "rime" do indeed "plainly say, *My God, My King*", then so does Herbert. (Few readers of Gosson could describe his euphuism as "plainly saying"; is there a suspicion of this thought in the praise of "honest" shepherds?).

The last line alludes to Psalm 68:24: "[the Lord's] enemies have seen … the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary".[54] The Bible is the "truth" referred to in line 2, not, despite lines 5 and 10, a Platonic conception of a true Idea from which an artist, painting a picture, is several stages away. God is the "king" of poetic "lines". Imitation should be of Biblical truth, and "plainly". Implied in the second stanza is the direct access to God brought by Christ:

> Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
> And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?
> . . .
> Must all be vail'd . . . ? (ll. 1, 2, 9)

There is no longer need for the "vail" of romance or allegory, just as the veil of the Jewish Temple, separating the Holiest Place from the ordinary worshipper, was torn from top to bottom at the time of the Crucifixion. "Shadow" close to "vail'd" confirms the stanza's deeper allusion. "Shadow" gives, in the first instance, an amusing image of lines so far from the truth ("course-spunne") that they need the convention of a "sudden arbour" to keep them from the sun's revealing light: the poorly-made garment looks better in the shade. Poets such as Ariosto who deal in "enchanted groves" of myth-based love and marvel-decorated heroism cause the reader to "divine", even to impose, an allegorical scheme.

---

[54] Other Psalms also combine the two expressions: see 5, 10, 24, 19, 44, 47, 74, 84, 98, 149.

"Shadow" also suggests typology, as in Colossians 2:17: "[External observances] are but a shadow of things to come: but the body is of Christ", or Hebrews 8:5,6: "[Earthly priests] serve unto the shadow and example of heavenly things ... [but now Christ] is the mediator of a better covenant.". Poets who need "purling streams" to "refresh" their dusty earthly topics are living, as those in the New Testament who clung to the old letter (Romans 7:6, II Corinthians 3:6), in an unnecessary world of type and symbol, shadow rather than substance. False hair, a painted chair, imply the real, not the earthly "real" only, but the reality of a creating God (hence "two removes"); human love is a shadow of God's. Christ, the "King", has come, and can "plainly", now, be that which is "becoming" as a topic for verse. The veils, groves and arbours of typology and allegory are not needed on this side Jordan, where shepherds sing not pastorals but hymns: see 'Christmas', 80, where "the pasture is thy word" and the "streams" are of divine grace and not poetic fictions to "refresh a lovers loves" (l. 19).

3. Imitation and nation: why Herbert wrote no epic

Then came brave Glorie puffing by …

'The Quip', l. 13.

The English nation had been brought out of the darkness of Popery into the light of "Bibles laid open" ('Sinne' I, 45). The Englishman grateful for the Reformation could see God's kingship reflected, however fallibly, in an earthly kingship which allowed the individual direct access to the truths of Scripture. "My God, my king" ('Jordan' I) might now rule over a secondary and visible kingdom, not that of global Papacy but of the new Israel, England / Britain. An epic of this new people of God, the people of the Book, could be written, particularly to instruct in godly living and to foster national pride. The flaws in the identification of the unseen church of God, the bride of Christ, with a geographical entity, were not yet obvious to many. Some Puritans urged the subordination of state to church, but the day of full separation of church and state, which is not the same thing, was still to come. So Spenser, and others less talented, wrote epics of the history of England and for the imitative education of the earthly monarch and other leaders of the newly Protestant nation. Herbert did not.

The Cambridge Orator and Protestant preacher, aware of his poetic gift, caring about England, the national church, and the language, might be thought a good candidate to be an English Virgil. Since matters of state and religion were inextricably connected at this period, an epic to thank God for Britain,[55] the true Rome descended from Brut and therefore from Troy, finding its destiny at last in the rejection of pagan and medieval superstition, and an epic to educate and to praise the sovereign, would seem an appropriate means for Herbert to help establish English as a literary language and present England as the chosen power of God.

A life which ended at forty may have been the only factor keeping Herbert from epic authorship. Speculation is inappropriate. However, three reasons for Herbert to confine himself to shorter forms may be safely deduced from his existing theological poetic. First, the epic implies earthly glory, of subject, of author, and perhaps of imitating reader.

Herbert, however, aimed to glorify only Christ. On every title page of *The Temple* from 1633 to 1707 is "Psal. 29. *In his Temple doth every man speak of his honour.*" Second, the epic demands a hero, limited by fate perhaps, but (in Renaissance criticism) able to be imitated. Christ, to Herbert, is neither involuntarily limited by fate nor able to be imitated in his redemptive work. And third, the epic exists to exalt a nation. Herbert was interested in nation, but more so in the people of God in all ages and places, and in the eternal implications of life on earth.

Herbert certainly loved his nation and its language. The absence of epic from Herbert's corpus does not suppose an individualistic, pietistic devotion. He was interested in national honour and progress, current politics, and the use of English.[56] But his love of nation was always subordinated to the honour of Christ and his Word. What follows is a consideration of how that subordination demonstrates the imitative theory of a poet working simultaneously on two levels, that of experience, and that of the achieved work of the unchanging God. The first level may seem the imitative reality, but the second, though sometimes hidden, is the dominant. Sometimes in Herbert's poems the experience-level of earthly glory, authorial heroism, or national honour of language and character, appears to dominate, for instance as a cause for anxiety. But the end is written before the beginning, and written in the first instance by God. The speaker-level is not the author-level. Herbert's love of England, therefore, did not produce an epic, because national (and authorial) glory must be subject to the glory of Christ. It is impossible, by nature of the genre, to write an epic poem glorifying the work of Christ.

I have not especially separated the matter of language from the conceptual problems of epic such as imitative virtue. The humanist writers associated them: Ascham believed that "good matter and good utterance [are] never or seldom asonder"; [57] Melanchthon asked "how many errors in religion ... have come from ... neglected and irregular training in

---

[55] Compare Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, in *The Works of ... Richard Hooker*, ed. J. Keble, Vol. I, Book IV. xiv. [6]-[7], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1836, 615-620.

[56] Several recent studies have demonstrated Herbert's, and *The Temple's*, involvement with social and political affairs. See for example Sidney Gottlieb, "The Social and Political Backgrounds of George Herbert's Poetry", *The Muses Common-Weale: Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1988.

the art of speaking!" and pointed out concerning the "barbarian" scholastic theologians that "[c]arefulnes in speaking having slipped away, they have even lost discrimination in thoughts".[58] To Herbert, Christ is the author of the matter (salvation) and of the human writer: the author is authored. The attitudes represented by epic content and form cannot co-exist with an imitation depending upon the authorising "writing" of Christ. Language, nation, and virtue, were to reveal and honour Christ. Virtue, whether considered as morality or as strength, is Christ's only. Glory for nation would not come through glorious writing, implying glory also for the human author, but through national and individual relationship to Christ.

Herbert may simply have preferred experimenting with short forms. Yet it is not true to say that his choice of the lyric reflected a private prayer-mode directed to God alone.[59] *The Temple* is public, not in the sense of being poetic statecraft but in its didactic intent. Herbert has plenty to say in short poems and in "The Church-porch" about matters of national concern. But what Herbert has to say about destiny, which can be read in "The Church Militant" (below), is very different from any epic representation. And what Herbert has to say about authorship and its glories may be read in many poems in "The Church": that all authorial glory belongs to the "Sonne" and may not be usurped by virtuous individual, nation, or writer, however Protestant. To put that another way, to be truly Protestant must be to refuse epic imitation.

Herbert's refusal of the Virgilian role on theological grounds implies some criticism of his contemporaries. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* reflects the glory of England rather than the glory of Christ, proving that the Reformation epic, or national heroism within a framework of the all-achieving grace of God, is an impossibility. The validation of England's past with archaisms such as allegory, Chaucerian language, and chivalry is contradicted by the rejection of that past's Roman Catholicism. Redcrosse's denial of merit is followed by Guyon's more classical (and Roman Catholic) suggestion of inherent

---

[57] Roger Ascham, "On Imitation", Smith, Vol. I, 5.

[58] "Melancthon's 'Reply' to G. Pico della Mirandola", 1558, ed. Quirinus Breen, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1) (Jan. 1952): 413-26, esp. 414, 418.

[59] Cristina Malcolmson is correct to say, as did Rosemond Tuve long before, that *The Temple* is not a "voice, pouring out 'emotion reflected in tranquillity' … transcribing what was unique about the self", but was for "social performance", and, I would add, for social edification. *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, 207.

virtue.[60] Further, Herbert rejected the prospect of national honour accruing to the writer of epic. Spenser, Milton, and the lesser epic writers did not think of their work as "a broken Altar". Yet Protestant belief implies glory to Christ alone.

Herbert, or his representative speaker, was not immune to the temptations represented by epic authorship, as 'Frailtie' demonstrates. But before considering that and other poems indicating Herbert's theological poetic and its anti-epic stance, the moral and even theological importance of epic to the Renaissance may be briefly considered. Gabriel Harvey insisted on the training of scholars by means of epic, "the fountaine of skill, the root of vertue, the seminary of government, the foundation of all publicke and private good". George Chapman called Homer the "bottomlesse fountaine" of "all learning, government and wisdome" and, with the usual association of matter and manner, "of all wit, elegancie, disposition and judgment".[61] The reader was assumed to be able to "translate" into virtuous life the excellence of the words as well as the worthy life those words were expressing. Even Sidney, who found in writers and readers Luther's "infected will", still takes for granted the desire of readers of heroic poetry to be like Aeneas.[62] Chapelain, in 1620, had no doubt about the result of presenting such examples: "la vraisemblance sert d'instrument pour acheminer l'homme a la vertu".[63] The translation made by "W. J." in 1695 of Le Bossu's earlier treatise on epic sums up what had been said for the previous century. His preface says:

> The Epick [is] the Principal, and most sublime part of all Poesie ... I shall make bold to use my Author's Words. "The Epopea, or Epick Poem (says he) is a Discourse or Story invented by Art to form Mens Manners ..." [W]hat ... can be more Great and Noble? To regulate Mens manners; to purge and refine them from the Dregs and Corruptions of Vice; to keep their Passions within due bounds, and to make them the servants ... of right Reason [is] a great perfection of Humane Nature. [Epic examples are] the strongest Arguments to persuade Men to be Vertuous. [64]

---

[60] That Spenser negotiated all this so well made him, as E.K. predicted concerning *The Shepheardes Calender*, "beloved of all, embraced by the most, and wondered at of the best." Vickers, ed., *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 176.

[61] Smith, II, 236, 299.

[62] *Defence*, van Dorsten , 25 and 41.

[63] *La Preface a l'Adonis*, in Basil Willey, *Tendencies in Renaissance Literary Theory*, Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1922, 17.

[64] *Le Bossu and Voltaire on the Epic*, ed. Stuart Curran, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, Gainesville, FL, 1970 ("W. J"s preface is unpaged).

Herbert refused "the Principal, and most sublime part of all Poesie" chiefly because its syncretistic implications denied Christ the glory. Man is glorified in epic, and in that glory it is impossible to separate reader, subject, and author. Gabriel Harvey interweaves these three strands as, in an unusually gentle moment in his dealings with Robert Greene, he pleads:

> Good sweete Oratour, be a devine Poet indeede: and use heavenly Eloquence indeede; … and with heroicall Cantoes honour right Vertue, and brave valour indeede, as noble Sir Philip Sidney and gentle Maister Spencer have done … according to the fine modell of Orpheus, Homer, Pindarus, & the excellentest wittes of Greece and of the Lande that floweth with milk and hony. [65]

Harvey too casually, for Herbert's liking, associates "devine" and "heavenly" with "Orpheus, Homer, Pindarus", too closely associates "the excellentest wittes of Greece" with any writing of and from "the Lande that floweth with milk and hony". The excellent wits of *that* land find "vertue" and "valour" only in Christ:

> Herod and all his bands do set me light,
> Who teach all hands to warre, fingers to fight,
> And onely am the Lord of hosts and might:
> Was ever grief, &c.
>
> . . .
>
> So sits the earths great curse in Adams fall
> Upon my head: so I remove it all
> From th'earth unto my brows, and bear the thrall:
> Was ever grief like mine?
>
> . . .
>
> Shame tears my soul, my bodie many a wound;
> Sharp nails pierce this, but sharper that confound;
> Reproches, which are free, while I am bound.
> Was ever grief, &c.
> ('The Sacrifice', 26, ll. 77-80, 165-8, 197-200)

For Herbert to use hexameter or any other feature of classical epic would be to paint Christ as just another, if perhaps supreme, hero. 'The Sacrifice' is really a meditation on the paradox of the two natures of Christ. As God, he "teaches … fingers to fight" (l. 78; see Psalm 144:1, II Samuel 22: 35), yet as man, he does what no epic hero has done: he voluntarily dies a shameful death, having borne the guilt of all since Adam.

---

[65] Harvey, 1592, in Smith, II, 234-236.

The Italian writers urged the reading of epic as medicinal. Minturno upheld epic as that "by which you can educate children in all disciplines, exhort men to all virtues, preserve the aged in finest condition ... and lead [the people] where you will".[66] The English nationalists agreed. Sir John Harington, considering the Bible "a deepe and profound studie and not subject to everie weake capacitie" (a subtle protest against Luther?), proposed "studies of humanitie", especially epic, as the alternative means by which God's truths may be known and practised:

> Heroicall Poesy ... with her sweet statelinesse doth erect the mind and lift it up to the consideration of the highest matters, and allureth them that of themselves would otherwise loathe them, to take and swallow and digest the holsome precepts of Philosophie, and many times even of the true divinitie.[67]

The reader, whose affections are allured by the sweetness of beautiful writing and of a good example, and whose mind is rectified by "the highest matters", necessarily becomes good by exposure, and not only good in a civil sense, but able to understand "the true divinitie". The inability of the reader, without grace, to become even Aeneas, to say nothing of Christ (who alone is "the true divinitie") does not occur to Harington, nor the anomaly of terming the selfish, lustful and cruel actions of warring gods "the highest matters".

The speaker of 'Frailtie' (71) is attracted to earthly glory, particularly as an author who is attracted to epic glory as it reflects on him. Herbert's two levels, of apparently triumphant experience and a truly victorious heavenly "Regiment", are evident here, particularly in the seemingly open ending.

Lord, in my silence how do I despise
What upon trust
Is styled *honour, riches,* or *fair eyes;*
But is *fair dust!*
I surname them *guilded clay,*
Deare earth, fine grasse or *hay;*
In all, I think my foot doth ever tread
Upon their head. 8

But when I view abroad both Regiments;
The worlds, and thine:
Thine clad with simplenesse, and sad events;
The other fine,
Full of glorie and gay weeds
Brave language, braver deeds:

---

[66] Minturno, *de Poeta* (1559), in Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, University of Chicago Press, 1963, Vol. 2, 737.
[67] Harington, 1591, in Smith I, 198.

That which was dust before, doth quickly rise
And prick mine eyes. 16

O brook not this, lest if what even now
My foot did tread,
Affront those joyes, wherewith thou didst endow
And long since wed
My poore soul, ev'n sick of love:
It may a Babel prove
Commodious to conquer heav'n and thee
Planted in me. 24

'Frailtie' is representative of any struggling Christian. But it also reflects the temptations for the Christian poet to establish authorial credentials by fostering national glory: "brave language" about, and producing, "braver deeds". "Honour", "riches", and "glorie" are the dazzling dust of epic heroism and human virtue, inseparable from literary glory, which in the speaker's eyes may become the trachoma of Babel, removing the sight of Christ's "simplenesse and sad events". The blindness and defeat occur only on the experience-level. The reader is not seriously to imagine any Babel sufficiently "commodious" -- a reference, perhaps, to the spaciousness of epic as opposed to the small lyric appropriate to one lovesick for Christ -- to envelop the infinitely greater "Regiment" of "heav'n and thee". (That lyric poetry is not also without its temptations is suggested by "fair eyes".) The frailty the speaker is conscious of is always present when pen is put to paper. It is the authorial frailty which longs for recognition, Milton's "last infirmity of noble mind". Harvey would have praised "brave language" which combined Athens and Jerusalem for the sake of England. But Herbert, who was less dust-blinded than his poetic voice here implies, could see the dust of earthly pride waiting to be built into a Babel of autonomous authority.

Following 'Frailtie', but appearing to contradict all that it and many other poems have to say about human inadequacy and the necessity for the grace of God, is 'Constancie' (72):

Who is the honest man?
He that doth still and strongly good pursue . . .

Who, when great trials come,
Nor seeks, nor shuns them; but doth calmly stay,
Till he the thing and the example weigh . . .

Whom others faults do not defeat;
But though men fail him, yet his part doth play.
(ll. 1-2, 11-12, 29-30)

This appears an extreme exposition of "capability", the epic hero without Odysseus' trickery, Aeneas comfortably allegorized into the model for the new Renaissance man of Christian England.[68] To be strong in oneself despite outside forces, the theme of 'Constancie', seems of the essence of classical *virtus*. Does Herbert believe, after all, in epic values and inherent capability?

The Bible, however, also presents a man who is unshakeable. His strength depends not on himself but on God and His Word. The Psalms, for example, hold up for imitation "the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly ... he is like a tree planted by the rivers of water" (Ps. 1). Herbert's constant man cannot be blown away by the "ruffling wind" of those who would "work or wooe" him into a "trick or sleight" (ll. 7, 16-17). "I have not sat with vain persons, neither ... a dissembler [whose] right hand is full of bribes", says the singer of Psalm 26; Herbert's representation of spiritual capability is one whom "nothing can procure" (l. 31). "Mark the perfect man", says Psalm 37, the one who does not "fret ... because of him who prospereth in his way"; this man becomes, in Herbert, the one who "rides his sure and even trot, / While the world now rides by, now lags behind" (ll. 9-10). The book of Proverbs has also many references to the wisdom of honesty and immoveability.

The immoveable man of Psalm 1 is so because he does not guide his life by "the counsel of the ungodly". The man who rises above envy and complaint is not the hero of epic or tragedy who imagines himself master of his fate, daring capricious gods to throw their worst at him, but one who trusts a fatherly God who will vindicate his right and bring true justice eventually. Self-righteousness is not the righteousness portrayed in the Old Testament any more than in the New.[69]

A "glittering look" cannot "blinde" the honesty (l. 8) that knows its own weakness. This glitter refers to the dazzling sights in the preceding 'Frailtie', and to the corruption so difficult to avoid by those wanting advancement in a Renaissance court. Odysseus is not the model for the new nationhood: the constant man will not "use in any thing a trick or sleight" (l. 18). There are New Testament precedents for following a "Mark-man" (l. 34).

---

[68] Mary Ellen Rickey suggests Horace's *Integer Vitae* as a source for 'Constancie'. *Utmost Art*, 1966, 52, 95.

[69] The sacrificial system implied human failure, and provided substitutionary justice and forgiveness. Compare Calvin, *Institutes,* 2. 10. 4 and passim.

This is an imitation which is commended in the Bible. It is not the attempt to set up one's own redemptive righteousness by imitating Christ or a saint, but it is the following of an example of trust and "constancie" in the experiential level of life. It applies to one's sanctification, not to one's justification. The verses which suggest this contain the words "follow" or "followers", perhaps more correctly translated by the New International Version (from the Greek *mimeo*) as "imitate" and "imitators". In every case these verses are addressed to those who have already been accepted by God because of the virtue of Christ's work.[70] The imitators are enabled, by the Holy Spirit, to become what they are. Their "legal" status, righteous in God's eyes, becomes the empowerment to "abhorre deceit", to become the man "whom others faults do not defeat" (ll. 18, 29).

'Constancie' has within it the answer to its own apparent epic glory. This is not a poem to "push man towards virtue" by inflaming his own strength. In fact,

> The sunne to others writeth laws,
> And is their vertue; Vertue is his Sunne. (ll. 24-25)

"Sunne" is in the first printed edition (Thomas Buck, 1633). MS Tanner 307 (Bodleian) has "Sonne".[71] But even without this likely reading, the second "Sunne" would suggest Christ. It is probable that Herbert intended a contrast between natural, or pagan, morality ("the sunne to others writeth laws") such as that of the Stoic "constant man" whom he must have had in mind, and the only true "Vertue", Christ. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul points out that every man, Jewish or not, has within him a sense of a Creator who is good. It is in this way that the sun, which shines on every man, "writeth laws": "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse" (1:17).

The "vertue" of 'Constancie' is illuminated by the last stanza of the poem 'Vertue' (87) whose subject may be interpreted as referring primarily, though not only, to Christ.

> Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
> Like season'd timber, never gives;
> But though the whole world turn to coal,
> Then chiefly lives. (ll. 13-16)

---

[70] I Cor. 4:16, Eph. 5:1, I Thess. 1:6 and 2:14, Heb. 6:12 and 13:7, III John 11. In Phil. 4:9, Paul makes himself the "Mark-man": the Philippians are to do what they both hear from, and see, in Paul -- "doctrine *and* life", as Herbert suggests in 'The Windows'. Paul is not the epic hero, but a living fulfilment of "in Christ", a model to follow before the New Testament was compiled.

[71] See also Hutchinson's marginal variation (72); compare C. A. Patrides, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, London, Everyman, 1974, 89, and Mario di Cesare, intro. and notes, *The Temple: A Diplomatic Edition of … MS Tanner 307*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Binghamton, NY, 1995, 107.

Mary Ellen Rickey finds an Ovidian precedent.[72] But 'Vertue' may be an Easter poem. It follows 'Lent', it speaks of Spring (ll. 9-12), and the lines above suggest the Resurrection. If so, the 'Vertue' of the title would then suggest that the classical (epic) "virtus", a strength which includes the stability of constancy, is properly understood only in the person of Christ. A self-generated virtue, then, is a dying imitation (the dying represented in stanzas 1 to 3 of 'Vertue') of the one who *is* virtue, the never-dying Christ.

The first "sunne" in 'Constancie' lights a virtue given life only by notice and approval, which melts when disapproval or temptation become too hot or disappears when the sun sets into the darkness of difficult circumstances. The man in Christ

> never melts or thaws
> At close tentations: when the day is done,
> His goodnesse sets not, but in the dark can runne (ll. 21-3).

Herbert is thus contradicting the assumption that man is naturally inclined to good and needs only the guidance of humanist educators, selecting from the literature of the past, to enable him to be constant (or to be any other good thing). The sun which "to others writeth laws" (l. 24) will set; the sunlight of notice and approval, which for the natural man in the "shame culture" of epic is the only motivation to virtue, must at some stage become the darkness of neglect or misunderstanding, in which the virtue will disappear. A virtue which disregards circumstance and opinion is fully seen, and achievable only, in the "Sonne". The prayerful dependence on God which ends the poem indicates that glory, for writer as for doer, is God's alone.

'Constancie' may be a subtle education of the nation's leaders, or even of the monarch; so was much Renaissance epic. But epic educated the monarch largely by praise; this poem is straightforwardly didactic. Herbert praises his sovereign in his Latin poetry, to the distaste of recent critical sensibilities. Yet his English poetry is by no means "fawning" (l.4), as Sidney Gottlieb points out in connection with the worm at the root of the "Crown Imperiall" flower in 'Peace'.[73] In writing 'Constancie', Herbert may be taking his own

---

[72] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, II.111-120, in Mary Ellen Rickey, *Utmost Art*, 22-3.

[73] "The Social and Political Backgrounds of Herbert's Poetry", *"The Muses Common-Weale": Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1988, 110.

advice in "The Church-porch": "Towards great persons use respective boldnesse: / That temper gives them theirs, and yet doth take / Nothing from thine" ; "Feed no man in his sinnes: for adulation / Doth make thee parcell-devil in damnation" (ll. 253-5, 257-8). Richard Strier has recently presented a socially and politically manipulative "Church-porch" Herbert.[74] But the comment 'Constancie' makes on "The Church-porch" casts doubt on this argument. Strier is making a plea for an Empsonian reading of the text as it appears, so that the apparently worldly advice of "The Church-porch" can co-exist with the Biblical and unflattering 'Constancie'. I would argue for a rather more consistent -- constant -- Herbert corpus.[75] And to "know the wayes of Honour" is not to desire them, or a "glorie" which moulds "the heart ... to all expressions"; to know "how manie drammes of spirit there must be / To sell my life" is to have turned from this possibility to "I love thee", a love which is the greater for such knowing ('The Pearl', 88). At any rate, in 'Constancie', the constant man "who still is right" against "the wide world" (ll. 35, 32) is not the epic-heroic poet or reader, superior to courts, patronage and even community by "virtue" of the authority within his own breast. Rather, he is one who holds to the authority of God's Word, so that his own words, in poetry as in life, are "clear and straight"(l. 20).

'Faith' (49) presents a remarkable alternative to the imitation of epic "storie":

> Faith makes me anything, or all
> That I beleeve is in the sacred storie:
> And where sin placeth me in Adam's fall,
> Faith sets me higher in his glorie. (ll. 16-19)

The glory of Aeneas is no higher than the fall of Adam. Herbert's rather striking statement here is not that of Sidney, who would have the fictional examples of "storie" of more use than those of history.[76] But it is biblical revelation, not history understood as driven by humanity, nor the fictions of the poetic imagination, into which Herbert sees the believer as entering. Such extended typology actually "makes me" and "sets me" what and where I ought to be; epic "storie" may only raise the desire (and then the desired "glorie" is my own, not "his"). Natural man as reader / imitator cannot rise beyond the exclusion from Eden. But the glory which would have been Adam's is restored by faith in the glorious work of Christ. "His [Adam's] glorie" is ambiguous: Adam is here both

---

[74] "Impossible Worldliness" in *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, 83 ff.

[75] I would also argue that Empson is not as "against schemes" and "against received ideas" as Strier has suggested in *Resistant Structures*. See Empson's own admission of his presuppositions in "Last Words", *Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 31, 1993, 11-12.

[76] *A Defence of Poetry*, 30, 35, 36-38, 48.

restored man and Christ, the second Adam. But there is no epic hero subtly being introduced here: the glory is available only in Christ and by faith. Glory for author or reader lies only in identification with Christ. Faith disclaims its own authority and glories in another's. The "conceit" of faith, l. 6 -- how well Herbert uses his beloved ambiguities -- provides not only acceptable writing but accepted life.

The Catholic humanist Thomas More found irritating the apparent arrogance of a faith which claimed all for no effort: "I could for my part be verie wel content that sin and pain all were as shortlye gone as Tyndale telleth us." [77] Herbert's speaker in 'Faith' tells us that they are, however, and that such comfort, described in metaphors of eating, drinking, healing, and debt absolution, has nothing to do with merit. [78] More's implication is that Christ alone cannot be relied upon for salvation. The sinner must show himself fit. The qualities of the classical epic hero must be transferred to the soul seeking salvation. Otherwise, the natural mind sees God as unjust, a worry perhaps at the back of More's mind and certainly expressed in the first stanza of Herbert's poem: "Lord, how couldst thou so much appease / Thy wrath for sinne …?" Herbert does not exactly answer his own question, or not in this poem. What is not answered is "how is it that …?" or "why …?". What is answered is "what is the *means by which* 'I' or 'a peasant' or 'creatures' may benefit from your appeasement of wrath, and what are its results?" The means, the instrument, is faith. 'Faith' is not the answer to "how couldst thou …?", but to "how may I …?". Faith is the appropriation, not the basis, of salvation. The basis has been set out in 'The Sacrifice'. If 'Faith' is taken alone as Herbert's imitation of how Christian man is more blessed than epic hero, then it appears that Herbert's theology is subjective and existential. "What Christ hath done" (l. 36) seems in this poem to be overweighted by what "I did conceit" (l. 6). But what is said about faith here needs to be taken with the many poems which present the ground of faith, the death of Christ. If faith becomes a meritorious work, then all the benefits described in 'Faith' are attributable to the believer. The object of faith becomes himself, and he is the epic hero after all, merely changing the "storie" from a voyage to Ithaca or Italy to a pilgrimage, with one instead of many gods to appease. Rather, 'Faith' needs to be understood in its position, coming after several poems denying the possibility of "my" agony or of any meritorious imitation of

---

[77] In C.S.Lewis, *Sixteenth-Century English Literature Excluding Drama*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1954, 34.

[78] The context is forensic rather than experiential, although the believer's experience gradually changes as he "lives accordingly". Herbert has in mind Romans 4-8, II Cor. 5, and Galatians 2. See also *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, entries "grace", "justification", and "merit", for a comparison of Roman Catholic with Protestant views.

redeeming virtue. The poem itself reminds us that "if blisse had lien in art or strength / None but the wise or strong had gained it" (ll. 25, 26). There is no back-door epic hero here, whose faith is an inherent virtue. "Art or strength" suggests writing an epic hero or becoming one; the knightly heroes of, say, Grail stories or other romance epics were tested on their faith, but such faith was an aspect of character, and it gained earthly glory for the earthly hero. The biblical faith here represented by Herbert is a gift, and it is, as Calvin said, a sight (stanza 1), an understanding and grasping (apprehension -- stanza 3), of what Christ has done.[79] No glory pertains to man ("I owed thousands", l. 13), except by the gift of the sun's rays, the imputation of righteousness; all glory pertains to Christ, who *is* the "sunne" (ll. 33-36).

More's disagreement with Tyndale concerns both the nature of faith and the justice of God.[80] Herbert's poem is an imitation of how faith works and of justice vindicated.[81] Christ, "who sweetly took / Our flesh and frailtie, death and danger" (ll.23-4), authors a new life, overcoming even the "dust" of mortality, and is the basis both for the "conceit" of faith and of Herbert's poetic imitation. The speaker, and so the reader, can then not only "beleeve" that he owes nothing, but "liv[e] accordingly" (ll. 14, 15). His life-imitation is based on, and becomes part of, the "sacred storie". Those who, like More, imagined some power inherent in man's moral being, would see starvation, sickness and debt as more appropriate metaphors than Herbert's banqueting, healing, wealth, and glory (stanzas 2-8). All these desirable things are gained in epic by the *agon* of the hero, and in non-reformed theologies by the earthly life of the soul which must prove itself worthy; the faith of Herbert's speaker / reader may have them by appropriating Christ's agony (ll. 23-4).

The believer is "bright" in his status before God. This is not from military or moral virtue celebrated in epic, "reall light", but from the imputation of Christ's inherent and achieved virtue:

> When creatures had no reall light
> Inherent in them, thou didst make the sunne
> Impute a lustre, and allow them bright;

---

[79] *Institutes*, 3. 2. 19 (and whole section on faith).

[80] See also Eilean ni Chuilleanhain, "The debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (3) (July 1988): 382-98.

[81] This theory of the Atonement, and also that which sets a gracious and unselfish Son against a cruel and capricious Father, and other theories, are well set out in John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, London, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986, and briefly in historical context in R.A. Finlayson, *The Story of Theology*, Tyndale Press, London, 1963.

And in this shew, what Christ hath done. (ll. 33-36)

We could say that the heroes of epic are also "allowed" brightness by the establishment of their being and fame by their creators, and by the secondary candle-flames of their real-life imitators. But Herbert is not talking about being bright with fame, *clarus*. The light referred to here is that of a shining righteousness before God.[82] Herbert adds his own image to that of Paul (Romans 4; 5:12-21; Galatians 3:6-7) to show that the brightness is entirely imputed, not inherent or infused.

Renaissance criticism generally agreed that epic should be at or near the top of a proposed generic ladder.[83] But 'Faith' questions this as well. As so often, Herbert's meaning includes both literary theory and soteriology.

A peasant may beleeve as much
As a great Clerk, and reach the highest stature.
Thus dost thou make proud knowledge bend and crouch
While grace fills up uneven nature. (ll.29-32)

"Proud knowledge" and perhaps high social status are necessary for a full appreciation of epic, and the coming of Renaissance humanism merely changed the nature of the difficulty, from having to penetrate the veil of allegory to needing a scholarly knowledge of language and contextual meaning. Francesco Buonamici, amongst others, suggested that tragedy and, particularly, epic, were only for the "well reared" and those of governing potential. Epic "is more stable and moves the passions less [than tragedy]; emotion is more necessary in rude hearts; thus it requires a less rude listener."[84]

The dispute in England over the use of the vernacular had as its sometimes hidden motivation the problem of the access by the "rude" to poetry, particularly heroic poetry.[85] "Grace", however, allows the highest subject -- God -- to be celebrated in lyric, the song-

---

[82] Herbert is here combining three ideas: the righteous shine -- Matthew 13:43, "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun"; the fact that "the righteous" are not so by their own works or nature; and that such imputation can be compared to objects or air shining because of sunlight, not intrinsically.

[83] Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 2, ch. 13.

[84] Buonamici, *Discorsi Poetici nella Accademia fiorentina in difesa d'Aristotile*, 1597, in Weinberg, Vol. 2, 694.

[85] See also my chapter "Decorum".

form of the commoner.[86] The simply rounded, singable a b a b, 4-5-5-4 rhyme and metre imply that it is faith, not the "art or strength" of the "wise or strong" (ll. 25, 26), which is the means to either poetic or salvific "blisse". This is suggested also in 'A True Hymne'. Not that Herbert is suggesting, or practising, artlessness: the very doubleness of meaning precludes that. The art that is excluded, or exceeded, is that thought to be found in Adam, or Aeneas, inherently. "See how thy *beggar* works on thee / By art", says a seemingly presumptuous speaker in 'Gratefulnesse' (123) (my emphasis); the writer / beggar, confident in having nothing and receiving all, knows art, like faith, is a gift. If words are God's, and God has been made accessible by the sacrifice of Christ, then poetry may be for the meanest. Herbert is very far from the intellectual and social arrogance of many of his contemporary literary critics.

The poetic immortality hoped for by the pagan poet lauding immortal deeds in epic is replaced, in 'Faith', by the certainty of bodily resurrection.

> What though my bodie runne to dust?
> Faith cleaves unto it, counting ev'ry grain
> With an exact and most particular trust,
> Reserving all for flesh again. (ll. 41-44)

The poet's body will "runne to dust" (l. 41), but so will his poem, if more slowly. The epic poet, once the sometimes nameless oral singer of valiant deeds, had by the Renaissance become important in himself as a contributor to language and to life. Hobbes defends the reading of epic poets not primarily because we may through them learn about virtuous deeds and noble characters, although he does speak of this, but because the poet's use of language is itself somehow exemplary to the reader. These new "virtues ... are comprehended all in this one word, discretion", and may be itemised as choice of words, construction, contrivance, elevation of the fancy, justice and impartiality (of the poet), clearness of descriptions, and amplitude of the subject. To Hobbes, Homer is the hero more than Achilles; immortality belongs to the writer, not to (and no longer even because of) the hero's virtues enshrined by that writer.[87]

---

[86] Courtier and cavalier of course also used simple singable forms, but for love poetry, not for matters of "the highest stature". See also Coburn Freer's interesting comparisons of the simple forms of the Sternhold and Hopkins psalms with the Sidney psalms. *Music for a King,* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

[87] *Preface to Homer's Odysses*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 618, 619; compare Hobbes' rather tongue-in-cheek praise of Davenant's *Gondibert*, which "would last as long as either the Aeneid or the Iliad" but for it being in English (*A Preface to Gondibert ... with an Answer by Mr Hobbs*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 617).

The omnipotence of death, however, makes such immortality metaphoric. Herbert is concerned always with actual immortality, never with poetic. Is Herbert's "exact and most particular" poetic technique therefore pointless? No, because the believer's becoming "flesh again" validates art, the product of fleshly existence. There is no demeaning of things done in the body, such as writing poetry, in a belief-system which makes the body eternal as well as the soul, and whose God came in flesh. Paul's resurrection analogy of differing "glories" in I Corinthians 15: 40-41 goes on to speak, this time without analogy, of a body "raised in glory" (43). There is no dualistic hierarchy here of flesh and spirit; nor is there in Herbert. But though the poetic art is valued, it is not the means of the overcoming of death. The title *The Temple* suggests immortality, but through the indwelling of God, not poetic fame (I Corinthians 3:16). I Corinthians 3: 11-15 suggests that when "the whole world turn to coal" ('Vertue' 87), when "all things burn" ('Decay', 99), what will last is the virtue of Christ and his made-virtuous ones, not the epic glory of a poem, its subject, or its author.

Epic, nationhood, and language are related themes in the English Renaissance, and in 'The British Church' (109) and 'The Sonne' (167). Herbert wrote in a climate of "theological turmoil which provoked, or at least justified, political turmoil".[88] *The Temple* reflects the historical situation, but its theological groundedness gives its patriotism a more secure foundation than epic's humanism. These poems glorify Christ rather than nation, although the "elect nation" idea does appear ("none but thee", 'The British Church' l. 30). 'The British Church', a poem neither ornate nor undressed in its imagery, diction, and structure, is an embodied *via media* demonstrating theology as the foundation for poetry:

> 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. (ll. 1-6)

In making a poetic imitation of the national church, there may seem to be some epic-like exaltation of nation. What is "perfect … sweet and bright" is not, however, the nation, but the church: not the actual and visible church in England, but the ideal. 'Church-rents and

---

[88] Ilona Bell, "George Herbert and the English Reformation", *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (3) (Sept. 1977): 219-244.

schismes' (140), a sadder poem, indicates Herbert's clear view of the human imperfections of contemporary Christianity in Britain. The Mother / Rose in that poem is blamed for allowing "debates and fretting jealousies" to weaken her, so that the (Presbyterian?) "north-winde" can tear her to shreds.

Hutchinson explains "dates her letters" in terms of Herbert's use of the calendar, and this may be its immediate reference.[89] But the image here is also that of a child's first experience of beauty, its mother, and of that mother as the first teacher of "letters" and, as we see from *Memoriae Matris Sacrum*, of faith. [90] "Mother" is a significant contrast to the nation -- *patria* -- defined by its military history and by the epic record of conquest. The church, female, is not an epic subject. The people of God are defined in the Old Testament as a beloved yet straying "woman" (see Hosea, for example), and in the New Testament as the bride of Christ. Herbert here makes her maternal, a Christian substitute for Fatherland.[91] The "imitation" Herbert is suggesting here is astonishing: the British church is the authority for beauty's letters, that is, poetry. These "letters" owe their true being to the Church, the body of Christ. This at first appears to contradict the purely word-centred authority, literary and spiritual, of "thy book alone" in 'Discipline'. Yet there is no contradiction, because the church, to Reformation England, was the creation of and under the authority of the word written.[92]

"Double-moated" (l. 29) may seem praise of nation. [93] Rather, the church is protected, in the providence of God over geography, by a Channel keeping out Papal influences and letting in the truths of the Reformation. It also, in the reigns of Henry and Mary, provided both an escape route and a safety barrier for the fleeing supporters of the Reformation.

---

[89] Hutchinson 515.

[90] *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert*, tr. Mark McCloskey and Paul Murphy, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1965.

[91] Claude Summers compares "brides" in Spenser, Donne and Herbert (though not in the context of epic patriotism) in "The Bride of the Apocalypse and the Quest for True Religion", *"Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse": The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1987. See also Liam Semler, "The Protestant Birth Ethic … Contexts for *Eliza's Babes*", *English Literary Renaissance* 30 (3) (2000): 432-456, and references therein to the "bride" topos.

[92] See Calvin's *Institutes*, 4.10.23 and *passim*. Compare Hooker's careful qualifications: *Ecclesiastical Polity*, II. viii. 5-7 (ed. Keble, 1836, 420-423). See John Coolidge's comments in *The Pauline Renaissance in England*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, esp. ch. 1.

[93] Compare "A moat defensive to a house … whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege of Neptune". Shakespeare, *Richard II*, II. I.46, 48, 62-3. In a speech perhaps in Herbert's mind, King James associated the "moat", the fairly new monarchy and the fairly new faith, and Britain as a wife (but not Christ's). The nation is: "a little world within itself, being entrenched and fortified round about with a natural, and yet admirable strong pond or ditch, whereby all the former fond fears of this nation are quite cut off … I am the husband and all the whole isle is my lawful wife". Quoted in Claire MacEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood 1590-1612*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 141.

The Elizabethan Settlement has been presented as a compromise enabling the "Mother" to choose from two styles, so that all her "aray" is derivative. No doubt it seemed so politically; but Herbert suggests that his (ideal) church is original, "Mother" even to errant Continental children. She is the standard by which they must measure themselves:

> A fine aspect in fit aray
> Neither too mean, nor yet too gay,
> Shows who is best.
> Outlandish looks may not compare:
> For all they either painted are
> Or else undrest. (ll. 7-12)

But here a further caution is needed. The "painted" and "undrest" women are ecclesiological rather than doctrinal. Christopher Hodgkins has shown that 'The British Church' cannot be used, as Hutchinson suggests, to create an Anglo-Catholic Herbert.[94] Doctrinally, Herbert's "Mother" was Calvinistic.[95] C. and K. George describe the "rents" in the "brave rose" ('Church-rents and schismes') as "not doctrinal but almost entirely ecclesiastical or institutional". [96] It was the clothes and cosmetics, or lack of them, which provided the point of difference from Continental "mothers" on hills and in valleys. The nature of Herbert's *via media* conception is important in determining the relation between Herbert and epic. A poet who is Calvinistic in soteriology cannot consistently glorify hero or nation.

'The British Church' indicates that poetic and spiritual authority are inextricable. To Herbert, the authority for beautiful poetry is the British church. "Beautie" classically found a false "place" in Venus, who as the "mother" of Aeneas, and so of Rome, provides

---

[94] *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert,* 1993, 149-52, 165-7.

[95] *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571): A Facsimile ... of the 1623 Edition*, intro. Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, Gainesville, FL, 1968.
On the Jacobean church as "Calvinistic", see Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954; K. and C. George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961; Ilona Bell, "Setting Foot Into Divinity", 1977; Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, and "Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635", *Past and Present* 114 (Feb. 1987): 32-76; Gene E. Veith, *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1985; C.J. Summers, "The Bride of the Apocalypse and The Quest for True Religion", 1987; Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert*, 1993; Daniel Doerksen, *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne, and the English Church before Laud,* Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press, 1997, esp. 16-19.

[96] *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation*, 1961, 354.

a relationship between the beauty of epic poetry and the "virtus" of founding a nation. In this sense, even patriarchal Rome had a maternal aspect. Rome was now a symbol for a corrupt church, however, and her church practices seen as idolatry. Therefore she can no longer be the "mother" of the true beauty of poetry, and is not an appropriate authority for the writings of a "new" nation:

> 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 e'en her face from kissing shines
> For her reward. (ll. 13-18)

Herbert is here using the frequent Old Testament association between sexual immorality and idolatry, and the equally frequent Tudor and Stuart association between idolatry and the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The latter has only man-made exteriority, a painted face (and that at second hand) "for her reward". "Reward" also implies materialism, of medieval Catholicism's indulgences, for example. The glittering panoply of Bale's "Whore of Babylon", [97] she who claims to be "Mother" but has her reward only on earth,[98] is not the authority for nation, church or poetry.

The British Church is not a lukewarm mediocrity, a poor compromise of grey between two striking colours, but is the perfection from which either side has strayed: "The mean, thy praise and glorie is" (l. 26). This "middle", as both Christopher Hodgkins and Daniel Doerksen have said, is not a messy patchwork of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but is itself the original, the standard.[99] In the neatness of his metre and stanzaic form, in the "middle" style of his diction and metaphors (neither high-flown and extended as in epic, ode and tragedy, or base as in satire and comedy), Herbert presents an imitation of the British church as the centre, the modest, the pure. From this Christ-honouring authority alone can beauty write, "dating" its imitation not from a pagan antiquity or from a Roman, or Genevan, aberration, but from the "praise and glorie" which belongs to Christ's true spouse. [100] This "she" is also "mother"[101] to all who are thankful to the

---

[97] John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches*, in Claire MacEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood 1590-1612*, 27.

[98] Herbert may have had in mind Jesus' words about the outwardness of the Pharisees, who "disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. … [T]hey have their reward." Matthew 6:16.

[99] Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society,* 1993; Doerksen, *Conforming to the Word*, 1997.

[100] It can be argued that "she in the valley … who nothing wears" refers not to Genevan Calvinism but to Anabaptist radicalism. The Anabaptists had Luther and Calvin as well as secular authorities against them, and were far more drastic in their ecclesiastical reforms than the moderate followers of Calvin, who himself said "If it has the ministry of the Word and honours it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be considered a church. …. In this way we preserve for the universal Church its unity, which devilish spirits have always tried to sunder; and we do not defraud of their authority those

English Reformation, a better foundation, to Herbert, both for writing and for a nation than the epic virtue of Homer and Virgil. Only such children know the "love" of God through his "grace" (ll. 26-29).

Language, nation and belief are intertwined in 'The Sonne' (167). The form is the sonnet, but the matter is epic -- the East to West journey of the church, carrying the humility and the glory of Christ to "fresh … Western discoveries", as elaborated, more bleakly, in the heroic couplets of the pseudo-epic "The Church Militant". The work of Christ needs neither epic form nor ancient language; it is its own authorisation. The poem is not a mere lyric addition to the continuing English Renaissance debate about the use of the vernacular, but makes Christ the authority for the nation's very being. Virgil's epic bestowed dynastic authority upon Augustus, and itself was authorised by Augustus being his hidden subject, his primary and ideal reader, and in a sense the object of his instruction. The Bible, now translated into English as one of the "Western discov'ries of posteritie", reveals one far greater than Augustus. Aeneas, son of Venus, authorised Augustus, Rome, and Latin; Christ, the Son of Man and of God, has authorised England and the English language. The very language of this nation contains in one word the name of the once-worshipped sun, on which all natural life depends, and its infinite superior, the Son of God:

> Let forrain nations of their language boast,
> What fine varieties each tongue affords:
> I like our language, as our men and coast:
> Who cannot dresse it well, want wit, not words.
> How neatly doe we give one onely name
> To parents issue and the sunnes bright starre!
> A sonne is light and fruit; a fruitfull flame
> Chasing the fathers dimnesse, carri'd farre
> From the first man in th'East, to fresh and new
> Western discov'ries of posteritie.
> So in one word our Lords humilitie
> We turn upon him in a sense most true:

---

lawful assemblies which have been set up in accordance with local needs" (*Institutes* 4. 1. 9, tr. Battles, 1960). See also Daniel Doerksen, *Conforming To The Word*, 1997, esp. 22 and 39. Doerksen's example on p.52 of Dr. Mountford, St. Martin-in-the-Fields 1602-33, being "no more addicted to the conclave of Rome, then addicted to the parlour of Amsterdam" is pertinent, Amsterdam being a centre for *un*Calvinistic radicalism. See also Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority,* and Richard Strier, "A Polemic Note" in *Papers on Language and Literature* 17 (3) (1981): 347-52, esp. 351.

[101] Herbert's own mother is in the background of this poem as a model for "beautie's" imitation in life and in writing: "She never diverted towards the Papist, in undervaluing the Scripture; nor towards the Separatist, in undervaluing the Church" (Donne's memorial sermon for Magdalen Herbert, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson, Berkeley, University of California, 1956, 8.90 ff.).

For what Christ once in humblenesse began
We him in glorie call, *The Sonne of Man.*

There are two language issues here, and they reflect the issues in the contemporary apologies: the vernacular in relation to the classical languages, and English in relation to other vernaculars. The primary purpose of language is to praise God. This can best be done in the language of the heart, just as God's revelation is best received in one's own tongue, not mediated through a clerical hierarchy using a learned language.[102] This is the Reformation argument against using Latin for congregational Bible reading, prayer, or praise: thus prayer and ministry must always be "in a tongue ... understanded of the people".[103] Herbert therefore chose the sonnet, traditionally a vernacular form. The sonnet form itself, then, says something about the providence of God in the movement of history ("Western discov'ries"). [104] This poem presents the possibility and even the superiority of using a humble language to praise a redemption begun in "humblenesse".[105] The choice of language is not to be determined on purely technical grounds, as when Sidney finds English more poetic than other vernaculars in various ways.[106] Those technicalities result from God's blessing on England. Rhyme is a vernacular characteristic, and English rhyme, as Sidney says, is particularly suitable to poetry.[107] Therefore rhyme is essential to Herbert's argument in this poem: the use of rhyme is itself a support of English.

Further, while Sidney points out that rhyming is easier in English, Herbert demonstrates that the very structures of English words convey the truth of the Incarnation. By straightforward statement and by demonstration, the poem shows English to be better than other vernaculars, because of its ambiguities. In playing aural tricks, Herbert is here again showing that the "wit" to "dresse" language well is intended to be for the praise of Christ.[108] And the ambiguity is not confined to the homophone. Christ is in glory, yet he

---

[102] There were those who argued that English national credentials would be better supported by (a purified) Latin. See Anthony Miller, *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern Culture*, Early Modern Literature in History, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, 12; J. W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England,* Leeds, Francis Cairns, 1990, *passim.*

[103] Article 24. Compare 1662 preface: " ... it be appointed that all things shall be read and sung in the Church in the English tongue, to the end that the congregation may be thereby edified."

[104] In "George Herbert's 'The Sonne': In Defense of the English Language" in *Essential Articles For the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*, Hamden, CT, Archon, 1979, Frederick von Ende suggests, however, that the argument is in the form of a classical oration. If this is so, it may be that Herbert was bringing both traditions, the classical and the vernacular, into a new form for the praise of God in Christ.

[105] For the continuity of Latin, see J. W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture,* 1990.

[106] *Defence*, 72-74.

[107] *Defence*, 72-74.

[108] See Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God*, Toronto, University of

is there still "the son of man". His voluntary humility has made him still accessible as son of man, representative Saviour; he shines as mankind's sun because he is mankind's son.[109] It is a glory by means of humility (compare Philippians 2:6 ff). Herbert is suggesting that only English can cope "neatly" with such theological complexities.

"I like our language" defends English not only against ancient languages and other vernaculars but against attempts to force English metre into classical moulds. Puttenham ridiculed Stanyhurst's attempts to "English" Latin heroic hexameter,[110] and it is not hard to agree that the unfortunate Stanyhurst had let his patriotism eclipse his aesthetics.[111] Despite Harvey's better attempts, and his wish to be epitaphed as "the Inventour of the English Hexameter",[112] the project was doomed from the start, as Nashe pointed out:

> Our English tongue is … too bad to imitate the Greeke and Latine … [Stanyhurst] trod a foule, lumbring, boystrous, wallowing measure in his translation of Virgil. … This Clyme of ours [the hexameter] cannot thrive in.[113]

Likewise Alexander Neville: "Consider the grossness of our own country[s] language, which can by no means aspire to the high lofty Latinists style." [114] Milton did his best to provide the ultimate answer to his own complaint that "England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskilful handling of monks and mechanics".[115]

Herbert's support for his language, that "Who cannot dress it well, want wit, not words", would have found approval with Gascoigne in 1575 and with E.K. in 1579:

Toronto Press, 1981, particularly her introduction. Although her view of *The Temple* is more "sacramental" than mine, I share her interest in Herbert's use of language as itself an evidence of Incarnational authority. Also see William Shullenberger, "'Ars Praedicandi' in George Herbert's Poetry" in *Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse,* ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, 1987; Joseph Mazzeo, *Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1964; and Chauncey Wood, "A Reading of 'Coloss. 3.3'" in *George Herbert Journal* 2 (2) (Spring 1979): 15-24.

[109] "Son of man" refers to divinity becoming representative humanity: "The Son of man came … to give his life a ransom for many", "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost", Luke 19:10, Mark 10:45. But it is used also of divinity in judgment: "Upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle", Revelation 14.

[110] Smith, II, 122.

[111] See Richard Stanyhurst, *The First Four Books of the Aeneid … in English Heroic Verse*, 1583, or the extract in Robin Sowerby, *The Classical Legacy in English Renaissance Poetry*, London, Longman, 1997, 38.

[112] Smith, II, 230.

[113] Smith, II, 240.

[114] Vickers, *Criticism*, 127.

[115] Vickers, *Criticism*, 593.

> The most ancient English words are those of one syllable, so that the more monosyllables that you use the truer Englishman you shall seem, and the less you shall smell of the inkhorn.
>
> Our mother tongue (which truly of itself is both full enough for prose and stately enough for verse) hath long time been counted most bare and barren of both. ... [Some] have made our English tongue a gallimaufry or hodgepodge of all other speeches. [116]

"Who cannot dresse it well, want wit, not words" was a sentiment also expressed by Puttenham, speaking of "the Latins and the Greeks" :

> Our language [is] no less copious, pithy, and significative than theirs, our conceits the same, and our wits no less apt to devise and imitate than theirs were.[117]

Richard Carew in 1596 was pleased with "how neatly do we give one onely name ...":

> by Bill are meant a weapon, a scroll, and a birds beake; by Grave, sober, a tombe, and to carve; and by light, march, match, file, sore, and praye, the semblable.[118]

Although "sun / Son" is homophonic rather than homonymic, Herbert delighted like Carew in the possibilities of English, but unlike Carew knew that only the work of "the Sonne" and not the imitative poet could create new people. Carew, inclining to the Sidneian "maker" model, perceived the near-creative potential of the English language:

> our speech does not consist only of wordes, but in a sorte even of deedes, as when we expresse a matter by Metaphors, wherin the English is very frutefull and forcible [119]

but Herbert saw that the "fruitfull" Son of God and of Adam ('The Sonne', l.7), not merely language or its "deedes", would make a true nation.

Herbert agreed with those critics who favoured the use of English and its natural rhythms, but disagreed with those who believed that wisdom and virtue were intimately associated with the written remains of Greece and Rome, and who held that even the imitated technicalities of antique languages would somehow yield a virtuous nation. The idea of imitative national heroism lay behind the whole dispute. The argument between Campion and Daniel over metre and rhyme, for example, was as much to do with forming a glorious nation as with poetic competitiveness. Campion, in 1602, gives an example of

---

[116] Vickers, *Criticism,* Milton, 593, Gascoigne, 166, E. K., 178.
[117] Vickers, *Criticism*, 193.
[118] Smith, II, 258
[119] Smith, II, 288.

English imitation of one classical metre. Even though he is arguing against rhyme, one line of Campion's poem may have been a source for 'The Sonne':

> I will set down a short poem in licentiate iambics, which may give more light to them that shall hereafter imitate … :
>
> Go [English numbers] …
> Tell them that pity or perversely scorn
> Poor English poesy as the slave to rhyme,
> You are the lofty numbers that revive
> Triumphs of princes or stern tragedies …
> [Apollo] will turn his glory from the sunny climes
> The North-bred wits alone to patronise.
> *Let France their Bartas, Italy Tasso praise*;
> Phoebus shuns none but in their flight from him. [120]

Not only the italicized line, but the "Phoebus" reference, may have given Herbert the occasion to defend rhyme by example and to point out that wit, north-bred or not, is given for the purpose of the praise of God. Daniel replied to Campion that metre, rhyme and diction bow to "custom that is before all law, nature that is above all art." Since "every language hath her proper number or measure fitted to use or delight … our own accustomed phrase … would express us to better delight than all this idle affectation of antiquity or novelty can do". [121]

Herbert enters into this argument by taking it into a much higher realm. Linguistic glory comes from the imitation of the redemptive work of the "Sonne". England may be a "sonne" of "the fathers glory" in an earthly sense, the "Western posteritie" of Greece and Rome, an epic *translatio imperii*; but the true glory of the nation must be derivative of the glory of Christ, not of Troy or Rome. This is the true "chasing [of] the father's dimness", the second Adam chasing away the penalty for and propensity to sin which the first Adam contracted (Romans 5:12-17; I Corinthians 15:22). England cannot glorify herself by re-burnishing a faded antiquity, but only by being shone upon by that *Sun* of man who is the light of the world (John 1:4,9).

"A sense most true" refers to the belief that the very way language works is provided by the providence of God, and is tied up with the choice by God of England. The ability of English to be ambiguous in sound (and at that time, often orthographically as well) gives deeper meaning to "sonne". Such ambiguity distinguishes England from "forrain

---

120 Vickers, *Criticism*, 436, my emphasis.
121 Vickers, *Criticism,* 442, 453.

nations", and, far from being a handicap, is given by God. Although "we give one onely name" and "we turn upon him" might imply that language is a human production, culturally determined, the direction of the sonnet is towards the sovereign purpose of God in choosing England for his praise ("we him in glorie call, *The Sonne of Man*"). "Posteritie" being "a fruitfull flame", "fresh and new", contradicts the Renaissance view of deterioration, of the inadequacy of the moderns compared to the ancients. Herbert has a very biblical view of the deterioration of relationship between man and God, but this is a relationship capable of renewal, as is fallen man himself. That is what this poem demonstrates; it is not just an argument for the English language.

There are three related strands of "overgoing" in this sonnet: Christ is more glorious than Adam; Christ in heaven is more glorious than Christ on earth; England, now, is more glorious than its easterly origins. The last is subtle, and it may be an over-determination to find a parallel between Christ's glorification and England's glory. If the parallel is there, so is the caution implied in the word "humilitie": "Let this mind [Christ's] be [also] in you", says Paul, to make yourself of no reputation (Philippians 2:5-8). As Adam's son, Christ's inimitable redemptive work was in the "humilitie" of flesh. Yet he is "our Lord", England's Lord, not on the soil of England but "in glorie". This alone is the basis for any national glory, linguistic or otherwise. So the way is prepared for the final couplet and the return to the God-given equivocation of English. The "Sunne" of heaven has no "yesterday and today" (Hebrews 13:7), yet as redemptive "Sonne" had an apparent beginning, so that man may have (unlike the sonnet) no end.

The sonnet's theological ending seems to have strayed from the patriotic beginning. But in fact this little anti-epic subtly makes England the "Western discov'rie" which supersedes all extant and past nations. "We" (l. 14) does not here mean every person or even every believer, but "every speaker of English". This new Israel alone has the language which recognizes, and exemplifies, the double nature of Christ. Yet that language, with its theological connotations, was also travelling to further "Western discov'ries" in the American settlements. "The Church Militant" is not so sanguine about either the parent "new Israel" or the American child. But this sonnet celebrates the "Sonne", and the westward-trailing "Sinne" is here excluded.

"I like our language" also implies an approval of the vernacular Bible for "our men and coast". Translation of the Bible, however, like translation of the pagan classics, involves some interpretation on the part of the translator. The reader's dependence upon

interpretation was arguably greater in the days of widespread illiteracy, allegorisation of the Bible, and submission to the hermeneutical authority of Rome. But translation into English could still be said to distance the reader somewhat from the Word of God. Rather than considering this a problem, however, Herbert glories in its freeing possibilities. "How neatly" -- and how boldly -- "do we give one onely name" to sun and son: for the Hebrew and Greek do not. Just as English imitation of epic, by pen or as moral example, forced a re-contextualisation because of the geographical and temporal distance between Renaissance England and Homer's, or even Virgil's, world of ideas, so does the use of the vernacular in the "imitation" of biblical truths necessitate, in Herbert's eyes happily, a certain creative re-formulation. "New Western discov'ries" include the potential of the vernacular, particularly this vernacular, newly to express (not, of course, to create) truths of faith.

English allows national glory by means of national praise of God, so that epic and its anthropocentrism is not necessary. "Neatly", in fourteen lines, not twelve or twenty-four books, the glory of England and English is presented: "one onely name … the Sonne of man".[122] Language is also a link between the two levels of Herbert's poetry (the experiential and the eternal) and between the two levels of Christian being, which the poetry reflects. The ambiguities of English reflect the paradox of a God incarnate in "humblenesse" and a "Sonne of Man" reigning in "glorie".

---

[122] Compare Acts 4:12: "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved".

4. "The Church Militant" as Anti-Epic

> A sonne is light and fruit; a fruitfull flame
> … carri'd farre
> From the first man in th'East, to fresh and new
> Western discov'ries of posteritie.
>
> 'The Sonne', ll. 7-10.

"The Church Militant", a fairly long poem largely in heroic couplets, may at first appear a miniaturised epic with the church or, sometimes interchangeably, "religion", as hero. A westward odyssey is made by the chosen people of God. Sin follows, producing all manner of trouble, testing the heroic capabilities of the church. All the assaults are met by fresh strategies or geographic renewals. The opposition is mocked, and Christian versions of "Prowesse" (the strength of Achilles) and "Arts" (the wiles of Odysseus) (l. 75) triumph over the forces of darkness on earth and their unseen machinery.

But these suggestions of epic are misleading. "The Church Militant" in fact protests against any association of epic glory with the gospel. Glory is given to God alone. The church is constantly humiliated by the dogging presence of sin, and the poem ends in judgment for the church as well as for the world. The imitation here, both formal and thematic, is of the already-written "counsels" of God contrasting with, yet underlying, the circular "conquest" of the world by both church and sin. Human history is dark, and neither church nor author is glorified. The poem is circular in that God's judgment is presupposed from the beginning. Yet time and geography are neither linear nor circular to the "Almightie Lord" who "seest and rulest all things as one"(ll. 1-2). To God all is "now" and "here". A poem cannot imitate this state. Its imitation can only be of a chronological and spatial human perception of circumstances. In this case, however, such imitation is underwritten by the knowledge, available only by Biblical revelation and to faith, that God is using apparent defeat for his glory and that of his people. The closest approximation to a poetic imitation of this twofold state of being is to show, using a circumnavigatory trope, the movements of history as ending where they began, in the purposes of God who in "not the decrees of power, but bands of love" (l. 10) entered time and space.

An idea of improvement, material as well as moral, was implied in the Renaissance imitative use of epic.[123] National status, and therefore individual well-being, would be benefitted by the values (and language) of ancient epic and the writing of new epic. But the only hope for mankind or nation held out by "The Church Militant" is in obeying and loving "thy counsels". There is no prophecy, based on past deeds, of a straight upward line of betterment. Any nationalistic hope is demolished by phrases such as "future bane" (l. 239).

Joseph Summers finds "The Church Militant" "strange", but says that it "approach[es] the heroic mode".[124] I believe that it opposes the heroic mode. Some recent criticism sees Herbert's poetry as a means of an attempted worldly upward climb, and includes his "nationalistic" poetry in this projected advancement.[125] Yet this is not a poem which would win favour from those who saw England's Protestant status as a means to England's glory. In fact it may be seen as Herbert's own implied attack on epic ethos and on contemporary theory which promulgated epic and its imitation as examplary for Protestant nationhood and personal Christian values. It is also important, in any consideration of Herbert's theological poetic, to consider why a poem whose title implies military values is not imitative of epic.

The poem is immediately addressed to God. *The Faerie Queene*, by contrast, has the monarch as both the object and the educative subject of the imitation. And Puttenham, in making Elizabeth both poet and exemplary epic subject, sets a model:

> Yourself … the most excellent poet; by your princely purse, favours, and countenance, making …the poor man rich, the lewd well learned, the coward courageous, and the vile both noble and valiant. Then for imitation …your person …representing Venus in countenance, in life Diana, Pallas for government, and Juno in all honour and magnificence.[126]

---

[123] The first use of the word "progress" to mean perceived human benefit in material terms was in 1603 (OED).

[124] "Sir Calidore and the Country Parson"; "George Herbert and Anglican Traditions", *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1 & 2) (1992-3), 54, 37.

[125] Marion White Singleton, *God's Courtier*, Cambridge University Press, 1987; Michael Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991; Richard Strier, "Impossible Worldliness", *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995; Cristina Malcolmson, *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic*, 1999.

[126] *The Faerie Queene*, see Dedication, the Proems, and throughout the poem; Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, in Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 1999, 193.

In addressing and praising God alone, Herbert's imitation in "The Church Militant" is quite unlike that of ancient or contemporary epic.[127] Neither monarch nor nation is praised. It is well known that the censors disapproved of the criticism of England in lines 235-258.[128] But even from the beginning the poem dissociates national from epic glory. God alone is to be glorified, who has both secured the future of his church (an entity not equivalent, in Herbert, to geographic nation) and decreed its shadowed westward flight.

"The Church Militant" is a phrase of Cranmer's from the Communion Service in the Book of Common Prayer: "Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's church [,] militant here in earth." The allusion is biblical. The metaphor of the church as an army is found throughout the New Testament. Matthew 16:18b, for example, often taken as a promise of passive security, in fact implies aggression, for "gates" are besieged, not besiegers: "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it".

Yet Herbert's poem suggests a rather fugitive church. No gates of hell are shattering in this history and prophecy of the church. But Herbert's imitative poetic, as has been said, is double. In this poem, for the church, the surface experience is failure; but the deeper, and permanently true situation, is the triumph of the purposes of God, and therefore of his church. This is reflected in form, with two conceits.

One conceit draws a paradoxical contrast between the apparent flatness of maps on which east and west are as widely separated as possible, and the truth of the global nature of the earth, which means that east and west are, in one sense, the same. "The Church Militant", while not being as obviously circular in word use as 'Sinnes Round', does end where it began -- in the east and with the glory of God -- even while it appears to be taking a westward journey. The Bible confirms the continual "progress" of the church. Neither the church -- and "sinne" -- will end in Britain nor

[127] This does not make "The Church Militant" a private expression to God. Its being addressed to, and praising, God, is representatively exemplary. It is as didactic as "The Church-porch".

[128] See Hutchinson, 546 (also his westward-gospel references); Patrides, *Heritage*, 58; Hodgkins, *Authority*, 184-7. In c. 1631, Thomas Hooker said "God is going from England". "The Danger of

even America, but "when they have accomplished their round" they will be met "in the east" by "judgement" (ll. 267-277).

The other conceit is based on the fact that the sun appears to rise in the east, travel across the sky, and set in the west; yet its apparent setting, or ending, is its rising, or its beginning, somewhere else. "Sunne" can never shake off "Darknesse" if either the old flat, or even the new global, view of geography and history becomes all: that is, if truth is thought to be limited to human perception and experience, and relative, therefore, to culture. "Thy word is all, if we could spell" ('The Flower'): *if* we could spell, then "thy counsels" would be seen to be all. If we could see according to the truth and not appearances, if we would judge by what God has said and not by the authority of our standpoint, we would understand the "bands of love" which tie Spouse to "Almightie" Husband. We would see the events of history, even its darkness -- even the darkness which has afflicted the Spouse through her own fault -- as being for the sake of the glory of Christ and the good of the church. Such providence can only be known and appreciated if "thy counsels" (meaning the available Bible, not the unavailable meanings behind God's providences) are "deare to me" (ll. 47, 99, 155, 209, 278). Geography and history do not provide the sum of meaning. This poem implies rather than states that judgment will end darkness, and the church militant will become the church triumphant, the city of God, where there is no night for the Lamb is its sun (Revelation 21:25, 22:5).

A further reason for a poem whose content appears to ironise its title is that Herbert does not equate church and nation.[129] While much epic equates divine purpose with land and nation, *The Temple* never praises a church whose boundaries are co-

---

Desertion (A Farewell Sermon)", *Thomas Hooker: Writings in England and Holland*, ed. G. Williams *et al*, Cambridge, MA, Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, 1974, 234, 244-6.

[129] The Foxe tradition of providential Protestantism in Elizabethan literature equated church and nation. Richard Hooker agrees with this in the sense that Elizabeth was the gift of God for the preservation of the reformed religion (*Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, Book IV, xiv.7). He distinguishes the functions of church and commonwealth , though not their constituency: "We hold that … there is not any man of the Church of England but the same man is also a member of the commonwealth; nor is any man a member of the commonwealth, which is not also of the Church of England" (*E.P.* VIII. i. 1-7). *The Works of … Richard Hooker*, ed. J. Keble, 1836, Vol. 3.2, 411. Peter Lake points out that Hooker, while associating church and "England", did not necessarily equate church and "saved", that is, visible and invisible: *Anglicans and Puritans?*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1988, especially 162-182. See also Anthony Milton's discussion of various views of the constituency and boundaries of the visible and invisible church (including those of John Davenant, Herbert's bishop) in "The Church of

terminous with a geographical empire won by conquest. Even 'The British Church' is double-moated "by thy grace", not by the present or historical strength of man. Therefore whatever difficulties the church faced could not be solved by changes in England's economic, political, or international status. In reverse, however, the church does make an impact on the nation in these areas, particularly through godly individuals; "The Church-porch" is an example of such a vision. "The Church Militant" has not much of such hopefulness, however. Summers' "strange" might be redefined as "dark".

There is darkness in ancient epic, certainly. *The Iliad*, and particularly, *The Aeneid*, do not pretend that war is always glorious. Achilles' honour causes suffering for himself and for others. Rome's founding and continuance are to involve destruction of peoples and individuals as fine as their conquerors. Yet the Renaissance sometimes ignored this darkness, taking the military hero as the pattern of virtue, virtue both as moral goodness and as *virtus*, what a man ought to be. "Warfare [is] our welfare", said Gabriel Harvey; "give me the man that is meeke in spirit, lofty in zeale, simple in presumption, gallant in endevor, poore in profession, rich in performance ...Valour is their divine worke of supererogation."[130]

Harvey's mixture of Beatitudes and *bellona* is not Herbert's. Herbert is strongly against the "Christianisation" of epic glory. "The Church Militant" reveals the historic details of what 'Frailtie' says in general: that the gold of epic honour is really dust. The Church is not Herbert's epic hero. The Church is female (ll. 9 ff:). It is established by "bands of love" rather than in "power" (l. 10). The Ark of the Old Covenant "shone" in temporal "glory", but now the church is a dusty "pilgrime", with a cross / staff for knocking at doors, not a sword for hewing them down (ll. 27-30). "Religion" in the Rome of early Christianity causes the warrior to care more for the glory of Christ's wounds than his own, and temporarily to give up his spear and "the spoils of lust" (ll. 67-70). "Prowesse" seems to get a kind mention in l. 75 as a means of establishing the Gospel, but within a few lines, "Empire" is a "dying thing"; "Strength" in l. 87 is not approved, but seen as part of God's providence in preparing

---

England, Rome, and the True Church: The Demise of a Jacobean Consensus", especially 188-198, in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-42*, ed. K Fincham, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993.

the ground. It is sin who is the "Emperour" in Rome in ll. 140 and 172. And in 'L'Envoy' (199),[131] which may be the sending into the world of just "The Church Militant" rather than the entire *Temple,*[132] the "glorie" of Christ, rather than achieved by war, is to "make warre to cease" (from Psalm 46). The "envoi" tradition asks a patron to protect the literary work: this little piece, instead, asks Christ to protect his church, a church which is here biblically but unmilitarily a flock of threatened sheep.

G. J. Weinberger[133] misunderstands the ironic aspect of the title and the theology informing the poem. The church, to Weinberger, is still "striving for that salvation", "search[ing] for salvation", making "progress towards salvation". It comes about through a "human impulse to religion"; "religion sprang from man" and man can only "imagine" salvation while on this earth. But to Herbert, the Spouse is chosen at the beginning of history, and this choice is therefore placed at the beginning of the poem. Faith is not humanly initiated. The sin-harassed church throughout the poem represents the already saved. There are several allusions to Revelation, which itself is a vision of a persecuted church triumphing through the death and glory of the Lamb, not through its own never-certain, merit-based "searching".

The poem immediately introduces as its theme the rule of God over all creation, and over human "policies", even those which appear to be against him. But almost as immediately, perhaps because of the tendency to construct such sovereignty as arbitrary, cruel, or detached, Herbert introduces "love" (ll. 10 and 16) as that which the Bride of Christ, the Church, "doth prove" (l. 9). The death of Christ is also introduced early (ll. 25-6). This is no proto-Deist praise of a remote God, nor a history which gives token acknowledgement to God but whose hero and centre is really man. It is written in iambic couplets, but there is no sense of "maxims"; there is not the complacency of the human moralist as in the Augustan mock-epic. The sixteen-syllable refrain breaks the continuity five times, reminding the reader of the underlying and invincible framework of God's sovereignty.

---

[130] "Against Thomas Nashe" from *Pierce's Supererogation,* in Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. II, 258, 262.

[131] 'L'Envoy' with 'To the Queen of Bohemia' (211) is circumnavigatory, but may not be by Herbert.

[132] See Hutchinson's note, 199.

[133] "George Herbert's 'The Church Militant'", *Connecticut Review* 4 (1971): 49-57.

Having introduced the love-based decree of God as underlying all the vicissitudes of the church, the "westward" theme is introduced. The westward "movement" from Rome to Britain of the church is compared to the earlier westward movement of the church from Palestine to Rome, just as Virgil perhaps meant the westward conquests of Rome to be vindicated by the earlier westward journey of Aeneas from Troy to Italy. This similarity does not make "The Church Militant" a little epic, however. There is no analogy between Virgil's glorification of Rome and Herbert's harsh treatment of it in either its ancient pre-Christian, or its Papal, forms (ll. 139-150, ll. 157ff). The sun appears to travel from east to west; so does the church, or "religion", the patchy source of light in a fallen world. The church is both created by and the vehicle of Christ's truth, his "Spouse, / Trimme as the light" (ll. 13-14). The church is envisaged, as commonly in Reformation teaching, as beginning with Abraham.[134] Old and New Testaments are seen as one history of the work of God. As the westward movement of the sun leaves darkness in its wake, so does "Sinne" follow wherever the church is planted. "Sinne" is born in Babylon, a place representing to Reformation England not only paganism, but Papal religion. There is no escape, even to America, because the world is round and "west" eventually becomes "east" again. The church will return to the east; sin will follow; judgement will separate God's people from dark imitations, and God will be glorified.

Although later than Herbert and from a theologically opposite point of view, Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther" also uses the East-to-West conceit to comment on nationalism and religion.[135]

> Behold what heav'nly rays adorn her brows,
> What from His wardrobe her belov'd allows
> To deck the wedding-day of His unspotted spouse. . .
>
> From East to West triumphantly she rides,
> All shores are watered by her wealthy tides.

Herbert's true church, however, "alwaies sides with povertie" (l. 252). Dryden's pro-Catholic poem does have some similarities to "The Church Militant" in personifying aspects of history. This is a characteristic of epic also; but there are differences. "The

---

[134] Compare Galatians 3:7, " . . they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham", and Calvin, *Institutes*, 2. 10. 11.

[135] *Selected Poetry and Prose of John Dryden,* ed. Earl Miner, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1969, ll. 517-19, 549-50 (pp.372-3).

Church Militant" presents an imitation of true history, and, at a deeper level but not darkly concealed, the rule of that history by God. The sun is sometimes Christ himself and sometimes the sun's light and influence as the church. The church is at first a spouse, and is also compared to light, a vine, and a dove. The church travels as a pilgrim and a fugitive. Sin is sometimes darkness, sometimes various pagan manifestations, and then prophet, priest and king, amongst other counterfeits. These are largely biblical metaphors. Herbert's own is the double conceit of the flat map, representing a falsely triumphant westward movement, and of the globe as the circular, unending aspect of God's purposes. These imitatively expose reality; they do not conceal reality beneath an allegorical story, or extended epic metaphor, which can stand by itself. And any "conquest" aspect is ironised.

Herbert's metaphors, with more or less success, keep to his principle of biblical truth, of straightening rather than re-curling curled hair ('Jordan' I). They are closer to biblical explanations of reality, such as "the Lord is my shepherd" or "I am the bread of life", than to "dawn is a rosy-fingered maiden". Dryden's personifications of the Anglican church as a panther, or of the Puritans or radical sects as wolves, however satisfactory to those who agree with Dryden's theological standpoint, do not reach beyond their own wit to approach the true nature of things. Herbert's images, including the overall conceit, are biblical either in specific language or in idea.

"The Church Militant" is un-epic also in that it does not present high-born men doing fine deeds for imitation. Hobbes, despite his doubts about its usefulness, still spoke of epic as "the description of great men and great actions", for and about "great persons that have their mind on great designs"; Puttenham complained that "learned princes" no longer fashion their behaviour by epic.[136] Modern critics have agreed that the epic narrative "must be in the highest degree exemplary, and to the highest persons. It must present noble acts meriting and requiring imitation",[137] being written "*about* nobles, made *for* nobles, and performed on occasion, *by* nobles".[138]

---

[136] Hobbes' "Answer to Sir Will. D'Avenant's Preface"; Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*; both in Vickers, *Criticism*, 614, 616, 200.
[137] E.M.W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1954, 182.
[138] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface To Paradise Lost*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1942, 15.

The power of epic to produce imitative heroes was unquestioned. The westward-moving light shone not from the work of God in redeeming a people for himself, but from the progress of ancient writing from Greece to Italy to England, especially epic, which to Spenser was "the light of simple veritie", and to Jonson was "vertue pressed [and] buried" and now rediscovered. [139] "Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back, that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act?" asked Sidney, neither questioning the desire for magnanimity in his readers nor finding any strangeness in setting for his readers a pagan example, and a mythical one at that (although this last factor is, of course, part of his argument).[140] "I believe", said Harington, "the reading of a good heroical poem may make a man both wiser and honester".[141] Renaissance desires for an ethical justification of poetry read, and translated, into epic an emphasis which may not have been there: Chapman's translation of *The Iliad* finds Achilles an example of patience, kindness, love, and wisdom.[142] There is nothing exemplary in "The Church Militant", except perhaps the fact of writing a poem praising God. No noble person is addressed, written about, or implied; no nobility of behaviour is upheld. The propulsive action is all God's and therefore inimitable.

Since epic was an imitation of the good, and was able to produce good people, its author must be inherently good. To Ronsard "les Muses ne veullent loger en une ame si elle n'est bonne, saincte et vertueuse". [143] Even Milton held a version of this idea. The epic author must know virtue in practice before he can produce virtuous imitators.[144] The author of "The Church Militant", however, is not relying on his own virtue to produce a similar reader. He is "a true Poem" only in the sense that Christ has "written" him. It is not "my counsels" but "thy counsels" to which Herbert points. No author as a godlike creator "may with thee compare". To Herbert, the only

---

[139] In Thomas M. Greene, *The Light In Troy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, 33.
[140] *Defence,* 41.
[141] "A Preface …to [his translation of] Orlando Furioso", in Vickers, *Criticism,* 313.
[142] See the comparison of Chapman's 1598 and 1611 versions with the original in Robin Sowerby, *The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry*, London, Longman, 1994, 14 ff.
[143] In Basil Willey, *Tendencies in Renaissance Literary Theory*, Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1922, 17.
[144] "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well in laudable things, ought him selfe to be a true Poem … and patterne of the best and honourablest things: not presuming to sing praises of heroic men … unlesse he have in himselfe the experience and practice of all which is praise-worthy." From *An Apology For Smectymnuus*, in *John Milton: Selected Prose*, ed. C.A.Patrides, Penguin, 1974, 62.

authorial virtue comes from the imputed virtue of Christ and is not inherent, nor gained by works of authorship.

Further, there can be no fame for the author of an "epic" with such a dubious hero. If there is a hero, it is a shadowed and inglorious church, with which the poet is identified. The praise is given to the sovereign plan of God, not to God's fumbling people. The apparent hero is female, a clinging "vine", not a mighty oak, a "sweet" and "chaste" bride whose role is receptive, not protagonistic, "militant" only through the strength of another (ll. 9-16). It is God's work to make this bride spotless and therefore victorious (Revelation 21). Herbert's fleeing female reflects the woman of Revelation 12, pursued by a dragon. As in Revelation, God's work appears defeated. The recurring chorus seems inappropriate at times to the depressing action:

> How deare to me, O God, thy counsels are!
> Who may with thee compare?

But this is both a biblical and an epic allusion. "Who is like thee" among the gods -- and heroes -- of this world? [145] The action of classical epic is moved by the lusts, spites and jealousies of gods who are, as were the heathen gods surrounding the Hebrew nations, merely enlarged and often unadmirable humans. The action of true history is moved by the one true God, who not only sees but rules (l. 2).

Such almighty power is incompatible with any epic decorum. It is not immediately comprehensible to human reason, unlike the machinery of the arguing gods in ancient epic. But the Christian poet is not faced with a choice between a God who transcends understanding (and is therefore logically beyond writing) and the anthropomorphic gods (the creation of the poet's mind and therefore no gods at all). The means of (enough) understanding has been sent: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father", said God in human form (John 14:9). The power moving "The Church Militant" is

---

[145] Romans 11:33: "O the depth and the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Also: Psalm 89:90: "Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?"; Isaiah 40: 17-31: "To whom then will ye liken me, or to whom will I be equal?… there is no searching of his understanding" (the context is the uselessness of idols and the power of God to uphold his people); Isaiah 46:5-10: "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me …? I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning … saying, My counsel shall stand, and I shall do all my pleasure." God's "counsels" refers to many other passages, for example, Isaiah 25, Psalms 33, 73, and especially 139:

beyond manipulative appeasement, yet it "bands" itself to the limits of a totally undeserved love (ll.9-10). This love appears to cause the suffering and defeat of his people, and yet such treatment provokes a responsive love ("how deare to me") which no Homeric Pallas Athene, and no Virgilian Venus or Juno, could inspire. Suffering and "defeat", after all, were first the portion of God Incarnate: "Wounds willingly endur'd to work his blisse / Who by an ambush lost his Paradise" (ll. 65-6). No god of epic has done this.

Also, no Aeneas could be grateful for divine organisation of the type Herbert describes in this poem. That God's failure-producing decrees are "deare to me" displays a work of grace beyond the rationality of nature. The church first appears to overcome, but then deteriorates, and Herbert's prophecy (so entirely fulfilled) even for the future of a somewhat inadequate Reformation is gloomy:

> The second Temple could not reach the first;
> And the late Reformation never durst
> Compare with ancient times and purer yeares;
> But in the Jews and us deserveth tears. (ll. 225-228)

The ending, far from giving glory to man, ends with "judgement" for the church, although this also praises the incomparable God.

"The Church Militant" at first looks like, but is actually quite different from, the many historical, national and dynastic epic-type poems written in this period. These ultimately glorify man, being imitative of the classical anthropocentric form which aimed at glory for human subject and human author. "The Church Militant'" however, presents a permanently unhopeful picture of humanity, even of God's "church visible". *The Aeneid,* model for the Renaissance patriotic epic, is not without patches of darkness in its view of Rome's past and future. Nor are its Renaissance imitations. These reversals of fortune, however, are a formal device to set off the brightness of human capacity. Such *peripeteiai* exalt the hero and, as Sidney implies in his denigration of actual history as exemplary, exalt an author whose sense of justice is preferable to God's (although of course Sidney is not so explicit).[146] When the hero

---

"How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (v. 17). Compare Isaiah 66:2 for a non-epic "hero".

[146] *Defence*, 37-8.

appears in a less than flattering light, it is only a narrative device to emphasize his later overcoming.

Luis de Camoens (b. 1517 or 1524) was Virgil's Portuguese imitator. In his *Lusiads* he makes the traditional opposition a necessary accompaniment to Christianity. There appears to be some Herbert-like concern about the incompatibility between historical "Christianity" and ideal epic "virtue", about "These bloody Christians" who "With Flames and Pyracies have fill'd the Sea, / [And] rob us of our goods, and lives, / And take for slaves our Children, and our Wives." However, as in *The Aeneid*, this is a sad necessity in the path of the ultimate aim, the glorification of the heroes. This glorification involves outdoing the "man of Troy" and the "Sage of Greece": "Cease All, whose Actions ancient Bards exprest: / A brighter Valour rises in the West." As in many such vernacular epics, *The Lusiad* begins, as does *The Aeneid*, with the praise of men whose actions are beyond the usual "strength of humane nature". In this epic, the Virgilian introductory praise of "Armes, and the Men above the vulgar File" is openly extended to the poet, but the poet's glory is at the expense of the people. Illumination of the reader is necessary for authorial fame. King, hero, and explorers are praiseworthy, but not the mass of his readers, who are

> deaf … and without remorse.
> Favour (that wont t'inspire the POET'S tongue)
> Our Country yeilds it not, she minds the Purse
> Too much, exaling from her gilded Mud
> Nothing but gross and melancholy blood. [147]

This lamentation for the loss of an elite readership casts doubt on the success of moral education by epic. But even this black moment in fact serves, by contrast, to exalt the author, and his prime audience, the king. "The Church Militant", however, does not start with praise of king, church or holy militarism, or with the self-vaunting of the poet in the form of an invocation to the Muse, but with an address to the "Almightie Lord", and with his praise. Herbert does not include a lack of appreciation on the part of readers in his description of "Sinne", because he associates himself with his reader-nation. Twelve times in lines 228 to 258 England is referred to, not as "them" but as "we", and not once in a positive light. The dark background is not for the flattering of

---

[147] *The Lusiads* of Luiz de Camoens (Camoes), 1572, tr. Sir Richard Fanshawe, 1655, edited by Geoffrey Bullough, London, Centaur, 1963, I.79 (compare I.71), I.1, X.145. Italics omitted.

author or heroes, but to display the wisdom and power of God. "Darknesse" only makes the "Sunne" shine more brightly (ll. 272-3).

Ronsard's *Franciade* gave France a Trojan origin, as Spenser, from Geoffrey of Monmouth and others, had provided for England.[148] "The Church Militant" also gives the British Church origins "from the East", but not Troy, and uncomfortably near Babylon, the birthplace of "Sinne" (ll. 13, 103). The French King Charles praised *La Franciade* as "un example domestique pour le retirer du vice et le pousser a la vertue."[149] But Troy was not Eden; no example, and no story of origin, can restore Adam's Paradise. Nor could such a Paradise, to Herbert, have national boundaries, or inhabitants who necessarily speak English, although there is a suggestion that English would be better than French or Italian: "Sein shall swallow Tiber, and the Thames / By letting in them both pollutes her streams" (ll. 241-2). "The Church Militant" sees the Fall as reversible only by Christ. Virtue is not achieved for a country by dynasty, the example of past or fictional heroes, or the contemporary spear:

> The warrior his deare skarres no more resounds,
> But seems to yield Christ hath the greater wounds,
> Wounds willingly endur'd to work his blisse,
> Who by an ambush lost his Paradise.
> The great heart stoops, and taketh from the dust
> A sad repentance, not the spoils of lust:
> Quitting his spear, lest it should pierce again
> Him in his members, who for him was slain. (ll. 63-70)

The Roman spear having pierced Christ's side, no other spear, however exemplary or nationalistic, however beautifully celebrated in poetry, can work virtue.

Protestant England also translated and imitated in order to "fashion a gentleman" in the inherently impossible shape of a Reformation humanist. Two translations may serve as illustration.

---

[148] *La Franciade,* in *Les Oeuvres de Pierre Ronsard (Texte de 1587),* ed. Isidore Silver, Chicago and Paris, Chicago University Press and Libraire Marcel Didier, Vol. IV, 1967, for example I, pp.1, 47, 50 (no line nos); and see Isidore Silver, *Ronsard and the Greek Epic*, St Louis, Washington University, 1961, 145 and 413 ff. *The Faerie Queene,* ed. A. C. Hamilton. Longman, London, 1977, II.x.9; II.x.13. See also Willey, 1922, 16.

[149] Tillyard, *English Epic*, 236-7.

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is imitative of Virgilian epic and of medieval romance, and an imitation, in the Aristotelian sense, of virtuous acts. Intermingling romance with epic may convey a "smiling disenchantment [with] the great human paradox", a world-view of "ironic disparities".[150] Sir John Harington, as far as we know, saw no ironies when he made his translation in 1591:[151]

> The reading of Virgill may make a man honest and virtuous … whatsoever is prayseworthy in Virgill is plentifully to be found in Ariosto, and some things that Virgill could not have, for the ignoraunce of the age he lived in.[152]

Harington gives Dante as the authority by which Virgil may be used to "reclaime [a reader] from [a] daungerous and lewd course". [153] He shows Ariosto to be both Virgil's imitator and a Christian "overgoer". [154] Ariosto's improvement upon Virgil's ignorant age is given as "the devout and Christen demeanor of Charlemagne; the conversion of Rogero; infinit places full of Christen exhortation, doctrine, and example". The romance episodes in Ariosto, like Virgil's "false gods [and] fowle deeds, hurtfull in example", are "meant … to breed detestation, not delectation".[155] The possibility of this unlikely occurrence in the reader is justified by giving his own experience of translating Ariosto (while he quietly establishes his credentials as a scholar):

> I began to think that my Tutor, a grave and learned man, and one of a verie austere life, might say to me … "was it for this that I read Aristotle and Plato to you, and instructed you so carefully both in Greek and Latin, to have you now become a translator of Italian toyes?" But I was aware that it was no toy that could put such an honest and serious consideration into my mind. [156]

---

[150] *Selections From the Translation of Orlando Furioso by Sir John Harington*, ed. Rudolf Gottfried, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1970, Introduction 16. See also Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, ch.3.

[151] Since Harington's own wit produced *The Metamorphosis of Ajax* [A-jakes], for which the Queen's punishment was this translation (Vickers, *Criticism*, 302), he may have seen irony in Ariosto, and may have intended his own translation to be less moralising than his comment above implies.

[152] Smith II, 212.

[153] Smith II, 212.

[154] Smith II, 211.

[155] Smith II, 214-5. Compare Ascham's condemnation of "all the books … of beastly libertines and monks" with Milton: "those lofty fables and romances [and] even those books which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness … proved to me so many incitements … to the love and steadfast observation of …virtue". Vickers, *Criticism*, 143 (*Scholemaster*) and 598-99 (… *Smectymnuus*).

[156] Smith II, 220.

Whatever Ariosto's ironic intent, English humanism recruited his vernacular epic for the "serious consideration" of the achievement of virtue in a Protestant context. This created its own irony, for Protestant righteousness is based not on the capability of imitation of virtue, but on the righteousness of Christ. [157] Harington quotes Rogero's learning " 'how to Christ he must impute / The pardon of his sins'" as a proof of Ariosto's "Christen exhortation", but elsewhere, and more often, he presents Virgil as a way to God. "When [Dante] wandred out of the right way … Virgill was the first that made him looke into himselfe and reclaime himselfe … do we not make our children read it commonly before they can understand it?" [158] To Herbert, there was no morality outside of Christ; any "reclaiming" must be done by the Owner. Virgil's Rome could save no more than the Pope's: "As new and old Rome did one Empire twist; / So both together are one Antichrist" (ll. 205-206). Christ, not Virgil, plants the vine (l. 11) and shines on its growth (l. 97). Epic can neither justify nor sanctify.

Torquato Tasso's *Ierusalemma Liberata* was translated by Edward Fairfax in 1600 in stanzaic "heroicall verse", entitled *Godfrey of Bulloigne.* Tasso's work, with Ariosto's one of Spenser's sources for *The Faerie Queene*, praises a church literally militant. As Sidney argues there should be, a sour moral good for everyone hides in this "sweet" tale of witchcraft and Crusading bloodthirstiness:

> O heavenly Muse . . .
> Inspire life in my wit, my thoughts upraise,
> My verse ennoble, and forgive the thing,
> If fictions light I mix with truth divine
> And fill these lines with others praise then thine. . .
> They drink deceiv'd, and so deceiv'd, they live. [159]

Because of these "fictions light", the cherry-sweetened pill goes down – an Horatian argument, perhaps, for the intermingling of romance with epic. In "The Church Militant", Herbert describes this deceitful action of poetry, its "fictions and false hair" ('Jordan' I) as "Sinne's" activity in Greece:

> Nay, he became a poet, and would serve
> His pills of sublimate in that conserve. (ll. 131-2)

---

[157] "Man is not righteous in himself but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation. … The obedience of Christ is reckoned to us as if it were our own." Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.23 and *passim*.

[158] Harington, Smith II, 213, 212; compare 210, 211, 215.

[159] *Ierusalemma Liberata*, Torquato Tasso, "Done into English Heroicall verse by Edward Fairfax, Gent., London, 1600, as *Godfrey of Bulloigne* or The Recovery of Jerusalem." Critical Edition, Kathleen M. Lea and T. M. Gang, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, Book I, Stanzas 2-3.

Poetry may be the jam which conceals poison as well as medicine, as many Renaissance writers saw.[160] Milton lamented

> the corruption and bane which [our youth and gentry] suck in dayly from the writings of libidinous and ignorant Poetasters, [who] for the most part lap up vitious principles in sweet pils to be swallowed down, and make the taste of vertuous documents harsh and sowr. [161]

Herbert does not object to poetry as a concealing [162] sweetener, but to the pill itself being the poison of untruth. The "overwhelming assertion of the *dulce et utile* justification of poetry … spanning the classical, medieval, and Renaissance poets", Thomas Roche's reason for disagreement with a Jesuit, Freudian, or even Protestant poetics,[163] encompasses Herbert as well, but with two vital qualifications. The usefulness of poetry, the "pill", must be the work of Christ, not the work, actual or possible, of humanity; and the sweetness of poetry, the "conserve", must be the fruit of a wit wholly God's, whose aim is the glory of the authorial Word, not its own genius. Herbert's Protestant poetics can co-exist with "the *dulce et utile* justification", but not if that sweetness and that usefulness come in the form of epic.

The pill's "conserve" may be allegorisation as well as the fictions themselves. The dedication of the second edition of Fairfax's *Godfrey of Bulloigne* to Prince Charles in 1624 by John Bill suggests an allegorical as well as an imitative sweetening. Tasso himself wrote an "Allegorie of the Poem" after he had half-completed the work, perhaps with some fear of church authorities.[164] In this prefatory "explanation", Tasso is Aristotelian: "the heroically written Imitation of an Other, is nothing else, but the

---

[160] Most Renaissance critics either rationalise or abhor poetic lasciviousness. Some writers unconsciously defeat themselves: "When … reason in [a man] is confirmed with serious learning and long experiences, then shall he … condemn the folly and dotage expressed by poets lascivious". Since the reading of these poets was part of the "long experiences", their educative effects in this case would seem pointless, undesirable, or too late. Thomas Elyot, *The Boke named the Governour*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 61. See also my chapter "Teach and Delight".

[161] *The Reason of Church-Government*, in Patrides (ed)., 57.

[162] Herbert's concealing was not in the sense of allegory, so that only the illuminated few might understand and benefit, but in the sense of making his difficult art seem simple and accessible, so that all may benefit and so that the poet is not the primary receiver of praise.

[163] Thomas P. Roche, Jnr., review of A. Raspa, *The Emotive Image: Jesuit Poetics in the English Renaissance*, in *George Herbert Journal* 9 (1) (1985): 57.

[164] Rhu cautions that while no doubt Tasso "felt compelled to protect his poem from censorship", this "by no means implies that the allegory is merely a postfactum addition without any organic connection to the *Liberata*." *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory*, Lawrence F. Rhu, Wayne State University Press, 1993, 51. See also Fichter, *Poets Historical*, ch. 4.

patterne and image of humane action"; but he allows imitation and allegory to exist together, describing allegory as "respect[ing] the passions, the opinions and customs… principally in their being hidden and inward … such as only the understanders of the nature of things can fully comprehend." He asks us to see the army as "Man", Jerusalem as "civil happiness" (but a "Christian" happiness, he hastens to say), Godfrey as "understanding" or "reason", Rinaldo as anger (inferior to reason), devils interestingly as "both a figure and the thing figured". Even the flowers, the fountains, and the rivers have allegorical equivalents.[165]

John Bill defines Godfrey as the church militant (allegory) but also as the individual hero (imitation), and hopes that the reader will be edified both by "history" and allegory:

> Beside the story (which must needs bee acceptable to all Christians) and the celebration of so many Heroes, the art of the poet is admirable, both for the imitation, which is the life of Poetrie, and for Allegorie: For it doth not only containe the truth of an historicall narration, sweetned with some Poeticall fictions; but doth also secretly expresse a morall sense; shewing the Practicke part of vertue, leading to the consummation of felicitie: So that at once the understanding may be informed by the storie, the fancy delighted with the colours of Poetrie, and the will rectified with the example of morality. Such endes have been aimed at in other epicke Poemes.[166]

So the epic-romance is to be useful both imitatively and allegorically. Either the example of Godfrey, or what the reader is to understand by "Godfrey" and his actions and circumstances, supposedly makes straight and upright, rectifies, the will. But a will, or heart,[167] rectifiable by the study of "epicke Poemes" is not that of *The Temple*, in which the heart is made of stone, unable to read epic to any good effect unless itself written upon by God. Even Sidney, while praising epic for its stirring example, admits that the will is "infected".[168] Both life-imitation and allegory preach to the converted; the will must first have been "rectified" before the reader wants or is able to live in the ideal fashion represented, or make the necessary allegorical connections. As there is no exemplary character or action in "The Church Militant", so it is not written for intellectually elite "understanders". There is much imagery, but no allegorical

---

[165] Fairfax's *Godfrey,* Lea and Gang, 89.
[166] *Godfrey*, 590.
[167] "Heart" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a synonym for will as often as for emotion.
[168] *Defence*, 25.

character and progress of plot; that is, there is no "veil of allegory" to keep the truth from being trampled on by the unworthy.[169] She who goes "like a pilgrime, westward bent, / Knocking at all doors" (ll. 29-30) is herself, Religion or the Church. The reader of "The Church Militant" needs to be an understander, but the nature of that understanding is spiritual rather than intellectual, based on an acceptance of the sovereignty of God over all events, and on a will "rectified" by Christ.

For history, even Tasso's romanticised history, to become allegory, supposes an understanding of God's ordering of the world which is not Herbert's. When Herbert writes "Holy *Macarius* and great *Anthonie* / Made *Pharaoh Moses*, changing th'historie" (ll. 41-2) his metaphorical wit is praising the sovereignty of God in bringing the Gospel to North Africa in actual past time. The sovereign purpose of God used evil (Pharaoh) to bring about good (Moses), the eventual result being the coming of Christ and the planting of the church in Egypt.[170] Allegory is not necessary in a predestinarian understanding of history which encompasses evil in the good purposes of God. History has its own lessons which may not be fictionalised, but must be seen in the light of God's sovereign "counsels". Bunyan achieved a Christian allegory without theological and literary strain because his surface story was not actual recorded history. But the feats of valour which recovered Jerusalem, however Tasso saw them, are to Bill timeless exemplars of the possible: the achieving of the kingdom of heaven by the inherent virtue of the Christian who is always the soldier of Christ. Historical actuality almost does not matter in such a scheme. But actual sin and actual, once-occurring redemption, propel the movement of Herbert's narrative: appear to propel, because what is "below" these events is not discoverable by the fourfold allegorical technique of human devising. The real propulsion is God, and his "counsels" – inimitable, not explainable by allegory, but revealed in Christ the "Sunne".

Allegorisation had been the early church's means of coping with classical man-centredness and pagan gods, while maintaining literary credibility. But Herbert describes this as papistical fudging, a syncretistic taking of "learning from Greece" as

---

[169] See Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, especially ch. 7 on the decline of allegory in the Renaissance.

one of the "fine vizards to conceal his crimes" (ll. 188, 186). Behind Bill, behind Fairfax, and behind Tasso, stands Virgil, and behind him, Homer; and this to Herbert is one great difficulty of seeing epic as *utile*, however *dulce* it is to human pride. Pagan epic glorifies pagan capability, and no allegorisation, however enlightened the reader, can compensate for this displacement of the work of Christ. The humanist attempt to combine Christianity and paganism is condemned in "The Church Militant" in two ways. First Herbert shows Christianity to be a superior replacement of ancient philosophy, not, as some seventeenth-century writers claimed, foreshadowed in it.[171] Christ swept away the wisdom of the Greeks; revelation is greater than rationalisation:

> Learning was pos'd, Philosophie was set,
> Sophisters taken in a fishers net.
> *Plato* and *Aristotle* were at a losse,
> And wheel'd about again to spell *Christ-Crosse*.
> Prayers chas'd syllogismes into their den,
> And *Ergo* was transform'd into *Amen*. (ll. 51-56)

The church is militant enough at this stage. Second, Herbert attacks another sort of syncretism, the Papal. Here the *poet* is militant, describing "Sinne" or the Pope (the confusion is deliberate) taking

> From *Egypt* Anchorisme and retirednesse,
> Learning from *Greece*, from old *Rome* statelinesse;
> And blending these he carri'd all mens eyes
> While Truth sat by ... (ll. 185-190)

The poem's mention of sin's passage from Greece to Rome (l. 139) and of oracles (ll. 128, 147) alludes to ancient epic and tragedy (sin "became a poet"), and condemns the attempt by Christian nations to find "glorie", "pleasure" and "treasure" through literary heroism: "our Saviour did destroy the game", l. 146.

"The Church Militant" is very different also from its English contemporaries, by which I mean any heroic-national poem, long or short, celebrating the current situation or creating for it an ancestry.[172] Herbert's writing about the current situation

---

[170] Joseph, the "cause" of the Hebrew presence in Egypt, remarked that though his brothers had intended evil, God meant it for good (Genesis 45 and 50).

[171] See Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1970, ch. II.

[172] "The function of epic was conceived to be the glorification of the existing government." T.W. Russell, *Voltaire, Dryden, and Heroic Tragedy*, 1946, in Ruth Nevo, *The Dial of Virtue*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963, 11.

was not usually cheerful.[173] "The Church Militant" celebrates God's purposes, not national successes present or potential.

"The Church Militant" shows the permanent damage done to human capability by sin. Its movement is one of flight rather than fight, of failed colonisation rather than travel destined to establish a nation. In "The Embarrassments of Paradise Lost", Joseph Summers points out that Milton, and his readers, also had and have difficulty reconciling the political with the eternal:

> In the Renaissance ... the great national poem also became a sign of the maturation of the national ethos, the final proof that the new tongue was worthy of taking its place with the classic languages. ... But what do we find with *Paradise Lost*? ... The deeds with which it is concerned are neither tribal nor national. ... The nearest thing to specific evocations of English civilisation are unsettling references to "evil dayes ... and evil tongues" ... or "the Sons / Of Belial". If this age or nation can provide "fit audience", they will ... certainly be few. [174]

"Unsettling references" are certainly also characteristic of 'The Church Militant': in the not too distant future, "height of malice, and prodigious lusts, / Impudent sinning ... shall ... make our measure up" (ll.237-240). The patriotism of 'The Sonne' and 'The British Church' is here subjected to the longer view. Sin is indeed black and apparently triumphant, but in fact acts as a foil to set off the brightness of God. The blackness is greater than that painted into epic to set off heroic brightness; sometimes it seems as the only hope in "The Church Militant" is the repeated quotation of the Word of God, which "will never return void", and its reminder of the love and the rule of God. The poetic effect of surrounding the Scriptural refrains with a (generally) depressing human history is that of chiaroscuro. Herbert is not a depressed poet; but his joy and comfort come from a higher source than *virtus*. While both *Paradise Lost* and "The Church Militant" reverse epic convention by dispraising the present establishment, Herbert, by biblically making even "darknesse" the work of God (ll. 229-233a), removes any authority from man.

---

[173] *Ad Fratres*, for example, deplores an England in which "Puritan and Papist have / Each their own". See *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert (A Bilingual Edition)*, tr. Paul R Murphy and Mark McCloskey, Ohio University Press, 1965, XXI.

[174] *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1 & 2) (1992-3): 142-3.

Epic *peripeteiai* are designed to display the indomitable will of the hero triumphing against all odds. The opposition in "The Church Militant", however, comes from the source which must simultaneously be trusted: God. To shape a literary imitation of this, and with historical and geographical reference rather than (as in "The Church") the personal, is a much harder task than imitating ancient epic. Herbert is more interested in the truth of God's dealings with mankind than in producing a narrative shape which would glorify human virtue or England. Literary structures providing an inevitable human overcoming are necessary for epic and for its imitative transformation into individual and national life. "Heroical poetry", said Sidney, "most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy".[175] But to Herbert, the only "counsels" which can make a person or nation worthy are God's. The only inflaming is that of sin (l. 145). The only propulsion of events is the unfathomable God, who punishes yet allows "darknesse", who "dost love, yet strike" his church ("Bitter-Sweet"), and who is to be seen as just and good against all appearances.

Such trust, to Herbert, is the only way a nation may be valorised. His poem is closer to the Biblical than to the classical way of understanding circumstances and becoming a "glorious" nation: that is, by trusting in God despite God's puzzling dispensations. So Abraham believed in the goodness of a God who apparently wished Isaac, the carrier of national and divine honour, killed, and so Habakkuk watched God's destruction of his own nation (and, apparently, God's purposes) and yet trusted. [176]

Herbert's stylised history deals, of course, not just with national honour or origins but with that global fugitive, the church. Neither the gospel nor sin find their culmination in England. The same successes and defeats will apply to America as to more eastward nations in the past.

> Yet as the Church shall thither westward flie,
> So Sinne shall trace and dog her instantly; (ll. 259-60)

---

[175] *Defence*, 47.

[176] "I will make of thee a great nation. … Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac … and offer him for a burnt offering … And Abraham rose up early in the morning and took … Isaac his son … And Abraham said: God will provide himself a lamb." Genesis 12: 2, 22: 2-3. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall

The forces of darkness are not comfortably "other". They are in, they almost are, the church. Herbert is concerned to show the darkness in "Christian" lands. Even Roman Catholicism, which is harshly treated here, is not the final home of the blackness. "Our land", "our cup", "of us", "what sinnes / Shall … in England domineer" (ll. 235, 239, 243, 245-6): there can be no nationalistic smugness.[177] "Empire" and "Arts", Rome and Greece, strength and learning, do not provide a Gospel sufficient to overcome "Sinne and Darknesse" (ll. 263, 272). That is, the depravity of "men's hearts" (l. 264) is greater than that accounted for by the Renaissance educators and theorists. Neither statehood, even that of England's new Israel, nor culture, even that of a purified classicism combined with the Bible, would be able to resist the pursuing blackness, for it is in the English Protestant heart as well as left behind in an eastern pagan or papal history.

A global and historical blackness bringing God's judgment, rather than setting off heroism, is also the theme of 'Decay' (99):

> I see the world grows old, when as the heat
> Of thy great love, once spread, as in an urn
> Doth closet up itself, and still retreat,
> Cold Sinne still forcing it, till it return,
> And calling *Justice,* all things burn. (ll. 16-20)

This powerful picture of the heat of a mighty love, apparently defeated, becoming the consuming fire of judgment, is much like that of "The Church Militant". Whatever the present appearances, justice will still be done and God be exalted as righteous and true. "Judgement" being "deare to me" is only possible to one who cannot be disappointed, or not ultimately disappointed, in humanity, because he or she, writer or reader, knows that God, not humanity, is the standard and origin of justice. The expectations in "The Church Militant" are in God, not man. The poem is an admission that God's judgment is deserved. The repentance implied by lines 225-258 is not the imitative identification required by the reader of epic.

---

yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Habakkuk 3: 17-18.

[177] Joseph Summers, in "George Herbert and Anglican Traditions", *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1 & 2) (1992-3):37, has pointed out that Herbert's prediction of Gospel purity "siding with" poverty has been fulfilled. Exploited second world has become the exploiter of the third world. That third world is home to many churches "rich" in the truth (cf. ll. 247-58).

"The [Gospel's] course was westward" to Herbert so that "understanding" might never be darkened fully (ll. 17-18). The church chased a perpetual day without sunset, but "[sin] chid the church away, where'er he came" (l. 105). In fact, the westward progress would not have occurred without the settling of night over once-enlightened lands. Jewish, then Roman, then Muslim persecution were factors in the westward spread of the Gospel; but this was part of the plan of God. "Common-weals acknowledge thee" (l. 5) not of their choice, but like the heathen nations which threatened Old Testament Israel, "wrap their policies in thy decree" (l.6) whether they know it or not. This may seem similar to the Trojan defeat leading to the establishment of Rome; but there is no connection between a manipulating Venus and Herbert's God, whose power rules "the smallest ant or atom" (l. 3). Herbert was not trying to establish a mythological ancestry or destiny for an English ruler. The westward movement of "The Church Militant" leads only to judgment.

To many English Renaissance humanists, however, the "sunne" was the westward movement of the new / old learning, clearing away medieval ignorance through the intimate connection between writing and life. So it appeared to Samuel Daniel:

> . . . what good is like to this,
> To do worthy the writing, and to write
> Worthy the reading, and the world's delight?
> 'Musophilus', ll. 190-193[178]

"The Church Militant" does not present a character who has done "worthy the writing". Worth is all in Christ, and his glory will not be increased by literary encomium. Further, Christ is himself the writer of any "good". "To write / worthy the reading" was also a vision of Ascham's for England, but not by the example of the westward movement of the recent vernacular "bookes made in Italie and translated in England", the "readiest way to entangle the mynde with false doctrine" and "intice the will to wanton livyng".[179] Ascham was happy about the westward movement of Cicero and Virgil, moral paganism seeming better to him than immoral papistry. [180]

---

[178] *Samuel Daniel: Selected Poetry and A Defense of Rhyme*, ed. G. G. Hiller and P. L. Groves, Pegasus Press, University of North Carolina, 1998, 119.
[179] From *The Scholemaster*, Smith I, 1-2.
[180] *Scholemaster*, 7.

Herbert may have had vicious Italian books in mind, but he may also have meant ancient models:

> . . . as in vice the copie still exceeds
> The pattern, but not so in vertuous deeds;
> . . . height of malice, and prodigious lusts,
> Impudent sinning, witchcrafts, and distrusts
> (The marks of future bane) shall fill our cup
> Unto the brimme, and make our measure up. (ll. 221-2, 237-40)

The "progress" is always negative. In absolute contrast to those who suppose that the imitation of epic will result in a dismissing of the vice and an emulating, even overgoing, of the good, he points out, as if it were a known fact, that the "copie" overgoes the "pattern" only in sinning. As English literary efforts tended to be worse, not better, than their ancient models, so did the moral imitation of epic result in the emulation of *hubris* and the exaltation of human capability. It was convenient to overlook, as did Spenser, the deceitfulness of Odysseus and the rashness and impiety of Agamemnon ("Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man"[181]) or even, as Herbert's comment implies, to excuse them and therefore to emulate them.

Herbert's poem reflects the sun setting upon even Reformation hopes of restoring original truth. Our "copie" "deserveth teares" (l. 228). The sun "goes" back to the east as it goes west, of course; but this poem does not end even with Hopkins' hope of continual Spirit-provided renewal:

> And though the last lights off the black West went
> Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
> Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
> World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. [182]

The only remaining "eastward" dawn in Herbert's poem brings the end of human action, "bent" because self-saving. Christ having come once in mercy, his second coming will be in judgment. Yet Hopkins' poem fulfils Herbert's prophecy in that the spread of the Gospel, bringing light, has left the west, which is now black.

---

[181] " To the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh", *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 1977, 737.

[182] 'God's Grandeur', ll. 9-14, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose*, ed. W.H.Gardner, Penguin, 1953, 27.

Virgil regretted the blood spilt in Rome's civilising endeavours, but does not question the necessity or the benefits of the enterprise. "The Church Militant", however, is uncomfortable with the idea of empire, even an empire justified, as in Renaissance epic, as usher for the gospel. Herbert concedes a historical connection between "Prowesse and Arts" and "Gospel", ll. 75-6, 87-8, the Roman roads and peace having allowed the fugitive and missionary journeys of the early church. But he dislikes the Roman Catholic imperialistic conquests, Christianity at sword's point or salvation by culture:

> And where of old the Empire and the Arts
> Ushered the Gospel ever in men's hearts,
> Spain hath done one; when Arts perform the other,
> The Church shall come, and . . .

Here the poetic structure leads us to expect a positive note, but :

> Sinne the Church shall smother. (ll. 263-6).

Hutchinson suggests that line 265 is a "complimentary reference to Spain",[183] presumably for its supposedly civilising work in the Americas, but in fact "The Church Militant" constantly associates empire with sin. Indeed these lines suggest that if the Church which follows "Empire and Arts" is Roman Catholic, "church" and "Sinne" are practically one. The Roman Empire was used by God "of old" to facilitate the progress of the Gospel; here, the poetic juxtaposition of smothering sin and Spain's activities removes the possibility of another such sovereign use by God of empire.

Cristina Malcolmson proposes that Herbert "justif[ies] the appropriation of territory" in this poem. Her claim that Herbert is proposing a "piously motivated" colonization ignores, however, lines 237-46, which savagely remove any whitewashing of imperialistic greed with English piety, and lines 259-66, which predict that sin will "instantly" bring the same effects to the colonies, since it goes hand in hand with the church.[184]

---

[183] Works, 543.
[184] *Heart-work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, 203.

Samuel Daniel's 'Epistle to Prince Henrie', c. 1609-10, [185] has, like "The Church Militant", an east to west theme. The 'Epistle' is unhappy about "Western discov'ries" (Herbert's 'The Sonne', l. 10), if the greed and pride of colonization were to be disguised as extending the kingdom of God. Daniel uses the example of Spain to show that

> Superfluous wealth, as well as knowledg, doth
> Deprive men of the Paradice of rest. (ll. 67-8)

He then goes beyond this traditional advice to be contented with moderation. In lines reminiscent of, perhaps even influential upon, "The Church Militant", the question of evangelisation and the geographic progress of the church is tackled:

> But some may say, this worke yet glorious was
> For that it did the Christien faith extend
> To Infidels . . .
> I grannt that time, their turne must bring about
> When the universall wheele of things shall move
> Unto that point, and those rude lands throughout
> Th'Europian arts and Customes shall approve;
> . . .
> When we perhaps, arriv'd unto a more
> Then Asiatique weaknes . . .
> . . . may be made
> A prey unto some Gothique barbarous hand
> That shall lay wast our glorie . . .
> The earth being still the Center, as it was
> About which all theis revolutions turne
> Where we behould ruynes, and raisings pass
> From East to west, succeeding in their turne. (ll. 71-94)

Daniel sees the "cost of bloud" (l. 143) in distant colonisation, and also the inconsistencies of an imperialism in the name of Christ:

> And how t'agrandize your abilitie
> By spoil and ruyn of your neighbors, may
> Square with the lyne of christianitie
> Lies in the scale of conscience well to weigh,
> Since time shewes how, by others former deedes
> Th'inheritannce of violence succeedes. (ll. 151-156)

Yet Daniel is ultimately more Virgilian than Christian in his arguments, worrying about the effect of Empire's wealth and peace, much as Augustan Rome worried about the corrupting effect of Egyptian and Asian morals, and of conquest's luxuries:

---

[185] Samuel Daniel: *The Brotherton Manuscript*, ed. John Pitcher, University of Leeds, 1981, 13.

> Els may a soft and an unsinowed rest
> Undoe us unawares . . .
> For an unactive peace, disarmes our mynds
> Of all the peeces of true manlines
> And laies us open to the basest kinds
> Of dissolute and female weaknesses . . . (ll. 175-182)

"That comely peace", on the other hand, which results from careful statecraft at home, "will not ondoe her native customes"; it "shutts Forraigne vanities out from all sides" (ll. 203, 213, 209). Daniel urges an armed vigilance at home lest foreign luxuries – and perhaps the regrowth of foreign doctrines – bring an "Asiatique weaknes" on this new Rome, much as Gabriel Harvey irritatedly asks if there were not enough manly things to be doing, or writing about, at this crucial time for the nation, without having to play with Italian-born erotic poetry. [186] Cautions about empire-by-conquest do not seem to Daniel, in 'Musophilus', inconsistent with a glorifying of empire-by-literature:

> Or who can tell for what great work in hand
> The greatness of our style is now ordained?
> What powers it shall bring in, what spirits command,
> What thoughts let out, what humours keep restrained,
> What mischief it may powerfully withstand,
> And what fair ends may thereby be attained? (ll. 953-58).[187]

This is to give to "our style" powers almost amounting to those of the Holy Spirit. Daniel's careful qualifications of "who can tell?" and "ordained" do not keep this from being a startling claim for poetry. Herbert, however, knows that no writing can provide a "comely peace" for the church, or for the church as identified with England; the tares are so interlaced with the wheat that no advice to future kings, no Stoic moderation, no withdrawing from Virginia, will purify the church. Judgement for Christians has in a sense already taken place at the Cross "eastward", as Donne's speaker was aware in 'Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward', but for the world, and in a purifying sense for the church, judgment has yet to be. Only God's work, in the past in the historic work of Christ and in the future in judgment, will show God's glory. The epic westward journey of the church merely brought sin with it. Human power

[186] Smith, II, 234, 259, 262.

[187] *Daniel: Selected Poetry*, 148. These lines are preceded by the question "Who … knows … to what strange shores / The gain of our best glory shall be sent … What worlds in the yet unformed Occident / May come refined with th'accents that are ours?"

and art can never produce a universal Christendom, as Luther observed sarcastically in his defence of the secular sword: "first take heed and fill the world with real Christians before ruling it in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish." [188]

The difficulties inherent in those works which did set out to be "Protestant epics" are not evident in "The Church Militant", which does not try to combine biblical truth with a genre of classic "capability". Redcrosse, in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, is dependent upon the grace of God, but Guyon represents a classical virtue provided by education rather than regeneration. [189] One may *either* fashion a gentleman *or* a Christian. Athens cannot have to do with Jerusalem, for the problem of embodying "Christian" virtues in classical mythology is merely the surface of a greater difficulty: the idea of the Christian, rather than Christ, having meritorious virtues. Spenser's wonderful epic-romance attempts to be at once timelessly exemplary (for which the medieval language and context is appropriate) and historically and prophetically glorifying God and a post-Reformation England (for which a language had yet to be invented). A poetic language to express a *humanist* England was in process; but only Herbert came near to a successful putting of Reformation theology and poetry together, and this could not be done, consistently, while simultaneously glorifying England.

Abraham Cowley's *Davideis*, though starting with an invocation to Christ, does not avoid the idea of the glory which is owed to the epic poet. Indeed, this author seeks it:

> Lo, this great work, a Temple to thy praise,
> On polisht Pillars of strong Verse I raise!
> A Temple, where if Thou vouchsafe to dwell,
> It Solomons, and Herods shall excel.
> . . . Thou, Eternal Word, hast call'ed forth Mee
> Th'Apostle, to convert that World to Thee;
> T'unbind the charms that in slight Fables lie,
> And teach that Truth is truest Poesie. (ll. 33-43)[190]

---

[188] "Secular Authority" (1523) in *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, tr. and ed. John Dillenberger, New York, Doubleday, 1964, 371.

[189] John N. King describes the virtues imitated in Books II to VI as sanctification after conversion. The necessity for such explanation merely underlines the problem of "Christian humanism". *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

There could scarcely be a greater contrast with another poetic "Temple" and its "broken Altar" whose stones are cut and set only by the grace of God. Although Herbert agrees with Cowley that "Fables" -- "fictions and false hair" -- are not necessary for poetry, authorship as apostleship is actively denied in many of his poems.

Milton's confidence in his calling was also great: justifying the ways of God to men is a remarkable piece of forensic advocacy. Milton's Arminian position made epic a true possibility. *Paradise Lost* justifies human capability as well as the "decrees of power" and "bands of love" which alone are the subject of Herbert's poem. It is true that in *Paradise Lost*, as Summers amusingly points out, "most of the heroic and civilised and official virtues are found in Hell".[191] But it is an heroic poem none the less. While Milton despises the "infinite / Man-slaughter" which is called glory, he still complains that "what most merits fame" – his authorship, perhaps – is "in silence hid" (XI. 692-3, 699). For the reader, this "Protestant" epic form implies a theological system which leaves choice and capability to humanity.

What kind of imitation, then, is "The Church Militant"? It is not a formal literary imitation of ancient epic. It is not an Aristotelian imitation of noble and heroic characters doing noble and heroic deeds. It is not a Renaissance ethical imitative model of how to govern or how to live virtuously as a citizen. If it is an imitation, it is a representation in the Sidneian sense of a "figuring forth", though not of "what may be and should be", but of what is.[192] This representation is of the historic purposes of God in history through, and for, his "Sunne". As the world began with God in creation, so the world will end with God in judgment, a judgment based on the enlightenment of nations and individuals by that sun / Son. The apparent triumphs and failures of the gospel, represented by the apparent east-to-west movement of the church and of sin (day and night), are all part of the incomparable "counsels" of a loving God. These loving purposes are represented, imitated, to our earthly understanding, by the circular, global reality which ends where it begins, in God.

---

[190] *A Critical Edition of Abraham Cowley's 'Davideis'*, ed. Gayle Shadduck, New York, Garland Publishing, 1987, which contains the delightful editorial dedication: "To Abraham Cowley – with deep gratitude for his decision not to complete his proposed twelve books".

[191] "The Embarrassments of *Paradise Lost* ", *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1 & 2) (1992-3): 144.

[192] *Defence*, 25, 26.

Herbert's formal imitation of the twofold nature of a Christian's life (appearance and reality, drama and stasis, the experience of sanctification and the "already-written" fact of justification) which we find throughout *The Temple*, is here presented as a dual geographic conceit. The purpose is not glorification of hero, nation, or author, but of God. Herbert's imitation, ultimately, is of the Word of God as that power which turns the world or "moves" the sun, and demonstrates the inadequacy of any explanation of history which excludes God:

> *How deare to me, O God, thy counsels are!*
> *Who may with thee compare?*

Herbert negates everything represented by the epic and by those critics who saw no anomaly in a Christian reconstruction of Greek and Roman values. In giving all glory to God, he may have been poetically unique. The later mock-epic would satirise the literary and social pretensions of society, yet still base a hope of reform in human capability. "The Church Militant" reflects no glory from even the regenerate human. The Cambridge censors who disliked the prophesied disappearance of the Gospel to colonial shores (l. 247) might have derived some perverse satisfaction from a more careful consideration of ll. 259-62. There is no glorification of a future America here, for "Sinne shall trace and dog her instantly". What there is, however, is not the closure of indeterminacy or darkness, but Luther's "let God be God". In a true epic form, Milton would also grapple with the apparent defeat of God's kingdom, a *felix culpa* which was actually intended to bring greater glory to God. This judgment-glory does not wipe out humanity, but encompasses it. The judgment upon Christ's true church will not be damnatory, for only his saved ones can call an electing and sovereign God and his "counsels" "deare". Herbert's circumnavigating "anti-epic" ends on that paradoxical note. No human glory can compare with God's, and no human writing can imitate his "counsels". Yet in Christ humanity is loved and exalted: "Yet as the Sunne still goes both west and east" (274) is a description of the all-conquering "Son", and in Herbert's poetry, Christ's conquests are all by love. The heroic paradigm cannot do God's work for him, producing righteousness by imitation and replacing the Atonement. No epic or other poetry can glorify God by producing glorious humans. To Herbert, God alone is glorious; humans are merely loved.

INVENTION

" ... a sweetnesse readie penn'd."

Jordan (II), l. 17.

Herbert has several things to say about invention. He uses the term positively, in its older sense of "finding" (*invenio* and the rhetorical *inventio*), and negatively, in the sense then just starting to be used, that of "creating from nothing". He writes favourably about invention as "finding", both in its literary sense and as a metaphor for aspects of relationship with God. He writes unfavourably about invention as "creating", again referring both to the writing process and to salvation.

Inventio was the classical rhetorical term for finding places, topics, to illustrate a case being pleaded. In the Renaissance it came to be used of poetic imagery and wit.[1] George Gascoigne said:

> The first and most necessary point ... in making of a delectable poem is this, to ground it upon some fine invention. ... The occasions of inventions are (as it were) infinite ... [T]he rule of invention ... of all other rules is most to be marked. ... For, that being found, pleasant words will follow fast enough.[2]

Gascoigne proposes avoiding the *trite et obvia* of, for example, praising a woman's crystal eye and cherry lip.[3] Herbert avoids such dullness by recognizing, as Gascoigne does not, that the gift of invention was given to man in order to praise God, not flesh. Herbert considers invention also in its theological aspects: can, and should, the Christian poet create? can the human invent his own way to God? what are the grounds of invention -- the poet's mind, existing nature, or the person and the "writing" of the work of Christ?

---

[1] John Steadman has a detailed discussion of the relationship in the ancient and Renaissance critics between poetic and rhetorical invention in ch. VII of *The Lamb and the Elephant*, San Marino, CA, The Huntington Library, 1974. Note especially the different applications by the critics of the term "invention" to poetry, 183 ff.

[2] George Gascoigne, "Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English", in Brian Vickers, ed., *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, 162-3.

[3] Gascoigne, in Vickers, 163.

At the age of seventeen, Herbert thought about the true ground of invention. His two youthful sonnets deal with secular poetry's abuse of invention. Having perhaps reflected on and partially agreed with Gascoigne's words, he shows how limiting is female blazon, for

> *Roses* and *Lillies* speak thee; and to make
> A pair of Cheeks of them, is thy abuse.
> Why should I *Womens eyes* for Chrystal take?
> (Sonnets from Walton's *Lives*, H. 206, II, ll. 6-8)

But he goes further still, and, playing on the idea of invention, succinctly explains his whole poetic: "Lord, in thee / The *beauty* lies in the *discovery*" (II, ll. 13-14). Invention is discovery: the dis-, or un-, covering of something already there. In terms of poetry, the matter to be discovered is Christ: "there is enough in thee to dry / Oceans of *Ink*" (II, ll. 1-2). That is, the grounds of invention are not merely either nature (Jonson) or the poet's mind (Sidney). The supreme ground of invention and source of matter is Christ. "Such poor invention burns in their low mind" (II, l. 9) who can find poetic topoi only in women. More importantly, that the beauty consists in the "discovery" *represents* the Christian life. In a relationship with a mortal woman, the excitement is all at the beginning. Her beauty fades, and eventually decays in the grave (both sonnets end with macabre images of bodily death). Relationship with Christ, however, is always deepening, is always presenting new and exciting aspects, and is *for* always. The rest of *The Temple* is usually less harsh than these early sonnets; but Herbert never departed from his youthful decision that the invention-matter of poetry was "of thee" and "in thee" (I, l. 5; II, ll. 1, 13).

Herbert understands the faculty of invention as a good gift of God to man, to whom alone of all creation God has given the "penne …And made him Secretarie of thy praise" ('Providence', 116, l. 7-8). Invention is "that fire, which by thy power and might / *Each* breast doth feel …" ("Walton" sonnets, I, ll. 12-13, my emphasis). However, when invention in poetry becomes the "discovery" that ultimate worth and beauty is in what is mortal, it is abused; and when invention in life becomes a fertile resource for creating means of disobedience, or when it allows man to "create" his own way to God, it is even more seriously sin. All these aspects are presented in *The Temple*.

1. Invention desired and despised

The poet-speaker of 'Dulnesse' (115) berates himself for his lack of invention compared to earthly lovers. 'Dulnesse' inventively craves invention:

> Why do I languish thus, drooping and dull,
> As if I were all earth?
> O give me quicknesse, that I may with mirth
> Praise thee brim-full!
>
> . . .
> Lovers are still pretending, & ev'n wrongs
> Sharpen their Muse:
>
> But I am lost in flesh, whose sugred lyes
> Still mock me, and grow bold:
> Sure thou didst put a minde there, if I could
> Find where it lies.
>
> Lord, clear thy gift, that with a constant wit
> I may but look towards thee: . . . (ll. 1-4, 19-26)

The complaint is of a lack of invention, the more surprising given the immortal nature of the redeemed speaker (l. 2), and the greatness of his subject ("my life, my light, / Beautie alone", ll. 9-10). The "sugred lyes" of the "pretending" lovelorn sonnetteer, whose fancied wrongs only make more witty his poetry, have as their real subject the speaker. The "pure red and white" (l. 12) of the traditional beloved actually exist only to ornament the poetry, and thus the reputation and authority of the poet. The ultimate literary authority in such a case is situated in the poet. For the Protestant devotional poet, however, authority for writing and subject are the same: that is, as his "life" derives from Christ, so Christ is the subject of his poetic praises:

> Thou art my lovelinesse, my life, my light,
> Beautie alone to me:
> Thy bloudy death and undeserv'd, makes thee
> Pure red and white. (ll. 9-12)

Thus Herbert's opposition in this poem is not only to the use of the "curious strain[s]" of poetry by the "wanton lover" (l. 5), when poetry and its praises rightly belong to God, but also to his own fleshly "dulnesse". Christ's active and undeserved love of the speaker should provide real motivation, in contrast to the manipulative and

deceitful praising of the "fairest fair", the secular poet's creation of a subject whose reality is his own praise and authority. The red and white, not of female cheeks, but of the death of Christ, becomes "my life", poetic as well as spiritual life.[4] Given this real "quicknesse", (l. 3), regeneration, the question is "Where are *my* lines then?" (l. 17, my emphasis). "Since I really have a life-giving love-relationship to sing about, why am I so thick and heavy when it comes to inventing sparkling conceits which, like good wine, will 'praise thee brim-full'?" It is not merely that the work of Christ provides a moving and interesting subject, upon which there can be no lack of invention; the very poet has been changed by this relationship. He is no longer "all earth" (l. 2), and therefore the prayer "O give me quicknesse" (l. 3) *has* been granted. Christ is already "my life" (l. 9). The praise may sometimes be lacking, but the relationship is secure.

This new life-providing relationship not only motivates, but actually enables, poetic "creation". Silence, despite Elizabeth Clarke and Barbara Harman, is exactly not the outcome.[5]

> When all perfections as but one appeare,
> That those thy form doth show,
> The very dust, where thou dost tread and go,
> Makes beauties here. (ll. 13-16)

Dust which knows the imprint of the Saviour's feet becomes beautiful. It also becomes regenerate: as Adam was formed from the dust, so the dusty sinner is re-formed into a new and truly living person. This person is able to "make beauties", of word, phrase and poem, "here". The Christian does not, therefore, have to live a life of silence; indeed Herbert condemns this: "Let me not languish then, and spend / A life as barren to thy praise / As is the [unregenerate] dust …" ('Employment' I, 57, ll. 13-15). Invention is not only possible, but necessary. The matter has been provided: "thy form", not poetic form, or the forms of nature, provides "all perfections"; all that

---

[4] Compare Shakespeare's sonnets 98 and 99 with Herbert's view of what those "Roses and Lillies" (Sonnets at 17), in the garden and on the cheeks, are intended for.

[5] Clarke confuses justification with the Christian life: "The 'rest' of God, when the believer ceases from his own words and works, … for the Christian poet … may mean falling silent" (*Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, 280). Similarly Barbara Harman, assuming the point of poetry to be self-representation, sees the only option for the speaker of 'The Holdfast', for example, to be silence: Christ the interlocutor is interested in "rejecting, and finally pre-empting, speech itself" and therefore, in other poems, "narration is … the work not of invention but of opposition". *Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982, 59, 51, 61.

is beautiful will one day be seen as part of Christ. Beauty is not the creation of the poet, who re-curls the hair of his "fairest fair" by his "quaint metaphors". But there *is* a work of the poet, and that is to represent "here" what is already the true beauty, Christ. The dust which is under Christ's feet, the saved and serving soul, "makes beauties here": but the stanza suggests that Christ is the ultimate cause of the making.

Invention, then, is an apparent desideratum. The redeemed poet has only to "finde" where God's "gift", his "minde", is lying dormant (a dormancy resulting, in a nice play on words, from the "lyes" of the remaining fleshly nature ['Dulnesse', ll. 23-24]), and use it in God's service – as inventively as possible. The despairing spiral construction of the Babel of 'Sinnes Round' (122) destroys such a hope. The straight-line simplicity of an invention which is all for God seems unachievable:

> Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am,
> That my offences course it in a ring.
> My thoughts are working like a busie flame,
> Till like a cockatrice they hatch and bring:
> And when they once have perfected their draughts,
> My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.
>
> My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,
> Which spit it forth like the Sicilian Hill.
> They vent the wares, and passe them with their faults,
> And by their breathing ventilate the ill.
> But words suffice not, when there are lewd intentions:
> My hands do join to finish the inventions.
>
> My hands do join to finish the inventions:
> And so my sinnes ascend three stories high,
> As Babel grew, before there were dissensions.
> Yet ill deeds loyter not: for they supplie
> New thoughts of sinning: wherefore, to my shame,
> Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am.

The inventions of the natural heart are opposed to God. "All the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually" is the comment of Genesis on antediluvian humanity. Law, prophecy and miracle made no difference, except to increase responsibility, for the Israelite of Paul's time "doeth the same things". All the

"wisdom" and culture of the pagan ancients is likewise "foolishness" to God.[6] The "lewd intentions" described in 'Sinnes round', then, seem to apply to everybody, even the highly educated humanist in that favoured nation, that new Rome and Israel, Reformation England. That every faculty of man was corrupted by the Fall and by every moment's choice, and that there is no spark of virtue or inherent grace which may of itself attract the favour of God, is also the theme of the inclusive 'Miserie' (H. 100) and of every poem in *The Temple*, overtly or covertly.

The "Round", the cycle of thought to word to deed to thought again, is a fiery spiral, which is set on fire by a purpose to arrogate Godhead, but is not allowed, by God's limiting of evil, to ascend to heaven. Thus it continually falls back upon and re-ignites itself. Its inventions are both from, and with the intention of, a usurped authorship. The poem's spiral construction is a reminder in form that God will not be mocked. Like Babel, the cycle of sin does not go anywhere. Its only outward movement, a centrifugal escapee, is "sorrie I am". Language directed to the autonomy of self is bound (by God) to be in the end meaningless, despite its temporary volcanic ("Sicilian hill") effects.

There is no "dulnesse" here. But the flames that flicker in dark smoke are not the fire of "that ancient heat towards thee" of the martyrs' love to God ("Walton's" Sonnet I). Here the fire is destructive. Sinful actions are constantly breathed upon by the bellows of self-exalting thoughts and words. "The tongue is a fire", cautions the epistle of James, "[itself] set on fire by hell".[7] But "your tongue", said Luis Vives in 1555, "is the one instrument nature gave you for doing good".[8] This is not a contradiction of James so much as a humanistic plea for the priority of eloquence over scholastic dialectics in education. Invention is a key part of such eloquence, in poetic as well as in oratorical rhetoric. Vives, though, did not see what Herbert could see: the cycle of invention, left to "nature", starts with "thoughts", goes on to "words" ("ventilated" by means of the tongue) and is completed by actions ("hands", "deeds"), and all of these are "offences". This cycle perpetuates itself. Only the implication of forgiveness

---

[6] Geneva Bible, Genesis 6:5, Romans 2:1, I Corinthians 1-3 *passim.*

[7] James 3:6.

[8] *De ratione dicendi* III.12, in Brian Vickers, "Rhetoric and Poetics", *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C.B. Schmitt and Q. Skinner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,1988, 728.

("Sorrie I am") breaks the cycle in regard to the inventor's eternal punishment, though not, as the "round" form shows, in regard to actual behaviour during this life: the sinful nature is always present. There is a reminder too of the historical providence of God in stopping evil from progressing too far and damaging his people and his purposes: "dissensions" and the confusion of *tongues* prevented the builders of Babel from fulfilling their divinity-appropriating purpose. [9]

Erasmus, like Vives, had no qualms about the efficacy of "an eloquence which not only captivates the ear with its fleeting delight but leaves a lasting sting in the mind of its hearers, which grips, which transforms, which sends away a far different listener than it had received". [10] This refers to more than invention, but includes it. Sidney, despite his token recognition of the "stony and beastly people" upon which poetry has to work, is one with his humanist predecessors in not admitting that only God's invention and God's writing can return stone to flesh. To Sidney, poetry's images, not the Word of God by the work of the Holy Spirit, can "strike, pierce and possess the soul", implying, though Sidney is careful not to state this explicitly, a striking, piercing and possessing of the heart for God, a complete change of inward allegiance and outward behaviour. Poetry does not merely picture, but creates, virtue: the result is a nation of "many Cyruses".[11] This inventive work of rhetoric threatens to replace the work of Christ.

'Sinnes Round', unlike 'Dulnesse', inventively abhors invention. Its creativity is not of new men, rather of sinful actions which "supplie / New thoughts of sinning"; the circle endlessly chases itself and can never "create" in the sense of "and God saw … and it was good". The poem's circular form reinforces this non-creative "invention". The tower of Babel is traditionally pictured as a building of cornucopic shape whose

---

[9] There is probably a reference to Babel in the A.V. of Ecclesiastes 7:29: "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions".

[10] Quoted in Andrew D. Weiner, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Protestantism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1978, vii.

[11] *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. Jan van Dorsten, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, 19, 32, 24. There is a significant, though perhaps unconscious, similarity between Sidney's description of the effects of poetic imagery, and Hebrews 4:12: "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit … and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

"stories" wind upwards in continuous spiral fashion.[12] 'Sinnes Round' is also an idolatrous ring dance around an edifice of would-be authority. Invention even in the service of God would seem to be precluded, therefore. How can the sinner praise? "How shall infection / Presume on thy perfection?" ('Miserie'. ll. 35-6). For while "inventions" in 'Sinnes Round' have a wider context than literary authorship, poetry is included (thoughts, words, hands). Herbert constantly associates the theological understanding of life with the writing of poetry. "My words take fire" would sound well in the mouth of a Romantic poet, whose revolutionary ardour would, with the self-authorisation of "my inflamed thoughts", burn the existing literary establishment. But to Herbert, the fire is sulphurous – and self-destructive. The spiral achieves nothing: the "doom of nonsense" [13] is the only product of the endlessly self-referential words.

The only end to this process of clever poetic invention and destructive self-invention would appear to be judgment – and silence. But 'Judgement' (187) demonstrates a poet who goes on writing, and insouciantly, in the face of the most appalling and silencing possibilities. The poem speaks of the poet's personal life in terms of writing. One may present as basis for his eternal acceptance his own "book" of inventions which are creations of self-righteousness, or the book recording – discovering -- Christ's "writing" of substitutionary salvation. The latter "invention" is the discovery that the speaker's sins are "written" into Christ's record. God will "call / For ev'ry man's peculiar book" (ll. 4-5) and at that time

> . . . some will turn thee to some leaves therein
> So void of sinne,
> That they in merit shall excell.
> But I resolve, when thou shalt call for mine
> That to decline,
> And thrust a Testament into thy hand:
> Let that be scann'd.
> There thou shalt find my faults are thine. (ll. 8-15)

---

[12] Umberto Eco, in *The Search For The Perfect Language*, has associated Babel with attempts, especially in the seventeenth century, to "invent" the perfect language. Tr. J. Fentress, London, Fontana, 1997.

[13] The phrase is C.S.Lewis', in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, London, Oxford University Press, 1942, 95, 121.

The choice is apparent only. The poem does not propose that there are in fact any who by their own "merit shall excell". The only "book" which can be accepted by God is the unspotted record of the life, and the vicariously blackened record of the death, of Christ: "my faults are thine". ("Lo, here I hang, charged with a world of sinne": 'The Sacrifice', l. 205.). As for poet, so for reader. Not the lessons of history nor the abstractions of philosophy, nor, despite Sidney, the golden persuasions of poetry's inventions, can remove "my faults". Only Christ's substitutionary sin-bearing and God's willingness to impute "leaves … void of sinne" to the life-writer can allow "poor wretches" to "brook …Thy dreadfull look" (ll. 1-2).

The poet can therefore go on writing in the face of such a prospect. Reformation theology does not disable poetic invention. Stanley Fish has supposed that submission to the work of God in Christ (the end of self-effort) makes Herbert's poetry consume itself, its matter making its form sinful.[14] But this is, as Richard Strier puts it, to mistake "a theological distinction for a philosophical one".[15] Fish confuses the end of self-effort in the area of pleasing God with any effort at all. What Christ has done actually allows the sinner to "do".[16] Indeed writing which is praising God rather than hating, escaping from, or substituting self for God can only be written by the justified sinner. And only the justified sinner will "find" (invent) his matter in Christ, being himself "found" (invented) by Christ. So far from being rendered impotent by a disappearance of self into God, the justified self to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed is the only self, as 'The Holdfast' indicates, capable of God-pleasing works.

Herbert is aware of the "inventive" properties of his sinful nature, and here and there expresses anxieties (or his reader-representative speaker does) about the writing of poetry. *The Temple*, however, so far from being a negation of poetry and therefore an inventive exercise in astounding futility, expresses a self not negated but re-born in

---

[14] *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972.
[15] "Self-Consumption", *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts*, Berkeley, University of California, 1995, 28, referring to *Love Known*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1983, 61-83. See also Joseph Summers, "Stanley Fish's Reading of Seventeenth-Century Literature", *Modern Language Quarterly* 35 (1974): 403-417.
[16] Romans 4-8. See Luther's remarks on good works as the fruit of justification in "Commentary on Galatians", *Martin Luther, Selections from his Writings*, ed. J. Dillenberger, New York, Doubleday, 109-111. See also "The Sum of Saving Knowledge", *The Westminster Confession of Faith* [1643], Edinburgh, The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1966, 325, 334.

Christ. The "invention" which is the basis of Herbert's corpus is a constant "finding" of more of the truth in Christ, in whom "the beauty lies in the discovery". As 'Sinnes Round' is itself a most clever rhetorical device whose origin is a sinful human heart, it would indeed be an artifact consumed by its own fierily wicked invention if it were not for what Fish overlooked in Herbert's poetry: "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation ... all things are become new".[17] New again is the creative power of naming given to Adam. Fish supposes that a pantheistic negation of being is what the poems "do" (if a nothing can be "done").[18] Human words whose authority is the Divine Word, however, will never "return void".[19] Both subject and authority are the recreating love of God in Christ, by which the circularity of the ultimately non-referential words of the Babel attitude is straightened and given the reference (God) for which all language was intended. When the original "inventing" is allowed to be God's, there is real signifying and real meaning.

This may make the process sound more simple than Herbert's struggles with invention actually suggest. The Christian poet may still "find" that his poetry is for his own glory, and that his thoughts and works in life are subtly returning to a legalistic "inventing" of his own salvation by looking at his own goodness. The re-living dust has dusty characteristics still. But that is now not the whole story, nor the end of the story. That permanent dust to which the praiseless will inevitably "tend / But with delaies" ('Employment' I, 57, ll. 15-16) is not the final resting place for the Christian poet, nor even the main environment of his earthly days. He may invent; indeed he can hardly help himself. Joy and hope flavour most of Herbert's poetry, because human incapacity is a counsel of despair only when hope is thought to reside in human authority.

An inherent self-trust makes rhetorical invention in the service of God seem entirely justified. Ceri Sullivan points out that in English recusant writing from 1570 to 1603 rhetorical devices were heavily relied upon, because in the Catholic thinking of that time "any reader can provide for his own salvation. ... Believing that the individual can craft his own character, ... these Catholic texts see rhetoric as irresistibly

[17] 2 Corinthians 5:17; Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 1972.
[18] *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 4, and Appendix, 383; also see chapter III, 'The Dialectic of the Self in Herbert's Poetry' and its miscontextualisation of "Thy word is all" in 'The Flower'.

attractive".[20] But Protestant humanist writers were also often unable to see the anomaly between, on the one hand, their professed faith in the spiritual incapacity of man and the finished work of Christ, and on the other, a belief, consistent from Ascham to Milton, in the life-changing power of persuasive invention. This belief presupposed the goodness and freedom of the will of both the writer and the reader.

It is not only the misreading of Herbert's theology, but the misreading of Herbert's rhetorical and didactic approach, which causes Fish and his followers to see Herbert's poetry as consumed, collapsing, a poor substitute for silence, or inventive in preaching the wickedness of invention. Most of the lyric poems are better understood by the model of a preacher and a congregation.[21] M. C. Allen has demonstrated the purpose of Herbert's invention: "Herbert's ingenuity is pastoral".[22] As the preacher will speak of "I" or "my" but will not necessarily mean himself in the particulars of his topic, so does the speaker of Herbert's poems represent the majority of the readers. A preacher may not have committed such a sin or fallen into such a misconception of the love of God as he is speaking about, but he will speak as if he has or will, for he knows his own heart is as "dusty" as that of any of his congregation. Just so do the sinful inventions of the generalised forgiveness-needing heart become, sinlessly, the inventions of the representative poet. Herbert's poet-speaker is representative of that item much decried in postmodern theory, human nature, and often of an even less popular entity, redeemed human nature. Therefore many poems are double in their meaning; are not autobiographical of a Christian poet's difficulties, because what is being said about poetry is really about salvation; and have an end known before the beginning, not necessarily in the literal writing of each poem, but in the matter for invention generally. Closure, in a spiritual sense, is certain. Barbara Harman's concerns about the collapsed, or re-invented, poem, for example, are therefore based on an insufficient view of Herbert's -- let it be said -- intention. [23]

---

[19] Isaiah 55:11.

[20] *Dismembered Rhetoric*: *English Recusant Writing 1580-1603*, London, Assd. University Presses, 1995, 144.

[21] "He that hath been sick of a Consumption, and knows what recovered him, is a Physitian so far as he meets with the same disease … much better [than he that] was never sick." "The Parson's Library", *CP*., H. 278.

[22] "George Herbert's Pastoral Wit", *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995, 122.

[23] *Costly Monuments*, 101, 139, for example.

In an earlier article on the nature of Herbert's speaker and the representation of the self,[24] Harman usefully opposes Martz and Halewood, theologically differing but in this point of Herbert's poetic critically agreeing, to Tuve, Fish and Vendler. Martz and Halewood believe, as I also have suggested, that Herbert's speakers are representative of the reader, and that the "I", when poet, knows the end from the beginning. Tuve, however, sees a technique of exemplary representation as manipulative of the reader, and therefore untrue of Herbert, and says that the sins written about were real to Herbert.[25] They were certainly that, although not to the extent of "keeping his savior on the rack", implying Herbert's ignorance of the finished nature of the work of Christ (and therefore the finished "written" nature of the invention-material for the Christian poet). Tuve's argument would suggest that a poet, or a preacher, must experience before he can write – a romantic and expressive implication which contradicts her premises about Renaissance poetry.[26] To Fish, though, the speaker disappears, consumed by his own inventions; there is no independent self. Vendler finds Herbert's matter for invention, Reformation dogma, trite and unoriginal, and is interested only in a speaker-self who is independent of God, any other position tending to equate God and Herbert. I suggest that both the independence and the equation would be equally appalling to Herbert.

The problem is one of authority. Harman does recognize that "Herbert's poems have a reference outside the self to which they owe whatever authority they have", but then assumes that they "temporarily suspend" knowledge of this authority, and it is (only) then that "autobiography -- or lyric, or dream" can flourish. I believe that there is never such a suspension, but only an appearance of it. The apparent disappearance, and return, of the speaker's acknowledgment of God's authority are to demonstrate to the anxious reader that he will never be dropped from the "holdfast" of the loving authority of God. In Herbert's poetic, invention is not a function of the independent self, but flourishes only by the writing and re-writing of God.[27]

---

[24] "George Herbert's 'Affliction' (I): The Limits of Representation", *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*, ed. J. R. Roberts, Hamden, Connecticut, Archon Books, 1979.
[25] "Herbert and *Caritas,*" *Essays of Rosemond Tuve*, ed. T. P. Roche, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970.
[26] See *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1947, and *A Reading of George Herbert*, London, Faber and Faber, 1952.
[27] Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954; William Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970; Rosemond Tuve, "Herbert and *Caritas*", *Essays of Rosemond Tuve*, ed. T. P. Roche, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970;

'Dulnesse' (the need for invention) and 'Sinnes round' (the problem with invention) are not contradictory of each other, but complementary. 'Dulnesse' has a speaker who ought to be inventive; 'Sinnes Round' has a speaker who knows that in practice any invention is likely to be of sin, for the only creative authority belonging to the fallen human is the negativity of rebellion. But the two speakers are the one believer. The two poems together describe the dilemma of Romans 7, using the difficulties of writing poetry as metaphor for the problems caused by the remaining (though not ultimately triumphant) sinful nature.[28] At the practical pen-to-paper stage, how is this to be resolved? Sidney's breast-beating and pen-biting Astrophil looks in his heart, to the image of Stella rather than, perhaps, to the ten places of invention suggested by Ramus.[29] But Herbert does not like the heart's facility for invention, seeing there only an image of the self that would be king. To Jeremiah and to Herbert, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked", not an independently authoritative source of truth.[30] The heart is stony, in Herbert's poetry, not because it lacks images, but because it is adamant and dead towards God. However, Romans 7:24, "O wretched man that I am", is over-compensated for by Romans 8:1. "There is … no condemnation" to the one who by the gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ is "in Christ Jesus". Rhetorical invention alone cannot soften stony hearers. But the blood-softened heart may use the old rhetorical mode without deceit. Invention and a derived authority may co-exist, just as the inventions of the poets imitating antiquity are both their work and the acknowledgment of a greater authority (at least theoretically). For the poet whose authority is Christ, the two identities of "my work" and "not my work" are even closer, for the poet himself is changed: "Christ in you,

---

Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 1972; Helen Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1975; Clarke, *Theory and Theology*, 1997; John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Culture of Religious Despair*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991; Julia Guernsey, *The Pulse of Praise: Form as a Second Self in the Poetry of George Herbert,* Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1999. There are of course other participators in this debate; A. D. Nuttall, for example, has difficulty with the "invention" of the speaking voice of God in Herbert's poems: *Overheard by God*, London, Methuen, 1980.

[28] "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace", Romans 6:14.

[29] *Astrophil and Stella*, I, in *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. W. Ringler, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962, 165. See also Ringler's Introduction, xix, xxii, concerning Sidney and Ramus. Sidney was interested in Ramus, who put *inventio* with *dispositio* in "logic" rather than in "rhetoric", and proposed "causes, effects, subjects, adjuncts, opposites, comparatives, names, divisions, definitions, witnesses" as *topoi.* See Wilbur Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*, Princeton, University of Princeton., 1971, 16. Herbert's poetry does not reject these (or any other similar scheme, of which there were many) as sinful, but rather the use to which they were put.

[30] Jeremiah 17:9.

the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). The poet is both in his authority and his authority in him.

2. The invented inventor

The so-called "Christian humanist" literary critics do not come to grips with the Fall or with the irony of a new world, necessitated by the Fall, being invented by a poet disabled by the Fall. George Puttenham speaks as if to pre-lapsarian Adam:

> [As God created *ex nihilo*], even so the very Poet makes and contrives out of his own braine both the verse and the matter of his poeme ... therefore [poets] be (by maner of speech) as creating gods. [31]

"By maner of speech" does not help much, since "speech" itself is the poetic (and biblical) agent of creation. Puttenham alludes to an argument put forth by some of the Italian critics, influenced perhaps by the counter-Reformation and by Platonism, who refuse to believe man's sub-creatorly faculties damaged by the Fall.[32] Puttenham here goes further than his literary master Sidney's cautious and tongue-in-cheek attitude in *A Defence of Poetry*. But Sidney too would have caused problems for Herbert. Although his language holds back from ideas of poetic divinity, Sidney in fact puts poetry in the place of the Holy Spirit's regeneration of corrupt nature:

> Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection [to nature], lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms that never were in nature ... freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. [33]

Here we watch linguistic change happening.[34] The rhetorical *inventio* is becoming the Romantic "invention". "Finding" what is objectively there is becoming "creating" from within the self. This is an example of a change in word use which directly depends upon a change in the theological view of the world and the self. That there

---

[31] From *The Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham (supposedly), in Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1904, Vol. II, p. 3.

[32] For example, Minturno. See Vernon Hall, *Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of its Social Content*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1945, 64.

[33] *Defence*, 23-4.

[34] See OED: there is a use of "invention" in the sense of individual creation as early as 1536, but most examples suggest that in Sidney's time the word was still largely used in connection with the rhetorical "finding matter for topics", implying "that which is in existence already". "Invention" and its cognates in *The Temple* have both traditional and modern meanings.

were theological problems for the Protestant Sidney in such an assertion perhaps accounts for the gently mocking tone of the *Defence*. The tone is even more self-ironisingly extravagant at the end, when, despite having promised not to weave "circles about your imagination, to believe for true what he writes" he proceeds to "conjure" his audience into a belief, after all, in the divine status of the poet, referring to the "sacred mysteries of poetry", the gift by the "heavenly Deity" through the poets of "all knowledge …", and to the "divine fury", which confers "immortality" upon poet and subject.[35]

Sidney excuses his "saucy … comparison", of the poet who invents with the God who creates and recreates, by referring to the Genesis edict making man the ruler over nature. Yet the poet goes beyond a derived dominion if "with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth *surpassing* [nature's] doings": strong theological meat, and certainly an argument, as he predicts, "by few … understood, and by fewer granted".[36] Much depends upon the definition of "things". If the golden world remains on paper, there is little problem to the pragmatic mind of the Elizabethan and Jacobean nation-building reader. But Sidney removes this possibility, and here we see the unexamined flaw in the basic assumption of the Christian humanist:

> Which delivering forth is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh … to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright how and why that maker made him.[37]

"If", indeed. Sidney's next passage destroys all possibility of a world full of actual Cyruses: "our erected wit makes us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keeps us from reaching unto it". But as with imitation, so with invention: there can be no transfer from page to person, according to Herbert, unless the will (of hearer as of speaker) is remade by the work of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit. The already-achieved and finished work of Christ's love is the means of such a transformation.

'The Posie' (182) suggests a familiarity with Sidney's opposition of "wit" and "will", and supplies the beginnings of a resolution to this apparent conflict and a way forward

---

[35] *Defence*, 53, 74-5.
[36] *Defence*, 24-5, my emphasis.

for the "infected" poet. "Rest", the property of one who has "ceased from his own works" and is trusting in Christ's, paradoxically produces "invention" – or there is no poem:

Let wits contest,
And with their words and posies windows fill:
Lesse then the least
Of all thy mercies, is my posie still.

This on my ring,
This on my picture, in my book I write:
Whether I sing,
Or say, or dictate, this is my delight.

Invention rest,
Comparisons go play, wit use thy will:
Lesse then the least
Of all God's mercies, is my posie still.

Wit's use of its will may be an allusion to Sidney's *Defence*, and if so, its meaning is more than merely "go and do what you wish". The connotation may be negative, and sarcastic, for the will, in Reformation teaching, has no freedom except to sin, and the wit can therefore lend itself only to what is damaging. The redeemed wit, rather than display its superiority to others, sees itself as the object of grace. Despite his sending "comparisons" out to play, seeing them as childish, Herbert *does* set up a comparison, but in the form of a contrast between his motto of thankfulness and humility (glorifying God) and the poetic "contests" of secular writers (glorifying self). This poet is God's invention. The posy, both flowers and a written motto, and perhaps "poesy", here becomes a symbol of the poet himself. [38]

The motto is a difficult one, and to be understood as hyperbole, for logically "less than least" is non-existent. Jacob said "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant"; and Paul said: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Genesis 32:10, Ephesians 3:8). This context helps us to understand that to Herbert, poetic invention for its own sake

---

[37] *Defence*, 24.

[38] Posy, OED: 1. A short motto … within a ring, etc: "Let this be your posie rather: Manners makes man" (1569). 2. A bunch of flowers. 3. A collection of "flowers" of poetry or rhetoric (1569).

is "play" indeed, compared to the wealth the speaker really has. So the motto is deliberately misleading. The poet feels full, not empty. The motto is not a cringing insincerity, complaint in disguise. "Less then the least of all thy mercies" is still infinitely greater than the greatest in the realm outside the mercy of God. As the motto has depths beneath its apparently simple surface, so the very existence of the poem, in its "simple" words and metre, indicates matters of unsurpassable importance. "Mercy" implies an undeserved rescue from the brink of hell. So great a matter can only be expressed inadequately; the small bunch of everyday flowers, the motto on the ring, are as capable of expressing the saving love of God as the utmost sophistication of wit. The poem is a comparison which admits that here there are no "comparisons".

'The Posie' is designed to look simple, less than the least of all inventions, but is in fact an "invention" of the highest order, for it is itself a metaphor. Its problem appears to be that it decries invention while being inventively deceptive, an artful artlessness. A duplicitous Herbert is hard to swallow; but even bearing in mind Richard Strier's call for criticism to "look", not to pre-impose unity, such indigestion is not necessary, with this poem at any rate.[39] The only way to avoid seeing this poem as art concealing art or as a poem consuming itself is to remember Herbert's use of the "writing" trope in connection with salvation. The contest of wits (l. 1), as in 'Jordan' (II), is between man and God. Hence "use thy will" in the third stanza: man's will is to save himself, not to be one of "God's mercies" (and a microscopic one at that). "Invention", on this understanding, is the creation of oneself as the authority in the universe. Wit's inventions, amusing and poet-glorifying in secular love poetry, are inadequate to show the love of God; their inadequacy is like that of the will's inventions, desperate not to be indebted to "thy mercy".

3. Invention's origins

Who originates and owns Herbert's inventions? 'The Dedication', at the beginning of *The Temple*, does and does not give an answer. 'The Dedication' immediately follows "The Printers to the Reader", which ends with "his own Motto, with which he used to conclude all things that might seem to tend any way to his own honour; *Lesse then the*

[39] See "Impossible Worldliness" and other essays in *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Resistant Texts*, 1995.

least of Gods mercies." [40] The conjunction of the motto and the dedicatory poem would have pleased Herbert. As the motto speaks to God, so does 'The Dedication'. God is the "patron"; the writer is one of "God's mercies", and the conception and accomplishment of the work is due to God alone. But 'The Dedication' speaks also to the reader: here at the very beginning, Herbert declares his dual intention, to give to God the praise-fruits of lips that honour him (Hebrews 13:15) and to be profitable to the reader. The reader who does not wish to "make a gain" but who will damage himself by the increased responsibility which knowledge of the gospel brings -- and in this way, as well as by attack or misunderstanding, hurt the writer -- is asked not to turn any more pages.

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
And must return. Accept of them and me,
And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.
Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

The poem does not really give an answer to "who invents?". Herbert says "my" and then "not mine". He asks God to accept both poem and poet. Accepting implies an origin outside the accepter. Two origins are given, yet as God is origin of all ("from thee … and must return") they are in fact one. The double layering in many poems, dramatic speaker-experience laid over a foundation of the unchanging, achieved, already-"written" work of Christ, is expressed in 'The Dedication' in terms of origins and ownership. The two layers are held together in a tension of "mine and thine" as in 'Clasping of Hands' (137), as 'The Holdfast' (143) suggests is the nature of the Christian life, and as Heather Asals suggests is also the nature of (Herbert's) predicative language.[41] Nothing is more characteristic of Reformation Christianity than this necessity of holding in the mind two truths which logically ought to cancel one another out: human responsibility and God's sovereignty, for example. Herbert here applies this paradoxical tension to the matter of literary authority, of who owns the "fruits" of invention.

---

[40] In all versions 1633-1695.

[41] *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Each of the first four lines demonstrates the apparent impossibility of Christian invention. Herbert cannot of himself have a "first" anything: Christ is the "first fruits" of resurrection (I Corinthians 15: 20, 23) and all else in life depends on inclusion in him. "The branch cannot bear fruit of itself", Jesus points out in John 15. The Old Testament law of the presentation of the first harvestings of the field, orchard and flock was not for the appeasement of God, but a reminder to those offering that nothing in fact was of their originating. The two origins in 'The Dedication' are not equal chronologically or authoritatively. God alone is Origin, from whom all else is derivative. God is to "accept" what is his already – it is the poet's fruit, yet God's. The poet is to "strive" because empowered to do so – it is his work, yet God's.

'The Dedication' conveys both the early and the later meanings of "invention". God has so structured the universe that analogies are there for the "finding". The correlations of true wit must speak of him.[42] Poets who stop at second causes (for example, nature) have "poor invention" and a "low mind" (Sonnet II from Walton's *Lives*, l. 9) because they do not see that "roses and lillies speak thee", that the accidents of nature say something about their Maker, and are themselves analogies, the wit of God.[43] The poetic fruits, therefore, are "not mine". Yet they are still, and truly, "my first fruits"; there can be no giving without prior ownership. The poet's mind is the source, yet it functions in the service of the glory of God because redeemed from the necessity of being itself god.

Boccaccio's discussion of invention deals with the problem of human or divine origin with no apparent difficulty, combining a discourse of inspiration with that of human capability as if they are aspects of one thing. Boccaccio makes no mention, as does Sidney's use of his work, of the effect of sin upon even the divinely-gifted poet:

> This poetry … is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention … which the mind has invented. It proceeds from the bosom of God … [I]t impels the soul to a longing for utterance; it brings forth strange and unheard-of creations of the mind; it … adorns the whole composition with unusual

---

[42] Compare Judith Dundas, " 'All things are bigge with jest': Wit as a Means of Grace", *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, ed. J. R. Roberts, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1994, 124-142, esp.136 and ff.

[43] Compare Joseph Summer's "hieroglyphic" universe in *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1954, 76-82. Also see Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Poetry*, ch. VII.

> interweaving of words and thoughts, and thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction. ... Furthermore, places of retirement, the lovely handiwork of Nature herself, are favourable to poetry, as well as peace of mind and desire for worldly glory ... [T]he poets would declare with their own lips under whose help and guidance they compose their inventions when, for example, they raise flights of symbolic steps to heaven, or make thick-branching trees spring aloft to the very stars, or go winding about mountains to their summits. Haply, to disparage this art of poetry ... men will say that it is rhetoric which the poets employ. Indeed. I will not deny it in part, for rhetoric has its own inventions. [But] whatever is composed as under a veil, and thus exquisitely wrought, is poetry and poetry alone. [44]

The context is allegory, but the remarks about the origin of poetic invention seem to foreshadow 'The Dedication's' apparent duality. Invention comes "from the bosom of God" yet is of the poet's originating ("their inventions"). But Herbert has thought much more deeply about where invention originates, and who is glorified by it. "The lovely handiwork of Nature", and even nature's Creator, can be used as inventive material for the furtherance of "worldly glory" for the poet. It is this which alarms the speaker of 'Jordan' (II).

4. Invention as metaphor

The first-fruits of 'Dedication' are related to the 'Jordan' poems, as John Mulder points out.[45] The crossing of the Jordan river was for the Israelites a beginning of an entirely new life, a possession of a land which had been undeservedly given. In token of a paying-back impossible in total, "it shall be, when thou art come into the land which the Lord the God giveth thee ... thou shalt take the first of all the fruit of the earth ... and the priest ... shall set it down before the altar ... and thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee" (Deuteronomy 26:1-11).

'Invention' was the first title for 'Jordan' (II) (102).[46] It depicts the Christian poet who, having crossed the river dividing the self-glorifying efforts of secular poetry from that which praises God for his works, and having tasted the undeserved "fruit"

[44] Giovanni Boccaccio, from *De genealogia deorum gentilium* (1350-74), XIV, 7, tr. and ed. Robert P. Miller, in *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977.
[45] *The Temple of the Mind: Education and Literary Taste in Seventeenth-Century England*, New York, Pegasus, 1969, 138-9.
[46] Hutchinson, 513.

of God's grace, hopes that the inventions of his wit and pen may be a token thanksgiving. 'Jordan' (II) expresses anxiety about becoming entangled, even west of Jordan, in Boccaccio's glory-bearing trees of invention. To "deck the sense", unironised, would have met with Boccaccio's approval, however, and in the Renaissance was an expected function of poetry:

> When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention,
> Such was their lustre, they did so excell;
> That 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. (ll. 1-6)

Writers of advice to poets would have found nothing but good sense in the first four lines, unless perhaps a little unease with "*heav'nly* joyes". Boccaccio's "desire for worldly glory" found favour with George Gascoigne, who saw nothing wrong with "decking the sense": the poet must use "some fine invention … shewing the quick capacitie of the writer",[47] advice which may have been in Herbert's mind when he worried that "this was not quick enough, and that was dead" (l. 10). "Trim invention" must "sell" both the poet and the "sense". But the sense is a "plain intention": to praise God for the gift of grace, free and not "to sell". The "lustre" meant for God rubs off on the poet; the intention is no longer plain (simple). The connection here between rhetoric and property suggests that "decking the sense" with "trim invention" is inappropriate for the Christian poet, whether his anticipated audience be God or needy human. But a "plain intention" ("My God, my king"?) could scarcely be more metaphor-curled than in this poem, itself a metaphor of relationship with God and, as with many Herbert poems, far from having straight hair. The problem faced in this poem is not that of "quaint words and trim invention" in themselves, but that they were "sought out" (l. 3) in order to "weave myself into the sense" (l. 14).

Certainly the sun needs no gorgeous clothing; the Son needs no such ornamented manipulation in the guise of praise or poetic evangelisation-by-rhetoric. But the main concern of the writer is that such "curling" belongs to the contest of wits scorned in

---

[47] Vickers, *Criticism*, 162-3.

'The Posie'. The constant search for imagery "quick enough" betrays a concern for the life and fame of the author, not for the "sense" of the work of Christ:

> 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.
> Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
> Much less those joyes which trample on his head. (ll. 7-12)

"If *I* were not sped". The desire for fame as a poet is used as a metaphor for the desire to "clothe the sunne" by works of self-righteousness, which "trample on his head" because taking from Christ's glory in the work of salvation. There is a parallel throughout this poem between the problem of writing Christian poetry and the problem of "writing" a life pleasing to God. "Quick" and "dead" are juxtaposed as an allusion to Ephesians 2:5: "Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)". The "thousands of notions" suggest the many attempts made by the individual who imagines a God appeased by his efforts, and lest we think too well of such sincere efforts, Herbert depicts them as those which "trample on his head". Calvin, in a section dealing with the status of spiritual death of the apparently living, describes these "thousands of notions" in their reality:

> [T]he mind of man has been so completely estranged from God's righteousness that it conceives, desires and undertakes, only that which is impious, perverted, foul, impure, and infamous. The heart is so steeped in the poison of sin, that it can breathe out nothing but a loathsome stench. But if some men occasionally make a show of good, their minds nevertheless ever remain enveloped in hypocrisy and deceitful craft, and their hearts bound by inner perversity. [48]

This is close, I believe, to Herbert's use, here and in the original title, of the word "invention". The attempt to clothe the "sunne", to substitute for or add to the work of Christ, is a work of "deceitful craft", as Calvin said, and an indication of the "not quick enough", in fact "dead", status of the would-be life-writer. Only Christ, not poetry's inventions, Boccaccio's "symbolic steps to heaven", can bring man to God. The "lustre" is not that of the "sunne", Christ, but of the "lines" (ll. 11,1,2). Primarily,

'Jordan' suggests a complete change in the way everything is viewed, even poetry, just as crossing the river meant for the Israelites a new life in the land of God's gift to them. Part of this change involves a new understanding of the nature of "clothing the sunne", that the apparently beautiful attempts to please God are actually, as Calvin says, both the products and the producers of corruption and death.

Line twelve removes all possibility of mistaking the poem for an instruction in "how to write better devotional poetry". The inventions of 'Jordan' (II) ironise the advice of the Renaissance critics on invention. The "places" or "topics" which represented, in classical rhetoric, different approaches by which one's subject might be accused, exonerated, shown to be true or false, or praised or blamed, are in relation to poetry to or about God shown to be "thousands of notions" whose end is the exaltation of the poetic self. The fires of 'Sinnes Round' burn also in this poem, revealing a usurping authority:

> As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,
> So did I weave myself into the sense.
> But while I bustled, I might hear a friend
> Whisper, *How wide is all this long pretence!*
> *There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd:*
> *Copie out onely that, and save expense.* (l. 13-18)

Now if Herbert is understood as castigating himself for elaborating and decorating a "plain intention" with poetic ornament, because the praise of God must be simple and unadorned by rhetorical device, the reader is in trouble: for the poem is a rhetorical "invention" in the highest degree. Therefore either the "intention" is hypocritical, and poetry can never escape the "long pretence", as Michael Schoenfeldt argues even Herbert's poetry can not, of the "manipulative tactics of supplication"; or 'Jordan' (II) is, as I suggest, a metaphorical explanation of salvation. [49]

'Jordan' (II) is as much about the writing of the life as about the writing of poetry. "Trim invention" and "thousands of notions" refer not only to the poetic decorating of the Gospel message, but also to the belief that one can redeem one's own life and

---

[48] *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F. L. Battles, ed. J. McNeill, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960, 2. 5. 19.

make it acceptable to God. This usurpation of authorship is struggled with in many of Herbert's poems. The unregenerate self, as life-writer, will weave himself into the sense, trying to gain salvation on his own merits.

The double meaning in 'Jordan' (II) is illustrated in 'Good Friday' (39), in which we are told that the speaker will write with the ink of its own heart's blood, actually sin, unless the Saviour write first:

> Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write
> Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight;
> My heart hath store, write there, where in
> One box doth lie both ink and sinne: (ll. 21-24).

These lines also illustrate how a poet, and the seeker of salvation, may in practice still write, with invention, what is already written. Much of the conceit itself is literally already written, being a compilation of biblical metaphors about the heart.[50] Herbert, inventing by finding existing materials and applying them, has the heart as a container for a writing fluid, blood. The speaker's heart-blood may be ink for the Saviour to use to engrave there His "sorrows … and bloudie fight". The heart is also a container for sin, which will dominate without the Lord's writing. Other poems continue the heart / writing theme, particularly with the biblical image of the stony heart, which must be made flesh before it can come up with acceptable inventions. Calvin pointed out, referring to Ezekiel 36:26-27,[51] verses crucial to Herbert's invention both in their spirit and in their letter, that a heart (a will) of malleable material, already God's and merely slightly misshapen, needs only re-moulding by the Spirit of God (see 'Love unknown', 129), whereas the heart of stone must be removed and replaced by a heart of flesh, "soft and supple to thy will", 'H. Baptisme' (II) (44). "[B]y this comparison the Lord wished to show that nothing good can ever be wrung from our heart, unless

---

[49] *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, 13.

[50] Proverbs 3:3, 7:3; Jeremiah 31:33; II Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 8:10, for example. William Alabaster has "Thy blood the ink" in 'The Sponge', written c.1597, and it may be that Herbert saw this poem. Alabaster, however, proposes tears also as ink, suggesting a meritorious grief on the part of the sinner. *The Sonnets of William Alabaster*, ed. G.M. Story and Helen Gardner, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, 13, and see Ceri Sullivan, *Dismembered Rhetoric*, 103, and Claudine Raynaud, "Blood, Ink, and Sin: Writing Sacrifice in *The Temple*", QWERTY 7 (Oct. 1997): 39-49.

[51] "A new heart shall I give you, and will put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. And I shall put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes" (Calvin's version, tr. Battles).

it become wholly other ... therefore ... everything good in us is the work of grace alone."[52]

In 'The Dedication' and in 'Jordan' (II), the poet gives what he is given, and writes what has been written and as one written upon. As paradox is the nature of the gospel and of the Christian life, so paradox is the nature of *The Temple*. How Herbert writes is how we are saved. Salvation has been "written" and yet we may still "invent" -- discover, not create. Herbert's poetic inventions are of a love already penned; salvation for the individual is the discovery of a redemption already achieved. 'Jordan' (II) and other poems about poetry are special cases of Herbert's lyric theory: experience level (struggle and discovery) over "finished" level (security and resolution), the "I do" made possible by, or redeemed by, "Christ has done". Both are true at any moment; but the appearance, or drama, level becomes untrue if the other is discounted (as so much recent literary theory insists on discounting it). In the poems about poetry, the "doing" of the representative "I" speaker is the making of the poem. Herbert uses writing poetry as a metaphor for coming to God through Christ.

'Jordan' (II) alludes perhaps to Sonnets 1 and 3 of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* :[53]

> Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
> . . .
> I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
> Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
> . . .
> But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;
> Invention, Nature's child, fled stepdame Study's blows,
> . . .
> 'Fool', said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write'.
>
> (1, ll. 1, 5-6, 9-10, 14)
>
> . . . in Stella's face I read
> What love and beauty be; then all my deed
> But copying is, what in her Nature writes.
>
> (3, ll. 12-14)

Astrophil's image for copying is the love and beauty written in Stella by Nature, the mother of invention. What Herbert's "Nature" writes is "sinne" ('Nature', 45, 'Good

---

[52] *Institutes*, 2.3.6, 297-8.

[53] As 'Dulnesse' (ll.5-12) may to Sonnet 9, and 'Assurance' (ll. 29-30) to Sonnet 90. See *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. W. Ringler, 1962, 169, 224. Louis Martz gives more correspondences between *Astrophil and Stella* and *The Temple* in *The Poetry of Meditation*, 1955.

Friday', 38). To Herbert, the heart is not a source or mirror of invention, but stone: "And though my hard heart scarce to thee can grone / Remember that thou once didst write in stone", 'The Sinner' (38) ll. 13-14 (compare 'Sepulchre', 40). The natural heart is never seen as the source of God-pleasing invention. But as the love of Christ, seen in the Bible, is written by God in the heart with its own blood and Christ's, invention changes its character. What is being "found" in the heart newly written on is not the poet's love for a Stella whose image theoretically causes virtue but in practice despair ("rich" poetry but a poor life), but a life-changing knowledge: "loved" ('A True Hymne'). Such a poet need not go to the "expense" of buying books of rhetoric, or collections of poetry (Sidney's "others' leaves"), not because the individual genius is sufficient, but because all that is praiseworthy is already "penn'd" in the Bible and now in the regenerate heart. So the subject of west-of-Jordan poetry, and of the new life, is Christ; the inventions upon that subject are written by Christ and by the poet: paradoxically, it is the same thing.

Michael Schoenfeldt has trouble with this double existence. He appropriately relates 'Jordan' (II) to 'The Altar', but, like Stanley Fish earlier, can only see self-immolation as the alternative to self-glorification. In a study which understands spiritual mysteries only in terms of human power relationships, he portrays a poet who is "uncertain about the source of that voice" which whispers about pretence, because of the rhetorical pretence which is the poem itself. "Can one's praise of God accrue any value without an expense of spirit? ... To show God's power of creation ... requires the exercise of the mortal version of that power. He must appropriate the prerogative of the figure he intends to praise".[54] Schoenfeldt, however, like the speaker of stanza 1 of 'Jordan' (II), is still thinking in terms of "to sell". There has indeed been "expense"; but it has been Christ's. The "value" belongs intrinsically to the subject of the praise, and does not come from the rhetoric which is "decking" it. There need be no rivalry or misappropriation of authority. There is power, certainly, in praise of a superior, for praise implies judgment. Yet the power, though real, is derived: "a heart ... nothing but / Thy power doth cut" ('The Altar', 26, ll. 5-8). Herbert did not think of his poems as the inventions of an autonomous creator who wishes to manipulate

[54] *Prayer and Power*, 170, 171.

another power. They are both a celebration of, and a function of, Christ's regenerating sacrifice: "O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine" (l. 15).

5. Invention's crowns

The poems about poetry of Herbert's contemporaries provide as useful a standpoint for a study of Herbert as the prose of the critics. Donne and Marvell portray the Christian poet's inventions by a crown metaphor, but not in the same way as Herbert.

Donne's "La Corona" is a crown in its ring-form as well as in its praise of the life and work of Christ.[55] In IV, 'Temple', there is perhaps an anxiety about the very inventiveness which has constructed the poetic crown of praise:

> Joseph turne back; see where your child doth sit,
> Blowing, yea blowing out those sparks of wit,
> Which himselfe on those Doctors did bestow;
> The Word but lately could not speake, and loe
> It sodenly speakes wonders . . . (ll. 2-6)

Helen Gardner suggests that the twelve-year-old Christ both fanned into flame ("blowing") and extinguished ("blowing out") the sparks of reasoning posed by the teachers of the Law.[56] He heard them, thus encouraging the "wit / Which himselfe ... did bestow", but he also answered them, and asked them his own questions (Luke 2:45,46), showing, as the next lines imply, "invention" which did not depend upon years of study. The person and work of Christ both provides and pre-empts the wit of man. It may be that Donne was considering the poet's work and "wit" in this ambiguous light. "La Corona" ends:

> Oh, with thine own blood quench thine own just wrath,
> And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise,
> Deigne at my hands this crowne of prayer and praise. (VII, ll.12-14).

If that crown is not originally, and again paradoxically, the work of the one whom it must crown, it is an unacceptable invention. This is why trying to explain devotional poetry exclusively in terms of human rhetoric is inadequate. Effective praise of God must originate with God: it is first of "thy holy Spirit" and then "at my hands", first

[55] John Donne, *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952, 1-5.

received and then returned. Both Donne and Herbert recognised that a life -- for that too is the "crown", the life of prayer and praise -- is acceptable to God only through the agency of God alone. Donne and Herbert agree that "thine own just wrath" is quenched only with "thine own blood": no invention can be acceptable to God (as the Old Testament prophets constantly said) while the matter of sin remains unresolved.

But while Christ's blood makes an invention of poetic praise acceptable, there is still a problem. "Deigne at my hands" does not remove the inherent difficulty in the act of coronation: the one doing the crowning is the one bestowing authority, and is therefore by implication the greater authority. Centuries of argument between church and state have been symbolised in this ceremonial ambiguity. The poet may metaphorically crown a human subject by celebrating his glory in, say, ode or epic; such a poet will not of course explicitly claim greater authority than that of the subject, but the implication is there, particularly in terms of future memorialisation. This may be one reason why Herbert did not call any of his poems a "crown". He did speak of a crown; what that crown was, will be discussed below.

Golden crowns of praise for God may achieve laurel crowns of praise for the poet, but this must not be the intention, however inevitable the result. Marvell is dismayed in 'The Coronet' that desire for glory slithers amongst even the flowers of praise to God. The problem of authority inheres in poetry, as in the act of coronation itself. The more beautiful the phrases redeemed from secular poetry ("my shepherdesses head"), the more congenial the camouflaging environment for their serpentine inhabitant:

> Alas I find the serpent old
> That, twining in his speckled breast
> About the flowers disguis'd doth fold
> With wreaths of fame and interest. (ll. 5-8) [57]

Donne also asked that "When we are mov'd to seeme religious / Only to vent wit, Lord deliver us" ('A Litanie', XXI). This fear of being "mov'd" by Marvell's reptilian wreath-maker is answered in 'La Corona', in which "thine own blood" has achieved the propitiation which a rhetorical effort could not; therefore the poet is free to make a

---

[56] Donne, *Poems*, ed. Gardner, 60-61.

crown. Donne (in this at least) goes beyond Marvell's sad resignation that his flowery crown must stay at foot level. "Thy blood" allows the presentation of a crown, despite that crown's inevitable interweavings of "fame and interest". There is a psychological truth involved also: imputed righteousness is empowering; guilt is disabling. Acceptance and love, not fear, produce inventions of genuine praise.

Herbert's poetic is built on this knowledge. By it he can say "Lord, I will mean and speak thy praise, / Thy praise alone" ('Praise' III, 157). Herbert exceeds Marvell and Donne, not in crown construction (for he sees the ambiguity in that) but in his understanding of the extent of the giving and accepting love of God. He sometimes throws it rather audaciously, but also with charming self-knowledge, in God's face:

> Thou that hast giv'n so much to me,
> Give one thing more, a gratefull heart.
> See how thy beggar works on thee
> By art.
>
> He makes thy gifts occasion more,
> And sayes, If he in this be crost,
> All thou hast giv'n him heretofore
> Is lost. ('Gratefulnesse', H. 123, ll. 1-8)

The gratitude, the source of the poetry, is from God also. Nothing is ultimately of the poet, even the inventive "art". Herbert's inventive capacity exists not so that others will praise (crown) the poet, but as a mode of thankfulness, and usefulness to others.

A poetic crown requires wit, a gift, as we have seen in 'Dulnesse', to be prized, not stifled. "O give me quicknesse ... Lord, clear thy gift, that with a constant wit / I may but look towards thee", ll. 3, 25-6. "Wit" could mean the ability to invent, or the spoken or written result of a person's inventive ability, or the inventive person himself. "Wit" in Herbert, like "invention", may also be negative. The ambiguous "let wits contest" ('A Posie') (wits being either the faculties, or the owners of the faculties) is uncomplimentary. Herbert's prayer for a "constant wit" is not a wish that he may be everlastingly clever, but a request for a faculty of reason that is constant, that is, faithful to its purpose (to "look towards thee"). Wit in the Renaissance more

[57] *Andrew Marvell, The Complete Poems*, ed. G. deF. Lord, New York, Everyman's Library, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984, 7.

usually meant the faculty of reason than, as in the eighteenth century, a facility with language whose purpose was amusement or admiration. Even so, it was not without negative connotations.[58] "Christianity and wit were not obvious bedfellows", comments Helen Wilcox; she goes on to suggest, however, that "the wit itself is devotion." [59]

When Sidney refers to a raised wit (and when Donne refers to a "raised" Muse), he means not (only) a competency with linguistic and formal invention, or impressing with catachresis, but the proper use of reason. Herbert is clearer than both in recognizing, in 'Dulnesse' and elsewhere, that the damaged reason requires first regeneration ("sure thou didst put a mind there") and then daily unfogging ("Lord, clear thy gift"). In the *Defence,* wit is what "makes us know what perfection is"; but, Sidney carefully says, "our infected will keeps us from reaching unto it". Carefully, because "infected" is not "dead" or even Luther's "bound"; the rhetorical *movere* of poetry may overcome the infection sufficiently that "reaching unto it" is a possibility. Otherwise, Sidney's whole argument in the rest of the work falls to the ground.

Calvin allowed much in civil affairs to the gift of reason, but considered it dead in regard to spiritual matters.

> Human reason [cannot] understand who the true God is ... [M]an's soul is so illumined by the brightness of God's light as never to be without ...at least a spark of it; but even with this illumination it does not comprehend God. ... It therefore remains for us to understand that the way to the kingdom of God is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. [60]

---

[58] See C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960 (Canto, 1990) and J. F. Burrows, *Andrew Marvell and the Idea of Wit*, Sydney, The Wentworth Press, 1972. See also Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, Vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, chs 1, 2 and 3, on the apparent conflict between reason and grace, which underlies problems concerning the use of wit in sacred poetry. Richard Hooker points out, in *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, that wit (intelligence, reason) has never been able to find (invent) a way to overcome human inability to keep God's laws. The solution could only be given by God. Book I, xi. 5,6; cf. III. viii. 4-17. *The Works of ... Richard Hooker*, ed. J. Keble, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1836, 323-328, 461-480. Herbert comments on the inability of natural wit and invention to find God, and on their fertility in finding, and describing, wickedness.

[59] " 'No More Wit Than a Christian"? The Case of Devotional Poetry." *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995, 9, 21.

[60] *Institutes*, 2. 2. 18-21. I have omitted the many Scripture references throughout this passage.

Sidney follows Calvin when he speaks, oxymoronically, of the limited perfection which learning's "purifying of wit" is able only to "draw us to"; this limitation is caused by our "degenerate souls" and their "clayey lodgings". At other times, Sidney takes the humanist position that if reason can grasp what is good, there must be the possibility of doing good. This implies that the will's infection is partial, because reason alone does not achieve *praxis*; the will must be moved to do what the reason approves, and this is the role of poetry. It might be argued that even Luther and Calvin distinguished, to an extent, between civil morality and the transforming knowledge of God, and that this is what Sidney is doing. The problem remains, though, that for Sidney's poet, "the divine consideration of what may be and should be" is "the course of his own invention".[61] For the Protestant Sidney, there are two anomalies here. Such a "consideration" may perhaps be grasped, but not applied, by the natural reason ("None is good, no, not one", Romans 3:10, Psalm 14:1). And it cannot be the poet's invention, but only God's: that is, "what should be" cannot be left to the reason to paint, in however lyrical or heroic colours. For the reason cannot exalt God or, properly, even man. Only the Incarnate Word and the written Word can define "what should be", which is man in his true position as worshipper and obeyer.

So what is Herbert's crown of inventive praise? He does not present one. Indeed he says, ambiguously, in 'The Quidditie' (69), that "a verse is not a crown". The apparent meiosis, or belittlement, which occurs towards "a verse" in this poem in fact exalts poetry. The possessions and activities of aristocracy, statesmanship or business listed in the short poem's simple rhyme and metre all amount to much less than that which the writing of poetry does provide: "I am with thee". Elsewhere, Herbert certainly calls Christ "King" and "my king", but this term is not a full poem-crown, a Corona, a Coronet. The only approximation to this form is fully negative: 'A Wreath'. But there is a "crown" in *The Temple* : "My joy, my life, my crown" ('A True Hymne'). Herbert's "crown" was not a particular poem, or the whole body of his poetry, but Christ himself.[62] And this well represents Herbert's theological poetic. Christ needs no poetic amplification or coronation, for he is Writer (authority, initiator, upholder) and Word. His is the authority whose grace crowns the head of his people. "My crown" may seem to imply a kingship for the *poet*; and indeed that is

---

[61] *Defence*, 28, 26.

scriptural: believers are "kings and priests to God", Revelation 1:6.[63] Of course Herbert, like the Bible, does often speak as if human words can bring glorification to God. Humanity may and does glorify God with verbal and life praise, as I have argued in opposition to those who would require Herbert in consistency to fall silent. This glorification is in the sense of saying what God is (*invenio*), not in the sense of adding glory. This is the nature of Herbert's invention, and of his praise: to say what Christ is. The crown is already Christ's, and Christ becomes the poet's crown. As it is the work of Christ which enables that praise, so Christ both is the crown and gives it. Christ is for Herbert both his true glory (the crown the poet wears) and the means by which poetic praise can be offered to God.

The offering will not be perfect. But that is beside the point:

> My joy, my life, my crown!
> My heart was meaning all the day,
> Something it fain would say:
> And still it runneth mutt'ring up and down
> With only this, My joy, my life, my crown. ('A True Hymne',168, ll.1-5)

"Runneth mutt'ring up and down" and "Something it fain would say" imply a lack of invention, a need perhaps for rhetoric's lists of topoi. But the solution appears, on a first reading of the following stanzas, not to be a further study of rhetoric ("beating myself" or "Stepdame's study's blows"[64]) but a Romantic authorial "sincerity":

> Yet slight not these few words:
> If truly said, they may take part
> Among the best in art.
> The finenesse which a hymne or psalme affords,
> Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.
>
> He who craves all the minde,
> And all the soule, and strength, and time,
> If the words onely ryme,
> Justly complains, that somewhat is behinde
> To make his verse, or write a hymne in kinde. (ll. 6-15)

---

[62] Compare Isaiah 28:5: "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people."
[63] Crowns are promised to believers also in 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Peter 5:4.
[64] Sidney, Sonnet 1, *Astrophil and Stella*.

This poem is not, however, a manifesto either for ignorant and unstudied spontaneity in poetry as being most acceptable to God, or for salvation by sincerity. Such expositions of this poem have not sufficiently distinguished author, representative persona, reader, and God. Who is doing the slighting? To whom does the psalm or hymn afford fineness? Who craves the whole time of the whole person, and whose verse is "behind"? And is poetry alone being referred to?

The "slighters" are probably those who jeer at the poet whose glory is given to God, as in 'The Quip' (110), where the opposition is between having and being, between "these fine things" (beauty, money, fame, wit) and "I am thine". But "the soul" which should "accord unto" the lines is not primarily the poet's. That is, it is not a statement of authorial sincerity. This poem does not give an excuse for slovenly writing on the anachronistic and Rousseauian assumption that an undoctored overflow of spontaneity must be "good" – morally and aesthetically "good", both senses being involved in Herbert's word "fineness". The use of "hymne or psalm" supposes the "soul" whose heart, as well as words, must "ryme" with God, to be a member of a congregation, not the poet. Hymns and psalms are to be the heart-music, even the conversation, of all the redeemed, who are to be "singing and making melody in [their] hearts to the Lord", and "speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"[65]. The invention here is still a finding that "my joy, my life, my crown" encompasses everything the soul can ever either need or say.

Elizabeth Clarke assumes that Herbert's lines reflect his own hesitation between a practice of poetic *simplicitas,* as recommended by Savonarola, and the need to be "rhetorically, as well as spiritually, successful" in the eyes of the devotional poet's two audiences.[66] But not only does "fineness" pertain to the reader of Herbert's poems rather than purely to the poet; the need for "ryme" between the written words and the soul (rather than merely between one word and another) also applies as much to the reader / singer of these "psalms and hymnes" as to their writer. Any rhetorical success in view here is not measured by acclaim for the poet, but by the conversion and sanctification of the reader. It is God, of course, who "justly" requires all the mind, soul, strength, and time, and consequently complains if it is only the words which

[65] Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.
[66] *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry*, 1997, 51-53.

rhyme with his commandments – in the case either of the singer or the song-writer. Between God, rhetorical inventor, and reader, there must at last be perfect "accord". Therefore the last stanza appears ambiguous:

> Whereas if th'heart be moved,
> Although the verse be somewhat scant,
> God doth supplie the want.
> As when th'heart sayes (sighing to be approved)
> *O, could I love!* And stops: God writeth, *Loved.*

Here is the clue which evades the reader conditioned to expect an expressivist, conflicted, post-Romantic Herbert. The poem applies equally to reader as to writer, because it is, exactly as 'Jordan" (II) is, a metaphor for the means to acceptance with God. The speaker is representative, not personal. He takes the role of poet to speak of relationship with God, not of some divine editing of and improvement to a literal poem, as Clarke suggests ("if the utterances truly spring from *simplicitas*, God will intervene to supply the rhetorical elements necessary to write good poetry in human terms"[67]). Herbert is not, on the other hand, denigrating "my joy, my life, my crown", nor, elsewhere, "my God, my king" as "scant" verse; for what more profound statements could there be? Rather, this is another instance of the poem which appears to be about the writing of poetry, but is in fact about the "writing" of relationship with God. "Somewhat scant" and "behinde" are descriptions of all human efforts to love God. Not on the basis of an effort made, a "few words" poorly written, but on the basis of an already completed act which "God doth supply", does God truly become joy, life, crown. God's act of writing (both in the book of judgment, and on the heart) entirely reverses the action from that of all merit-based religions (a struggle to love) to that of the astonished, grateful reception of imputed merit. Herbert's words allow us to see the very motive at the heart of God. "Moved" and "approved" do not, in fact, rhyme with the effort to "love", but with being "loved". The invention which causes the heart to be "moved" is, therefore, God's.

Yet "something it fain would say" *is* being said. The poem is, of course, a human invention also. The chronology of the poem does not suppose a contradiction of Luther's bound will, suggesting that the heart must first wish to praise God, and then

[67] Clarke, *Theory and Theology*, 52.

God "supplies" the means. Instead, the time frame is simultaneous: the speaker is "loved" and *therefore* can say, is saying, "my joy, my life, my crown". The re-invented soul can invent, can have again Adam's power of naming which allowed the hearer to know the exact essence of the creature named.[68] But the creature is not invented; invention is not creation, but discovery. The subject is a given, even in classical forensic, epideictic, or deliberative oratory. Much more for the poet whose task it is to praise God is the subject already "there".

The language of the contemporary critics does not always make this clear.[69] King James VI of Scotland, in his short treatise on "how to write poetry" (1584), commends invention, opposing it to servile imitation, but seems to extend it to the creating of a subject as well as the treatment of the subject:

> Ye man also be warre with composing ony thing in the same maner as hes bene ower oft vsit of before . . . or it will appere ye bot imitate, and that it cummis not of your awin Inventioun, quhilk is ane of the chief properteis of any Poete ...it is best that ye invent your awin subiect your self, and not to compose of sene subiectis.[70]

However, James is far from recommending, with Sidney, that the zodiac of the poet's wit and the authority of the poet's pen be the only boundaries. He warns that subjects pertaining to history, monarchy, and politics are outside the scope of poetic inventions. Thus he pays a backhanded compliment to the power of the pen, and his veiled threat aims to keep poetic invention from becoming political unrest:

> Ye man also be war of wryting any thing of materis of commoun weill, or other sic grave sene subiectis (except Metaphorically, of manifest treuth opinly knawin ...), because not onely ye essay nocht your awin Inventioun ... bot lykewayis they are to grave materis for a Poet to mell in.[71]

"Materis of commoun weill" and other "grave" subjects such as mankind's eternal destiny certainly do provide some of the topics of Herbert's invention, implying that

---

[68] See Umberto Eco's discussion of this traditional idea in *The Search For the Perfect Language*, 8.
[69] As Steadman points out in regard to the various meanings of "invention": *The Lamb and the Elephant*, 180.
[70] Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, 221.
[71] Smith, I, 221.

he flattered James less than Michael Schoenfeldt suggests.[72] Herbert's authority for choice of matter was a greater crowned Head than James'.

James disagrees with both Sidney and Herbert when he says "Ye cannot have the Inventioun except it come of Nature ... the chief cause of all the ... pairtis of Poesie. For airt is onely bot ane help and a remembraunce to Nature." [73] In Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, "Nature" is, as to James, the parent of invention (Sonnet I) and the writer of the text to be copied, a human being (Sonnet III).[74] But in Sidney's *Defence*, the poet goes beyond nature. Having described all other disciplines of human thought and activity as dependent upon nature, Sidney suggests an overcoming of nature, a rising above it, by the poet, who, "lifted up with the vigour of his *own invention*, doth grow in effect another nature".[75] Perhaps Sidney has the Pauline, entirely negative, definition of human "nature" in his mind, and the involvement of all creation with this. But the Pauline answer is not a recreation by one's "own invention". To James, Nature is the source of invention; to Sidney, the poet's wit not only arises elsewhere (he does not say where[76]) but creates a better Nature; to Herbert, nature is corrupt. The poet's wit is from God and for the purpose of "discovering" God, to himself and to others. God alone is creator or recreator.

The only crown of praise which Herbert considers valid (and unobtainable without God's prior gift) is that of the regenerate nature, resulting in an obedient life. The wreath of poetic invention must always be subject to the fading and rotting by the deceit mentioned by Marvell. The interlaced and circular form depicts the entrapment of the sinful nature that remains even in a recreated poet.

---

[72] Michael Schoenfeldt's *Prayer and Power*, especially ch. 2, implies that James did not find sufficient acknowledgement of Herbert's *earthly* monarch in phrases like "my Crown". But James was theologically educated. He knew that a recognition of Christ's kingship did not exclude a recognition of derived earthly authority; in fact, rather the opposite. Schoenfeldt gives "my God, my king" ('Jordan' I) an ambivalent quality, but has no other support than Buckingham's deliberate ambiguity (62). Herbert is far more interested in the love of God than in flattering James (see 'Content'); nor does he equate the divine monarchy with "the naked practice of power" (113) of an earthly tyranny.

[73] Smith, I, 221.

[74] *Poems*, ed. Ringler, 1962, 165-6.

[75] *Defence*, 24, my emphasis.

[76] Perhaps in "the Heavenly Maker ... who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature" (*Defence*, 24). However, "the force of a divine breath" is questioned by "that first accursed fall of Adam" (24, 25).

A wreathed garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
I give to thee, who knowest all my wayes,
My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
Wherein I die, not live: for life is straight,
Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee,
To thee, who art as farre above deceit,
Then deceit seems above simplicitie.
Give me simplicitie, that I may live,
So live and like, that I may know, thy wayes,
Know them and practise them: then shall I give
For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise.
('A Wreath', H. 185).

True life, as opposed to the apparent self-life which is really death, is straight, but "my wayes" twist back on their own authority as a wreath winds about itself and ends where it began. This wreath-form is not a single circle, but curves to a halfway point ("to thee / To thee") and goes back upon itself, echoing the incompletely closed wreaths of Roman illustrations. If this is the structural model, then there is a gap between "A wreathed garland" (poetry) and "a crown of praise" (life). This gap can only be filled in (so that the part-circle becomes a "crown") by something that is given by God. That something is "simplicitie", a single heart for God. That simplicity is represented by another image opposed to the complications of a wreath: "life is straight, and ever tends to thee". It is the "straight" life which is the "crown of praise", not the entangled complications of poetry's inventions, which have as much eye to the poet's fame as to the glory of God. This poem is the opposite of simple in its form, and that is the point. A "wreathed garland" is, by the syntactic contrast, and by its composition of dying flowers and greenery, death: but a wreath of thorns was placed upon Christ's head for his death, and so the twisted circularity of this poem – as of the life for which it is a metaphor -- is taken up by redemption. The poem, crooked in its cleverness, stands: it is an undying crown of praise already, just as Christ's vicarious death was his praise and that of his redeemed, and just as the twisted sinner is accepted because of and in Christ. The highly complex invention is accepted for the imputed "simplicitie" which it, and its author's natural life, do not have of themselves.

On the surface dramatic level, the speaker appears trapped in the wreath of his own making, the deceit "wherein I die". The speaker keeps doubling back to his legalistic state, as in 'The Bunch of Grapes': "I am where I began / Sev'n years ago … Brought back to the Red Sea, the sea of shame". "Life is straight … and ever tends to thee", whereas what appears to be life, "my crooked winding wayes", my inventions, is death. Living "thy wayes" leads to liking and then to knowing "thy wayes". This reverses the empirical order, which is first to prove intellectually, then to choose, then perhaps to practise. Jesus told some "crooked" questioners that "if any man will *do* his will, he shall *know* of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). The knowledge of true authority comes only with the obedience to, and willingness for, the invention of God.

The last line of 'A Wreath' is not an absolute return to the beginning, however. The ephemeral wreath of dying laurel is a second-hand gift to God, because it implies a wreath of praise given first to the poet. But God's own gift of "simplicitie" allows the poet to give a true and enduring crown, one made of the gold and gems of thankfulness. To "live", "like", "know" and "practise" are not a means of attracting God's favour; they result from the initiating action of God, not even first in the giving of simplicity, but in the providing of the desire ("Give me … "). "Some make man God's co-worker", complained Calvin, referring to Ephesians 2:8, Romans 5, and other passages, "as if Scripture taught that we are merely given the ability to believe, and not, rather, faith itself!"[77]

'A Wreath' addresses not only the means of conversion but also the inventive "crooked winding ways" of appearing to give praise to God when praise for the self is really being sought. Simplicity may be defined as seeing all that one does as a joyful response of gratitude. Deceit writes poems to help others to that thankfulness, but at the same time rejoices that the cleverness of those poems brings a wreath of praise to the poet's head as well. This poem is an expressed repentance for such doubleness. The poem itself, however, is not, as it is in the winding ways of Michael Schoenfeldt's argument, a "cultivated obscurity", whose "impressive formal accomplishment, [apparently] demeaned, is paraded"; a hypocritical poem whose

[77] *Institutes*, 3. 24. 3.

purpose is impressing earthly powers.[78] The poem recognizes that there is always that possibility, but it is not itself a means to the performing of it. As the reader may always be suspicious, so is the speaker himself even more suspicious of his motives. Schoenfeldt correctly terms this an "irreconcilable aesthetic dilemma",[79] but it is not an irreconcilable spiritual dilemma. For that, the poem has only one recourse: that something will be given by God to man. A wreath given by man to God in public, however self-deprecatory, must always be open to such questions. Schoenfeldt overlooks the poem's own answer: "give me" precedes, even becomes the same as, "take from me".

Julia Guernsey's argument of form as a truer "self", contradicting the speaker's wrong self-construction, does not apply to 'A Wreath'. [80] Herbert certainly often intends a contrast between the voice of the speaker and the "voice" of the form. In this case, though, the twisted-back wreath implies the falsity of the natural inventions of the sinner who would be his own authority in life. The speaker's requests are genuine -- and they are genuinely granted. The fading and convoluted wreath remains, not consumed, not collapsed, but redeemed and accepted, not a meritorious work but a testimony *in its very "deceit"* to the righteousness, independent of human work, which the objective work of the Cross imputes. Such acceptance in fact enables the "loved" to practise "thy wayes".

"Simplicitie" is not to be equated with the *simplicitas* of Savonarola, a style of life and of writing which Elizabeth Clarke suggests may be "useful for understanding Herbert's rhetoric". It cannot be "useful" because there are basic differences in theology, as Clarke herself admits. Savonarola proposes a writing which proceeds from and reflects "sincerity and purity of heart"; the "heart" of Herbert's speaker is full of "crooked winding wayes", and is neither the authority for, nor that which is reflected in, his poems.[81] While such crookedness often appears in his poetry, it is always set in contrast to God's provision of the straightness of true life. The "underneath" level of unchanging truth works against it. The imputation of the "straightness" of the righteousness of Christ is that underlying truth. It justifies

---

[78] *Prayer and Power*, 176, 175.
[79] *Prayer and Power*, 175.
[80] *The Pulse of Praise,* 1999, 151-3 and *passim.*

(straightens) by allowing the wreath-maker "legal" acceptance, and it sanctifies, "simplifies", by motivating and empowering towards singleness of eye and action. The whole point of 'A Wreath' is that the speaker has no "simplicity and purity", and the convolutions of the wreath are to make it appear that he has. The heart cannot be the basis for God-pleasing poetry. Again, this does not make for poetic "collapse". The end (redemption and order) is seen from the beginning, just as, in the Jacobean church's predestinarian belief, evil is encompassed beforehand by the sovereign purposes of God and in the end works to his glory. Herbert presents his own ways in order to glorify God's.

This is not a "continuing to sin that grace may abound", for the existence of the poem is the evidence of "straightening" grace. The "natural" poet can only write "twistingly"; the speaker of 'A Wreath', however, is not being accepted on the basis of his works, but on those of Christ. Straightness can only be imputed. The justified sinner's twisted wreath-invention is an acceptable crown of praise now, because of the work of the One "farre above deceit". Human rebellion is presented as the Bible presents it, neither hidden nor glorified, neither accepted nor unsolved. The simplicity asked for amidst the complexities of 'A Wreath' is the awareness of being loved by the One "farre above" all necessities of human rhetoric and corruptions of language. Only this awareness, this simplicity of childlike trust, will allow the speaker to "know and practise" the straightness of God's ways, not to gain salvation but as the purpose of his salvation. Nor is this a complex prayer for a simplistic *style* (itself a rhetorical art) as more befitting the Christian, although this is still argued despite Joseph Summers' convincing disproof long ago.[82]

5. Invention justified

Invention is first negatively associated with poetic authority and then positively sought as the means of praise of God in the pair of sonnets 'Love' (I) and (II) (54). The current situation in poetry is seen to be one of an usurping imperialism:

---

[81] Clarke, *Theory and Theology*, 68-70, 31.
[82] *George Herbert, His Religion and Art*, 1954, 102, 186-90.

Immortal Love, authour of this great frame,
Sprung from that beautie which can never fade,
How hath man parcel'd out thy glorious name,
And thrown it on the dust which thou hast made,
While mortal love doth all the title gain!
Which siding with invention, they together
Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
(Thy workmanship) and give thee share in neither.
Wit fancies beautie, beautie raiseth wit:
The world is theirs; they two play out the game,
Thou standing by: and though thy glorious name
Wrought our deliverance from th'infernall pit,
Who sings thy praise? onely a skarf or glove
Doth warm our hands, and make us write of love.

"Thy glorious name" is Love. This describes not merely a characteristic of God, but God Himself: "God is love" (I John 4:8). This, the only true love, has been taken over by – the syntax is complicated – man, mortal love, and invention, a rebellious trio which has pressed the human heart and brain into service. The "game" of wresting authority from the Love who is creator and saviour is then given to two elder statesmen: "Wit fancies beautie, beautie raiseth wit" (l. 9). "Fancies" suggests an imaginative creation, a beauty which exists only in the golden-world mind of the poet. This in turn erects the wit, but it is a false or unworthy raising, and not towards the discovery (invention) of the perfection of true Love, as Sidney proposed. Only the work of God can make the wit's inventions praise him:

Immortal Heat, O let thy greater flame
Attract the lesser to it: let those fires,
Which shall consume the world, first make it tame;
And kindle in our hearts such true desires,
As may consume our lusts, and make thee way.
Then shall our hearts pant thee; then shall our brain
All her invention on thine Altar lay,
And there in hymnes send back thy fire again:
Our eies shall see thee, which before saw dust;
Dust blown by wit, till that they both were blinde:
Thou shalt recover all thy goods in kinde,
Who wert disseized by usurping lust:
All knees shall bow to thee; all wits shall rise,
And praise him who did make and mend our eies.

Again, Herbert is not dismissing invention as sinful. When the "Immortal Heat" of 'Love' (II) will "consume our lusts", the heart and brain will be reclaimed: the heart "shall pant thee" and the brain "all her invention on thine Altar lay" (ll. 1, 5-7), not in resignation but for a higher use: "in hymnes send back thy fire again" (l. 8). The wit-beauty cycle of 'Love' (I) is revealed as wit-dust. Wit is necessary, but having come from God, it must go back to God by being used as God intended. Invention's purpose is the discovery of the love of God, not intellectually but personally. John Savoie points out that "a peculiar tic of Herbert's predication is the elision of the expected preposition that normally would fix the relationship between the terms". "Roses and Lillies speak thee"; here, our hearts will "pant thee"; and, significantly, to "manifest God in the very act of writing", Herbert asks to be able to "write thee" ('H. Baptisme' II). This grammatical construction demonstrates closeness. And "as Herbert's poetry 'writes' God, God's Scripture 'writes' the believer: the 'storie pennes and sets us down' ('The Bunch of Grapes') ... Herbert and God write and are written, each unto the other."[83] Invention is thus bounded by Scripture, and is the discovery of what God has written already. As the poet is "written", so are his inventions God's inventions.

In this way wit shall truly and permanently "rise". The "raised" or "erected" wit, mentioned earlier in connection with Sidney, alludes (ideally) to right reason. Sidney's "erected wit" suggests "made right" (Latin "rectus", right or straight).[84] The verbal connections and allusions are to justification (making right), to resurrection ("rise", "raising"), and to the correct use of reason. They are not to eroticism, despite Schoenfeldt and Clarke finding – inventing -- puns inappropriate to Herbert.[85] That correct, rectified, justified use is to "praise him who did make and mend our eies". Wit after regeneration sees earthly beauty as "dust", and its rhetorical inventions are now to persuade others to see the true value of things. "See better, Lear", Shakespeare's Kent says to his value-blinded sovereign. But the poet is not the ultimate agent of change: both the initiative and the power, in 'Love' (II), belong to

[83] "The Word Within: Predicating the Presence of God in George Herbert's *The Temple", George Herbert Journal* 23 (1&2) (Fall 1999 / Spring 2000): 73-75.
[84] *Defence*, 25.
[85] Michael Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power,* 239; Elizabeth Clarke, "Herbert's House of Pleasure?", *George Herbert Journal* 19 (1-2) (Fall 1995 - Spring 1996): 55-71. Richard Strier's wit also overtakes a contextualised reading when he says "Herbert views his erected wit with alarm" (*Love Known*, 1983, 39 n. 30).

God. The newly-seeing poetic speaker may have to write for those who remain blind and deaf, but must do it, like Ezekiel, "whether they hear or refuse to hear".[86]

Invention comes from God ('Love' I) and is to be returned to God ('Love' II). The sonnets present true and false versions of love, heat, and possession. The sonnet form alludes to Petrarchan neo-Platonism, but there is no suggestion here that earthly love (a counterfeit of the heavenly), earthly lust (a counterfeit of God's burning love and its answering flames), or earthly possession (a counterfeit of true authority and ownership) might be a means to bring a soul to God.[87] Not "use" but "consume" is the request to the fire of God concerning the heats of earthly passions. Herbert rejects the use of earthly love and its poetic inventions as a path to God. Neo-Platonism makes the inventions of the creating human artist originate with man and then rise to God.[88] But in these sonnets there is no suggestion that the contemplation of earthly beauty can raise anything but earthly wit, nor that the creation of poetic beauty will be a means to salvation. It is the death of Christ, not poetic invention, which has "wrought our deliverance from th'infernall pit" (I, l. 12). "True desires" are not that man may become more godlike, but rather that "all knees shall bow", that there will be a return of "thy goods" and "praise" of the One who both created and recreated (II, ll. 4, 13, 11, 14). The right use of wit is praise and thanksgiving. This is the ascent of the soul, not the contemplation of earthly beauty or the practice of earthly love.

The discussion of invention in 'The Forerunners' (176) has also been seen as influenced by neo-Platonism: "True beautie dwells on high: ours is a flame / But borrowed thence to light us thither" (ll. 28-9).[89] Its supposed Platonism, though, is subject to the same arguments as that of 'Love' (I) and (II). Earthly love is not the way to God. Human and poetic beauty are *borrowed* flames. "Thou art still my God"

[86] Ezekiel 3:11 and elsewhere.

[87] Richard Todd implies a *Temple* influenced by neo-Platonism through Augustine: *The Opacity of Signs*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1986, *passim*.

[88] See P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, New York, Harper, 1961, 60-65, and A. Baldwin and S. Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, esp. ch. 2 (Baldwin) on the ascent to God through beauty and love (though her association of Platonic logos and Johannine logos is incorrect). In same volume, see also J. Kraye on the Italian neo-Platonists, and J. Roe on neo-Platonism in Sidney's sonnets. Herbert cannot be "Platonic" because he rejects any possibility of "humanity upwards"; all love, beauty, grace and redemption is, in *The Temple*, "God downwards".

[89] For example, Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968, 17; Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 216-223.

(ll. 5, 10, 32) cannot exist with a possibility of authorial divinity (just as a "creating" theory of authorship cannot also be a "derived") [90]. Mark Taylor is right to point out, against Robert Ellrodt, that these lines "make it clear that Herbert did not intend [an] artificial ... distinction between divine truth and artistic embellishment", but incorrect in supposing these lines to say that "one's life, derived from the divine, can be its own guide to the ultimate return to God and union in heavenly love".[91] The context is "beauteous words", and as elsewhere, Herbert is arguing their true origin and use. The poem is not an argument for the use of mortal beauty as a stepping-stone to personal divinity. Language and its inventions come from "on high" and should go back there, in the form of God-honouring poetry. "Lovers" and "brothels" do not own "sweet phrases". "Follie" should stick to its coarse vocabulary and stop meddling with beautiful metaphors and comparisons which are intended to cause men to marvel at God. This, not a neo-Platonic contemplation of beauty which can raise man to God, is the context of "true beautie dwells on high".

A more serious argument suggests ambiguity in 'The Forerunners' about the spiritual status of invention. The poem's tone has been read as anything from regretful, unresolved, even resentful[92] to joyful and predeterminedly closed.[93] The first stanza certainly appears to mourn the inevitable loss of the source of invention (a source which itself suggests some doubt, since what the human mind breeds reminds us of 'Sinnes Round' and 'A Wreath' [94]). Must illness and old age

> ... have my brain? must they dispark
> Those sparkling notions, wherein they were bred?
> Must dulnesse turn me to a clod?
> Yet they have left me, Thou art still my God. (ll. 3-6)

The "best room" (l. 7) which is left uncommandeered by the royal visitors of temporality is "Thou art still my God". This statement of faith and relationship expresses both an invention by the poet (discovery) and an invention by God (creation). These will last through illness and death and for eternity. Only this, if

---

[90] See section on Florentine neo-Platonism and on Castiglione's *The Courtier*, IV, in Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*, London, Routledge, 1994, 36-8.
[91] *The Soul in Paraphrase: George Herbert's Poetics*, The Hague, Mouton, 1974, 37, 47.
[92] Fish, *Artifacts*; Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power*, 100-1; Clarke, *Theory and Theology,* 230, 271.
[93] Summers, *Religion and Art*, 119; Strier, *Love Known*, 216.
[94] Compare Sidney, *Defence*: "his own invention", 23; "the inward light each mind hath in itself", 39; "the poet only bringeth his own stuff ... maketh matter for a conceit", 48; "conceits of the mind", 73.

written "with fear" – with belief, and accompanied by obedience – will "please him" (l.12). The "sweet phrases, lovely metaphors" (l. 13) are helpful for earthly persuasion, delight, and encouragement of other humans, but can be farewelled without personal loss when white hairs presage death. The phrase in its location has a second implication, however, overlooked by those who would see a Herbert angry or anguished. "Thou art still my God" is the speaker's total, and joyful, submission to the sovereignty of God over the circumstances of his life. If God wishes to remove the poetic faculties, to make person and poetry characterised by "a bleak paleness", then it is an action coming from his goodness and wisdom. "My hearts desire / Unto thine is bent: / I aspire / To a full consent" says the speaker of 'Discipline', ll. 5-8, and it is a consent which springs from trust. "My God" cannot be an invention malleable to all the desires of the remaining rebellious sin-principle. An omnipotent God, who is other than the speaker, will be and do that which is not always comprehensible. Trust and obedience are required even when knowledge is absent. There is sorrow, both for himself ("must dulnesse turn me to a clod?") and for poetry ("whither wilt thou flie?"). But there is trust: "let winter have his fee", for eternal summer both will be, and is now.

The regrets in 'The Forerunners' are expressed by a poet who fears that his death will mean one less writer redeeming for the use of the "Church" the "lovely enchanting language, sugar-cane, / Hony of roses". So far from seeking a renunciatory silence, the speaker fears it. Without the firm hand of the redeemed and redeeming poet, poetry's inventions, like rebellious children, will go back to playing in the gutter. The language will itself be damaged ("hurt thyself") by returning to the "stews and brothels" of contemporary love-poetry, and in turn damage those who write and read it. A connection is made between moral and linguistic deterioration, between "lov[ing] a stie" and "hurt[ing] thyself", "thyself" being the "sweet phrases" admonished by Herbert (a tactful way of rebuking his poetic contemporaries). The humanists were concerned about the negative influence upon national morality of scholasticism, foreign importations, inkhorn terms, and scurrilous language. Herbert shows the influence to be in both directions: morality affects language, as well as the reverse. As language comes from God, so it is meant for God's praise and will

deteriorate in vocabulary and grammar if used in idolatrous inventions.[95] Ascham's "divorce betwixt the tongue and the heart" damages tongue as well as heart.[96] This is not to say, of course, that Herbert was concerned for words more than for their speakers or hearers. "Hurt thyself", that is, words, and "hurt ...him that sings the note" (l. 24) is in the end the same thing.

The decrepitude and death of a poet whose concern is that language and its "sugar cane" wit be used only in the service of God may mean that language will "flie" back to its previous unsavoury associations, and that the one "that sings the note" will contract that worst of all venereal diseases, an illusion of his own authority over the moral universe. That "hurt" will preclude the enjoyment of the "true beautie ... on high" (l. 28) or of the true pleasures which come from an earthly life lived under God's authority ("livelier" in line 35 has all those implications). Again, the theme is that of the misuse of the wit, by which the inventions of Herbert's contemporaries bring much glory to the human author but none to the true Author. But even if other poets take over the sparkling analogies of God's praise for the praise of women, and of themselves, and language is assumed to be of human ownership, "thou art still my God" indicates that the Word of God will be intact, and will continue its function of reconciliation and of judgment. "My words shall never pass away" (Isaiah 55:11) is the primary thought beneath 'The Forerunners'. The poem is not merely (as several recent critics have assumed) the regret of a poet having to relinquish his creativity or sacrifice it on a supposed altar of silence. The tone is positive. In all vicissitudes of earthly circumstance, "thou art still my God".

Invention was to Herbert the dis-covery, the uncovering, of truths about God. These "enchanting" discoveries could be shaped into the forms, images and rhetorical features of language. In another sense (for the Renaissance critics spoke variously of invention as the faculty, the idea, and the words expressing the idea) these structures, conceits and images, God-given, were themselves the discovery, the invention. God is

---

[95] The Old Testament uses adultery and whoredom ("stews and brothels", l. 15) as metaphors for idolatry. Herbert's analogy of sexual immorality therefore implies that the invention of a substitute god such as beauty or self is idolatry.

[96] Ascham, *Scholemaster*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 142. Compare Melancthon, "The Praise of Eloquence", in W. Rebhorn, ed., *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000, 198-210. In *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* Gibbon suggests a direct connection

discovered, and then the apparatus of praise. Both processes are God-given. Invention as writing what has been written parallels the means God has appointed for coming to him and living with him. Invention in its negative sense likewise parallels the devices of the sinful human heart: the attempts to create, to construct its own salvation, or to continue to rebel. Herbert both wrote about invention in these ways, and made his poetic inventions themselves to be written models of how, or how not, to relate to the God who has written.

---

between the deterioration of a nation's language and of its morals. Ed. D. Milman, M. Guizot & W. Smith, London, John Murray, 1903, Bk. 2, 304; Bk. 4, 380-1; Bk. 7, 36-39.

DECORUM

"But thou shalt answer, Lord, for me."

'The Quip', ll. 8, 12, 16, 20.

This chapter considers both Herbert's comments on and practice of decorum.[1] Herbert relates the literary concept of decorum to what is appropriate to a relationship with God which is made possible only by the work of Christ. He therefore must find a new decorum of poetry, for the forms urged by the contemporary "critics", because based on human valuations, are inappropriate to a poetics of grace.

'The Collar' (153) suggests a poetic, as well as a life, much concerned with "what is fit, and not". The rebellious speaker-self describes this question of fitness (decorum) as a "cold dispute". The foundation position of the poem, its stasis level, is one of warmth, however: "*Child!*". Family relationship, not social status, or the attempt to please a distant God, is the basis of Herbert's decorum. The experience-level speaker, chafing, entertains a suggestion that "what is fit" is opposed to freedom, youth, strength and joy. The correcting discovery at the end is of a new decorum of life and of literature. "My Lord" is the true freedom. The liberating answer to "cage" is not "wilde"; it is, surprisingly, "childe". Herbert's English poetry does not discard decorum simply because its matter is the freeing grace of God. Rather, it operates by a decorum different from that recommended by the critics. It is "fit", but on principles other than the classical social criteria.

1. Honouring man, honouring God

The Renaissance decorum of genre followed Aristotle's *Poetics,* which speaks of the hierarchical and even chronological primacy of epic and tragic poetry. Poetry about the high-born is first in "the natural order". Of the types of early poetry, "the more dignified represented noble actions and those of noble men, the less serious those of low-class people". The great ones of the world are honoured, even created, by the use

---

[1] *The Temple* does not contain the word "decorum"; Herbert uses other terms, such as "fit". Renaissance criticism similarly had many synonyms. Some of these, in Wilson, Ascham, Puttenham and Jonson, are: proper, apt, meet, toward, usual, expressing the nature of, agreeable, comely, decent,

of words: "if one wants to see how important it is to use [words] suitably one should take epic verses and put ordinary words into them". Earthly honour is the criterion when deciding what are "trivial subjects" and what "subjects that require pomp"[2].

A gospel of incarnation, inclusion and God-initiated redemption, as basis for a poetic, cannot co-exist with an aristocratic, or an Aristotelian, decorum. Erich Auerbach has shown that the Christian gospel turns upside down the classical concepts of decorum: "the true heart of the Christian doctrine – Incarnation and Passion – was ... totally incompatible with the principle of the separation of styles".[3] Auerbach uses the example of Augustine, who, as a teacher of rhetoric, struggled after his conversion with the apparently uncouth style of the Bible, but came to realise that classical literary style was based on a world-view entirely incompatible with a gospel of inability and grace.[4] Yet the literary decorum demanded by English Renaissance critics remained aristocratic, derived from teachers of classical rhetoric or critics of drama.[5] Quintilian had said "our language must not be obscene, unseemly or mean. Language may be described as mean when it is beneath the dignity of the subject or the rank of the speaker".[6] Quintilian was referring to forensic oratory, but his words were applied to all types of writing. Puttenham applied them to poetry: "To have the stile decent and comely it behooveth the maker or Poet to follow the nature of his subject ... they that do otherwise use it, applying to ... hie matters stile either mean or base ... do utterly disgrace their poesie".[7] Ben Jonson thought Sidney may have "disgraced" his "poesie": according to William Drummond, "[Jonson's] Censure of the English Poets was this, that Sidney did not keep a Decorum in making every one

---

proportionate, seemly, kindly, conforming, convenient (and their noun forms, and their opposites). Collected from Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999.

[2] *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, 90, 96, 94, 121, 139, 145.

[3] *Mimesis*, tr. W. Trask, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953, 14 ff, 72 ff, 151, and *passim*. Auerbach's argument pertains largely to the development of narrative realism.

[4] Augustine may have had difficulty with such a reconciliation. See Joseph Mazzeo on Augustine and Auerbach: "St Augustine's Rhetoric of Silence", in *Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1964, 13; and see below on Augustine's allegorising of "indecorous" passages.

[5] Vernon Hall, *Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of its Social Content*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1945, 14, 57, 192 ff, 208 ff, 213, 222.

[6] *Quintilian*, tr. H.E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library, 1920 / 1969, Book VIII, 197.

[7] George Puttenham, "Of Ornament", *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Smith, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1904, Vol. II, 155.

speak as well as himself".[8] A little earlier, John Hoskyns, however, had used the *Arcadia* as example of all that is decorous. He bases his wish for literary decorum in the use of rhetorical figures upon "the order of God's creatures" which is "eloquent" and interestingly suggests that "disordered speech is not so much injury to the lips which give it forth, or the thoughts which put it forth, as to the right proportion and coherence of things in themselves, so wrongfully expressed." The created order of the universe is done a disservice by indecorum, a thought which is often Herbert's also; yet Herbert's ideas of the causes of disorder, and of order's restoration, are not quite Hoskyns'. Real indecorum, to Herbert, comes from a heart which "not ever kneels" ('Businesse', 112); the understanding of "high, low and base" is irrelevant, for however cleverly words may match subject, still "dirtie hands foul all they touch" ('Miserie', 100). Herbert would agree with Hoskyns that "careless speech ... discrediteth the truth, force, and uniformity of the matter and substance". He would not, however, look for an ultimate remedy in education (such as may be had in reading Sidney, or Hoskyns' own handbook) or expect that "wisdom" and "wit" can repair the ill-fittedness of man to God.[9] Instead, "where thou dwellest", as Herbert says to his Lord, "order plaies the soul" and "all is neat" ('The Familie', 136). A true decorum results from a true relationship.

Herbert as University Orator kept to the Aristotelian proprieties.[10] But Herbert as English poet of the grace of God did not maintain the social type of literary decorum. His poems neither flatter earthly power nor address God according to his majesty, but rather according to his grace and fatherhood.[11] Yet his writing is decorous in a deeper, and paradoxical, sense. His forms decorously convey the indecorous love of Christ. In order to do so, he often had to find his own structures and analogies. 'Content' (68) may at first seem to maintain the social order, but it is in fact anti-aristocratic, even anti-monarchical, in its thought (ll. 21-24, 32).[12] The "*gentle* measure" which

---

[8] *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and P. Simpson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925, repr. corr. 1974, vol. I, 132. Brian Vickers remarks that Jonson is unfair, as Sidney in *Arcadia* has Dametas speak in the appropriate rustic idiom. *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 529, n. 5.

[9] John Hoskyns, *Directions for Speech and Style,* in Vickers, *Criticism*, 399-400.

[10] See, for example, *Orationes*, H. 440 ff.

[11] Luther said that we cannot know God in any way outside of Christ and the Scriptures which reveal Christ: "Now, God in his own nature and majesty is to be left alone ... We have to do with him [only] as clothed and displayed in his Word". *The Bondage of the Will,* in John Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, New York, Anchor Books (Doubleday), 1962, 191.

[12] Compare 'Praise' (I) (61) ll. 9-10.

"complies and suits with all estates" (ll. 13-14) refers to a poetic metre and genre which is both unaggressive and noble, and to a portion in life ("the pliant minde") which causes no friction and in so doing finds the true nobility, that of manner and attitude. The simple rhythms and metaphors of 'The Elixir' (184) may seem appropriate to "drudgerie" (l. 18), yet the point of the poem is that even sweeping a room, and by implication the sweeper, is turned to "gold" if touched by God. In a climate of aristocratic literary criticism, we admire the courage of the attempt of the aristocratic George Herbert to emphasize in his poems the end of the "high, low, and middle" which the coming of Christ achieved, in both life and literature.

The lyric, rather than epic, was Herbert's choice partly because, as has been argued, God's love of the lowly, not the exploits of the high-born and self-sufficient, is the nature of the gospel, and so is better described in lyric form. Puttenham's comments about lyric, therefore, show Herbert to be both decorous and indecorous in his choice:

> So commendable, yea honourable a thing as love well meant, were it in princely estate or private, might ... be uttered in good form and order. [Love] requireth a form of poesy variable, constant, affected, curious, and most witty of any others, whereof the joys were to be uttered in one sort, the sorrows in another, and, by the many forms of poesy, the many moods and pangs of lovers thoroughly to be discovered ... with a thousand delicate devices, odes, songs, elegies, ballads, sonnets ... moving ... to great compassion.[13]

Herbert's many forms of the poetry of love to and by God are, then, appropriate, decorous. But Puttenham's lyric paradigm is the lover initiating, seeking, pursuing; Herbert's is God as Lover. He alone seeks, and successfully. Even Herbert's poems of apparent forsakenness are just that: apparent. The level of stasis is that of an eternally secure love. So in Puttenham's view, Herbert is indecorous.

The love of Christ is itself indecorous. It turns upside down all natural conceptions of worth. This applies to the Son of God himself and to all who are his. Paul's letter to the Greek- and Roman-thinking Galatians alludes to such "natural" divisions. The impropriety of "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" in whom "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female" (3:26, 28), and of the fact that "not many mighty, not many noble, are

called" (I Corinthians 1:26)[14] must have been considerable to its first readers. Paul saw that there can be no compromise. The gospel of a crucified carpenter changes human status. Whenever English Renaissance writers try to be both biblical and humanist, therefore, there is tension. Herbert aimed at a biblical decorum. "When the soul unto the lines accords" ('A True Hymne', 168) describes the new decorum at which he aimed, whose authority derived from being "loved" (l. 20). Humanistic rules of literary propriety, judged harshly, derived from the fear and flattery of man. Herbert had God, not man, for subject, audience, and sometimes addressee. The requirements for this decorum are even more stringent, however, than for writing which faces only other humans: "heart, mind, soul, strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37) are necessary to "write a hymne in kinde" ('A True Hymne', l. 15). Only the "loved", to whom Christ's righteousness is imputed, can achieve this decorum: that is, such a poet can write "in kinde" because Christ, not he, has achieved the appropriate life and death. He "stops" saying "O, could I love!" (l. 20) because he is "loved":[15] his soul is in accord with the lines not because he is, but because he is accounted to be, righteous. In 'Faith' (49), not "art or strength" or "proud knowledge" or an imagined "inherent light", but only God's plan to see sinners in Christ, can "impute a lustre" (ll. 25, 31, 34, 35). A literary decorum which regards "the wise or strong", the capable or the high-born, must be discarded, for now "one size doth all conditions fit" (l. 28).

Human estimates of human worth are the foundation of decorum, according to Giraldi Cinthio: an author must determine his characters and their words "according to their blood, position, dignity, and authority, and according to places and times".[16] Similarly, in *The Garden of Eloquence*, Henry Peacham, discussing the rhetorical figure "antonomasia", points out the connection between decorous language and human assessment of worth:

---

[13] *The Arte of English Poesie*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 204-5.

[14] Compare John Owen's observation that the apostles were "poor, low, and in every way despised ... Christianity was the religion of idiots and men illiterate [II Corinthians 4:7]." *Works*, ed. W. Goold, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth reprint, 1974, Vol. IV, 38.

[15] Compare Calvin: "His love precedes our reconciliation in Christ." *Institutes* 2. 16.3, tr. F.L.Battles, ed. J. McNeill, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, 505.

[16] Giraldi Cinthio, *On Romances*, translated and edited by Henry L. Snuggs, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1968, 56, 61.

> [With] this figure ... the orator, when he speaketh to high dignities, he boweth (as it were) the knee of his speech, and lifteth up the eye of his phrase to the bright beames of earthly glory, thereby declaring his due reverence, and their high dignitie. It helpeth much in praising or dispraising ... The faults that may be committed are these, To give a lesse name than the dignitie requireth ... or to use amorous termes, as sweete heart, and ... to use any name which is unfit for the person to whom it is attributed ... either in appearance, or in shadowed signification. [17]

Herbert's addressees are God, whose "high dignitie" would seem to be almost beyond appropriate address; his audience, which is more the congregation-model than the witty and perhaps superficial coterie-model described by Cristina Malcolmson;[18] himself; or all three. In all cases God is his intended primary reader. When Herbert addresses God, it is always through the person of Christ and on the basis of his work. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me", Jesus said, and it is on this basis that Herbert can speak so familiarly to Deity.[19] This verse amongst others was no doubt in Herbert's mind in writing 'The Call' (157): "Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life"; by the last stanza this has become "my Joy, my Love, my Heart", still biblical in concept, but not a direct transposition of phrase. It is because of Christ that Herbert can "call" upon God to "come" to a sinner; in the words of Paul, he has "boldness and access with confidence" (Ephesians 3:12; compare 2:18, Romans 5:2).

If Peacham's "bright beames of *earthly* glory" require so much verbal "dignitie", God as the object of rhetorical address must require, in Renaissance decorum, words and forms expressing the utmost distance and honour. But Herbert is, in Peacham's terms, constantly using "name[s] unfit for the person to whom [they are] attributed". Herbert addresses God the Son with many equivalents of Peacham's inappropriate "sweete heart": "my deare" ('Affliction' I, 46), "sweet God" ('Whitsunday,' 59), "sweetest Saviour" ('Dialogue', 114), "deare Friend" ('Love Unknown', 129), "bowels of pitie" ('Longing', 148 -- a phrase used often by Sibbes and other Puritan writers[20]), "my Love, my sweetnesse" ('Longing'), "my Love, my Heart" ('The Call', 156), "thou art mine" ('Clasping of hands', 157), "my Love" ('The Search', 162), all of 'Bitter-

---

[17] Facsimile ed. Wm. Crane, Gainesville, FL, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1954, 23.
[18] *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1999.
[19] John 14:6.

sweet' (171), "soul's joy" ('A Parodie'), 183, and "my deare" even in the context of unworthiness ('Love' III, 188). Herbert's instructions and complaints to God are also in this category of "unfit" for the addressee. For example: "when first thou didst entice..." ('Affliction' I, 46); "wilt thou meet arms with man ...?" ('The Temper" I, 55); "kill me not every day" ('Affliction' II, 62); "do not beguile my heart" ('Complaining', 143). Herbert also makes deliberately inappropriate juxtapositions, such as "Great God ...doth submit" (Sion', 106), or "Dread Lord" combined with a context of equality: "then we are shooters both" ('Artillerie', 139).[21]

These addresses to God are indecorous only if the basis of access to God is one's own worth. *The Temple*, however, is built on the recognition that there can be no human basis for such access, and on the amazed thankfulness that Christ has done what man cannot. This thankfulness, strangely, allows for complaints; only a God of grace is both great enough and giving enough to hear and to care. The poems which suggest a not hearing and a not caring only evidence and strengthen that underlying relationship. The complaints are not to be equated with, say, those of a citizen concerning the government. Such complaints are based on an idea of justice unfulfilled, and on a presumption of rights. In the Christian relation, all the justice is God's, however misunderstood by humanity, and the complainer has no intrinsic rights, as Herbert freely admits: "And should Gods eare / Which needs not man, be ty'd to those / Who heare not him ...?" ('The Method', 133). However, "I am / ... thy dust that calls" ('Complaining', 143); "Though my sinnes against me cried, / Thou didst clear me" ('Praise' II, 146). It is not injustice, but love as the fulfilment of justice, which recognizes the nature of sin, provides the return of love, allows complaint, and demands that the complainer "sit and eat" at a feast which was not of the complainer's providing, in company of which the guest is not worthy.

---

[20] Compare Philippians 1:8, 2:1; 1 John 3:17.

[21] O. B. Hardison suggests that the poets of the Franciscan revival, who also wrote praises to God and Christ using terms of endearment, were the forerunners of the *stilnovisti*, who used the pattern of these religious lyrics for poems of secular love (*This Enduring Monument: A Study in the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1962, 97-100). Herbert may therefore be said to have restored lyric to its first vernacular function. Rosemond Tuve (*A Reading*, 1952), Louis Martz (*The Poetry of Meditation*, 1954) and R. V Young (*Doctrine and Devotion*, 2000) have argued medieval and baroque influences for Herbert's "love" lyrics. Herbert's lyrics are different, however, in that nothing in the speaker, not even the intensity of his love, is ever a basis for the return of love. His endearments and praises are based on the work of Christ and on a received love, and are not manipulative.

Renaissance decorum was an appropriateness to the matter dealt with as well as to the addressee. Puttenham said "to have the style decent and comely it behoveth the maker to follow the nature of his subject [high, mean, or base]" and that such "decency ... is the chief praise of any writer." [22] The choice of subject is itself often conditioned by the imagined audience or the addressee. In the case of *The Temple*, the subject is often the same as the addressee: the person of Christ. If a human reader is addressed, Christ is still the "hidden" audience, and certainly almost always, in person, work or relationship, the overt subject. Sidney wonders if it is to "profane that holy name" of God by associating it with poetry, which has become "ridiculous" in the eyes of society's reformers. But, using the example of biblical poetry, he shows that it is possible to produce a poetic representation of (that is, to "imitate"), paradoxically, "the unconceivable excellencies of God". [23] Such a subject would appear to call for a high style. However, a high style adds lustre to the subject; this implies deficiency. What can be added to God? Worse, the praise by humanity of God must always be the praise of sinners: "dirtie hands foul all they touch ...yet either this, / Or none, thy portion is" ('Miserie', 100).

Applying rules such as Puttenham's to *The Temple* does not work, because humanistic rules discount both the problem of the sinful writer and its solution, the coming of Christ. Puttenham's comment that "divine lauds [and] all hymns" are "written in the high style ... otherwise they had been utterly disproportioned" is not qualified, as in Sidney's *Defence*, by the remark that this refers to ancient pagan poetry.[24] Even Sidney does not quite see that poetry written concerning "a full wrong divinity" cannot be used as a model. The problem is that these writers imagine God and man with no intermediary, as if poetry can be written to and about a God unimaginable and inexpressible, by mortals both finite and tainted. Therefore "hymns" are bracketed unthinkingly by Puttenham with "histories and tragedies" as if the human model of greatness needs only stepping up a notch or two for the correct decorum for writing about or to God. But man, as both Judaism and Christianity teach, cannot go straight to God. "They could not endure that which was commanded ... and so terrible was the

[22] *The Arte of English Poesie*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 228.
[23] *Defence*, 22, 25.

sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear ... But ye are come to ... Jesus the mediator ... and to the blood of sprinkling" (Hebrews 12:20-24, referring to Exodus 19:13; compare Exodus 24:2, and chapters 28, 29).

The base or low style, said Puttenham, is used for "the doings of the common artificer, servingman, ... swineherd, and such like of homely calling, degree, and bringing up." This requires a "low, mild, and simple manner of utterance".[25] Herbert's subject is the highest of all. Yet "what can be lower then the common manger?" ('Faith', 50). Herbert's plain style,[26] although not exactly "base" nor excluding of ornament, is appropriate to a God who came to earth "undressing all the way" ('The Bag', 151; compare Philippians 2:5-11). Poetry about, and modelling, a relationship with God can only be written because of the humiliation of Christ and the grace of a God who before eternity wrote the names of the undeserving as if they were the name of his Son.[27]

Christ, then, has made the poetry of the love of God possible. Its style can be plain or low, which is decorous or fitting to the incarnation and crucifixion and the human nature of the Son of God (and, of course, to sinful writer, speaker, and reader). But the unfittedness of the human in the service of God still causes Herbert's speaker temporary distress in 'The Priesthood' (160). Because of the inseparable bond in the sacraments between word, spiritual truth and function, and earthly matter, this poem has a wider meaning than its title suggests. When Herbert's speaker trembles at the thought "Their hands convey him, who conveys their hands. / O what pure things, most pure must those things be, / Who bring my God to me!" (ll. 28-30), he is not meditating only on the Holy Communion, or only on the bringing of God's word to the congregation ("thy just censures", l. 4, "deal in holy Writ", l. 12); he is reflecting too on poetic form as a vehicle for conveying God and the Word of God. The vehicle of poetry, and its author, may be "much unfit", "wretched earth" and "mean stuffe" (ll. 11, 38), but God can make it "for high uses meet". What is "meet", decorous, in the service of God, is "submission" (l.41). Herbert may have been reflecting on ideas

---

[24] Vickers, *Criticism*, 230-1.
[25] Vickers, *Criticism*, 231, 230.
[26] See Arnold Stein, "The Art of Plainness", *The Poetic Tradition*, ed. D. C. Allen and T. H. Rowell, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968.

such as Peacham's when he dismisses "those great ones" who "make the bravest shows" (ll. 19, 18) and who, to Peacham, emit "bright beames of earthly glory", as having "earth" (ll. 20-24) as their origin and end.

Herbert is implying not the politic usefulness, but the pointlessness, of bowing the knee of the speech and lifting the eye of the phrase to the earthly great, when one may instead "throw me at [God's] feet" (l. 36). "The distance of the meek / Doth flatter power" is not, as Michael Schoenfeldt suggests, a lowering of God to the manipulations of an earthly decorum.[28] Its wry glance at the misuses of earthly power by its courtiers is based on an understanding of true power. That which praises earthly might alone is "ill"; that is "good" which understands the decorum of the true object of "submission" (ll. 39-42). Further, Schoenfeldt fails to see that the position "at his feet" is not at a great "distance"; in fact, it is very near. Herbert is being deliberately contradictory. The whole poem is against the "cunning hand" of the "skilfull artists" (ll. 13, 17) who manoeuvre themselves into positions of power by manipulation. "I dare not ... put forth my hand" so as to seem useful in the eyes of "those / Who make the bravest shows" (l. 18). "Submission" is, in this case and probably always, an act of love and sincerity. Those who are forced to submit do not truly submit at all: the heart's "pride" is still in "opposition" mode (l. 42). 'The Priesthood' can of course still be interpreted as hypocritical and devious self-serving, to Schoenfeldt "ingratiating divine authority", "the calculated observance of occasion" (referring, uncontextually, to "then is my time", l. 39), and "spiritual opportunism."[29] But if this is the case, then the whole *Temple* is built on sand.

Such submission might cause the poet ultimately to fall silent. What decorum of language can express God? Yet God has been expressed not only in the flesh as Christ but in the written Word revealing Christ, and further still, in his new creation which has "the mind of Christ".[30] While all creation "declares the glory of God",[31] only a human, speaking and writing, can be "secretarie of his praise" ('Providence', 116, l. 8). *The Temple* is neither blasphemy nor indecorum, for it is neither another Christ nor

---

[27] Compare Luke 10:20 with John 17:24, Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5.
[28] *Prayer and Power*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1991, 183-4.
[29] *Prayer and Power*, 23.
[30] I Corinthians 2:16.

another authoritative Scripture. But in applying the Word of God, the Bible, to the modern situation, it becomes a writing of the Gospel on the heart. As Herbert sees himself to be "written" first, under the authority of Christ's saving work and of the Bible, so can he write, with decorum, what has been written already. The new decorum of the Gospel is that of a thankful obedience: "submission".

Maintaining the classical appropriateness of topic and form to a particular class is therefore *in*appropriate for the Christian, for it implies that power and authority are intrinsic to humanity. It is an attempt to achieve literary authority without reference to God. The autonomy of the human is implied. Schoenfeldt's Herbert sees, or even creates, God in terms of human power-structures. His reference to "the human ground on which theology rests" betrays an attitude entirely opposed to Herbert's own.[32] Similarly, Cristina Malcolmson's *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic* can envisage no other motive for Herbert's poetry, at least before its revisions, than an attempt to flatter power and so find employment: "[Herbert's] lyrics must be included in accounts of his pursuit of patronage" [33]. The decorum involved here is that of the coterie game of matching wits.[34] Such a construction chooses to ignore Herbert's declared abhorrance of such contests (see 'The Posie', 'The Pearl' or 'Love' [I] and [II] among others). These attempts to reduce the possibility of a relationship with God, or perhaps even the existence of God, to societal expectations or cultural productions, turn any appearance of sincerity or genuineness in Herbert into a means to something else. Ultimately it is impossible to disprove such arguments; their disproof lies, paradoxically but necessarily, outside the earthly realm. Yet even earthly debate, to be logical, must assume an objective and findable truth (which itself assumes a God-given "grand narrative"), and must build on shared presuppositions and declared intent. Herbert understood this when he gave his non-answer: "Say, I am thine; / And then they have their answer home" ('The Quip', 110) and when he expressed frustration with those who, for political or ideological purposes, "cut and carve / Divinities transcendent skie" ('Divinitie', 134). Herbert's decorum,

---

[31] Psalm 19:1-6.
[32] *Prayer and Power*, 12.
[33] Stanford University Press, 1999, 52.
[34] *Heart-Work*, Ch. 2 and *passim*. She includes Donne, Bacon, and the Earl of Pembroke.

appropriate to revelation and faith, was not then and is not now grasped by those who deny his first principles.

Herbert of course played with the conventions, as any good poet must. Parody and allusion imply a witty "overgoing". Any manipulation of language, and Herbert was here a master, must seem to counteract a declared purpose of being "simple". To imply, however, a necessary seeking of status or wealth because of a delight in words is too great a leap in logic. Pleasure in language and its ambiguities does not necessitate its socially or theologically manipulative use, nor need it imply a lack of belief in meaningful reference. Indeed suspicion was active in Herbert's mind before it dominated the thinking of his recent critics. But the object of suspicion was himself: "As dirtie hands foul all they touch ... My God, I mean my self" ('Miserie', 100, ll. 39, 78).

Rather than assume this to be merely the topos of modesty, I propose that we allow Herbert, beneath his self-admitted layer of enjoyable artifice, his "bait of pleasure", to be genuine. Following the Bible's attitude, he saw all authority as derived (with whatever various corruptions) from a God who is before and outside the frames of human reference. His decorum, therefore, while still maintaining as much poetic correctness as would make it acceptable to a wide audience, must present the incongruities of a God who came to earth as an artisan and whose life went from animal shed to gibbet: "the offence of the Cross" (Galatians 5:11[35]). This final and worst "offence" to classical decorum, salvation by total dependence upon a representative execution, is, after all, the subject, implied or overt, of most of Herbert's poetry. Today's materialist and relativist critics find offence in Herbert's presuppositions: that there is a holy and personal God, and that it is humanity who has offended Him, not the reverse. These tenets are unacceptable to postmodernism with its many competing narratives, and to New Historicism, left with the awkward options of a Herbert either deceived or deceiving.

---

[35] The Geneva Bible has "the sclander of the crosse". 1560 facsimile, ed. Lloyd Berry, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

2. A decorum for an indecorous gospel

The problem concerns authority before it concerns decorum: or, the true decorum of Herbert's poetry is in its fidelity to the Scriptures. Its authority can come only from its congruity with the word-revealed work of God: "thy book alone" ('Discipline', 178, ll. 5-12). This is true of the Christian life, but it is also true of the writing of Christian poetry, which must achieve an appropriateness of image, diction, tone, rhyme, metre and structure *to the Christian gospel,* not to a social rank nor (except for the necessity of communication) to a particular culture. 'Discipline' goes on to say:

> Though I fail, I weep:
> Though I halt in pace,
> Yet I creep
> To the throne of grace. (ll. 13-16)

Herbert is again referring to both writing and salvation. Puttenham said: "Base things [are] to be holden within their tether by a low, mild, and simple manner of utterance, creeping rather than climbing."[36] The speaker of 'Discipline' sees himself as a "base thing" indeed, so on the one hand there is decorum -- fit, appropriateness -- between Herbert's "low, mild and simple" style of poem and its speaker. As the speaker can only "creep" to God, so the poem is (deceptively) "creeping rather than climbing" in diction, line length, and metre. Deceptively, because the poem is not "simple". It only wishes to appear so. Its every feature speaks of thought and art. "Though I halt in pace" may seem to say that my style, like my obedience, is awkward and limping; yet the suggestion of a caesura after "halt" provides the perfect imitation in sound of the meaning of the line. On the other hand, "creep" is hardly denominative of a literary style which accords with a "throne"; so since the subject is more truly "thou art God" (l. 31) than "I" or "I fail", Herbert is indecorous again from a Renaissance, or classical, point of view. Defining "thou art God", however, is crucial. The God of Herbert's poem is not (only) the unapproachable, infinitely holy, God, who, Luther said, is unknowable by man without his self-revelation in Christ; such a God is opposite to all temporal attributes and must be "wrath" to sinful mortals. This God is Love (ll.18, 19, 21, 22, 28): "Thou art God" means "Thou art Love" and this warrior, Love, Herbert most indecorously reminds God, is more effective than wrath, for it "brought thee low" (l. 27). As Christ was God become low, so is 'Discipline' decorous for writing of God in a "low" style.

The paradox of the gospel is that "the dignity of the subject" could not be higher, and yet that subject, the Son of God, deliberately took upon himself the most unseemly and mean death. Herbert's is therefore a decorum of paradox. The author of *The Temple* faced the difficult task of writing in a style which would be accessible to readers having expectations about how poetry should look and sound, and yet which would be in conformity with "the offence of the Cross" (Galatians 5:11). Since "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1 Corinthians 2:14), Herbert's task was, at first sight, impossible: to entice into belief, with the sugared delights of poetry, readers who by nature hate the subject of that poetry. Music and metaphor must be "a house of pleasure" ('Church-Musick', 65, 1. 3) to attract the world, and yet be pleasing to a God whose friendship means enmity with the world. Yet this is no greater paradox than that of preaching to the "dead", or that the change from spiritual death to life occurs by human means yet is entirely the doing of God. Herbert had to work out a literary decorum for a further paradox: his poetry would "bewail" and "approve" a God who is at once "deare" and "angrie" ('Bitter-Sweet', 171).

Joseph Hall did not see the paradox of the indecorous gospel, nor his own theological indecorum, in his plea for devotional poetry to take the classical mythologies "into the holy house of Bethlehem". His Satire VIII starts, as does "The Church", with "Hence ye profane: mell not with holy things", but unlike "The Church", the poem is happy if "good St Peter weeps pure Helicon, / And both the Maries make a music moan", as if a baptism by devotional poetry is sufficient for "Parnassus [to be] transformed to Sion hill" [37]. Indeed Hall's argument implies that devotional poetry is inadequate without classical reference.[38] Hall is comfortable with pagan Muses, so long as they are not excuses for immorality, as he fears is happening in English poetry: "Now is Parnassus turned to a stewes / And on bay-stocks the wanton myrtle grewes".[39] Herbert, whose

---

[36] Vickers, *Criticism*, 230.

[37] Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum*, 1597, this edition R. Clements, Oxford, 1753, 1.8.

[38] Samuel Johnson disagreed with this argument in his comment on Milton's 'Lycidas': "Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting ... With these trifling fictions [Jove and Phoebus, Neptune and Aeolus, and other mythological imagery] are mingled the most awful and sacred truths ... The shepherd ... is now a superintendent of a Christian flock" (Samuel Johnson, *Selected Writings*, ed. Patrick Cruttwell, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, 409-10.)

[39] *Virgidemiarum*, 1.2.

"lovely metaphors" were "washed" from the "stews and brothels" of secular poetry ('The Forerunners' 176, ll. 13-16), would have agreed. But Hall would have liked those verbal baptismal candidates of Herbert's to be more decorous by being more classical.

By the time of eighteenth-century criticism, devotional lyric poetry as an entire genre could be seen as indecorous. Delight was incongruous with devotion in a theological climate which no longer saw God as entirely responsible for salvation.[40] Herbert's playful poems of thankfulness for a salvation all of grace would have seemed only trifling to Samuel Johnson:

> Contemplative piety ... cannot be poetical. ... [T]he topics of devotion ... can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression. ... Omnipotence cannot be exalted; Infinity cannot be amplified; Perfection cannot be improved. ... Repentance, trembling in the presence of the judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets ... supplication to God can only cry for mercy.[41]

The problem of sin and the holiness of God were realities to the devout Johnson; but he, and many at that time, considered poetry such as Herbert's as familiar, even as arrogant, in its referring to God as friend, just as the doctrine of assurance seemed arrogant to those who were depending on their own works. But a poetic indecorum in the other direction – God as friend and lover – Herbert saw not as arrogant but as entirely biblical.

'Justice' (II) (141) at first deals with the decorum certainly appropriate to a Christless theology:

O dreadfull Justice, what a fright and terrour
Wast thou of old,
When sinne and errour
Did show and shape thy looks to me,
And through their glasse discolour thee!
He that did but look up, was proud and bold.

The dishes of thy balance seem'd to gape,
Like two great pits;
The beam and scape

[40] For the change during the seventeenth century in mainstream soteriology, see C.F.Allison, *The Rise of Moralism,* London, SPCK, 1966.
[41] From "The Life of Waller" in *Selected Writings*, 1968, 407-8.

Did like some torturing engine show;
Thy hand above did burn and glow,
Daunting the stoutest hearts, *the proudest wits*. (ll.1-12, my emphases)

Justice being accomplished by the work of Christ, however, the expectations upon the sinner – and the decorum of language pertaining to the Judge – are entirely changed:

But now that Christs pure vail presents the sight,
I see no fears;
. . .
For where before thou still didst call on me,
Now I still touch
And *harp on thee*. . . (ll.13-14, 19-21)

The speaker's expectation was once that God would "call on" him for a righteous life, or, in the absence of that, for punishment. "Of old" (l. 4) means both the Old Covenant and the past times of the speaker's life. Natural decorum sees God as human nobility, authority, and justice, many times magnified. "Sin and errour" allow only resentment or "fears" as responses to the authority of God. The result is, as Michael Schoenfeldt has said, the attempt to manipulate by humility (line 6). But Herbert is careful to point out two vital things: this is not the truth about God, for he is not just a projection of all we know of human magistracy, such a construction being "sinne and errour" which will "discolour" the true nature of the justice of God; and, "thy balance", the "torturing engine", and "thy hand" refer to Justice classically personified, and *in the poem* -- that is, by the "old" speaker. Schoenfeldt is not correct in identifying the torturer as Herbert's God.[42] The distinction is fine, but it is there. The man-made personification of Justice, the addressee in the first two stanzas, is not the same as the "justice" of line 23, which Christ both demonstrated and satisfied.

'Justice' (II) pictures, first, the appropriate decorum for the relation of Christless man to God's justice, which is "fright and terrour"; then, the appropriate decorum for the relation of man to God by the death of Christ, which is "touch", "harp on thee", and "mine" (ll. 20-22). Now, the righteousness and the punishment are Another's ("Christs pure vail"). Now, the "great pits" of the balance's dishes, with their suggestion of hell, have become homely and helpful "buckets … lifting [us] to heaven" (ll. 7, 16, 18). Now, poetic praise (to "look up") is possible. Intellect,

language and music, "wit" and "harp", can in a new decorum of subject and form turn into poetry even those subjects previously terrifying. "Why should I justice now decline?", l. 23 – for the justice was both provided by and fell upon Christ. This decorum of imputation allows Herbert, university orator and exemplary classicist, to use the language of the kitchen in connection with a subject more sublime than any, the justice of God. He does this to demonstrate in a striking way that the work of Christ means the end of "fears", the end of God's "call[ing] on me" constantly with the Law's expectations, and the possibility of comfort: justice is now "for me" (an echo of Romans 8:31).

Many of the Renaissance critics claim to be furthering the cause of Christianity.[43] Their decorum, however, was classical. To Sir John Harington, the pagan authors reflect Scriptural truth:

> I cannot denie but to us that are Christians ... not only Poetrie but all other studies of Philosophy are in a manner vaine and superfluous ... But sith we live with men & not with saints, and because few men can embrace this strict and heroicall divinitie, or rather, indeed, for that the holy scriptures in which those high mysteries of our salvation are contained, are a deepe and profound studie and not subject to everie weak capacitie ... therefore do we first read some other authors ... and then after we have gathered more strength, we enter into profounder studies of higher mysteries, having first as it were enabled our eyes by long beholding the sunne in a bason of water at last to looke upon the sunne it selfe. [44]

On this argument, the Bible is open only to those of strong "capacitie". The belief that this moral and intellectual strength may be acquired by early steps through the foothills of pagan literature, or that the true reflection of Christ may be found in a "bason" of the murky water of pagan forms, has no basis in Scripture itself.[45] Yet there is rarely any realisation on the part of the English Christian humanists that the literary decorum they urge is opposed to a consistent Christian worldview. The unquestioned basis of their thinking is still the world of status, reason, and human authority.[46] This makes a decorum of syncretism inevitable. Many critics, even

---

[42] *Prayer and Power*, 154-5; compare ch. 3.
[43] For two examples, see Ascham and Lodge, in Smith, I, 2-4, 27, 65.
[44] Preface to the translation of *Orlando Furioso*, in Smith, II, 197-8.
[45] Humanist education of children in England was shaped by beliefs such as Harington's.
[46] See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Vol. I, 1991, chs. 1, 2 and 3, for a clear account of the difference between reason-based and faith-based morality, and the arguments for each in the seventeenth century.

Sidney, start their case for poetry with pagan antiquity and only then move on to biblical examples.[47] Isabel Rivers has pointed out the Christian humanist presupposition that reason was undamaged in the Fall,[48] and that an earlier humanity, albeit pagan, was closer to the reasonable image of God. If pagan literature, in its decorum of appropriateness to the "reasonable", can achieve "the Sunne itself", then the Cross was not necessary. The New Testament presents the Cross and Resurrection as the destruction of all decorum based on human valuation: "the world by wisdom knew not God ... the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach ... Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:20-24).

Richard Strier, although he does not directly tackle the problem of Renaissance criticism, has shown that Herbert recognized and opposed the presuppositions governing contemporary thinking about decorum in a number of poems, and in those poems particularly directed to the process and aims of writing, such as 'Jordan' (II), 'A True Hymne', and 'The Forerunners'.[49] Strier shows that the Christian relationship with God is opposed to concepts of decorum. The believer is able to "address God boldly and familiarly" and is free to express all types of emotion.[50] Strier has elsewhere written with clarity of the denial of merit and of the attack on reason presented by the Reformation understanding of Christianity.[51] He has not chosen to classify these matters also as transgressions of decorum, but he might have, because the Christian gospel is indecorous in its very nature and not only in the issue of the expression of emotion. The Christian privilege of a child's access to a heavenly Father is certainly contrary to all human ideas of decorum, as Strier says. Yet the effect on poetry of this relationship, so contrary to human ideas of the approach to God, is not only the freedom to express all types of emotion. The very basis of such freedom is an

---

[47] It was known that Moses pre-dated Plato. Some thought Greek philosophy derived from the Law and the Prophets. Meric Casaubon, for example, believed with many "learned men anciently, and the most learned of this age" that "a great part of the ancient mythology" was derived from the Scriptures. *Generall Learning*, ed. Richard Serjeantson, Cambridge, Renaissance Texts from Manuscript, 1999, 50. See also Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, and Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant*, New York, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970.

[48] *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, Vol. I, 1, 21, 25, and *passim.*

[49] *Love Known*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, 174 ff. The poems are 'Longing', 'Sion', 'Gratefulnesse', 'The Storm', 'The Familie', 'Deniall', 'The Altar' and 'Home'; and 'Jordan' (II), 'A True Hymne', and 'The Forerunners'.

[50] *Love Known*, 176 and chapter heading.

indecorous saving action, initiated by God, which cannot exist with any scheme of self-salvation. The new decorum – Herbert's – must deny inherent, independent human authority, as implied in the structures of power, or any suggestion of innate capacity to "be holy, as I am holy" (Leviticus 19:2, 20:7; compare Matthew 5:48). Any "fit" poetry must paradoxically have as its subject and form the grace of God to an unfit humanity. Herbert's poems are anti-decorous not just for the manner in which they address God, but because their basis, the essence of the Christian gospel, opposes the humanistic decorum pleaded for by the critics. "The preaching of the Cross is … foolishness" (I Corinthians 1:18) and its preachers, writers and hearers are to "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" and "go forth to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 11:26, 13:13), for "he who is ashamed of me and of my words … of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" (Mark 8:38).

Herbert did not take this "reproach" to mean he must write bad poetry.[52] Eloquence and wit are not ways to God, but they may be means of thanksgiving and evangelism. But Herbert was conscious of possible "reproach" in his poetry being *thought* bad because of its plainly saying "my God, my king", and because of incredulity about his disregard of "brave Glorie" ('The Quip', 110). Several poems show a poet attacked, or expecting attack, on the grounds of his poetic skill, his subjects, and his motives. Herbert, however, is never "ashamed of … the Son of man" or of his "words" as the basis for his poetic. He answers his critics with the higher authority of the Bible and with an "indecorous" relationship with its Author.

Herbert's decorum is not one of subjectivity, as Strier appears to suggest when he approves of Halewood's statement that "Herbert is in many ways an enthusiastic poet".[53] It may be true that "Herbert's stress on … emotional experience is his strongest link with the radicals"[54] insofar as both parties did indeed consider emotion important, but this by no means puts Herbert in the camp of radical enthusiasm,

---

[51] *Love Known*, chapters 1 and 2. Also see Strier, "Ironic Humanism in *The Temple*", *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 1980; "George Herbert and the World", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 1981, 11 (2): 211-236.
[52] See comments below on 'A True Hymne' and radical religion.
[53] William Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes and Structures in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970, 102, cited in Strier, *Love Known,* 175.

whose primary and unifying belief was that the indwelling Holy Spirit put the regenerate beyond the need for Scriptural authority. Each "enthusiast", thus God-indwelt, became inspired, became his own church, and, at the ultimate fringe, became himself or herself a god. Herbert's view of such an outgrowing of Scripture may be read in his answer to Juan Valdes.[55] The emotional experience Herbert's poems record results from a grasp of objective, propositional (Scriptural) truth.[56] In the Reformed understanding of biblical Christianity salvation depends on an objective and undeserved act. Praise is therefore appropriate, but so is the expressed consciousness of our failures. 'Sighs and Grones' (83) are the true decorum of a saved but sinful mortal. The enthusiasts referred to by Strier were more likely to teach an achievable subjective perfection in which "grones" were inappropriate and sinful, or at best represented immaturity. "Not my groveling wit / But thy silk twist let down from heav'n to me" ('The Pearl', 88) is a constant emphasis in *The Temple*. Herbert opposes, from 'The Thanksgiving' on, any suggestion that the sincerity of the heart, *rather than* the objective work of Christ, is "essential to salvation" [57] in the sense of achieving it, and opposes too any suggestion that inspiration or authority resided within himself or in his speakers.

Herbert's revulsion from certain aspects of the rules of decorum is not a rebellion against any idea of authority whatsoever. He was not overthrowing classical genres by making epic heroes out of the lower classes or out of the poet's life, as would Wordsworth, for example. His approach is not to substitute an inner for an outer authority, that of the individual rather than that of the society or the state, but to return writing to the decorum of obedience. Much Ranter writing, for example, confused spontaneity with the Holy Spirit's inspiration, or saw social rebellion as a mark of the Kingdom of God.[58] This type of indecorum is not Herbert's. The authority of the Word of God is to Herbert the basis for all literary decisions. He rejects a literary

---

[54] *Love Known*, 175.
[55] "To the 63 Consid.", H. 317, for example.
[56] Emotional expression is not peculiar to the sectarians, as any reading of the Reformers, the Elizabethan and Jacobean conformists, or the Calvinistic Puritans, will show.
[57] *Love Known*, 217.
[58] See Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, esp. ch. 8, "From Rhetoric to Style", and the "inspired poetry" on p.338.

authority based on "original" inventive genius as much as one based on class and tradition, for both exalt the human above the Divine.

Christopher Hodgkins, discussing 'Redemption', 'The Storm' and 'Gratefulnesse' as "violations of decorum", expresses the heart of Herbert's Christianity when he says of the desperate sinner who becomes the speaking "shameless beggar" : "[a]mazingly, God reacts to this crude opportunist with fond delight". [59] For a sinner to approach the almighty and perfect God at all is indecorous in the extreme. Such an approach, and therefore such poetry, is possible only through the mediatory priesthood of Christ, through whom the sinner / poet may come to God even with "boldness" (Hebrews 10:12-22): "*Wherefore* I crie, and crie again; / And in no quiet canst thou be ..." ('Gratefulnesse', 123, l. 25). Luther referred to this access as the "priesthood of all believers"[60] from I Peter 2:5,9, and this concept is taken up by Herbert in 'Aaron' and in his entire concept of a "temple": "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood ...that ye should show forth the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

As minister, poet, and representative speaker, Herbert departs, as Hodgkins points out, from the thinking which would see certain people as less important and intrinsically base. He even identifies himself with such people -- "my God, I mean my self" ('Miserie'). He also recognizes the prideful "unworthiness" which refuses to accept the gift of salvation, preferring to keep God at a distance yet wanting to span that distance by self-effort ('Love' III). Roger Ascham, in discussing the use of Plautus and Terence in education, finds the "thoughts and conditions of hard fathers, foolish mothers, unthrifty young men, crafty servants, subtle bawds, and wily harlots" indecorous matter for the minister to consider: "[h]ere is base stuff for that scholar that should become hereafter ...a good minister in religion ... (except the preacher do know such things to confute them)".[61] Yet Herbert portrays God himself as interested in these very people and their thoughts, and a Christ who "came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13), whose death was amongst unappreciative and

---

[59] *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert*, Columbia, University of Missouri, 1993, 194.
[60] See, for example, "The Pagan Servitude [Babylonian Captivity] of the Church", 1520, in J. Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 345.
[61] "Of Imitation", from *The Scholemaster*, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 155.

mocking "theeves and murderers" ('Redemption', 40). "Thy wretch so full of stains", not Ascham's decorous "civil gentleman" and his elegant language, was the one for whom Christ says he "did freely part / With my glorie and desert, / Left all joyes to feel all smart ..." ('Dialogue', 114). Therefore not just the minister Herbert's social vision, but the poet Herbert's literary task, was to be faithful -- decorous -- to a gospel of incarnation and identification, of a condescending God and a ready access. He must not imply Puttenham's "dignity of poets and poesy"[62] if that dignity in any way sets the poet or poem above the reader and becomes a barrier rather than a door to God. Yet this must be done without diminishing, in form, image, or diction, the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin.

3. Clothed in Another's clothing: an imputed decorum

Herbert rejected, sometimes by parody, the popular Petrarchisms of "fair eyes"; he rejected the flattery of power, which required a different vocabulary and metre for the different classes of subject or reader; and he rejected the overblown rhetoric of those who would please God by their own (poetical) efforts or have others admire them for doing so. Herbert replaced a decorum of earthly honour with one of theological relationship. Making that relationship possible is the doctrine of imputation, which may be (biblically) described as being clothed in Christ's righteousness. Decorum in poetry may be seen as giving appropriate clothing to the subject. Herbert's poetry is at once about, made possible through, and an example of, being dressed in the merits of Christ.

'Aaron' (174) shows sinner, priest, poet, and poem "drest" in Christ. Its same rhymes and half-rhymes over five stanzas, and its concurrence of idea between corresponding lines in each stanza (so that every line 3, for example, has the metaphor of music) conveys by its formal features the biblical teaching that there is continuity between Christ, the representative and inclusive Head, and his clothed people. At the same time there is a progress, from the Law's ideal, through its damage by the works of the self, to a grasp of the doctrine of imputed righteousness and the consequent new capacity of the minister (or any Christian), still sinful but now "drest" in Christ. This

[62] *The Arte of English Poesie*, Book I, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 204.

is done not merely by prose-paraphraseable idea, but by sound, by metre, by line length, by stanza number and shape, and by diction.

The poem begins with an indecorum, an ill-fittingness, a discordant mismatch between independent man and God, between what should be and what is. Yet this harshness *is* the true decorum, the suitable and only thing that can be "said" of someone trying to fulfil the Law by their own righteousness. The bell shapes imply, in the first stanza, the perfect priest (the bells are around the priest's hem) and by implication the perfect demands of God.[63] The second stanza is a dreary ringing "for dead", a cracked and tuneless Nine Tailors speaking of the grave, the only future for the sinner who cannot fulfil God's "harmonious" demands.

Holinesse on the head,
Light and perfections on the breast,
Harmonious bells below, raising the dead
To lead them unto life and rest:
Thus are true Aarons drest.

Profaneness in my head,
Defects and darknesse in my breast,
A noise of passions ringing me for dead
Unto a place where is no rest:
Poore priest thus am I drest.
(ll. 1-10)

That God accepts the perfections of Christ in the place of the imperfect works of the sinner – and this poem applies to all believers, not only those considering the priesthood -- allows an entire change of attitude, introduced by the rescue-word "Onely", meaning "except that" in line 11, and "sole" in ll. 16, 17 and 18. Now, decorum is present. There is a perfect "fit" between requirement and achievement, for *only* Christ is appropriate for the demands of law and gospel. The earlier "profaneness", "defects" and "noise" have been replaced by "Christ", "perfect", and "musick", so

That to the old man I may rest
And be in him new drest. (ll. 19-20)

What is indecorous, indeed incomprehensible, in a scheme of human striving and social status (the "old man", l. 19; cf. Coloss. 3:9), has now the perfect decorum of the

[63] Exodus 33-35.

"fit" between God and his Son. The sinner is seen as holy only "in my head" (l. 21). "My head" refers to Christ, the head of his body the Church. Man and God now "fit". The believer / priest is now appropriately "drest" by the clothing of Christ, and so is the poem now appropriately dressed -- decorous. Fracastoro rebuked those writers who would "dress" a mean or light subject in heroic dignity: "as a robe of gold does not dignify a peasant", it does not work. [64] Yet 'Aaron' says, biblically, that the filthiest sinner may be dressed in the glorious robe of the righteousness of Christ. Formally, there is a perfect "fit" as well. The poem's careful crafting, even in the harshness of the sounds in stanza 2 compared to the smoothness of stanzas 1 and 5, is designed to lead the reader to glorify Christ, not any human example. This poem is not trying to dignify a naturally base subject (sin leads to death) by beautiful and glorious words. There is no such incongruity. The "noise of passions" is not a beautiful phrase; yet *because* of this, the poem is decorous. Incongruity, to Herbert, would be to ornament the natural man's sin with a robe of gold of his own moral making, or of the poet's literary making.

So the decorum of *The Temple* has a double status. Herbert is "indecorous" by denying the basis of the traditional concept of decorum, that there are those who are, in their own right, by status, inherent goodness, or achievement, fit to be clothed in literary gold. Herbert is "decorous" in that his poetry is "drest" in the work of Christ. As friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4), so the consistent Christian poet cannot match his poetry to human ideas of desert and reward. Indecorous death, of Christ and of the poet ("striking me ev'n dead", 'Aaron' l. 18) is, oddly, the only possible decorum for a Christian writer.

Washing, rather than clothing, is the metaphor in 'Marie Magdalene' (173), but the principle is the same. It begins with apparently indecorous behaviour:

> When blessed Marie wip'd her Saviours feet . . .
> She being stain'd her self, why did she strive
> To make him clean, who could not be defil'd?
> Why kept she not her tears for her own faults
> And not his feet? (ll. 1, 7-10)

---

[64] In Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1947, 195.

Richard Strier, in his article "Herbert and Tears", [65] has demonstrated that this poem runs contrary to most devotional literature on tears, for the basis of Mary's forgiveness was the substitutionary atonement, not the tears of penance. It only remains to say that Herbert deliberately addresses the issue of decorum here. To wash Jesus' feet, and with tears, is entirely inappropriate in its symbolic dimension, if the only factors taken into account are an unstained Christ and the stain upon the one doing the washing.[66] It is the foundation question of the gospel: how may a sinner approach a holy God? Consequently, how may a sinful poet write poems about or to a holy God? Only by Christ's lack of decorum in not only allowing a sinner to wash his feet, but in himself washing the feet of a decorous and appalled Peter: "You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:8). Peter saw indecorum in his Lord becoming a menial, and took a long time to come to terms with the reply: "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me". Herbert's speaker sees indecorum in the reverse suggestion, that the Saviour needed to be washed. Yet to be the Saviour he would take upon himself all the world's uncleanness:

> Dear soul, she knew who did vouchsafe and deigne
> To bear her filth; and that her sinnes did dash
> Ev'n God himself:

Herbert provides the answer to his own puzzled speaker:

> And yet in washing one, she washed both. (ll. 13-18)

Mary's sins were "washed", not by the efficacy of her tears, but by her appropriation of a Saviour. The same audacity of exchange occurs in 'Judgment' (187): "There thou shalt find my faults are thine" (l.15). This unfairness is the basis of New Testament Christianity: Christ takes my sins, I receive his righteousness. 'Marie Magdalene' is indecorous in language by classical standards: "her sinnes did dash / Ev'n God himself". Herbert indecorously suggests a humiliated God elsewhere: the almighty God "doth submit" ('Sion'), the impassible God "puts on sense" ('Ephes. 4.30'). The whole of 'The Sacrifice' turns on just such irony of indecorum. An indecorous way of salvation needs an indecorum of verbal juxtaposition, which then becomes decorous if

---

[65] *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 221-247.

[66] Augustine could not cope with the indecorum of such an action, which to him had implications of immorality, so he allegorised it: "Those things which seem almost shameful [in the Bible] are figurative … no reasonable person would believe … that the feet of our Lord were anointed … in the manner of lecherous and dissolute men whose banquets we despise. For the good odour is the good fame which anyone … will have when he follows in the footsteps of Christ, as if anointing his feet with

God is understood biblically rather than philosophically or by extrapolation from social hierarchy. The Laudians are an example of misunderstanding this new and true decorum, in their wish to have the house of God appropriate to their understanding of the majesty of God. To Herbert, "trulie brasse and stone are heavie things, / Tombes for the dead, not temples fit for thee" ('Sion', 106).[67] The true "Temple" is the believer, and the true nature of God, or that which may be understood by humanity, is that of the Incarnation and Cross, of a Saviour washing sinful feet and, in his sin-bearing, being washed by a woman.

"What is this strange and uncouth thing?" asks Herbert's afflicted speaker in 'The Crosse' (164). The Oxford English Dictionary lists many early seventeenth century meanings for "uncouth". Amongst them are "unknown", "strange", "marvellous", "unpleasant", "unseemly and indecorous", "awkward and uncomely", all of which express a sense of indecorum.[68] Herbert's phrase expresses not only an insult to what is due to God, but all the scorn of the natural man whose sense of what is due to him is outraged. For two crosses are in view in this poem: Christ's offensive substitutionary paying of justice, and humanly adverse circumstances. Herbert relates the latter to the former by demonstrating the decorum of the follower not expecting better treatment than the Master, however laudable that follower's aims. Christ, the perfect, "owns" the cross: this is the implication of "properly". The follower therefore cannot "properly", decorously, complain about the uncouthness – inappropriateness, awkwardness, unsuitability – of his frustrations, in a religion whose centre is a scene of criminal execution and whose practice requires the denial of unregenerate human worth and reason. Five stanzas of complaint that God has removed the power to achieve his "deare end … to serve thee" take us from the "uncouth" nature of the mysterious will of God, to the sixth stanza:

> These contrarieties crush me: these crosse actions
> Doe winde a rope about, and cut my heart:
> And yet since these thy contradictions
> Are properly a crosse felt by thy Sonne,
> With but four words, my words, *Thy will be done.*

---

a most precious odour." *De Doctrina Christiana*, III.12, in *Chaucer, Sources and Backgrounds,* tr. and ed. Robert Miller, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, 55.

[67] See Christopher Hodgkins' treatment of 'Sion' in *Authority, Church and Society*, 150, 174-5, 179.

[68] Others include unfamiliar (esp. places and customs), rough, ignorant. The OED comments that "in many examples from the 17th and 18th centuries the exact sense is difficult to determine".

There is a propriety, a decorum, but it is not modelled on human society and is scarcely conceivable by human understanding. The earlier mentions of "wealth", "familie", "honour" and "threatenings" had already led the reader to suspect that the "place, where I might sing / And serve thee" is a creation which seems right to man, another subtle attempt of the decorous heart to earn its own salvation. Here, as so often, the work of the poet – "sing" – is a trope for the way to God. Poetry cannot both reflect the poet's glory and God's. Yet these stanzas are full of genuine pain. They are not a literary or even theological intellectual exercise, but image an ongoing struggle resolvable fully only in the future. "Things" are not fitting; there will always be an indecorum in this life ("things sort not to my will, / Ev'n when my will doth studie thy renown", ll. 19, 20). My most unselfish desires are crossed, says the confused speaker; and this speaker is not one for whom, as in many other poems, the reader has a ready answer, but one whose pain is all too familiar. The speaker cannot claim injustice, though, for the sinless Son was also so treated. "Thy will be done" is therefore, though beyond human reason, an answer.

Herbert does not reject the concept of poetic decorum in itself. Order, as Joseph Summers has shown, is part of Herbert's vision of redemption.[69] To Herbert, the technical essence of good poetry was that each poem's language and style should be appropriate to, indeed part of, that poem's conceptual content.[70] 'A True Hymne' (168), discussed in connection with invention, has things to say about decorum as well. This poem, which appears to reject technical facility in favour of sincerity, in fact upholds "accord" as necessary to "fineness":

> My joy, my life, my crown!
> My heart was meaning all the day,
> Something it fain would say:
> And still it runneth mutt'ring up and down
> With onely this, *My joy, my life, my crown.*
>
> Yet slight not these few words:
> If truly said, they may take part
> Among the best in art.
> The fineness which a hymne or psalme affords,
> Is, when the soul unto the lines accords. (ll. 1-10)

---

[69] *Religion and Art*, esp. chs. IV and V.
[70] See Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, ch. IX.

This "accord" is deliberately ambiguous: it may mean not only that between the writer's soul and the lines, but also between the singer's (reader's) soul and the lines. Since originality is not under consideration here -- "My joy, my life, my crown" is hardly *ex nihilo* invention, and that is the point of the "onely" -- the one who writes and the one who sings or reads both make the poem, and so the life, "the best ... art", by "meaning" what is said. The true decorum of the poetic "art" is to the "fineness" of the gospel of "loved" (l. 20).[71]

Perhaps there is a connection here with the decorum of forms of worship. "How a congregation should worship God" and "how a poet may write devotional poetry" are related, for visible form and invisible truth are related in the economy of God. In both cases, the old wineskins of medievalism must burst under the pressure of the new wine of the Reformation. Ilona Bell, Daniel Doerksen and Christopher Hodgkins have thoroughly surveyed Herbert's attitude to matters of ecclesiology. 'Sion' (106) makes irrelevant "all this glorie, all this pomp and state" in the worship of God, because it "did not affect thee much" in the time of Solomon; one suspects that Herbert's position in the contemporary dispute over what was decorous in services and buildings was that it still did not affect God much.[72] To Herbert, what is important is the internal relationship to God: "All thy frame and fabrick is within" (ll. 7, 8, 11). "Not ... putting a holiness in the things" (*The Country Parson*, H. 246), yet respecting the means to the knowledge and worship of God, is a rough guide to the attitude of the anti-Puritan, pro-Calvin Herbert. But there is not an easy equation between the Herbert who was a loyal (though far from uncritical) son of the Church of England and the Herbert who sought a new literary expression for a new relationship.[73] Perhaps it can at least be said that as Herbert did not reject all traditional forms in worship, but was happy to keep anything not directly forbidden in Scripture which

---

[71] In *The Country Parson*, literal clothing is to "accord" with, truly represent, the inner person: "his apparrell ...without spots, dust, or smell; the purity of his mind ... dilating itself even to his body, cloaths, and habitation." The parson's "habitation" must be "sweet", and the church building "decent, and befitting his Name by which it is called". H. 228, 241, 246.

[72] Ilona Bell, in "Herbert and Harvey: In the Shadow of the Temple", *Like Season'd Timber: New Essays on George Herbert*, New York, Peter Lang, 1987, points out that Christopher Harvey's *Synagogue* has poems *about* church furniture and ritual, whereas Herbert's poems with similar titles are not about the church floor, the windows, or the calendar as worthwhile in themselves, but are metaphors for the state of the heart.

[73] Hodgkins suggests Herbert's attitude towards the outward forms of the church to be similar to his attitude towards his poetry: "vanishing" and "figures and shadows". *Authority*, 176, 179.

was to the glory of Christ and to the help of the seeking sinner,[74] so he did not reject every poetic form which may have implications of paganism or of earthly decorum, but transformed them.

The ritualist depended on the decorum of church hierarchy, furniture, ceremony, calendar, and liturgy. The conservative non-ritualist used such traditional rather than biblical forms as instruments without supposing them the basis of his acceptance with God. "Loved" is that basis, not "O, could I love"; form, poetic or ecclesiastic, may be a means to the understanding of that love, but may not become the means of meritorious loving. 'A True Hymne' refers not only to poetry but to all of life's external (formal) expressions, and may be glancing at current debates about worship. Herbert expressed his decorum concisely with "God writeth, *Loved*". The "true hymne", the real and accepted worship as well as the perfectly decorous writing, is the poem, the church service, the life which rejoices in being already "loved".

What ultimately matters to Herbert is not the decorums of the outward church but the reality of "God's temple", the unseen building of God, in the heart and in community.[75] The poetic *Temple*, that is, poems, author, and believing reader, requires words, and behaviour, "fit" and "proper" for an unseen temple, whose foundation is an "uncouth" substitutionary death. 'Frailtie' (71) has been discussed in connection with what to write; it also speaks of how to write appropriately. "Brave language", fit and proper for human "glorie", is enormously attractive to the poet / speaker:

Lord, in my silence how do I despise
What upon trust
Is styled *honour, riches, or fair eyes;*
But is *fair dust!*
I surname them *guilded clay,*
Deare earth, fine grasse or *hay;*
In all, I think my foot doth ever tread
Upon their head.

But when I view abroad both Regiments;
The worlds, and thine:

---

[74] See Daniel Doerksen, "Things Fundamental or Indifferent: Adiaphorism and Herbert's Church Attitudes", *George Herbert Journal* 11 (1) (Fall 1987): 15-22.
[75] 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; compare Psalm 29:19.

Thine clad with simplenesse, and sad events;
The other fine,
Full of glorie and gay weeds,
Brave language, braver deeds:
That which was dust before, doth quickly rise,
And prick mine eyes. (ll. 1-16)

God's regiment (kingdom, reign or rule, or group of soldiers) is dressed in "simplenesse and sad events"; the "gay weeds" of "brave language" clothe the happy, successful, attractive secular world. "Simplenesse" of language is the decorum required to describe the "sad [serious] events" of the history of salvation. This is easy to see in solitude, "in my silence". Quiet meditation on the real values of the world shows that honour, wealth, and physical beauty are, like the dust or grass, of the earth earthy, to be trodden upon. The true dignity of the Christian lies in realising that the values of the world are "like the grass, which ... tomorrow is thrown into the oven" (Isaiah 40:6-8, I Peter 1:24, Matthew 6:30), and the true decorum of Christian language and deeds is simplicity. "Simplenesse" here does not mean language or behaviour (that in which life is "clad") which is childish, uneducated, or lacking in wit. It means having a single eye to God's glory, not complicated by sinful motive, unsophisticated,[76] true, and sincere.

The glittering army of motives for the worldly poet's decorum – flattery of the powerful, praise for cleverness, desire for wealth, erotic love – is blinding. The flashing armour and weapons, and the "brave" brightness of the troops and banners, dazzles sight and confuses motive, even though the speaker recognizes it is really only the effect of dust in the eyes. The glitter includes the attraction of secular epic and ode with their promise of patronage and fame, or the pleasures of Ovidian or Petrarchan love poetry. The difficulty of seeing with God's eyes makes the speaker start his third stanza with a plea that God will intervene in a battle too strong for him: "O brook not this". Otherwise, Babel-like, the world and its language may attempt to conquer the promise of heaven already growing in the speaker's heart (ll. 17-24). The indecorum of "the foolishness of preaching" and of the "base things of the world" must, and of course will, "bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians 1: 18-29). The dazzling powers of the world and its decorum will be shown to be dust.

A similar reversal of values is found in 'Dotage' (167), which paints a world of senile dementia in which "distracted men / . . . griefs in earnest, joyes in jest pursue" (ll. 13,14). The first stanza appears to contradict Philip Sidney's argument that fiction is morally useful. The world is presented as

> False glozing pleasures, casks of happinesse,
> Foolish night-fires, womens and childrens wishes,
> Chases in Arras, guilded emptinesse,
> Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career,
> Embroider'd lyes, nothing between two dishes; (ll. 1-5)

All these are descriptions not only of the lying appearances of the world's pleasures but of the misleading nature of fiction. Herbert is referring to the apparent realities of earthly life, not primarily to the writing of poetry. But shadows, dreams, embroidery, are words used to describe fiction, particularly allegory, in medieval and Renaissance discussions of literature. "Guilded" and "embroider'd" suggest both the false basis of literary decorum and an indecorum, an inappropriateness, between how the world appears in fiction and how it really is. Sidney's poetic world is "golden", but the real world to Herbert is "guilded". This may seem an argument on Sidney's side, that fiction constructs a world of genuine gold, rather than earthenware or base metal gilded over; it points to the perfection that is meant to be. Sidney admits, however, that golden fictions may make "more lovely" the already "too much loved earth".[77] Herbert wishes to make it less lovable and loved, to show it as it really is. Herbert's alternative to "guilded emptinesse" is not the poet's golden constructions. Herbert sees the glorified view of *this* world and its decorums as the fiction, and opposes it with earthly reality:

> True earnest sorrows, rooted miseries,
> Anguish in grain, vexations ripe and blown,
> Sure-footed griefs, solid calamities,
> Plain demonstrations, evident and clear,
> Fetching their proofs ev'n from the very bone; (ll. 7-11)

This is not confessional poetry. Herbert is not depressed, or bewailing a change in fortunes or health. This is representative exposition of the biblical truth that a rebellious world is not the source of satisfaction for the Christian – and fiction, however beautiful its poetic form, does tell lies in so far as it implies that immortal

---

[76] That is, not adulterated by motives of self-advancement. See OED, verb, adjective, noun forms.
[77] *Defence*, 24.

man can find his home in the insubstantiality of this present deceit, the mortal world organised in opposition to God:

> But oh the folly of distracted men,
> Who griefs in earnest, joyes in jest pursue;
> Preferring, like brute beasts, a lothsome den
> Before a court . . . (ll. 13-16)

When poetic decorum suggests a good "fit" between man made in the image of God and a world organized as if there were no God, then such decorum must be rejected. Herbert's contrast to this world and its false decorums is the genuinely golden heaven. What is truly suited to, proper to, decorous for man, is only in

> a court, ev'n that above so cleare,
> Where are no sorrows, but delights more true
> Then miseries are here! (ll. 16-18)

In this heavenly realm of truth, signification and signified, *verba* and *res* are one. In heaven, and sometimes in heaven's beginnings in the earthly lives of *un*distracted men, there is no anxious split between idea and its decorous expression. From the point of view of the Kingdom of God, literary decorum must be based on objective truth. Truth is not illusion, desire, dream, "chases in Arras". It is not relative to each interpreting subject or to the cultural conditions which produce words. Herbert saw that if life's meaning is only "shadows well mounted", or if words have no ultimate reference, the work of art may seem permanent, like tapestry pictures, but its interpretation is infinitely variable. The existential reality of "true earnest sorrows" is not the ultimate truth, either – for there is something even "more true" than the miseries of quotidian existence. The truth is delight (l. 17) and the delight has been purchased by a "demonstration" on the Cross. The suffering, the "very bone" of the Son of God, is proof that this world's values have been reversed. There is no greater indecorum.

'The Quip' (110), whose title in the W manuscript is 'Poetrie', is an illustration of Rosemond Tuve's subset of the "magnification of the *in*significance of things which other men accepted as significant and desirable" which she finds in the "mystical" poets.[78] Herbert demonstrates the insignificance of the abstractions which are attacking his thoughts by personifying them. An uncomplicated tetrameter and

alternating rhyme emphasize the sneer "I heard in Musick you had skill", as if to say "I have, but I refuse to use it if the real music is the jingling of the money motive". The speaker's defence is not heavy moralising from a self-righteous position. He laughs at his mockers a little ("brave Glorie puffing by") but takes no position of strength, tacitly admitting that he has contradicted the decorums of beauty, money, status and fame, and wit. His inadequacy is his strength, however. The minimization of himself, as well as the irony, cuts down to size those self-exalting motives which the world worships with serious application. Behind the poet transgressing the world's rules, as we as audience can see but the jeering accusers can not, is the waiting authority of the almighty Lord. "Thou shalt answer ... I am thine" is indecorous in its assurance: I have God; let others lick what earthly boots they must.

'The Quidditie' (69) considers, in the same metre and rhyme scheme, the writing of devotional poetry (identified as such because of its addressee: "My God"). To write such "verse" is to reject the decorum of courtly honour, of aristocratic pursuits, of bureaucratic or financial power, and even "art" (l. 9). But his audience and companion is God: "It [devotional verse] is that which while I use / I am with thee" (ll. 11-12). An autonomous decorum of art is rejected here. The writing of poetry itself is not rejected – far from it: "most take all" (l. 12).

4.Decorum, Nature, and Art

Decorum in writing, in Brian Vickers' summary of the Renaissance critics, meant giving "the illusion of nature" to the created form of literature.[79] "Nature" in this context includes the social order. Divisions according to birth, wealth, estate, were assumed to be part of the created order -- "nature". Literature both reflected and shaped such "natural" order.[80] The prime requirement for decorous writing was that persons be addressed and characterised according to their place in society. Propriety

---

[78] *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, 1947, 198.

[79] "Decorum ... starts from nature, is observed and organized by art, and when rightly practised gives again the illusion of nature. It begins as a rhetorical process ... of adjusting language to character, situation, or forms." Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry*, London, Macmillan, 1970, 76.

[80] See Hall, *Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of its Social Content*, 13; Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, esp. 91-119. Shuger misunderstands Gene Veith's "intrusion of grace", 102, as her scheme gives no place to *The Temple's* view of the "natural" state of sin.

of writing, to critics of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, meant having the existing situation either as boundary or, in the creation of "another nature", as guide.[81] "Nature" also meant human nature, a term which in English Renaissance writing may or may not be used pejoratively.[82] But the critical concept of "nature" is largely that of an unfallen "given" which includes original, ideal, or (confusingly) traditional, human behaviour; that is, it is more humanistic than biblical.

Herbert questions this assumption of "nature" as the model for writing. His opposition to the rationalistic view of nature as imitative model and boundary is not, however, that the poet is legitimate creator of beyond-nature marvels and monsters.[83] The legitimacy of the fantastic was much debated in Italy, but such poetic creation still does not necessarily question the goodness of the unvarnished original "nature" of which the marvellous is just an elaboration. Indeed it is an argument for its potential; though fallen, it can from itself (even in the poet's mind), without redemption, bring forth the marvellous. For Sidney, the "zodiac" of the human wit has a divine as well as a natural reach, man to Sidney being a hybrid creature, part image of God and part fallen nature. This is the origin of Sidney's self-contradiction.[84] To Francis Bacon, poetry is indecorous if it reaches beyond nature. Yet his poet is by implication a hybrid as well:

> Poesy is a part of learning in measure of words most truly restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination; which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things. [85]

If the imagination is "not tied to the laws of matter" then (since some autonomous region between, or other than, God and nature was not at that stage envisaged) what is poetically "created" must be either, as Bacon says, an unnatural joining of things already in nature, or, as Sidney says, a "surpassing" of nature by the mandate given by

---

[81] *Defence*, 23. Sidney's discussion here (23-24) may be interpreted as saying either that the poet depends on nature as source ("hand in hand ",) or that he is an entirely independent creator ("only the poet … zodiac of his own wit.").

[82] C. S. Lewis has exhaustively outlined the word's origins and variant meanings in *Studies in Words*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960 (Canto, 1990).

[83] See Baxter Hathaway, *Marvels and Commonplaces*, New York, Random House, 1968.

[84] "Our infected will keeps us from reaching unto it." *Defence*, 25.

[85] *Of the Advancement of Learning*, 1605, in Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 461.

"the heavenly Maker of that maker".[86] The use of "unlawful" as synonymous with "unnatural" indicates Bacon's belief in nature as final boundary for decorous poetic making. Nature is both intrinsically good and (in Bacon's wider context of education) capable of further good: that is, the human nature is capable of learning, of discovering the good. But this discovery, including poetic "creation", must, in order to be lawful (decorous), stay within a description of nature's existing forms and relationships. To Sidney, poetry can still be decorous, and indeed bring "right honour to the heavenly Maker", if it goes beyond nature. To Hobbes, however, like Bacon, poetry concerns "the manners of men". If "natural causes" must be dealt with, poets should confine themselves to the conceivable:

> For as truth is the bound of historical, so the resemblance of truth is the utmost limit of poetical liberty. ... I can allow a geographer to make, in the sea, a fish or ship which by the scale of his map would be two or three hundred miles long, and think it done for ornament, because it is done without the precincts of his undertaking; but when he paints an elephant so, I presently apprehend it as ignorance ...[87]

Herbert opposes the use of "Nature" as springboard for the marvellous, but also as imitative model (if exclusive) or as justification for a social order, because of the Fall. Reformation writings not only distinguish sharply between the perfection of God's first creation and its subsequent contamination, which affected everything,[88] but use the words "nature" and "original" often in a negative sense. Calvin outlines the necessary double use of the term:

> [Section title] *Natural* corruption of the *nature* created by God:
> Therefore we declare that man is corrupted through natural vitiation, but a vitiation that did not flow from nature. [It is not] a substantial quality which has been implanted from the beginning. Yet we call it "natural" ... since it holds all men fast by hereditary right [quotes Ephesians 2:3].[89]

Similarly, Herbert's poetry sees the world as being *by nature* darkly fallen. Redemption, however, means that Herbert's decorum is not restricted to nature, to the "reality" of the perceived creation, that which is available to the senses and to empirical science. "Truth", to Herbert, was not primarily what could be (fallibly) perceived, but revealed, and twofold: the visible truth that nature is fallen, and the

---

[86] *Defence*, 25, 24.
[87] "The Answer of Mr. Hobbes to Sir Will. D'Avenant's Preface before 'Gondibert'", in Vickers, *Criticism*, 609, 614.
[88] Romans 8:21,22 extends the effect of the Fall to all the non-human creation.

invisible truth of the new nature in Christ. The decorum of his representation, the "resemblance of truth", must be faithful to both.

The place of nature, and its relation to decorum, in Herbert's poetic is closer to Calvin's twofold understanding of nature than to the comments of Bacon or Hobbes, and differs even from Sidney, who is closer to the Reformation, in this matter at least, than some of his contemporaries. Sidney's position is somewhere between some of his Italian sources and Herbert. His golden world is not the brazen one merely gilded with marvels, but still is not quite the replacement nature, the complete transformation, which Herbert presents as necessary. Sidney sees "only the poet", in distinction from all other practitioners of arts and sciences, going beyond nature.[90] Yet this poetic new "nature" is capable of being reproduced in the reader. Sidney's conceived "surpassing" of nature is not so much towards the marvellous as towards "perfection"; "not … what is or is not, but what should or should not be". [91] The new nature is moral, not fabulous. He equates the "phantastic" poet with sophistry, as does Tasso.[92] But Sidney is not as willing as Herbert to see this world as no suitable mimetic subject for a poet, nor that poetry cannot recreate a fallen nature in which even "the sunne holds down his head for shame" ('Miserie', 100, l.33). Even 'Providence' (116), which appears to be happy with the world as it is, points out that its benefits to man come about only through God's "command or … permission"; God, not nature, "curbs sinnes" which would otherwise rob nature of all its goodness (ll. 33, 36). Even the neglect of praising God is "a world of sinne in one" (l. 20). The purpose of all things is "to honour thee" (l. 147) and of man to be "Secretarie of thy praise" (l. 8) -- that is why God has "put the penne alone into his hand" (l. 7), not to create a marvellous, or even a morally better, world by his own invention.

Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) equates "Nature" with the true good. This equation becomes the basis for correct (decorous) eloquence: "Nature is a right that fantasy has not framed, but God has graffed, whereof these are derived: 1. Religion … 2. Natural love … 3. Thankfulness … 4. Stoutness … 5. Reverence … 6.

---

[89] *Institutes*, 2. 2. 11, my emphases.
[90] See *Defence*, 23-24.
[91] *Defence*, 25, 53.

[T]ruth. ... [W]e are taught by nature to know the ever-living God and to worship him in spirit ... [W]e see by nature that everyone should deal truly". Wilson concludes that "apt words ... properly agree unto that thing which they signify, and plainly express the nature of the same". [93] But the matter is complex. At least four concepts of "natural" are evident in Herbert's time. "Natural" could imply "unregenerate" or the fallen part of the nature which remains in the regenerate; morally desirable, in the sense of "right", or God-implanted, reason, as in Wilson; "unlearned" or "inartistic" (as opposed to the contemporary term of praise, later to be condemnatory, "artificial"); or (increasingly through the seventeenth century) "true, real, essential, unadulterated, desirable". The change which gradually occurred in the third and fourth valuations is directly related to the theological change of viewpoint concerning the first, so that by the time of Pope the ancient writings were "but *Nature* Methodiz'd" [94].

The understanding of "natural" as "unregenerate", that is, unable to please God, fleshly (Romans 8:8), is the meaning which largely informs the decorum of *The Temple*. Almost every theological writer of Herbert's time has such a meaning for the word: I have chosen Richard Sibbes, close contemporary of Herbert and of similar outlook,[95] to illustrate both the first and second concepts of "natural", interestingly found in the same treatise:

> Our nature since the Fall is odious to God; a sinful, cursed nature remains in the best of us; and therefore that God may look peaceably upon it, he must look upon it in him that hath it undefiled, and in him whom he loves,

---

[92] *Defence*, 54 ; see Margaret Ferguson's discussion of Tasso's position in *Trials of Desire*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983, 105.

[93] In Vickers, *Renaissance Criticism*, 87-88. Wilson's comments contradict Lewis Soens' assumption that English literary critics made a strict separation between civic morality and theological righteousness (access to God): *Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesy*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970, xxiii, xxviii.

[94] "Essay on Criticism", l. 89, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, London, Methuen, 1963, 146. Sidney had the poet "making things ... better than nature bringeth forth" (*Defence*, 23); Pope restricted poetry to "unerring Nature", who "to all things fix'd the Limits fit", "at once the Source, and End, and Test of Art" ("Essay", ll. 70, 52, 73). Sidney was, however, perhaps eventually less willing to make art a separate sphere, untouched by the Fall. The poetic use of the concept "nature" by Pope and others is outlined in W. K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, 237 ff.

[95] See Daniel Doerksen, *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne, and the English Church before Laud*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1997, ch. 10, and "Show and Tell: George Herbert, Richard Sibbes, and Communings with God", *Christianity and Literature* 51 (2) (Winter 2002): 175-190.

> that hath taken our nature upon him. Now, our nature in Christ must needs be lovely and acceptable.

> Truth is truth, and error error, whether men think it to be so or no. Reason is reason in Turks as well as amongst us. The light of nature is the light of nature in any country as well as here. Principles of nature vary not as languages do, they are inbred things ... There is no monarch in the world can dispense with the law of nature, or with the divine law of God. [96]

Herbert does also at times refer indirectly to the second meaning: "What house more stately has there been, / Or can be, then is Man?" ('Man', 90, ll. 4-5); "Man doth know / The spring, whence all things flow" ('Miserie', 100, ll. 59-60); "Onely to Man thou hast made known thy wayes ... We all acknowledge both thy power and love / To be exact, transcendent, and divine" ('Providence', 116, ll. 6, 29-30); "When I had forgot my birth / And on earth / In delights of earth was drown'd" ('The Banquet', 181, ll.31-33[97]). At no time is Herbert sanguine about the remaining shreds of a natural "right reason". It is the first meaning of "nature" and "natural", the ruin of the image of God, which, along with and always subordinate to the love which restores that image, motivates Herbert's poetry. Any remaining right reason, knowledge of the good and of God, only increases guilt. Such knowledge brings a responsibility impossible to fulfil. Herbert's poetic decorum, therefore, must not look to what is natural but to what is of grace.

The difficulties of Herbert's becoming a "secretarie of thy praise" in an Aristotelian and humanistic literary climate have not always been appreciated.[98] A poetic which is thoroughly biblical -- whose decorum is "fitting" to God -- must re-think the relations of poetry, nature, and art. Or to put that another way, Herbert's art must depend upon a factor other than nature. This meant opposing the accepted wisdom about poetry, a stance whose pain can be seen in poems such as 'The Quip'. Wordsworth was later to

---

[96] "Yea and Amen, or, Precious Promises ..." in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. A. B. Grosart, in seven volumes 1862-64, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, Vol. 4, 1983, 119, 117.

[97] "My birth" here probably refers both to the birth of mankind in the image of God and to the second birth.

[98] The very art of Herbert's poetry has made it seem either simple or untutored to some: "gothic and uncouth" (Cowper); "enthusiasm without sublimity, and conceit without either ingenuity or imagination. ... He who takes up the poems of Herbert would little suspect that he had been public orator of a University ..." (Headley); "religious poetry is seldom of the highest order" (anon.); "gentler than Milton, though not half so great" (Nichol); these and other comments made by those deceived by Herbert's "utmost art" are in C.A. Patrides (ed.), *George Herbert: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, 164, 253, 260.

say that poetry is purely "the image of man and nature", whose decorum should reflect "the naked and native dignity of man". [99] To Herbert, there was, since Adam, no naked dignity, but rather, a nature leading to corruption, whose "dyings may be life in death" ('Mortification', 98, l. 36) only through the new nature provided by conversion.

Herbert's view of art, rather than depending on nature, was derived from his understanding of the art of God in his first and second creations.

> The grosser world stands to thy word and art;
> But thy diviner world of grace
> Thou suddenly dost raise and race,
> And ev'ry day a new Creatour art. ('The Temper' II, 56, 5-8)

The whole poem is a meditation on what ought to be the decorous behaviour -- "standing" -- of one who has been twice created. There are many other examples in *The Temple*, "personal" or referring to mankind, of God as twice a maker / artist. This idea is not of course unique to Herbert. What is unique is a poetic whose decorum reflected this. As with "natural", the word "art" meant several things in the English Renaissance. The critics used "artificial" as praise; Campion calls rhyme in epic "unarteficiall", and in equating that with a "tedious affectation", Campion's usage and that of his contemporaries was the opposite of today's.[100] "Art" had a negative meaning sometimes. In 'Gratefulnesse', (123), Herbert uses its negativity for the conceit but as a positive attribute in the underlying meaning. "See how thy beggar works on thee / By art" is humorously self-derogatory on the surface. Yet the gross indecorum of a beggar manipulating God by a trick ("He makes thy gifts occasion more ...") represents the truth, for "thou hast made a sigh and grone / Thy joyes" (l. 19-20). But despite the praise of "countrey-aires" (the sinner's sighs), the poem is a highly finished work of art, *because* the redeemed and thankful sinner is also. The beggar's art is the result of God's.

Art, nature, and the situating of decorum are considered in 'Nature' (45), which firmly relates the writing of poetry to the saving and sanctifying work of God:

---

[99] W. Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, in R. L. Brett and A. L. Jones (eds.), London, Methuen, 1965, 257-8.
[100] Smith, II, 327-331.

Full of rebellion, I would die,
Or fight, or travell, or denie
That thou hast ought to do with me.
O tame my heart;
It is thy highest art
To captivate strong holds to thee. (ll. 1-6)

"Art" is immediately connected with the work of God upon the human "nature". The grimly humorous first line follows "rebellion" closely with "die", indicating that the independent will exercises its only freedom in preferring eternal death to submission; and even this is only an appearance of existential choice, for the subjunctive here is really a future certainty: "I will die". The art contrasted here with such a very brazen nature is not the art of Sidney's poet: it is God's. The captured and tamed heart finds its only decorum in being, and displaying, the art of God. If God leaves human nature to itself, all suggestion of fortress-like substantiality disappears. The true nature of the self-authorised human is froth:

If thou shalt let this venome lurk,
And in suggestions fume and work,
My soul will turn to bubbles straight,
And thence by kinde
Vanish into a winde,
Making thy workmanship deceit.

"By kinde" indicates that the actuality of the nature, the fittedness, the decorum of the independent soul is a windy nothingness. The creation of man in the image of God ("thy workmanship") will become "deceit". As in other poems Herbert suggests that a temporary appearance of sin's conquest is possible ('Frailtie', 'Ungratefulness', 'Decay', for example). Bubbles, whose nature is only wind, appear a "strong hold": this is the "deceit". Appearance and reality can join only if there is a second instance of "thy workmanship" beyond the first act of creation. The third stanza complicates matters by adding two more metaphors, probably because Herbert finds one picture inadequate:

O smooth my rugged heart, and there
Engrave thy rev'rend Law and fear;
Or make a new one, since the old
Is saplesse grown,
And a much fitter stone
To hide my dust, then thee to hold. (ll. 13-18)

The "rugged heart" is not yet as appealing in its individualism as it would become in the nineteenth century, but indicates rebellion, just as the Renaissance approach to non-human nature was to tame it into usefulness, not to admire and learn from its wildness. Here again Herbert associates writing and salvation: as God wrote the first Law on the stones, so does he write the new Law of love on the heart. But this still smacks too much to the speaker of moralistic reformation. The image has been insufficient to show that rebellion is the entire fabric of the "old" heart. An analogy of new life and growth, not of improvement of a dead material, is necessary. But "saplesse grown" in relation to stone? Herbert is never careless. This unnatural and indecorous conjunction of ideas is necessary to point out the complete and radical change, achievable only by the work of God, implied in regeneration. Stone suggests tombs. The dead cannot raise themselves, nor is the rebellious heart more than a charnel house.

What is "natural", then, leads to death. "Art", though, is not necessarily the answer; Herbert's use of this word is ambiguous. The art of man is insufficient to achieve his happiness ('Faith') and hides sin from God ('Confession'), but is allowed by God in his grace to the supplicant ('Gratefulnesse'), enables the Christian to praise God for forgiveness ('Praise' II), and even turns sorrows into praise ('Mans medley'). The art of God, however, brought about and maintains creation ('Providence') and alone can bring about a new creation ('The Temper' II, 'The Church-Floore'). Neither nature nor art, as they are commonly understood, can be the guide for the Christian poet's decorum. Form and language must be appropriate to a new nature and glorify only the art of God. Herbert's biblical poetic is more than art "giving the illusion of nature"; it is an imitation of the art of God in recreating nature. The decorum in such a poetic is to be faithful to that work of God as it is revealed in the writing of God and the "nature" of Christ. Illusion, to Herbert, is the belief that nature is the only reality. *The Temple* consists of a double poetic imitation, as discussed elsewhere. The imitation of the illusion of the "reality" of this earthly perceivable life is balanced, or undergirded, in each poem by a poetic imitation of the operation of the spiritual reality.

Most Renaissance critics disregarded the art of God and commented only on the relation of human art to nature, and on the ethics of the creation of illusion. Puttenham, for example, tries to define the balance of art and nature for the decorous

poet by distinguishing him from others who depend on both: the painter, the carpenter and the gardener. Having first pointed out some similarities, Puttenham says that the poet is not, however, altogether "as the painter to counterfaite the naturall ..., nor as the carpenter to worke effects utterly unlike, but even as nature her selfe working by her owne peculiar vertue and proper instinct"; he is "most admired when he is most naturall and least artificiall". This claim is more complex than it appears, for the poet will be "more commended for his naturall eloquence then for his artificiall, and more for his artificiall well dissembled": art hiding art is the ultimate decorum, a workmanship of deceit indeed.[101] Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* criticizes this *sprezzatura* in contemporary poets and orators, this desire to appear unstudied, nonchalant, the courtly all-rounder to whom everything comes easily and nothing is serious. The "Bowre of Blisse" is a perfect work of art counterfeiting and improving upon nature. Against Sidney, Spenser criticises poetic creations of such golden worlds. All perfection is in heaven. If divine perfection is to be suggested, prophetically or symbolically, on earth, its imitation must be made obvious. Otherwise the Genius of Spenser's "place pickt out by choice of best alive, / That natures worke by art can imitate" will "secretly ... us procure to fall, / Through guilefull semblaunts ...". The deceits of poetry, "halfe in scorne / Of niggard Nature", can make "a trayle of yvie in his native hew" that the hapless reader "who did not well avis'd it vew, / Would surely deeme it to be yvie trew". The problem to Spenser is not the accuracy of the representation but its deceitful character: "The art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place",[102] so that our unregenerate nature is no longer seen as a problem. "Art concealing art" attempts to be its own authority, suggesting that what is produced by the unredeemed "natural" artist / writer is sufficient of itself. Hence the severity with which Guyon destroys the bower.

Herbert, while supporting Spenser's plea for simplicity and transparency (a plea ironically embedded within a most artistically framed golden world) goes further, because he sees that his own nature, his "crooked winding ways" ('A Wreath', 185), cannot achieve that simplicity and lack of artistic deceit. The authorship of God of a new nature must be that to which his writing is fitted; and only the new nature can

---

[101] Smith, II, 191-2.

write what is fit. 'The Pearl' (88) is a meditation on nature, art, and the grace of God which is above either of these. I know, says the Christian poet,

> What reason hath from nature borrowed . . .
> What willing nature speaks, what forc'd by fire . . .
> . . .what love and wit
> Have done these twentie hundred yeares, and more: . . .
> Yet I love thee.

God is the Maker and Artificer of the nature now able to love. Relationship, not knowledge ("I love" rather than "I know"); "thee", not art's use of nature (learning, honour, pleasure) whether concealed or open; God's initiating, not "my groveling wit" (l. 37): these constitute the decorum of the Christian and his poetry. The second stanza is particularly cutting in its clear sight of the motive behind Puttenham's advice to courtly poets:

> I know the wayes of Honour, what maintains
> The quick returns of courtesie and wit:
> In vies of favours whether partie gains,
> When glorie swell the heart, and moldeth it
> To all expressions both of hand and eye . . .
> How many drammes of spirit there must be
> To sell my life unto my friends or foes:
> Yet I love thee.

This speaker is not deceived by bowers of concealed art, for he knows his own heart, and its desire to "fit", to be decorous, to exercise art to gain the whole world and lose the soul. The heart is moulded to the inevitable expression of flattery and self-praise: "glorie" is the moulding agent, the motive for decorum. The "labyrinths" (l.37) of the deceiving, self-pleasing heart are impossible to escape without "thy silk twist" of grace and its instrument, the Word of God. The pearl of great price is a relationship with the Son of God (Matthew 13). "With open eyes" this poet knows its cost, and part of that cost is a relinquishing of earthly decorum – yet no cost at all, or not one to be paid by the speaker. How the world (its glory and goods) is valued is the issue here. Classical decorum, as understood by Renaissance literary theory, based itself on honour and property, and is therefore of the world, the love of which is enmity with God.[103] The heart of worldliness is to value the gifts above the Giver: compare 'The Pulley'. The "natural" attitude is that "which on the world a true-love-knot may tie"

---

[102] *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, London, Longman, 1977, II.xii.: 42.3-4, 48.5-6, 50.6-7, 61.2, 4-5, 58.9.

(l. 16). Herbert's speaker, however, knows the truth about the relative worth of "all these" (l. 31) and of "thy love" (l. 35).

The intricate artificiality of the sonnet form provides Herbert with an opportunity to represent the "art of God" in transforming nature. The indecorum of the saving death of Christ is related to an indecorous use of the sonnet genre in 'Redemption' (40). All his sonnets deal with the interaction of nature, human art, and God's art. The form, in both its Italian and English uses, traditionally suggests unsatisfied seeking. The speaker appeals to a higher power, or one made so for the purposes of the poem. The aspect of unattainability was important in the Petrarchan tradition, as fruitless struggle, even for a woman's love, was thought to improve character and purify the seeker on his path to God. This was neo-Platonic rather than Christian. Petrarchan convention required the speaker to be the pursuer, not the pursued. Herbert's sonnet appears to start decorously, with a human pursuer:

> 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. (ll. 1-4)

The analogy is tenancy (as it is in Jesus' parable of the vineyard, Matthew 21:33-41); the atmosphere is that of common sense, as in 'The Collar' ("thou hast hands ... He that forbears / To suit and serve his need, / Deserves his load"). There is no thought of what cost the landlord may bear. So far, the decorum of suppliant and provider is maintained. Although the tone is more confident than that of the traditional sonnet speaker, "not thriving" introduces the necessary note of need. I disagree with Richard Strier that the poem becomes a religious allegory only with the second quatrain.[104] Herbert's readers, familiar with the New Testament, would have recognized in "not thriving" a picture of every person's failure to keep the Law, the "old lease". [105]

---

[103] James 4:4; compare I John 2:15. The Geneva Bible puts James 4:4 euphoniously: "The amitie of the world is the enimitie of God."

[104] *Love Known*, 56.

[105] See also V. Mollenkott, "George Herbert's 'Redemption'", *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*, ed. J.R. Roberts, Hamden, CT, Archon Books, 1979.

Having sought the Lord "in heaven at his manour" (l. 5), the speaker (as Strier points out[106]) maintains decorum and the logic of worldly thinking:

> I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,
> Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
> In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts (ll.9-11).

"Accordingly", appropriately, fittingly, the speaker / seeker keeps the decorum of a religion which suits the pride of man, who by his own efforts will make things better for himself and keep God where he "ought" to be, supplicated but not interfering or initiating. But now the tradition of the sonnet is reversed. The sought turns out to have been the seeker and the initiator, and so the couplet, or rather the last three lines, provides a true resolving closure:

> At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
> Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
> Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, and died. (ll 12-14)

Not only is the offence of the Cross the indecorous topic, but there is also indecorum in the use of the sonnet to tell a story rather than to present an unchanging condition or play an intellectual game. The "turn" is not, as in some sonnets, the false logic of a witty playing with words, but real surprise about an event, and an event with personal application: the speaker, it is implied, must realise that it is not only the "theeves and murderers" but his own need which has caused this death. Yet the "cause" is ultimately in the prior love of God. Once again Herbert demonstrates that the recognition of the authority of Christ in salvation must result in a different view of literary authority, and that the indecorum of the Incarnation and Passion must reflect upon literary decorum. "Must", because a poet for whom Christ is "My Master", "My king", and "Lord", and who is "much more obliged to do thy will, / Then thou to grant mine" ('Artillerie', 139, ll. 22-3) cannot keep poetry separate from the rest of a life re-written by the authority of a Saviour.

Questions of decorum, nature and art concern the relation between poetry and truth, a relation of critical and practical interest ever since Plato considered poets to be liars. Mazzoni, for instance, said "the true can be considered (as logicians have said) either in concrete or abstract form. [It is the] concrete form from which the icastic poet

---

[106] *Love Known*, 57.

makes his idol. ... The other species of truth taken in the abstract is ... the nature of vice or virtue in themselves. And this is the species of the true from which the phantastic poet makes his idol."[107] Whatever is thought of Mazzoni's excuse for Bacon's "extremely licensed" phantastic poet, this illustrates the prime concern of critics of the Renaissance: that the mimetic reference [108] be to truth. To Herbert, language could not be divorced from reality, sign from signified, for Jesus had said that mankind is judged by its words and that out of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12: 32-37), that His words were life (John 6:63,68), and that He Himself was the Word, the true expression, of all that the Father is (John 1:1,14). "Fictions and false hair" were not, for the Christian, that which should "become", be comely for, suit, be decorous for, "a verse" ('Jordan' I, 56). Mazzoni's decorum of representing abstract truth was to lie: to make an "idol", image, of lies. Joseph Mazzeo's remark about Augustine is true of Herbert: there is

> a profound adaptation of the language of rhetoric to his metaphysics and theology. The nature and uses of signs became strictly related to the realities to be sought (discovery) and to their formulation (statement), so that the use of the arts of language is utterly dependent on the structure of reality, a relationship with which no classical rhetorician other than Plato had been concerned.[109]

Such a dependence is true decorum. Herbert's "structure of reality" was the need of man and the work of Christ. To separate word and truth would be to undermine all upon which he built his life -- and his *Temple*. Herbert replaced an anthropocentric decorum with words suited to the Word made flesh and revealed in "holy leaves" ('Heaven', 188). 'Heaven' is no game of wit. The poem engages with disbelief in revelation:

> Thou Echo, thou art mortall, all men know.
> *Echo.* No. (ll. 3-4)

The pagan "Echo" was a mortal fiction. Herbert uses the myth to indicate the immortal nature of the Bible (and, derivatively, his own poetry):

> Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse?
> *Echo.* Yes. (ll. 11-12)

---

[107] Giacopo Mazzoni, *On the Defence of the Comedy of Dante*, translated and edited by Robert Montgomery, Tallahassee, Florida State University Press, 1983, 24.
[108] Montgomery's phrase.
[109] Mazzeo, "St Augustine's Rhetoric", 3.

There is no argument, only statement. John Owen said that, although there are external rational proofs for Biblical revelation, ultimately it must be its own proof.[110] The form of 'Heaven' is similarly circular in argument: the "echo" is only that of the poetic speaker's, that is, a human, voice. Rationalists find it irritating to be told that the evidence for biblical authority and truth is intrinsic. The interlocutor is similarly critical, wanting empirical data:

O who will *show me* those delights on high? (l.1, my emphasis.)

Herbert knew that his "decorum", that which was true to a Bible whose own trustworthiness could be discovered only within it, ultimately contradicted "good sense". He knew too, in a pre-empting of poststructuralism, that there is no meaning if that Bible, which shows heaven, is false. Words and texts then indeed only point to other words and texts, for

Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves? (l. 5)

The echo simply answers "leaves"; ultimate, non-mortal truth is in the pages of the Bible, apparently written by mortals, an echo and product of "nature". The circularity is deliberate. The eternity of "light, joy and leisure" of lines 19 and 20 is available only to faith. "The Bible does not argue, syllogize, or allure the mind", said John Owen; "but it enlightens, persuades, constrains the soul unto obedience".[111]

Obedience to the authority of the Word was Herbert's decorum. His boundary and source is not nature, but Scripture. Even his "indecorous" challenges and complaints to God do not go beyond the Bible. The little jewel 'Bitter-Sweet' (171) puts musically and concisely merely what Job, the Psalms, the prophets, the epistles, and above all the Cross, have said already:

Ah my deare angrie Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.

---

[110] In "The Reason of Faith", John Owen describes the internal testimony of the Scriptures to themselves as double, being in style and in content. In style: "[Despite different times, languages, abilities, circumstances], there is ...such gravity, majesty, and authority, ...and absolute freedom from all ...affectation of esteem or applause ...as must excite admiration ...". In content: "[Eight passages quoted] -- Hereby we are able to discern the evidences of the divine original and authority of the Scripture that are in itself, as well as assert unto the truth contained in it." *Works* , Vol. IV, 34, 57.

[111] *Works*, Vol. IV, 190. Compare: "We believe the Scripture to be the Word of God ...for its own sake only; or, our faith is resolved unto the authority and truth of God only as revealing himself unto us therein and thereby ... 'Thus saith the Lord' is the reason we ought to believe ...and this we call the formal object or reason of our faith." *Works*, IV, 70.

I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve;
And all my sowre-sweet dayes
I will lament, and love.

Form both expresses and belies content; the drama of experience is in the content, and the stasis of eternal truth is in the perfect metre, the melodic alliteration, the neat expression, the happy closure. Psychologically (that is, if this world is the boundary of being) this should be a conflicted and tortured speaker for whom there are no answers. "I will do the like", however, in its witty impertinence implies "all is well between me and my Addressee". This is not the wishful thinking of a poet who would create a new nature, nor the manipulative rebellion of a crushed inferior. This is the decorum of "loved", of one who understands that "yet" describes an opposition which is apparent only. This is a God whose striking *is* his loving and whose casting down *is* his help. So is the complaining, bewailing and lamenting of the speaker actually, by the grace of the God who alone makes a new creation (I Corinthians 5:7), his praising, approving and loving.

Herbert, then, constructed a corpus of poetry with a decorum true to the Word which reveals the authoritative, initiating love of Christ. His art reflects the art of God in making a first and second nature. Relationship underlies his decorum, for his poetry is that

which while I use
I am with thee.

('The Quidditie', 69)

"TEACH AND DELIGHT"

I

How happy were my part,
If some kinde man would thrust his heart
Into these lines …

'Obedience', ll. 41-43

1. Teaching the stony heart

Hearken unto a Verser, who may chance
Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.
A verse may catch him, who a sermon flies
And turn delight into a sacrifice. (Perr. ll.3-6).

Poetry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was frequently justified by its moral usefulness.[1] Herbert, too, declares his own immediate aim to be chiefly didactic: "Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain" ('Dedication', l. 5) – Horace's *prodesse*.[2] His "I" is not merely experiential, but is representative and exemplary. His poems are closer to sermons than to autobiography. Even "to praise thy name" ('The Altar') includes the rhetorical effect upon others, for God is glorified "if some kinde man would thrust his heart / Into these lines", joining those in the kingdom of God who are "by winged souls / Entred … farre above their desert!" ('Obedience', ll. 42-45). 'The Church-porch', 'The Church Militant', and perhaps 'Charms and Knots' are more obviously didactic. But all his lyric poetry has a didactic purpose. It is not primarily a sharing of experiences for their own sake, or a desire to preserve authorial experience, or "an involuntary movement of imagination and passion";[3] and certainly

---

[1] This has not always been accepted. O. B. Hardison has suggested that early twentieth century compilers and editors of Renaissance criticism, such as Smith, Spingarn and Atkins, were influenced by Romanticism and then by the aesthetic movement, so that to them "didacticism was heresy". *This Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1962, x.

[2] Some disagree: "Herbert is simply not interested in any other audience than the God whom he addresses so intimately and passionately" (Charles Mosely, " 'A sweetness ready penned': poetry, love and devotion in *The Temple*", *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. L. Cookson and B. Loughrey, Longman Group, UK, 1990, 60). This is to disregard, amongst other things, Herbert's own explanation of his rhetorical strategies (see above). While his didacticism of course aims at God's glory, it is not God whom he wishes to "catch".

[3] Arthur Koestler, Philip Larkin, and William Hazlitt, in *Topics in Criticism*, ed. Christopher Butler and Alastair Fowler, Harlow, Longman, 1971, nos. 1-8.

it is not the "literature" defined by Northrop Frye as that in which "questions of fact or truth are subordinated to the primary literary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake".[4] His discussions with God all have a pastoral eye to the similar circumstances, needs, complaints, discoveries, repentances and thanksgivings of his readers. To teach others, by one's "own" experience or by applying the wit of the everyday to the Word of God, is to praise God by telling the truth about Him. It is being God's instrument towards the "joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10), or strengthening God's struggling people, the body of Christ on earth.

But a didactic George Herbert presents a problem. Herbert's theology implies the impossibility of *dulce* becoming *utile* in the heart "wicked above all things and desperately corrupt" (Jeremiah 17:9), in the mind "darkened" (Romans 1:21), or in the will which refuses to come to God through Jesus (John 5:40, 10:10). The persuasive authority of his own "sweet phrases, lovely metaphors" ('The Forerunners') seems outweighed by the will of the rebellious reader who "does not love this vertue, no", for whom "these Preachers make / His head to shoot and ake" ('Miserie'). If "nothing but / Thy pow'r doth cut" the writer's hard heart ('The Altar'), presumably the hearts of the readers are made of the same granite and can only be fashioned, softened, or replaced (Herbert uses all these biblical metaphors for regeneration) by the power of God. Yet as he did not practise inventive wit and art in order to decry wit and art, so neither did he write didactically while believing his poetry to be useless as an instrument of the purposes of God.

Sidney gave "to teach and delight" as the "end" of poetry. But Sidney also saw that the effectuality of delightful teaching is sabotaged by "our infected will".[5] Herbert's answer to this apparent dilemma will be suggested by an exploration of "The Church-porch", by a proposal about the reader of "The Church-porch" and of "The Church", and by a discussion of Herbert's poems about repentance in relation to justification, assurance, and perseverance, comparing his presentation of conditionality with the theology of the "antinomians" and their critics. Close definition of the theology of *The Temple* is essential, for it is the theological content, and not the form only, of his

---

[4] *Topics*, ed. Butler and Fowler, 11.
[5] *A Defence of Poetry,* ed. J. van Dorsten, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, repr. corr 1973, 25.

poetry, which provides the "delight" of Herbert's didacticism. Indeed the form owes its delights to the theology. The poems teach by the delights of sense (form) and those delights reflect a theology of delightful grace (paraphraseable content). Just as the believer has his true and unchanging being in Christ, yet simultaneously lives in the world of experience, so does each poem teach by representing the interaction of the eternal and the temporal. However, these are not equal. The static is master to the dramatic. Otherwise, there is nothing to teach.

Herbert's authority to "catch" anyone by poetry, and the authority of what he was teaching, was grounded in the authority of the work and word of Christ. The moral purpose of literature could not, for him, be justified humanistically, just as its means and modes (imitation, invention, decorum) were to be understood theologically. Yet many of his contemporaries preferred to authorise their aim, matter and manner by the weight of a non-Christian antiquity. The Horatian precept was used to justify poetry:

> Poetry aims at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life. ... The man who has managed to blend profit with delight wins everyone's approbation, for he gives his reader pleasure at the same time as he instructs him. This is the book that ... ensures a lasting fame for its author. [6]

The building of a Christian nation or individual, implying a dependence upon an authority expressed in incarnate and written Word, was of course not one of Horace's intentions. Yet many English Renaissance literary critics, for whom a Bible-based nation was certainly an aim, tried to rescue poetry from its attackers with such classical validation as this. William Webbe's attribution to poetry of all civilisation is even more sweeping than that of his his source, Sidney:

> Men were first withdrawn from a wylde and savadge kinde of life to civility and gentleness and the right knowledge of humanity by the force of this measurable and tunable speaking.

Later, in regard to Homer, he says:

---

[6] Horace: "On the Art of Poetry", in *Classical Literary Criticism*, tr. T.S. Dorsch, Penguin, 1965, 90-91.

> And so who liste to take views of hys two Bookes ... shall throughly perceive what the right use of Poetry is: which indeede is to mingle profite with pleasure, and so to delight the Reader with the pleasantnes of hys Arte, as in the mean time his mind may be well instructed with knowledge and wisedome. [7]

Ben Jonson pointed out that the edifying examples of past virtue would be lost without the muse who delightfully

> alone, can raise to heaven . . .
> . . . There were brave men, before
> Ajax, or Idomen, or all the store
> That Homer brought to Troy; yet none so live:
> Because they lack'd the sacred pen, could give
> Like life unto them. [8]

And in 1642, Milton was still saying that poetry "teaches the whole book of sanctity and vertu through all the instances of example." [9]

Imitative delight was to the Renaissance the means of virtue. This justification of poetry, Sidney's "medicine of cherries", [10] was perhaps valid in terms of civic *virtus*. The classics educated the British for local and imperial rule until the twentieth century. Virtue as moral character and as holiness of individual and nation, however, could not be achieved by the action of a rhetorically pleasing and persuasively delightful text upon a reader who to the reformers was morally incapable of pleasing God. When Erasmus asked "Who will try and reform his life"? Luther answered "Nobody! [Because] nobody can! ... 'Free-will' without God's grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondslave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good".[11] Cranmer reminded the English of "the weaknesse of man, and the goodness of God, the great infirmity of our selves, and the might and power of God, the imperfectnesse of our own works, and the most abundant grace of our Saviour

---

[7] In G. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1904, 231, 234.
[8] "The Forrest", ll. 41, 53-57, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, Vol. VIII, 1947, repr. corr. 1970, 114-115.
[9] "Reason of Church-Government", 1642, *Selected Prose*, ed. C. A. Patrides, Penguin, 1974, 57.
[10] *A Defence of Poetry*, 41.
[11] *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, London, James Clarke & Co., 1957, 99, 104.

Christ" and therefore "wholly to ascribe the merite and deserving of our justification unto Christ onely, and his most precious bloodshedding." [12]

Very few of those who defended poetry on moral grounds considered the obstacle of that trope used so often by Herbert, the hardened heart of the reader of poetry. In 1589 Thomas Nashe, almost despite himself, hinted at it:

> [Poetry is a] mixing of profit with pleasure, and precepts of doctrine with delightfull invention. Yet these [critics of poetry] condemne them of lasciviousness, vanitie, and curiositie, who under fayned stories include many profitable morrall precepts, describing the outrage of unbridled youth having the reine in their owne hands, the fruits of idlenes, the offspring of lust ... [They] cast away the nutte for mislike of the shell.
> Let not learning, which ought to be the Levell whereby such as live ill ought to square their crooked waies, be the occasion unto them of farther corruption who have already sucked infection. ... Even as a man is inclined, so his studies are bended. [13]

So it is not the material that is the determining factor, but the reader. George Whetstone, like Milton suggesting that censorship was pointless, agrees: "Naughtiness comes of the corruption of nature, and not by reading or hearing the lives of the good or lewd (for such publication is necessary) ..." [14] In order for the "usefulness" to justify the "delight", the reader must *first* be the sort of person who loves goodness and has the discernment and judgment to find it in his reading – which makes the reading matter somewhat superfluous as a changer of character. The ever-alliterative Nashe does see a danger in the material itself – "Let us take heede least ... we dwell not so long in Poetry that wee become Pagans, or that we make not such proceedinges in Aristotle that we proove proficients in Atheisme." The danger, though, is only for those whose aims and motives are, to begin with, so "inclined". For these, " knowledge [may] way them down into hell, when as the ignorant goe the direct way to heaven".[15] William Webbe is far more hopeful: "the wantonest poets of all, in their most lascivious works ..., sought rather by that meanes to withdraw mens

---

[12] "The Second Part of the Sermon of Salvation", *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I*: A facsimile of the edition of 1623, intr. and ed. Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup, Gainesville, FL, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968, 16; on Cranmer's authorship, see Introduction, vi.

[13] Smith, I, 330, 333, 337.

[14] "The Morality of Comedy", 1578, in Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1999, 173.

[15] Nashe, in Smith, II, 337.

mindes (especially the best natures) from such foul vices then to allure them to imbrace such beastly follies as they detected."[16] In Herbert's Reformation thinking, there are no "best natures". Everybody, without the work of God in the heart, would "imbrace", rather than "withdraw from", the "beastly follies" of idolatry and immorality. Fear or education may restrain action, but not prevent the "allure". Nor is discernment needed only where dubious matter is concerned. Nashe suggests that staying at the surface level of style or art is equally a problem:

> There is no extremitie ... more outragious then the excessive studies of delight, wherwith young students are so besotted that they forsake sounder Artes to followe smoother eloquence, not unlike ... Aesops Cocke, which parted with a Pearle for a Barlie kurnell. [17]

Those who use good matter in this fashion are not merely wasting their time, but are actively condemning themselves: "In the words of life they toil for the merchandise of death".[18] There is in Nashe and some of his contemporaries the implication, not fully faced, that what the reader makes of literature, and what it makes of him, depends upon a prior factor, the nature or heart of the reader.

Sidney assumes that the "infected" reader still cannot help loving the poetic presentation of a fictional virtue, that "form of goodness (which seen they cannot but love)".[19] By contrast, Herbert, as we have seen, presents in 'Miserie' and elsewhere a reader, and a poet, unable to love goodness. "Our hearts good store", he says sarcastically in 'Sepulchre' (40), "can lodge transgressions by the score"; those hearts, so far from loving the poetic picture of goodness, are "cold, hard, foul" (ll. 5, 6, 23). "Surely", he argues in 'Giddinesse' (127), "if each saw one anothers heart ... all would disperse / And live apart" (ll. 21-24). 'The Pulley' (159) suggests that a restless satiation with natural riches is God's intention for the sinner, because "goodnesse" will "lead him not" to God (ll. 16-20).

Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Sidney's example of cherry-medicine, *Arcadia*, do recognize the problem of the reader. While both are designed to persuade to virtue by

---

[16] Webbe, in Smith, I, 251.
[17] Nashe, in Smith, II, 333.
[18] Nashe, in Smith, II, 336.
[19] *Defence*, 25, 41.

delight both ruler and subjects, they depict examples of the bound will, unable to respond to rhetorical education, and changed only by the actions of the grace of God. Yet these two works in the end come down upon the humanist side, that of the power of the beautiful example. Grace and rhetoric become equivalents, for the reader is assumed to have sufficient love of goodness for the power of the persuasive example to overcome the "infected will".

Except for Herbert, Protestant persuaders of Protestant readers largely chose to overlook the Protestant doctrine that "there is none righteous, no, not one: ... there is none that seeketh after God" (Romans 3:10,11, quoting Psalm 14:1) and that "by grace are ye saved, through faith; ... not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). These and many other passages are the bases of Articles 9, 10, and 11 of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which make clear the "infection of nature", that "we have no power to do good works ... without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that will". Even though *The Faerie Queene*'s Book I sets out, in medieval language and context, an allegory of just this, the remainder of the six books imply a possibility of making oneself into a Christianly "fashioned gentleman".[20] The glory then becomes the identifying reader's, rather than Christ's alone.

The Temple is not fiction, or not fiction in the manner of *The Faerie Queene, Arcadia*, or even *Astrophil and Stella*. Yet its mode of teaching, reader / speaker identification, puts it in the area of exemplary imitation. Its delights are partly in the pictures of a life, in story and struggle, just as they are in fiction. The inconsistencies in the theory of fiction's ethical persuasion remain pertinent.

Those who would build a reformed England by teaching and delighting its people, or even only its rulers, through a moral and theological use of literature were thus self-contradictory. In a perceptive article on Sidney's practice compared with Sidney's theory, R. D. Bedford [21] points out that the power, or lack of power, of the "infected will" makes the transfer from golden world to reader's life impossible. Bedford

[20] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton, Letter to Raleigh, 737.
[21] "Conventions of Art" in *Dialogues with Convention*, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.

shows further that Sidney's Sonnet 51 presents an earthly Stella incomparably more desirable than the golden world of Astrophil's mental images of her. This contradicts Sidney's claim for the poet's ability to transcend nature and therefore to teach (change) a reader assumed to be delighted with the poetic images of the better. Sidney himself admits a "too much loved earth",[22] whose real experiences of love, loss and death always outweigh and make inadequate the comforts and examples of art. These contradictions make problematic the comment of Joseph Summers, at the end of his foundational study of Herbert, that "at the moment when we read [Herbert's] greatest poems we can only recognize with Rilke the immediate imperative of the greatest art: 'You must change your life.'. " [23]

The stony barrier to the effectiveness of Herbert as teacher is overcome in two ways. First, Herbert's poems are a poetic presentation of biblical truths. The power of the written Word is not of the same kind as the power of rhetoric. It is inherently powerful (authoritative), and does not depend on the manipulation of the will by the emotions. "The Word of God is quick, and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword ... " (Hebrews 4:12), and that sword is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). Its delights are not those of other literature: it has "infinite sweetnesse ... working against the states of death and hell" and it "lights to eternal blisse" ('The H. Scriptures', I & II).[24] The Holy Spirit, using the Bible's words, brings new life. This can occur through the experiences and images of poetic transformations of the Word, in the same way that a preacher can use his own failures, struggles and discoveries to illustrate the life-changing power of the Scriptures, or as a friend may introduce one who "a sermon flies" to a greater Friend. The power of the Word is by many first experienced in contact with that "Parson's library", a "holy life". The personal experience of one undergoing the same temptations, who "first preacheth to himselfe" - that is, first applies the promises of the Bible to himself - is effective in encouraging the enquiring struggler, and "much more feelingly, and judiciously, then he writes ... out of bookes." [25] So it is with a poem; although the reader's particular case cannot be

---

[22] *Defence*, 24.
[23] *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954, 190.
[24] Note the contrast in Psalm 12: 2, 4, 6 between human rhetoric ("flattering lips and a double heart ... with our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own") and God's authoritative word of integrity ("pure ...as silver tried in a furnace").
[25] "The Parson's Library", *CP*, H. 278-9.

known, yet the speaker is still himself an embodied, contextualised transformation of the Scriptures.

Second, not all readers of Herbert's poems *can* "turn delight into a sacrifice", just as not all readers of the Bible are "cut" by its sword nor, to use Herbert's analogy and that of Psalm 119:105, find it the light showing the path to heaven. That is, Herbert's teaching, however delightful, is not always effectual. Not every reader will "thrust his heart / Into these lines", as 'Obedience' implies (ll. 42-3). The reader who by faith can respond to the cutting, illuminating and softening of the Word of God is the one who will identify with the rhetorical "I" of Herbert's poems and be "caught" by his "verse". The heart apparently softened by poetry's persuasion and sweetening has been pre-softened already. Jesus said that some will respond, and some will not or can not: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). This is not to put *The Temple* on the same level as Jesus' words; but the reader may respond to Herbert's transformations of Scripture as he would to Scripture itself.

This solution creates another problem. If Herbert is teaching those whose hearts are already softened, why does he refer at times to "our hard hearts" ('Sepulchre', 40)? Why does he ask to be "soft and supple to thy will" ('H. Baptism' II, 44), implying a present hardness ("saplesse" and "stone", 'Nature', 45)? 'Love Unknown' (129) has a "Friend" saying "your heart was hard, I fear", a condition found also in 'The H. Communion' (52) and 'Grace' (60): "sin is *still* hammering …". The student of Herbert's poetic teaching is seemingly horrified as much as delighted.

The first answer is that only the regenerate heart is, paradoxically, horrified at its hardness. Only the recipient of grace can repent; only the heart written on by grace can recognize its (remaining) hardness. A second answer is related: part of Herbert's teaching method is retrospective. The drama, the apparent outworking, of the poem's surface is imaging an already achieved state. For example, the request that God "make a new [heart]" in 'Nature' (45, l. 15) has already been granted; otherwise no such poem could be written. Oddly, only the now "tame" can see himself as "full of rebellion" (ll. 4, 1). Third, there is a remaining propensity to sin, though not a love of or domination by sin, and no longer condemnation because of sin (see 'Conscience', 105). This remaining hardness in the Christian is evidenced whenever the will sets

itself up as authority, a situation portrayed in many poems of "The Church". A fourth answer is evangelism. This is not to contradict the argument that the only teachable reader of *The Temple* is already taught by the Holy Spirit. The question "how shall they hear without a preacher?" occurs in a biblical passage on election (Romans 10), suggesting that effectual calling and the necessity of means are not contradictory. Most of the poems assume regeneracy, but a biblically-based poem may be the means of causing "some kinde man" to "thrust his heart / Into these lines", thus causing joy to the preacher-poet ('Obedience', 104, ll. 41-43). But he is a *kinde* man -- not just well-natured, but of the same nature, suited, appropriate, whose stony heart is already being made flesh. So the rhetorical is not the ultimately powerful; the state of the reader determines the effect of the teaching and is itself made possible by God.

2. The relation of Porch to Church

"The Church-porch" introduces the matter of the reader -- not unproblematically -- as well as preparing the way for "The Church". Herbert's didactic poetic is more obvious in "The Church-porch" than in his lyric and dramatic poems. "The Church-porch", reprinted and known more than any other work of Herbert's for two centuries,[26] has much that may still teach and even still delight. Yet there are difficulties in the theological relation of "Porch" and "Church". This long list of instructions seems to assume, as "The Church" does not, that the critics are correct in their moralising of poetry, because any reader can, after all, change his life just by being told how to -- and not merely in the sense of outward behaviour, but in the sense of relating to God. "The Church-porch" is to some readers "the outward appearance and behaviour of the soul seeking for union with God".[27] By calling it the porch of the church, Herbert appears to be saying that entrance into the "Church invisible" as well as to the "Church visible" is possible by obeying these maxims: that is, by self-reformation. If this is so, "The Church-porch" contradicts the tenor of the lyrics of "The Church", which is the impossibility of righteousness by works, and the praise of the sufficient work of Christ.

---

[26] In the seventeenth century alone at least 70 allusions to 'The Church-porch' have been identified, compared to the next most popular, 'The Church Militant' with 19. In fact, it is said to be more frequently quoted and cited than *any* other literary work in the century except for two Jonson plays. Robert H. Ray, "Herbert's Seventeenth-Century Reputation", *George Herbert Journal* 9 (2) (Spring 1986): 1-16.

[27] Charles Mosely, " 'A sweetness ready penned' ", 61.

However, a porch can also be a metaphor for youth, an entry into the rest of one's life, just as the physical edifice is Herbert's metaphor not only for the church in community but for the individual Christian's walk with God. To instruct the young concerning the most appropriate earthly life need not imply an entry into eternal life *by means of* such a life. Its primary reader already understands that his acceptance with God is by grace alone, yet needs specific instruction in how to be a Christian in the details of seventeenth-century life.

Another possibility for relating "The Church-porch" to "The Church" is to put it in the category of the "courtesy book", which aimed to teach a newly elevated merchant class how aristocrats behave (or, more cynically, how to win favour at court). Some such books, and even *The Faerie Queene* may be so classified, were instruction for the ruler. Herbert is probably not going as far as that. He may have longed to tell James or Charles to "pitch thy behaviour low", "quit thy state" in church, and "be usefull where thou livest", but it is unlikely that he would think it "usefull" to write it. The addressee is educated and with some potential position, but may also face financial difficulty (stanzas 26-31); there is some "noblesse oblige" type of advice, but the net spreads wider than this: "Bring not thy *plough*, thy plots, thy pleasures" into the church service. The envisaged reader of the poem may or may not be gentle, but the more difficult and pertinent matter is his spiritual status, and by implication Herbert's success as teacher and consistency as theologian-poet. The worldly wisdom of the courtesy book is absent. The advice would not win its author praise in high places:

> O England! full of sinne, but most of sloth;
> Spit out thy flegme, and fill thy brest with glorie:
> Thy Gentrie bleats, as if thy native cloth
> Transfused a sheepishnese into the storie:
> Not that they all are so; but that the most
> Are gone to grasse, and in the pasture lost.
>
> This losse springs chiefly from our education ... (ll.91-97)

If "The Church-porch" does have "to fashion a gentleman" as one of its aspects, the problem remains of relating this aspect to the teaching of "The Church". It could be argued that gentlemen may be fashioned without reference to the righteousness

required by God.[28] This argument is made by Richard Strier and Debora Shuger, the latter citing even William Perkins as proposing such a division.[29] Yet I do not see Herbert as holding two moralities; 'Miserie', 'Giddinesse', 'Mortification', Home', 'Avarice', 'The Pearl', 'Church-monuments', 'Content' and 'Dotage', amongst others, work against a theory of a public self divided from a private self in *The Temple*. Herbert's reader, the object of his education, can only cry "God, be merciful to me, a sinner", whether as nation's leader or he "who sweeps a room" ('The Elixir', 184), whether as parson or member of congregation. The heart of stone, biblically and in *The Temple*, hardens the public persona just as it separates the private reader from God. Certainly a distinction may be made between a change in behaviour and a change in eternal status. It is possible to be good in the eyes of men without being righteous in the eyes of God. Yet the Renaissance critics did not usually make even this distinction. They were not always restricting themselves to a "civic" moral effect while they left the soul of man to the clergy. Their claims for poetry's effect tend to the all-encompassing.

Another possibility for the nature of "The Church-porch" is to see it as a presentation of the Law, the requirements of a holy God for whoever would approach him, as Gene Veith mentions.[30] Its position, at the "entrance" to *The Temple* and before the poem 'The Altar', seems to support this interpretation. *The Temple* may parallel the biblical chronology, in which the Law is given and then means of atonement, or in which Old Testament works precede New Testament gospel. The reader of *The Temple* should try to keep the moral dictates of "The Church-porch" and if he fails, there is an 'Altar'. That Herbert had all this in mind could be inferred from the references in 'The Altar' to stone, to brokenness in art as in the disobedience of God's law, and that "no workmans tool hath touch'd the same". "If thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Exodus 20:22-25).

---

[28] So argues Lewis Soens in his introduction to his edition of Sidney's *Defence*. He sees no difficulty with the *Defence*'s "bound will", as he takes Sidney's argument for poetry to apply only to civic virtue. *Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesy*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970, xiii.

[29] Strier, "Impossible Worldliness", *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995; Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990 (Perkins, 94).

[30] *Reformation Spirituality*, London, Assd. University Presses, 1985, 41.

On this theory, what is required of man is set out in "The Church-porch" first; the remainder of *The Temple* shows how the inevitable failure may be dealt with. That solution is not the sacrifice of Herbert or his poetry, as has been suggested in relation to 'The Altar'. The solution is the "one … full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice"[31] of Christ, given in the next poem, 'The Sacrifice'.

However, "The Church-porch" in relation to "The Church" does not parallel biblical chronology, for the Law did not precede the Gospel.[32] God did not set up a new system of faith in his disappointment over the failures under an earlier merit system. The moral Law could mean nothing without the ceremonial Law, whose sacrifices pointed to Christ. Further, Herbert's 'Altar', although its position appears to provide a sacrifice for those who have failed the examination of "The Church-porch", is modelled on a pagan altar, as were certain Greek and Roman poems, not on the altar of sacrifice of Tabernacle and Temple.[33] By this he suggests the redemption of poetry from its pagan (antique, secular, erotic, or humanist) associations. Nor is it an "altar" in a Christian church, for in Herbert's pre-Laudian church the bread and wine were served, in the Reformation fashion, at a "table" (*CP*, H. 246), avoiding any suggestion of priestly power.

The supposed pattern of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century preaching might still explain "The Church-porch" as the preaching of the Law before the preaching of the gospel. Paul said: "but for the Law I had not known sin" (Romans 7:7).[34] In *The Country Parson*, Herbert seems to suggest this:

---

[31] Service of Holy Communion, *Book of Common Prayer*. Entitled Prayer of Consecration in the 1662 *BCP*, but without title in 1559.

[32] Genesis 3:15 (the Proto-Evangelion), the choosing of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; compare Romans 4:13), and the ram caught in the thicket (Genesis 22:8), are three examples of salvific grace before the Mosaic Law.

[33] See Lillian Myers, "The Dwelling Place of God: The Significance of Structure in *The Temple*", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1999, and Mary Ellen Rickey, *Utmost Art*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966.

[34] "Before we come from nature to grace, we must come under the law …God gave the law, not to damn men but …that they might thereby see the impurity of their natures …appealing from the throne of justice to the throne of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ … [coming to] an holy despair in themselves." Richard Sibbes, Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:6, c. 1635, *Works*, Vol. 4, ed. Alexander Grosart, p.340, in seven volumes 1862-64, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth reprint 1983.

> A Pastor is the Deputy of Christ for the reducing of man to the Obedience of God. This definition ... containes the direct steps of Pastorall Duty and Auctority. For first, man fell from God by disobedience. ... [The Pastor] serves himselfe of the judgements of God ... He often tells them, that Sermons are dangerous things, that none goes out of the Church as he came in ... that none is careless before his Judg, and that the word of God shall judg us.[35]

The reader, on this presumption, is one who needs to understand the righteousness required by God. Thus convicted, the lyrics of the redeeming love of God in "The Church" will bring him to salvation. But this, though part of the truth, is inadequate. It was not Herbert's method to first terrify his hearers with their failures in the Law (as if there were some who in fact could keep the Law and be justified that way) so that he might then present the gospel.[36] The passage above from *The Country Parson* also says that "Christ is the glorious instrument of God for the revoking of Man" and continues: "[The pastor chooses] texts of Devotion, not Controversie, moving and ravishing texts, whereof the Scriptures are full" (225, 233). Herbert's approach is not to discourage and crush and so drive people to Christ, but to present the attracting love of God in Christ, which in itself shows up sin as much as it remedies it. It is to an extent true that Herbert follows the potential "judgements" of "The Church-porch" with the "moving and ravishing" lyrics of the saving love of God in "The Church". "The Church-porch" does seem an attempt to ensure that its young hearer is not "careless before his Judg". But there must not be a preaching of the law without the gospel.[37] "When the Apostles would have called down fire from Heaven, they were reproved ... For the Law required one thing, and the Gospel another: yet as diverse,

---

[35] Hutchinson, 225, 233.

[36] A pattern sequence is given by the Homilies, which do not preach the law without the gospel. Compare also the sequence of sermons, or the order within each sermon, of Richard Sibbes. A century earlier, William Tyndale had recommended to a less instructed England that preachers "teach the people God's law ... and prove that no man is righteous in the sight of God ... and then, when thou hast meeked them and feared them with the Law, teach them the ... promises which God hath made unto us in Christ". But it is only "whom God hath elect," to whom he "sendeth his Spirit", who can benefit from the Law and see "their misery and ... the knowledge of themselves" and that "they which keep it not are worthy to be damned". From "The Obedience of a Christian Man", "The Parable of the Wicked Mammon", and the "Answer to More", in H. Walter, ed., *William Tyndale's Doctrinal Treatises*, London, The Parker Society, 1848, 156, 89, 195, cited in A. M. Blanch, "The Development of Ideas about Conversion as seen in Protestant Theology in England, 1520-1540", unpublished thesis for Master of Arts, University of Sydney, 1982, 67, 71, 72.

[37] Sibbes argues that even in civil matters the gospel is more effective in reforming lives. Certainly "we ought to force the law in these dull and drowsy times", but "love may kindle love ... [D]uty, and abstaining from gross sins, is a great deal more groundedly enforced from the gospel than the law". Commentary on 2 Corinthians 4:6, *Works*, Vol. 4, 340.

not as repugnant: therefore the spirit of both is to be considered, and weighed", warns *The Country Parson* (H. 229). 'The Agonie' (37) shows that God's moral requirements may not be preached without the news that God himself has vicariously fulfilled them, and that they cannot be fully understood without appreciating the price paid over their breaking:

> Who would know Sinne, let him repair
> Unto Mount Olivet . . .
> Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain
> To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein. (ll. 7-8, 11-12)

"The Church-porch" is followed closely by 'The Sacrifice' and by the "Gospel" lyrics of "The Church", so that "who would know sinne" and "who would know love" should look to Christ, not to their own works.

However, the "Law before gospel" argument for the nature of "The Church-porch" is more true to Herbert's didactic and pastoral aim than is Strier's proposal of a set of Chesterfield-like worldly hints.[38] "The Church-porch" is not for the smoothing of someone's advancement by self-serving advice for a self-serving world, but to assist the reader who takes seriously the glory and the judgment of God:

> None shall in hell such bitter pangs endure
> As those, who mock at God's way of salvation.
> Whom oil and balsames kill, what salve can cure?
> . . . Though God do hedge us in, yet who is holy? (ll. 445-450)

The "Law before gospel" interpretation of the relation of "The Church-porch" to "The Church", however, is contradicted by the nature of the reader, who is already one "whom God in Baptisme washt with his own blood" (l. 8). If this suggests baptismal regeneration, then so does the Book of Common Prayer.[39] All that can be said here is that the addressee is a "treasure" who is presumed to belong to God already. The admonitions of "The Church-porch" are not "Gods way of salvation" (l. 446).

---

[38] "Impossible Worldliness", *Resistant Structures,* 1995.

[39] See the Order for Public Baptism, 1559 *BCP*, ed. J. Booty, Charlottesville, Folger Library, University Press of Virginia, 270-276. The *BCP* phrasing is ambiguous. The ambiguity is continued in, not clarified by, Articles 9, 13, 16, and 27. Many churchmen held both to a baptismal "entrance" and to

A further argument against "The Church-porch" as a poetic Sinai is that it by no means has the majesty and scope of the Ten Commandments. "Flie idlenesse" or "Calmnesse is great advantage" (l. 79, 313) are pieces of true and wise advice – but hardly the equivalent of "I am the Lord thy God ... thou shalt have none other gods before me" or "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Ezekiel 20:2-3, Deuteronomy 6:5), although of course consequent. The "second table of the Law" is represented in "The Church-porch" to some extent, but its basis, the first commandments about how to regard God, the world, and oneself as created worshipper, is not.

Poems such as 'The Agonie' seem a long way from such advice as "A civil guest / Will no more talk all, then eat all the feast" or "Who marks in church-time others symmetrie / Makes all their beautie his deformitie" ('The Church-porch', 305-6, 419-20), true and helpful though such advice may be. Herbert is not saying that such small, sometimes merely social, transgressions (alone) put Jesus on the Cross.[40] Yet as the Levitical minutiae in the Old Testament pointed to deeper issues, and their obeying or otherwise pointed to the state of the heart, so the small matters of "The Church-porch" indicate an attitude of wishing to please God before pleasing man or self. And those small matters do not ultimately concern self-interest. Lust, drunkenness, education, wealth, ambition, and a concern for the glory of God were, and are still, issues of great moment in the shaping of a nation. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). The courtesy-books had national honour in mind also, as did those who promoted the poetry of antiquity as modelling behaviour. But "The Church-porch" designs to teach that one's behaviour is towards God primarily, and not, as the courtesy-books and classics might suggest, towards, and for the sake of, man only, or national honour only; or rather, if national honour is to be gained, it is dependent upon the relationship of each member to God. The delights of secular epic, lyric, and drama may indeed present a

---

a later new birth. Herbert's understanding of baptism and of the nature of the church need lengthier examination than the present topic allows.

[40] Walter Chantry, referring to Deuteronomy 22:11, asks: "Was [Christ's] agony occasioned by men who wear garments of differing materials?" *God's Righteous Kingdom: The Law's Connection With the Gospel*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, 77. Christ's perfection and the supersession of Israel by the Church have fulfilled the purpose of laws concretely teaching Israel's purity and

morality which will advance a nation above other nations, if so interpreted. But whereas the "person" and "actions" of Aeneas said "do your duty to the nation", the person and actions of Christ have themselves fulfilled the Law, so that "my God feels [love] as bloud; but I, as wine" ('The Agonie', l. 18). Therefore "The Church-porch" presumes a reader, and a nation, whose foundation is the merit gained by Christ, but now needing instruction as to the practicalities of Christian living. "Houses are built by rule, and common-wealths" (l. 135). Neither Herbert nor his literary contemporaries – nor, in the main, the church leaders, even Hooker – saw England as the visible kingdom of God, with nation and body of Christ being exactly co-terminous.[41] Although Hooker had said that there is not "any man a member of the Commonwealth, which is not also of the Church of England", he did not suppose that the Church of England was in turn co-extensive with the invisible, true body of Christ.[42] Yet Erastian and Puritan alike believed in the possibility of a Christian "common-wealth" even if every member might not in "heart be true to God" (l. 73), a nation which would in its social justice and its magistracy, as in its worship, honour God.

This attitude is what is overlooked by Richard Strier in his recent placing of Herbert in the tradition of "devout humanism" and its "skillful management of the form, fictions, and practices of polite society". "The Church-porch" is not "Aristotelian rather than Pauline" in that "self-interest is the only motive" to which the poem appeals, unless that self-interest be interpreted as an interest in one's relationship with God. To respect the preacher and his Gospel message, for example, as in ll. 427-450, would not be true of Strier's supposed "proud" reader from the *beau monde*, for Herbert implies that the preacher may be unlearned or foolish, as indeed the Gospel

---

uniformity. "The Church-porch" is not quite of that nature, although it is more about the holiness of God and his people than about secular advancement.

[41] Laud did: "Commonwealth and Church … are so near allied that … the same men, which in a temporal respect make the Commonwealth do in a spiritual make the Church" (1621). Nicholas Tyacke, "Archbishop Laud", *The Early Stuart Church 1603-1642*, ed. K. Fincham, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993, 59.

[42] *Ecclesiastical Polity*, VIII, i, 2, Keble edn., 1836, 411. Compare Cranmer's view that the real church "is but a small herd or flock" amongst "the open known church" (cited in J. I. Packer, "Thomas Cranmer's Catholic Theology" in *Honouring the People of God: Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, Vol. 4, Carlisle, UK, Paternoster Press, 1999, 254). "No-one believing in infant baptism", says John Coolidge in opposition to Perry Miller, "ever entertained the notion … that the ideal polity 'would be to gather churches exclusively of the elect …'". *The Pauline Renaissance in England*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, 89.

itself seems (ll. 430, 439, 446; I Corinthians 1-3). [43] Both preacher and Gospel must be "thy Judge", not judged. This is not earthly advantage, but the (humanly) disadvantageous sincerity of obedience.

'The Church-porch', then, seems to be advice for Christians. The reader is one who has trusted in Christ for salvation. But this too is not unproblematic. What of

> Continence hath his joy: weigh both; and so
> If rottennesse have more, let Heaven go (ll. 17-18)

or

> If thou wilt die, the gates of hell are broad:
> Pride and full sinnes have made the way a road (ll. 71-2) ?

These appear to address a reader who is either able to save himself by works, such as chastity, or who has come to God in trust and repentance ("washt with his own blood", l.8) yet can still be condemned eternally. The remainder of Herbert's poetry presents neither of these ideas, as will be argued in relation to the "antinomian" controversy. Herbert does not suggest in "The Church-porch" that salvation is by works or that salvation may be lost, only to contradict these ideas in "The Church". "The Church-porch" here lays down general, and entirely biblical, truths. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4): Herbert, the gentle poet of love, speaks more frequently than has been recognized of judgment and Hell.[44] He is not afraid to "teach the *whole* counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). The Bible presents both responsibility and inability. It was Paul who said "God ... will render to every man according to his deeds: ... the doers of the law shall be justified" (Romans 2: 5-13). Yet neither Herbert nor Paul imagines a reader with power either to live a perfect life or to choose or reject eternal life of his own free volition. Herbert saw the biblical paradox that we choose to sin but cannot choose to obey, and that knowledge increases condemnation. That condemnation was laid upon the Son of God -- "Never was grief like mine"; but the reader must know first that matters such as sexuality and even speaking are neither primarily private nor social, but *coram deo*. "The Church-porch" teaches that one cannot sin with impunity.

---

[43] "Impossible Worldliness", *Resistant Structures,* 1995, 89, 96, 99, 97.

The poem sees outward behaviour as an indication of inward status, and not as intrinsically meritorious. Despite its injunctions about how to behave in church, for example (stanzas 65 - 75) -- and there is no reason to suppose Herbert did not mean a literal church service -- it is not based on a Laudian assumption that laxity in ceremonial observance amounts to apostasy, or that salvation is defined by the rites of the church.[45] Four stanzas are devoted to the importance of the sermon, whereas the Laudians diminished the value of preaching and sometimes dispensed with it.[46] *The Country Parson* condemns "putting a holiness in the things", again in opposition to the Laudian programme, and 'Sion', amongst other poems, points out that Christ having come, place, furniture and ceremony are no longer a means of access to God; the place of worship is the heart (*CP*, H. 246, 106).

"Deferre not the least vertue" (l. 459) is a model for the earthly happiness of the Christian (ll. 461-2); it is not an instruction which has Heaven hanging on it. "The Church-porch" assumes that failure is inherent in the Christian life -- "who is holy?" (l. 450). So does John in his first epistle: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1:9); and Article 9 agrees: "this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated". But 1 John 1:9 goes on to say that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness": this is the tenor of much of "The Church". The nature of God is holiness, and therefore his new creation, his people, are holy (I Peter 1:15). This is as true as to say "none is righteous" (Romans 3:10, Psalm 14:1). God's paradoxical expectation is fulfilled only in Christ, as the lyrics of "The Church" will make clear.

The "covenant theologian" William Guthrie, certain of the identification of his writings with biblical truth, said at the end of *The Christian's Great Interest* (1658) that if what he has written is slighted, "thy judgment shall be greater than that of Sodom and Gomorrah; and so much the greater that thou hast read this Treatise, for it

---

[44] C.A. Patrides is incorrect in saying "Hell . . . is completely bypassed in *The Temple*" (Introduction, *The Complete English Poems of George Herbert*, London, Everyman, 1974, 21). "The Church-porch" alone has nine references or allusions; 'The Sacrifice' has at least five.

[45] See Peter Lake, "The Laudian Style", *The Early Stuart Church 1603-1642*, esp. 167. Compare Daniel Doerksen, "Things Fundamental or Indifferent: Adiaphorism and Herbert's Church Attitudes", *George Herbert Journal* 11 (1) (1987): 15-22.

[46] Lake, "The Laudian Style", 169-70.

shall be a witness against thee at the last day".[47] "The Church-porch" also asks to be taken seriously (for example, ll. 445-6), but it is not made into a means of disposing of people eternally. The preacher "is thy Judge" (l. 427), but not, despite Herbert's high view of his task (see 'The Forerunners'), the poet. Neither writer- nor reader-authority extends to an arrogation of the authority of Christ in salvation. Yet one could argue otherwise: Herbert warned that the scoffer or doubter would read, just as he would become a member of the visible church, "at his peril" ('Superliminare'). That is rhetorical effectuality at its utmost. It places Herbert's poems almost on the same level as the words of the apostles, at which the hypocritical Ananias and Sapphira fell dead (Acts 5:1-11). We can at least say that Herbert had a high view of "teach and delight": the reader whose description is "profaneness" ('Superliminare'), whose attitude is secular, puts his soul in further danger by refusing to use the poems for reflection upon his relationship with God.

Determining the nature of "The Church-porch" depends upon being clear, as Herbert was clear and some of his commentators have not been, about the distinction between the status and the growth of the Christian. These two aspects of the reader are presented in the lyrics of "The Church" formally, as I have discussed elsewhere. Some commentators, discerning only one level and requiring an autobiographically self-expressive rather than a didactically exemplary Herbert, find attempts to merit salvation, or unhappiness with a cruel God.[48] "The Church-porch" lacks a personal speaker, but this does not mean it teaches salvation by morality. Debora Shuger describes it as purely worldly advice.[49] This disregards such lines as "we shall be / Most surely judg'd", 455-6. The status of the addressee in "The Church-porch" is the same as, if perhaps younger than, that of the reader of "The Church". While he is "a treasure", "washt", one who already has God's "lesson written in thy soul", a "saint on earth" (ll. 2, 8, 9, 438), he still needs instruction. Richard Hooker did not confuse growth with status:

> [A]lthough in ourselves we be altogether sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man which in himself is impious, full of iniquity, full of sin; him

[47] Inverness, Free Presbyterian Publications, 1952; Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1969.
[48] For example, A.D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God*, London, Methuen, 1980.
[49] *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, 1990, 93 ff.

> being found in Christ through faith ...him God beholdeth with a gracious eye ... and accepting him in Jesus Christ, as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that is commanded him in the law: shall I say more perfectly righteous than if himself had fulfilled the whole law? [50]

The early "antinomians" said nothing more striking. Yet the actuality of the Christian's earthly life, its growth (drama) rather than its justification (stasis), is a patchy, poor, struggling matter, as "The Church" also points out. The direct instructions of "The Church-porch" supply the Christian reader with a contextualised application of the Scriptures; the delight of "The Church-porch" is largely in the wit with which the application is made. There is humour, as well as sorrow, in the failures of the loved Christian. There can be delight, for justification is a settled matter. Unless at least the first two poems of "The Church" are taken with the medicine of "The Church-porch", the reader may think himself capable without Christ. "[S]ee what thy soul doth wear. / Dare to look in thy chest ... and tumble up and down what thou find'st there. ... Dresse and undresse thy soul: mark the decay / And growth of it" (ll. 146-8, 453-4) – such self-examination can lead only either to pride or despair if one's efforts are not seen as "a broken Altar", or if the sacrifice is seen as oneself and not the one inimitable 'Sacrifice'. A porch is merely an entrance; "The Church-porch" was not intended to be read on its own.

Standing in the porch is the reader for whom the poem was written:

> Thou, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance
> Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure (ll.1-2).

This "thou" appears again in 'Superliminare' (25), entering the "Church":

> Thou, whom the former precepts have
> Sprinkled and taught, how to behave
> Thy self in church: approach . . .

It is likely that this is a generic "thou", just as the "I" in "The Church" represents Everychristian. It has been suggested, however, that Herbert had in mind, in the first instance, his younger brother Henry, whose "sweet youth" was partly spent in Paris,

---

[50] "A Learned Discourse of Justification, Works, and how the foundation of Faith is overthrown" in *Works*, ed. Keble, 1836, Vol. III, Part II, 610.

and who later became Master of the Revels at court.[51] Chauncey Wood suggests that this is the Henry Herbert who wrote *The Broken Heart* and *The Golden Harpe*, devotional collections of Scripture passages topically arranged, but also admits that on paleographic evidence the identification is not certain.[52] If Henry the brother and Henry the author are the same, then "The Church-porch" was indeed an effectual method of teaching and delighting; Henry Herbert's works suggest a delight in the Scriptures and in a saving God, and a heart taught to know and repent of its sinfulness and to trust in Christ.

Herbert is not suggesting here for his young hopeful, whether brother or representative "youth", the saving effectuality of "precepts". 'Superliminare' suggests that even he who only "groneth" to be "holy, pure, and cleare" is welcome to "enter" the poetry: and the following series of poems concern the redemptive sacrifice of Christ and its application to the sinner. The person so described, who longs to be holy, has already been moved by the Holy Spirit. "Precepts" can only superficially "sprinkle". Valerie Carnes interprets 'Superliminare's' "sprinkled and taught" as showing that the stanzas of "The Church-porch" have "served the purpose of instruction before baptism and subsequent admission into the church itself".[53] She cites Mary Ellen Rickey's *Utmost Art*, which assumes that the beginning subtitle 'Perirrhanterium', which originally applied to the pagan pre-worship ceremonial cleansing, means that the ensuing precepts "would enable him *through his own efforts* to achieve ... the qualities which ... prepare [the Christian] for entering the Church proper".[54] But, as has been discussed, "The Church-porch" does not address an unbaptised person, nor one who is not yet in the church invisible, the body of Christ (for example, ll. 7-9). Nor is there anything in *The Temple* which would suggest a theology of "preparation", the idea that God's grace will come only to those who go

---

[51] A letter from George to Henry, giving advice for his stay in France, is dated 1618. A later letter to Henry, on the care of their nieces, is dated 1630, by which time Henry was married and knighted. This would fit Hutchinson's suggestion that "Herbert began 'The Church-porch' early and often revised it" (H. 476; letters, 365, 375). See the connection made between the letter to France and 'The Church-porch' in Nick Page, *George Herbert: A Portrait*, New York, Monarch, 1993, 49-50. Joseph Summers hints at it by association: *George Herbert: His Religion and Art,* 104.

[52] *George Herbert Journal* 20 (1&2) (1996/7): xxvi (vol. 20 is a reprint of *Herbert's Golden Harpe*).

[53] "The Unity of George Herbert's *The Temple*: A Reconsideration", *English Literary History* 35 (1968): 513.

[54] Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966, 6 (my emphasis).

halfway towards it by repentance and good works.[55] "The lesson written in thy soul" is a passive construction. The "writing" has been done by God in Christ on the Cross, and made personal by the gift of faith. 'The Church-porch" does not allow for a prideful self-writing which actively prepares the soul for a deserved salvation.

Carnes, Rickey, and also Martz have equated "The Church-porch" with the attempt to make oneself accepted by God.[56] However, if we are to assume a theologically consistent Herbert, whose "porch" and "church" are not built of entirely different materials, his rejection of any idea of salvation by works must apply to "The Church-porch". Nothing is so characteristic of Herbert as his denial of the authority of the self in salvation. The paradox of justification is poetic material throughout "The Church": expressed with all the delight of wit in 'The Holdfast' (143), it is echoed in many another poem. "I threatned to observe the strict decree / Of my deare God with all my power and might" (ll.1-2) immediately ironises any meritorious keeping of the lesser demands of "The Church-porch". "Threatned" shows the actual state of things – a rebel authority looking to itself for righteousness. "We have nought" (l. 10) leads to "all things … more ours for being his" (l. 12). An imputed righteousness does not remove a doing or having – or writing – self. But the self which authorises its own salvation will lose its righteousness at the grave; the self whose righteousness is Christ's is eternal. The reader who has passed through the "porch" and is now in "The Church" is not one who has entered by his own works.

Sheridan Blau proposes a relationship between "The Church-porch" and seventeenth-century casuistry, the counselling of cases of conscience in a newly reformed England, in which the Bible, not a priestly hierarchy, was the authority.[57] Camille Slights finds more casuistry in church than porch, analysing 'The Holdfast' as casuistical advice for balancing justification and responsibility. She agrees with Blau, though, that "The Church-porch" uses "the casuistical method of offering brief

---

[55] See C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism*, London, SPCK, 1966.

[56] Martz connects "The Church-porch" with the writings of pseudo-Bonaventure (the soul "correcting herself, purging herself from vices, and acquiring virtues") and with *The Imitation of Christ*. "Thus the Church-porch covers a world of error, and seeks to reform it by precepts …". *The Poetry of Meditation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954, 289-91.

[57] "The Poet as Casuist: Herbert's 'Church-porch'", *Genre* 4 (1971): 142-52.

solutions to typical cases".[58] Casuistry was the application of Scriptural principles to a cultural context different from that of the New Testament, and it assumes, as "The Church-porch" does, a heart "inclined to obey Thy commandments" (Psalm 119:112), one who "loves Gods abode" (l. 437) and who is happy to "dress and undress [the] soul: mark the decay / And growth of it" (453-4) in the matters of each day. This is a reasonable association; Herbert himself thought casuistry important:

> [The Parson] greatly esteemes also of cases of conscience ... Neither let any think this is a slight thing. For every one has not digested, when it is a sin to take something for money lent, or when not; when it is a fault to discover anothers fault, or when not; [and so on, mentioning covetousness, ambition, gluttony, drunkenness, sloth, lust]; and so in many circumstances of actions. Now if a shepherd know not which grass will bane, or which not, how is he fit to be a shepherd? Wherefore the Parson hath throughly canvassed al the particulars of humane actions.[59]

"The Church-porch" is the presentation of "what does God require of thee?" (Deuteronomy 5:10, Micah 6:8) contextualised, a pattern of Christian living in the daily details of English parish, family, and vocational life of the early seventeenth century. "The Church-porch" is not quite poetical casuistry, for true pastoral casuistry must be adapted to the individual circumstance: but it is close. It assumes a hearer who "groneth to be holy" or at least, one who would take its instruction seriously.

Without contradicting the "casuistry" theory of the nature of "The Church-porch", I would add that the poem may have a connection with the role of the godparent. Baptism is mentioned in the second stanza and at the end, in 'Superliminare'; the "former precepts" are metaphorically associated with baptism ("sprinkled"). Precepts cannot cleanse, as mentioned above, but the written poem has similarities to the instruction given by serious godparents. In a time when natural parents may easily be lost to the child by poverty, disease or war, godparents were necessary as a guarantee that the child would be both physically and spiritually provided for. Even without such eventuality they were to serve as teachers and examples of the life of faith.[60]

---

[58] *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1981, 199-207, 185-6.

[59] "The Parsons Accessary Knowledges", *CP*, H. 230.

[60] The godparents are to teach "what a solemn vow ... he has here made by you" and to "call upon him to hear sermons" and that "he may learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in the vulgar tongue, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health:

"The Church-porch" may have served in many homes as a supplement, and a witty one, to parental instruction.

The ideal "Church-porch" reader, then, is able to benefit from it only because he or she is enabled by the Holy Spirit to learn and change, just as the baptised believer benefits from advice from godparents (or older brothers) only because of a Spirit-softened heart. However, this is not the illuminated elite reader idealised by an irritated Henry Reynolds: "what bookes have wee of what ever knowledge, or in what mysteries soever, wisely by our Auncients (for avoiding of this present malady the world is now falne into) couched and carefully infoulded, but must bee by every illiterate person without exception deflowred and broke open, or broke in pieces, because beyond his skill to unlock them?" (And by "illiterate" he means any "puny graduate of some University"). To Reynolds, Bible and pagan myth, equally, yield deeper meanings only to the inherently wise, who are able to find the truth and avoid "poysonous errors and heresies".[61] "The Church-porch" is not "infoulded" in "mysteries". But it will teach and delight only the prepared. Conversely, "[t]here be some men", said Ben Jonson, "are born only to suck out the poison of books".[62] Jonson is not, of course, proposing that a percentage of the population were given life purely to the end that they damage themselves by "seeking the obscene and foul things in poets".[63] Yet his observation on how some readers seem inevitably drawn to "profaneness" is surprisingly predestinarian. Jonson assumes that something is true of the reader *before* he reads, so that the finding of vice to avoid or virtue to imitate depends on the nature of the reader more than on the nature of the text. Herbert's envisaged reader does not have (necessarily) a natural wisdom or goodness, or a superb education. His ideal reader "groneth to be holy" because the Holy Spirit has provided such a desire.

The scoffing reader bars himself from entry into the poetical "Church" proper ('Superliminare'). Such a reader will obtain, and to his "perill", the surface meaning

---

and that this child may be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life … continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections …" Publick Baptism of Infants, *BCP*.

[61] *Mythomystes*, in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 1, ed. J. Spingarn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908, 144-5.

[62] *Timber*, in Brian Vickers (ed.), *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1999, 567.

[63] *Timber*, 568.

only. The preaching of the Gospel may harden as well as soften.[64] "[C]hurches are either our heav'n or hell" ("The Church-porch", l. 426). The Gospel, and Herbert's poems, are "perill" in that they may confirm someone in his or her state (or choice -- both are true), not in that they will make "hard" one who wants to be "soft", as in some seventeenth-century distortions of the doctrine of reprobation. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37); "Lord, I have invited all" ('The Invitation', 179). There is no "perill" for "that which groneth." This is true also of the more obviously rhetorically delightful "Church" poems. Porch and church are not as unconnected as Strier and Fish would suggest.[65] Both are didactic, and both require -- as Coleridge partly saw -- a prepared heart.[66]

This is not a Wildean argument that art has no influence on, or moral connection with, life, but that readers find, as Jonson intimated, what they wish to find. "Delight" will only turn "into a sacrifice" for certain readers. "The Church-porch" delights with its wisdom, clothed in the attractive dress of wit, image, metre, structure and rhyme. "The Church" has the additional delight of "personal" experience. Yet none of this rhetorical drawing power would be effective unless the reader wished it to be so. This is not to place literary authority upon the head of the reader, or to make him the source of determining what is true and false. The preparing of the reader is the work of God; the reader's discernment is possible only by the prior writing of God upon the heart. [67]

---

[64] Compare Isaiah 6:9,10 with John 12:40; Exodus 7:13 with 8:15; and see Joshua 11:20. Confirmation of a prior choice is implied equally with that choice having been inevitable. "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Revelation 22:11).

[65] "Impossible Worldliness", 107.

[66] "The merits of [Herbert's] poems will never be felt without a sympathy with the mind and character of the man. To appreciate this volume, [the reader] must be ... a Christian, [and] both a zealous and an orthodox, both a devout and a devotional Christian [and] an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church, with a constitutional predisposition to ceremoniousness ... for religion is the element in which he lives, and the element in which he moves." As Coleridge was commenting on Harvey as well as on Herbert (presumably using the double volume) the "ceremoniousness" reference may indicate some confusion in an otherwise astute remark, for Harvey, not Herbert, wrote about ceremonies for their own sake. *Coleridge's Essays & Lectures on Shakspeare [sic] & Some Other Old Poets & Dramatists,* London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1907, 372.

[67] Compare Paul's words about the Jews who would not "see" the Gospel inherent in the Old Testament: "their minds were blinded: for until this day remains the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:14).

Civic morality, or the classical virtues, may to some degree be attainable by the "natural man".[68] But the motive is self-glory, not the love of Christ. The "many Cyruses" Sidney supposes produced by a reading of ancient literature would have an eye only to reputation -- or at best a love of country. "The Church-porch" presents, instead, the motive of thankful obedience to God. To "ryme thee to good" (l. 4) might be a common enough validation for poetry, if that "good" is personal or national self-interest. But the "sacrifice" (of thanksgiving, as in Romans 12:1-2) of line 6 shows that the direction of the poem, and of the reader, is "towards God" (l. 12). Only such a person had "ears to hear"; only such a person – Sidney did not go far enough to say -- could thoroughly change "gnosis" into "praxis". [69] Strier's self-interested and upwardly mobile reader would not understand a "delight" in a God so great that earthly promotion can be seen as detrimental (l. 6; 'Submission', 95).[70]

Herbert agreed that poetry must "teach and delight", but rejected the possibility of saving virtue inculcated by the delights of poetic image or example. "A sweet and vertuous soul" ('Vertue', 87) might indeed, as the poem suggests, resist mutability, but that virtue was not to be achieved even by the sweet day, rose, or Spring represented in, and representing, Herbert's own beautiful poetry. "All must die", poet, poem, and the reader trusting to his own virtue. Porch and church can only "teach and delight" as the Word of God is made pertinent and cutting in them, and as the reader is prepared by God. This work is beyond human ability, as Sidney said: "to be moved to do … or desire [the good], *hoc opus, hic labor est*".[71] Fit audience, though few? Perhaps. Herbert would not be surprised to find that much nineteenth and twentieth century criticism of his poetry has concentrated on the "literary" aspect, for he knew the heart of mankind: "He doth not like this vertue"; "Wit fancies beautie, beautie raiseth wit … who sings thy praise?"; " … he counts of heav'n, as of his treasure: /

---

[68] Luther: "There is a political or civil righteousness, with which emperors, princes, … philosophers and lawyers deal; there is a ceremonial … correction of manners; there is … the righteousness of the Law; [and] there is the righteousness of faith." *Commentary on Galatians*, 1531, in J. Dillenberger, ed., *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, New York, Doubleday, 1962, 100. Calvin: "I do not deny that all the notable endowments that manifest themselves among unbelievers are gifts of God [nor] contend that there is no difference between the justice, moderation and equity of … Trajan and the madness, intemperance and savagery of … Nero. [I]f we confuse these things, what order will remain in the world?" *Institutes*, 3. 14. 2.

[69] *Defence*, 39.

[70] "Impossible Worldliness", 1995.

[71] *Defence*, 39.

But then a thought creeps in, / And calls him coward ..." ('Miserie', 100; 'Love' I, 54; 'Giddinesse', 127). George Ryley, in 1715, was one of the few commentators on *The Temple* virtually to ignore "literary" aspects of the poems and purely to annotate their "spiritual" matter – and while this of course paradoxically diminishes the spiritual aspect of "teach", perhaps Ryley is closer to Herbert's ideally taught reader than one who makes more of the forms and wit, and dismisses the "religious" aspect as an oddity of seventeenth-century culture. [72] "A verse may find him" who "groneth" to be holy, not "him" who is interested only in style or social context.

3. "The Church" and representative didacticism

The remainder of *The Temple* is also didactic, although its chiefly lyric composition may mislead the modern reader.[73] The apparently expressive and autobiographic form is (in the best sense) rhetorical. The speakers' various joys and struggles enable the reader to identify with the grace, and word, of God, worked out in a seventeenth-century life. The delight of Herbert's teaching in "The Church" is as much in this representative aspect as in the features of wit and beauty. The reader senses a sympathetic understanding by this "teacher", whose poems do not stand on moral superiority, but come from the position of the teacher Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:15). Paul does not stay, though, on this level of experience, and neither does Herbert. The two-way identification is not one of mutual despair, as in much post-Romantic writing, but gives hope: "I have been shown this answer". The foundation level of each poem is secure, "something understood".

"The Church" presents a speaker who is the end-point of typology, not in himself but as he is in Christ: see 'The Holy Scriptures' (I) and (II) (58) and 'The Bunch of Grapes' (128). "Now love and truth will end in man" (and in the Son of Man) ('Assurance', 155). Man-in-Christ still needs, though, an example of how to cope with adverse circumstances, apparent spiritual desertion, and his own hubris. Part of the praise-function of "The Church" is to allow "kinde" men also to praise the all-

[72] See George Ryley, *Mr. Herbert's Temple and Church Militant Explained and Improved*, Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 199, ed. M. Boyd and C. Brown, New York, Garland, 1987.

[73] Hardison considers Renaissance lyric to be more epideictic (therefore more didactic) than any other genre. To Minturno, its sole purpose was to arouse the hearer to admiration and emulation. *This Enduring Monument*, 95.

conquering love of Christ as it works out in one fictionalised, but not untrue, representative life.[74]

The exemplary effect of representative didacticism, of what Barbara Lewalski calls an "individual-typical" speaker, does not function in the same way as the fictional examples of epic virtue. Thomas Hobbes, like Herbert, did not believe that Horace's "profit mixed with pleasure", the justification for poetry in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, actually worked.[75] In his preface to his translation of Homer (1675), Hobbes is at first conventional:

> [T]he design is not only to profit, but also to delight the reader. By profit I intend not here any accession of wealth, either to the poet or to the reader; but accession of prudence, justice, fortitude, by the *example* of such great and noble persons as he introduceth speaking, or describeth acting.

This is the standard justification produced by English Renaissance critics over the previous one hundred and forty years. But Hobbes then contradicts this orthodoxy:

> For all men love to behold, though not to practise, virtue. So that at last the work of an heroic poet is no more but to furnish an *ingenuous* reader (when his leisure abounds) with the diversion of an honest and delightful story, whether true or feigned.[76]

Herbert, too, saw that delightful examples of self-effort were useless in terms of the production of moral virtues pleasing to God. However, he had a hope unshared by Hobbes, that poetry whose authority was the instrumental Word of God could bring the grace of God to the reader. The "profit" he hoped the reader would find in his poems was not a morality of appearances, a civic righteousness produced by constraint or desire for good reputation. To Herbert, the only true profit, and the only true pleasure, was the knowledge of the love of God: "not that we loved God, but that

---

[74] Daniel Doerksen's article comparing Sibbes with Herbert, published too late for me to discuss it at any length, provides confirmation of this representative mode: "When they are writing of the personal relationship between the believer and God, Sibbes *describes* that relationship while Herbert *exemplifies* it in terms of the speaker's own experience. ...[W]hile Sibbes writes of these matters in the third person, or in a generalizing first-person plural, Herbert vividly uses the first-person singular. ... [T]he relationship with God about which Sibbes and other writers *give counsel* is strikingly *exemplified* in Herbert." "Show and Tell: George Herbert, Richard Sibbes, and Communings with God", *Christianity and Literature*, 51 (2) (Winter 2002): 175-191.

[75] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, tr. T.S. Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, 90, 91.

[76] "To the Reader, Concerning the Virtues of an Heroic Poem", in Vickers, *Criticism*, 618, my emphases.

he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10), a "downward" gift based on no "upward" worthiness.

The pleasures of ancient epic, ode, lyric and epigram, pleasures in story, wit and the poetic form itself, are in Herbert's poetry also. But these delights are not disassociated from the delight of grace, an unrelated rhetorical bait enticing reluctant fish to swallow a most unpleasant hook of moral doctrine or duty, as some Renaissance critics make them appear. The joys of Herbert's poetry are part of the delighted thankfulness of human author or reader for the deeper joy given by the Author of salvation (the term is that of Hebrews 12:2) and presented as the content of the poetry. The "example" aspect is not straightforwardly imitative, as if the reader can gain an "accession" of Odysseus' virtues by reading about them, but is sympathetically identificatory: I too struggle with sin; in Christ I overcome; his love has made me righteous; you too can so praise.

Hobbes echoes Sidney's doubts about the reader's desire to practise what he admires. By the time Hobbes is writing, the "delight" is all in the form. But Sidney still sees pleasure in the possibility of living humanity becoming like the Cyrus on the page.[77] Sidney immediately relates this to the mandate given by God to the author to become a sub-creator (though he admits this connection will be disputed) but as immediately hinders the progress of such a delightful possibility by remembering the reader and his "infected will". Sidney thus implies that his reproductive literary morality requires one who is already bent towards morality, able to become a Cyrus because willing. Although "our infected will" seems universal, the *Defence*, after this point, continues to imply that the pleasure in poetry is not just in its formal features, but in the re-making of the reader by the example of fiction.[78]

---

[77] *Defence*, 24-5.

[78] The *Defence* at this point displays a tension between the Reformation and neo-Platonism, possibly with Erasmian influences providing a compromise. Luther presents a total inability to choose the good, while Erasmus contends for some ability. *The Bondage of the Will* is Luther's reply to Erasmus's contention that, in Sidney's admirable summary phrases, the "infected will" is not so diseased as to disable the "erected wit". Sidney is also "neo-Platonic" in the sense of Pico della Mirandola's belief that man, in his virtue and his aesthetic, could by choice be a god-like creator.

Herbert's exemplary didacticism is effective in a way that Sidney's cannot be, for it assumes a reader made willing by the Holy Spirit. Its authority is the Bible, not the appeal of human virtue which, in the end, places the authority in the reader's desire and ability. It presents not a moral self-righteousness or the noble virtues of rulership, but one who struggles and rejoices just as the reader does, without condemning him to hopeless failure. Herbert's faulty speakers teach their readers as the perfect Christ teaches, by identification: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our unfirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace ..." (Hebrews 4: 15-16). This is not an exhortation to sinless perfection – "high priest" implies the existence of sin – but to the comfort of an identificatory understanding. The pleasure in Herbert's "profit" lies in this sense of undeserved understanding and comfortable freedom of access which underlies even his "desertion" poems. Correct example, even as painted by Sidney, can be cold, if it implies that we (the unable) must follow it. Herbert does as Sidney suggests in that he avoids both the unjust examples of history and the maxims of ancient and medieval philosophy.[79] Sidney complains that the one is insufficiently idealised to produce reader virtue, while the other is unattached to the vicissitudes of experience. Only fictitious example can inspire emulation. Herbert, however, goes beyond Sidney. He sees that the fictitious example will always remain just that, fictitious, for the humanist defence of poetry takes insufficient account of the reader's sinful nature. *The Temple's* "examples" are of the real, or likely, experiences of a sinner, but a sinner loved by Christ. Therefore they provide the possibility of living in them, and such a hope is their "delight". The poetic experiences are not nakedly presented, but are interpreted by a knowledge, and a relationship, which transforms them. Their dramatic level can teach and delight because of their foundation level; the writing of experience is full of hope, not by the poet's fictionalising, but by the saving "writing" of Christ.

[79] To "wade" in the "definitions, divisions and distinctions" of the Schoolmen does not "give sufficient cause to be honest". But Sidney's other condemnation, of history as example, suggests either that God is unjust or that eternal retribution is weaker than earthly retribution as a motive to goodness. The problematic implication by the Protestant Sidney is therefore that poetry is more effective than Divine revelation. *Defence*, 29, 32.

There is certainly pleasure in imagining a golden world whose inhabitants exemplify moral philosophy and whose earthly desert accords with a human sense of justice. To Sidney as to Herbert, to some extent, the pleasure is in the content as well as in the rhetorical features. But the golden world of goodness exists, for Herbert, not in the human imagination – and Sidney's argument is here humanistic rather than Protestant – but in Christ. Herbert's teaching, his "profitable pleasure", is that which would profit the reader eternally: an example of trust in the imputed righteousness of Christ.

This anti-self-morality, paradoxically expressed in personal example, provides the profit and the pleasure of "The Church". Its content is the gospel taught and provided by Jesus, which Paul, Luther and Cranmer, for instance, took great pains to distinguish from the righteousness of self-authoring.[80] This gospel implies no "doing". The "virtue" is Christ's; the sinner's part, to be thankful. No virtue of the reforming sinner, no fulfilment of conditions such as penance, would be a sufficient satisfaction to God for sin or even a lasting quietening of the conscience. Herbert's speakers play with the idea that delight lies in self-righteousness, but always conclude that "There is no dealing with thy mighty passion" ('The Reprisall', 36) for Christ's work pre-empted all others. "Your suit is granted", said the dying landlord to his impoverished tenant ('Redemption', 40); I have fulfilled the Law; never was grief like Mine; there is nothing more to be done except to praise. Herbert's teaching is by example, yet he does not assume any authority (power and ability) on the part of the reader to be virtuous, to earn or to keep one's acceptance with God. Neither does Hobbes, but Hobbes provides no hope. Herbert's exemplary didacticism, and its delight, is dependent on his understanding of salvation as wholly the initiating and continuing work of God.

---

[80] See Daniel Doerksen, "The Laudian Interpretation of George Herbert", *Literature and History* 3 (2) (1994): 36-54, and C. and K. George, Joseph Summers, Gene Veith, Christopher Hodgkins, and Richard Strier (all elsewhere cited) concerning the theology of Herbert's church and "Church".

"TEACH AND DELIGHT"

II

> This is the well
> That washeth what it shows ...
> 'The H. Scriptures.' II. ll. 9-10

Repentance is something of a test case in theological history. As classical and humanistic writings make man the author of his own virtue, so may certain doctrines of repentance make him the author of his own salvation. How repentance is taught indicates whether the teacher sees salvation as fully in God's authority. I have chosen Herbert's teaching on repentance as a pointer to his theology generally. I have said that the theological content, as well as the formal features, of *The Temple* embodies its delight. If his poems exemplify a repentance which merits salvation, then his teaching is doleful rather than delightful, for the reader is burdened with works, and the authority for his salvation is on his own incapable shoulders. Since Herbert also teaches that human failure is inevitable and that the sinner has as much capability as a stone, such reader-authoring could have no delight.

Louis Martz, in attempting to base the three-part structure of *The Temple* on Franciscan meditatory practices, implies that Herbert's poems on repentance and tears, indeed all in "The Church", represent a soul "trying with all its might to please God", "doing good actively to the neighbour, to one's great merit", having (by means of the advice in "The Church-porch") "purg[ed] herself from vices and acquir[ed] virtue".[81] Elizabeth Clarke shows, however, that this approach "is actually alien to Reformation spirituality, and to much of Herbert's poetic practice".[82] I would like to go further and detach Herbert from any suggestion of repentance, tears, or even assurance as meritorious works. Without making Herbert any sort of antinomian, I find similarities between Herbert's theology and some of the teachings of the so-called "antinomians" of the earlier seventeenth century.[83] A study of some of

[81] *The Poetry of Meditation*, 289.
[82] *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, 74.
[83] In a 1984 article somewhat misleadingly titled "George Herbert in Defence of Antinomianism" (*N & Q* 31 (3)), Nigel Smith shows that Henry Pinnell's *Nil Novi* (1654) uses parts of *The Temple* as an attack on ecclesiastical preferment and an argument for Pinnell's being given a clerical living. Smith,

Herbert's poems on repentance will indicate that Herbert does not diverge from Luther and Calvin towards the "preparation for faith" approach of covenant theologians such as William Perkins or, later, William Guthrie, nor towards the Jacobean Arminianism of Lancelot Andrewes or the Caroline moralism of Jeremy Taylor. Rather, his poetry exemplifies the "antinomian" arguments against such as Perkins, Andrewes, and Taylor. There is no conditionality laid down in *The Temple*; the love of its Builder is free and undeserved, and this is its delight.

Richard Strier has dealt in helpful detail with several of Herbert's "tears" poems, convincingly countering Martz's suggestion of Counter-Reformation influence.[84] However, there is still a distinction to be made *within* seventeenth-century Protestantism, between those who believed repentance to be a prior condition of salvation and of ongoing acceptance with God, and those who believed that repentance was a result of the gift of faith, inevitable and not conditional.[85] The first group, though saying that the death of Christ is the ground of salvation, still made it appear in practice that repentance and faith are required works of the will, and, relatedly, that the disfavour of God may again fall upon Christians who sin.[86] There are poems about weeping and repentance not dealt with by Strier which further indicate that "delight" may be theological as well as formal.

---

however, describes antinomianism as if it were standard Catholic or Protestant belief ("the Antinomian position [was] that man is saved through Christ's atonement … the Antinomian notion [was] that the spirit of Christ dwelt within the redeemed believer", 335). He misunderstands Herbert as well, implying that Herbert stressed the "Letter" above the "Spirit" (334). I concentrate here on Herbert's poetic presentation of repentance, focussing on conditionality and security. I do not find similarities between Herbert and other aspects of antinomian preaching, such as justification being from eternity.

[84] "Herbert and Tears", *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 221-47.

[85] Strier does deal with this to an extent in *Love Known* (ch. 4, 84-113). But Lisa Gordis, "The Exposition of Covenant Theology in *The Temple*", *Journal of Religion* 76 (3) (1996): 383-401, has argued that Strier has too easily accepted Perry Miller's inadequate and superseded description of covenant theology (in Miller's *The New England Mind*, Harvard University Press, 1954, for example). Unlike Strier, Gordis situates Herbert within covenant theology, arguing that he saw it, as did many Puritans, as "testamentary, not contractual". She sees Herbert's attitude to repentance as similar to that of the covenant theologians, who distinguished evangelical repentance, which "flowed from faith", from legal repentance. Her Herbert maintains a difficult balance between Pelagianism and Antinomianism. But I suggest that man does all / Christ does all is a false antithesis in relation to *The Temple*, in which the "mine" and "thine" of the man in Christ are inextricable.

[86] See Allison, *Moralism*, and R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, especially chs. 4 and 14.

1. Theological delight

Situating Herbert a little closer to the supposedly "antinomian" preachers of free grace than to the proponents of meritorious repentance is important in relation to the literary theorists of his time. These writers took the Horatian precept to imply that the substance of what had to be learned and followed was, in a Christian context, sour. Sweetness was provided only by the formal features of the exemplary poetry. The message of Renaissance literary didacticism is a confusion of, first, civic virtue, with its accompanying hope for glorious reputation, and, second, the overcoming of self to live virtuously and so earn God's favour, humanly difficult and biblically impossible. The theological teaching which informs *The Temple* is not that a sinner may become worthy and deserve either human credit or eternal bliss. It is that Christ alone has been worthy: "And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?". This worthiness substitutes for the inability of the sinner, who need no longer be browbeaten to stand and "serve" to earn salvation, but may, indeed "must", enjoy the sweetness of Another's merit: "You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat" ('Love' III, ll.15, 17). Therefore the delight of Herbert's poetry is in the content as well as the form, and the form is delightful because it embodies and represents the content.

Attempts to place Herbert theologically have literary implication. The skirmishes in what Gene E. Veith amusingly calls "the wars of the Cavaliers and the Roundheads" in Herbert studies are useful.[87] Christopher Hodgkins remarks that "[h]istorically, the stakes are high – the meaning of 'Anglicanism' and Herbert's place in it. Poetically, the stakes are perhaps even higher – the very nature of Herbert's aesthetic."[88] The highest praise Sidney can give to poetry is its past and present association with divinity.[89] To Herbert, writing and salvation are still more closely associated. The praise due to God for salvation, poetically expressed, is his prime concern. Any determination of the nature of his aesthetic must determine, with humility, his theology. Both aesthetic and theology are the "delight" of *The Temple*. Further, the

---

[87] Veith, "The Religious Wars in George Herbert Criticism", *George Herbert Journal* 11 (2) (Spring 1988): 19-35.

[88] *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert: The Exact Middle Way*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1993, 10.

[89] *Defence*, 21-2, 25-6. Note his (not altogether serious) reservation, 22.

relative authority of poem, reader, author, Word of God, and of the Holy Spirit working through written word and incarnate Word, are in question when *The Temple*, theologies of repentance, and the Horatian precept, are viewed in conjunction.

Bruce Johnson cautions that "we cannot know Herbert's theology; we can know what Herbert wanted his audience to hear about theology".[90] However, though we may not read *The Temple* as Herbert's spiritual biography, we may read it as Everyman's. Herbert's didactic method depends upon a reasonable amount of mutual assent to basic dogma. It is perhaps not appropriate to the early seventeenth century to imagine a Herbert who believed one thing and wrote another. The idea of a private theology, and certainly of a hypocritical or cynical rhetoric, may be reading the twentieth century back into Herbert's poetry. His concern for "those beams of truth, which onely save" ('Divinitie', 134) should keep us from assuming, with postmodernity, that Herbert had one truth for his readers and another for himself.

The English Renaissance critics sometimes stepped into theological areas. They did not always make a clear distinction between what one's country expects and what God expects, or between the way to be a good citizen and the way to please God. English nationalistic concerns encouraged such syncretism. To some critics, the fictions of poetry taught, through delight, not only civic and military virtues but the way to heaven – or hell. In 1531 in *The Boke Named the Governour*, Sir Thomas Elyot, concerned for the education of the upper-class child, wrote:

> How shall he abhor tyranny, fraud, and avarice when he doth see the pain of Duke Theseus, Prometheus, Sisyphus, and such other, tormented for their dissolute and vicious lying [sic. "Lyving"?]? How glad soon after shall he be when he shall behold in the pleasant fields of Elisius the souls of noble princes and captains which, for their virtue and labours ... do live eternally in pleasure inexplicable?[91]

Much later, Ben Jonson, in arguing that the good poet must be first a good man, called him "a teacher of things divine no less than human".[92] Milton sometimes seems to suggest two ways to God, one humanist and one Biblical; he proposed an

---

[90] "Theological Inconsistency and its Uses in George Herbert's Poetry", *George Herbert Journal* 15 (2) (Spring 1992): 1-18, 1.
[91] Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, 59-60.
[92] Vickers, *Criticism*, 469-70.

education which "will lead [our prime youth] and draw them in willing obedience, inflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue, stirred up ... to be brave men and worthy patriots, dear to God" .[93]

A fine-tuning of our perception of Herbert's theological views is therefore a literary necessity. Whether he saw repentance as a condition or an effect of salvation does pertain to his literary theory in general, and to his didacticism in particular. Herbert's literary authority is the same as his doctrinal authority. By whose authority does a poet "invent" analogies of the truth, in metaphor and in metre, and by these delights teach a delightful truth? If acceptance by God is by one's own doing – even partly, as in the fulfilment of covenant conditions – then the answer, for Herbert, would be "by my own authority". How one sees the order of things in the process of salvation is not, in fact, a small matter. If anything at all can be done by the unregenerate human will in preparation for salvation, then the authority is one's own. It is an authoritative Love, however, who

> 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. ...
>
> 'Love' (III), ll. 3-8

The guest's bitterly witty answer (l. 7) implies a remaining and desperate shred of belief that worth can be produced by the sinner. The authoritative, not conditional, imputation of Christ's righteousness ("you *shall* be he") is too much for the guest at first, who argues, wishing to "serve" and so hang on to the pride of meritorious doing. But he is told to "sit" and "eat *my* meat". In this concluding and summarising poem of "The Church", the response of the made-worthy guest is the basis of the writing of the experience: "So I did sit and eat".

This sitting and eating, and no longer arguing, does not imply the end of writing, as Fish, Harman and Clarke have suggested, as if writing were a function of a "merit" theology. Even in the terms of the poem, silence would not be compatible with a banquet among loving friends. To suggest that this is the end of authorship is a misunderstanding of justification by faith. The justified sinner does not end all

[93] Vickers, *Criticism*, 602-3.

worthwhile "doing": in fact, he only now begins it. The justified author has the freedom and power to write what is for spiritual "profit", just as he has the desire and ability now to live a godly life ("sit and eat" implies all this). But the ongoing pleasant tension between the stasis of truth and the drama of experience in "The Church" does mean that the arguing with God about whose "way" salvation is (see 'Dialogue', 114, amongst others) is only for the sake of the reader "who a sermon flies" and who is undergoing the same experience. That the end ("sit and eat") is known, and is not of his invention, is part of Herbert's theory of literary authority. The good teacher will use not only delightful methods and delightful content, but will know the outworking and end of his matter, even while he appears to be going through the same stages as his pupils.

2. The early "antinomians"

'Love' (III), while it does not suppose poetic silence, does imply the end of argument with God about worthiness, an arguing found in many poems. The several "threatenings" and other belligerent and military metaphors always end in a demonstration of their uselessness yet a delight in a defeat which is really a gain for the aggressive sinner. Such poems image the contemporary doctrinal dispute over the possibility of worth, and represent that tendency, which is in every person, to assert the power and pride of self under the cloak of virtue. In this Herbert sides with, or pre-empts, the "antinomians". One of these, John Eaton, gives in *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification* a prose version of the inadequately clothed guest at the wedding banquet, who is treated as in 'Love' (III):

> Justification is, when we feeling what lost creatures we are in our own selves, and in all our workes and holy walkings by reason of our sins, and sighing up to God for help, are by the power of Gods imputation, so cloathed with the wedding garment of Christs owne perfect righteousnesse, that of unjust we are made just before God: that is, all our sinnes are utterly abolished out of Gods sight, and we are made from all spot of sin perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely ... the persons who ... are capable of this benefit are such as truly feele what lost creatures they are in themselves, and in all their workes: this is all the preparative condition that God requireth on our part. [94]

[94] John Eaton, *The Honey-combe of Free Justification*, London, 1642, (posth.), 7. Both Eaton and 'Love' (III) allude to the frequently-made analogy between the imputation of righteousness and the host-given wedding garment; see for example Matthew 22:11, 2 Corinthians 5:3,4, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 21:2. The justified sinner is both guest and bride.

"I cannot look on thee", says the speaker in 'Love' (III), implying that he should be given time to weep sufficiently, himself washing away his "dust and sinne", his tears restoring his "marred" eyes. This subtle return to the belligerent "threatenings" of competition with Christ in merit was occurring before Herbert's and Eaton's time. William Perkins, thought of as the upholder of Calvinism in England, unlike Calvin taught that "repentance, humiliation and faith" are "available [availing] to salvation", not a result of salvation.[95] Perkins would have Herbert's "guest" wash himself in his own tears before being asked to "sit and eat", something Calvin never suggested.[96]

The unconditionality of Herbert's poetic teaching is in contrast to the teachings of those who would find a preparation for salvation in repentance and a foundation for salvation in experience, and is similar to the teachings of those in the early 1640s who would come to be labelled "antinomian". "Antinomian" can mean to be against any use of law whatsoever (anti-nomos), or it may refer to those who believed that justification meant licence. Or it may mean one who merely denied that law-keeping is a basis for acceptance with God. Those in whose writings I find some similarity to *The Temple* are the third group. These meanings were not always adequately distinguished by their critics, for instance, Samuel Rutherford.[97] Later Antinomians, particularly in Massachusetts, were indeed libertine and against Christians practising the morality set forth by the Law, even as a guide for their sanctification. To repent of a sin, as a Christian, was, with these later teachers, seen as a sin itself. [98] This rather Manichaean denial of sin arose because of a confusion of the imputation of righteousness (status) with sanctification (behaviour), and was a distortion of an

---

[95] *The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience*, London, 1606, facsimile edition, Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, and New York, Da Capo Press, 1972, 63.

[96] "When a bitterness of sorrow is demanded that corresponds to the magnitude of the offense ... [the penitents] wrest sorrow from themselves and squeeze out tears that they may thereby accomplish their contrition. [Such are] driven to desperation ... repentance is not the cause of forgiveness of sins. ...We have taught that the sinner does not dwell upon his own compunction or tears, but fixes both eyes upon the Lord's mercy alone." *Institutes*, tr. Battles, ed. McNeill, 1960, 3. 4. 2-3.

[97] Rutherford assumes that Denne, Eaton and Crispe held the same beliefs as Saltmarsh and Dell, his main targets; they did not, and it may be that Rutherford had not read much of the first three directly, although they are sometimes mentioned. *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist. Opening the secrets of Familisme and Antinomianisme in the Antichristian Doctrine of John Saltmarsh, and Will. Del, ... and of Robert Town, Tob. Crisp, H. Denne, Eaton, and others*. London, 1648.

[98] Christopher Hill, *Collected Essays,* London, Harvester Press, 1986, Vol. 2, chs. 9 and 10. Hill tends to confuse the encouragement to licence of later Antinomians, or of sects such as the Familists, with the preaching of Eaton, Denne and Crispe, all of whom specifically taught that although lawkeeping could not gain salvation, the justified believer must and is able to keep the moral law.

entirely Biblical emphasis, or re-emphasis, by the earlier so-called "antinomians" on the nature of unconditional saving grace.

"Antinomian" sermons, printed in the 1640s, reacted against anti-Reformation tendencies already evident in earlier decades.[99] They reminded their hearers that faith is a realisation of the already-completed work of Christ, and not given as a reward for repentance.[100] Their preachers feared an overturning of the Reformation, seeing in England an alarming tendency by Protestants to return to the "Papist" doctrine that God would accept them only after sufficient sorrow for sin and reformation of the life, rather than these being a *result* of justification and the gift of faith. Some giving this impression might be moralists and ritualists; but others might also be staunch Calvinists. John Downame, despite statedly aiming to comfort those worrying about their election, suggests that "bewail[ing] and forsak[ing] sins and imperfections" must be present before salvation may be considered certain.[101] Samuel Rutherford said that although "neither repentance, nor good works, [are] proper and formall conditions of the covenant of grace" yet they are "conditions of the covenanted", two positions rather difficult to distinguish in practice.[102] Henry Denne, John Eaton, and Tobias Crispe, "antinomians" whose teaching on repentance and assurance resembles Herbert's, argued that this conditionality was a contamination of the Gospel with the Law, and was a looking inward for assurance instead of trusting to the work of Christ in the sinner's place: indeed, "ev'n to trust in him, was also his: / We must confesse that nothing is our own" ('The Holdfast', 143). The "antinomians" tried to restore the

---

[99] Herbert died in 1633. But the "antinomian" issues in print in the 1640s were preached and (presumably) discussed in the 1620s and 1630s. Eaton, for example, lived from 1574 to 1641, and was preaching and writing throughout Herbert's lifetime.

[100] Calvin's teaching, changed by some of his English "followers": see "John Calvin's Doctrine of Faith" in Kendall. Mark Dever suggests that Kendall may have overstated the difference between Calvin and the English Calvinists, especially in the matter of the covenant: *Richard Sibbes (Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Jacobean England)*, Macon, GA, Mercer University Press, 2000, esp. 109-121. See also Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1982, for an earlier refutation of Kendall. For Sibbes' position relative to Herbert, see Doerksen's comparison of Sibbes and Herbert, *Conforming to the Word*, ch. 9.

[101] *The Christian Warfare*, 3rd edition, London, 1612 (STC 7136), 284. His reassurance is sometimes anything but: "[It is said that] though we most carefullie indevour to spend our lives in holinesse and righteousnesse, yet we may be reprobates …; this is utterly untrue: for whomsoever the Lord hath ordained to everlasting life, those also he hath ordained to use the means whereby they may be saved" (230). This has the unfortunate implication that those means are our holiness and righteousness.

[102] *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist*, Bk. II, 36.

purity of the Gospel in the face of an increasing stress on "preparation for faith",[103] Beza's and Perkins's distortion of Calvin's teachings on election and assurance, and a "Covenant theology" which brought back a certain legalism into the reformed faith.[104] They also battled a growing moralism in the established church.[105] Strangely, the experimental predestinarian tradition, in every other way theologically opposed to Laudian sacramental and outward conformity and Caroline moralism, in effect taught the same legalism, in suggesting that repentance could be a function of the natural man and a prerequisite of grace.[106]

Denne, Eaton and Crispe were merely echoing Luther, Calvin, and the early English reformers. The sermon on repentance in the second book of Homilies (c. 1562) says "they are greatly deceived that preach repentance without [a lively faith in] Christ".[107] Thomas Becon's 1563 catechism made it very clear that repentance was a function only of the "renewed".[108] But by the time *The Temple* was being written, some were teaching, unbiblically, that the sinner must prepare and reform himself before coming to the Saviour, even though Christ said that he came to call not the righteous, but sinners.[109] Against this teaching, Crispe, preaching on John 6:37, said "There is no person ... be he as vile as can possibly be imagined, who, if he doe but come to

---

[103] Kendall's thesis in *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, that the Westminster or covenant theologians distorted Calvin, teaching that repentance, faith and the production of evidences of election were in effect works, is disputed by Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1982. Helm distinguishes between being prepared for faith (by the Law) as part of the work of God in the soul, and preparing oneself for faith. He denies that the latter was preached by the Puritans. See esp. ch. 4. However, some sermons of the later English "Calvinists" do give the impression that repentance is a work the unregenerate can do, and must, *in order* to be granted saving faith.

[104] Details of these and other changes to doctrine in post-Reformation England may be found in Kendall; Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists", *John Calvin*, Centenary Studies in Reformation Theology, ed. G. E. Duffield, The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966; C. F. Allison, *Moralism*; and G. Huehns, *Antinomianism in English History,* Cresset Press, London, 1951. Compare Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 2000, and his useful summary of scholarship on this issue.

[105] For somewhat differing views on causes, see Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminianism, 1590-1640*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, and Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625-42*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992.

[106] See Peter Lake, "The Laudian Style", *The Early Stuart Church*, 1993. The phrase "experimental predestinarian" is Kendall's (*Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*).

[107] *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches* ... Facsimile edition, Rickey and Stroup, 1968, 256-74 (259, 268).

[108] "[E]vangelicall penitence [is] a continuall study, purpose, and endeverment, and wilfull meditacion of mortifying our fleshe, and fashioning our lives to the wyll of the Lorde. And this kinde of penitence is onely in them that are renued, and unto whom the forgivenesse of sin through Christ is given." *Demaundes of the Holy Scripture*, written 1563, printed London 1577, facsimile edition, Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1979, n. p.

[109] Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32.

Christ, even while he is so, shall be rejected of Christ".[110] Stephen Geree did not understand the significance of the "if" in that formula, and was representative of a change in thinking from the time of the early English reformers in being irritated that

> Doctor Crispe preached peace to none but wicked, and as they were wicked, while they were in the most desperate and devilish condition of all, though they had no *righteous qualifications* in the world, but onely a minde to be saved from their sinnes by Jesus Christ. Which, how horrible and hellish a doctrine it is, the ensuing confutation will evidence . . . [111]

Herbert might have been answering such as Geree when he wrote

> At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
> Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
> Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, and died.
> ('Redemption', ll. 12-14)

So a departure from the teachings of free grace was beginning to be evident in Herbert's lifetime. Richard Sibbes, Herbert's contemporary (1577-1635), complained that "the adversaries of free grace they fall foul upon us, because we preach justification by the free mercy and love of God in Christ ... Oh, say they, this is to dead the spirits of men, that they have no care of good works."[112] These "adversaries", conforming and non-conforming, were suggesting that repentance primarily, not the death of Christ primarily, is the work which will bring a sinning believer back into God's favour – and that such favour may be lost altogether.[113] If Herbert had been also of this mind, some of the "delight" of his apparent subject, the unconditionality of God's saving grace, is soured. On this scheme, any spiritual delight Herbert has promised actually depends, frighteningly, upon the reader's own "preparation for faith" and covenant-keeping. If that is the case, the formal delights of his poetry are merely a game of language, enjoyable rhetorical tricks, unrelated to content. Indeed the frivolity of poetry had better be eschewed altogether if "both the way and end be tears" ('The Pilgrimage', 141, l. 28).

---

[110] Tobias Crispe, *Christ Alone Exalted*, Fourteen Sermons, XIV, London, 1643.
[111] *The Doctrine of the Antinomians, by evidence of Gods truth plainly confuted*, London, 1644, my emphasis.
[112] "The Excellency of the Gospel above the Law', *Works*, Vol. 4, 271-2.
[113] See H.R. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1949; McAdoo is not making the point that the post-Jacobean church had departed from its foundations of justification by faith, but such a departure is clear in many of his source quotations.

In a 1641 sermon, whose title page remarks that it was "contradicted by many of the auditors", Henry Denne said: "It was prophesied by Luther, that after his time the difference between the Law and the Gospell, should be neglected. Our age hath proved him too true a Prophet. ... [T]he Law is good, if a man use it lawfully: but the fault is, not rightly to apply it; as when we apply it to troubled consciences, to give satisfaction. Let us take heed of mingling these two. ..." (p. 23).[114]

Luther had made the difference clear:

> This most excellent righteousness, of faith I mean (which God, through Christ, imputeth unto us), is neither political nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God's law, nor consisteth in our works, but is clean contrary: that is to say, a mere passive righteousness.... By the righteousness of the law, in doing many things we do nothing, and in fulfilling of the law[,] we fulfil it not, except first, without any merit or work of ours, we be made righteous by the Christian righteousness, which nothing appertaineth to the righteousness of the law ... Why, then, do we do nothing? ... Nothing at all ... but to know and believe this only, that Christ ... sitteth in heaven at the right hand of his Father ... intreating for us, and reigning over us and in us by grace. Here no sin is perceived, no terror or remorse of conscience is felt; for in this heavenly righteousness sin can have no place: for here is no law, and where no law is, there can be no transgression [Romans 4:15].[115]

Richard Strier has pointed out the echoes of Luther in many Herbert poems, and has established that justification by faith is the ground and material of the building of *The Temple*. But already in Herbert's time there were those who professed justification by faith and yet preached a practical self-righteousness. Caroline moral theology aimed to "show [the ordinary man] the way of salvation, which will be attained by the commandments of God and of the Church".[116] Such anti-Reformation preaching could be found within the conforming church (Andrewes, Laud, Cosin, Taylor, for instance).[117] Although it would be couched in different words, a similar burden was being replaced upon the people by certain Puritan covenant theologians (Perkins, Preston, Ames, Watson, Guthrie, for instance). Crispe spoke of the tendency of both groups to preach that

---

[114] *The Doctrine and Conversation of John Baptist*, London, 1642.
[115] *On Galatians*, in Dillenberger, *Martin Luther,* 101, 105.
[116] H. R. McAdoo, *Caroline Moral Theology*, 11.

> if a believer sins surely there must be humiliation, and confession ... and a good long continuance too ... there must be more brokennesse of heart yet, and more yet, and more yet ...

thus subtly returning to a doctrine of works and merit. Crispe acknowledges that "there must be confession ... and he must be sensible of the nature of sin",

> but ... he may conclude [while repenting] the love of Christ embracing him ... [There are more] relentings of heart, and breakings of spirit, when you see your sinnes pardoned, than in the most dispairing condition you can be in. [118]

Crispe is speaking of one who already believes; Luther, of the basis of believing. Herbert agrees that any emphasis on the works of the self, either in attempting to be accepted by God or to remain in that acceptance, is unbiblical, a counsel of despair, and even ludicrous: "I threatened ...".[119] It seems likely that Herbert, without conceiving of his poetry as direct polemic, had such contemporary departures from the Reformation gospel in mind. Some of the Caroline moralists distinguished between doctrine and pastoral pragmatism, privately holding to justification by faith but publicly urging the keeping of the Law, for fear that the knowledge of free salvation might lead to licentiousness. [120] Herbert's concern was also pastoral, but he saw that only the biblical truth of the gospel of grace is "the thankful glasse, / That mends the lookers eyes: ... the well / That washes what it shows" ('The H. Scriptures' II). Holy living, in *The Temple*, results only from the recognition of the authority and sufficiency of the work of Christ.

---

[117] See Peter Lake, "Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635", *Past and Present* 114 (Feb. 1987): 32-76; 50, 51.

[118] *Christ Alone Exalted*, Sermon XIV, 432, 439.

[119] In *Briefe Notes relating to [Juan de Valdes'] Considerations*, Herbert agrees with Valdes' proposition that "a Christian shall not bee chastized for his evill living, nor shall be rewarded for his well living", only preferring "punished" to "chastized". Herbert adds: "all the point lies in believing or not believing". Herbert agrees also, however, with Valdes when he qualifies (with Paul) "all things are lawful" by "all things are not expedient"; that is, the believer can never be punished, yet is "obliged to be like unto Christ" for his sanctification. H. 311.

[120] Allison, *Moralism*, 184-5.

3. Non-meritorious tears

"Moist tears dry up sin and quench the wrath of God", said Thomas Watson in 1668, although Samuel Rutherford earlier had said, against an "antinomian" accusation, "wee thinke not that teares wash away sinnes; Protestants speak not so."[121] Watson is throughout *The Doctrine of Repentance* highly figurative, and perhaps becomes alarmed by the end of the book at the implications of his language, adding "tears are not satisfactory for sin". But he immediately says "repentance helps to purge out the filth of sin ...". Watson's words are often ambiguous: it is not possible to tell from "O you whose head has been a fountain to weep for sin, Christ's side will be a fountain to wash away sin" exactly where the causality lies.[122] Herbert is much clearer:

> So when I view my sinnes, mine eyes remove
> More backward still, and to that water flie,
> Which is above the heav'ns, whose spring and vent
> Is in my deare Redeemer's pierced side.
>
> ('H. Baptisme' I, ll. 3-6)

The anti-Calvinist moralists also were proposing that the unregenerate, to Herbert the stones of death ('Sepulchre', 40), could by themselves repent; only then would the grace of God give them saving faith. Herbert Thorndike could not allow "that men are reconciled to God ... without consideration of any condition qualifying for it" but rather taught that "repentance ... is part of that quality in consideration whereof God for Christ's sake allows remission of sins". [123] Jeremy Taylor said, confusingly, that "a holy life is the only perfection of repentance, and the firm ground upon which we can cast the anchor of hope in the mercies of God through Jesus Christ".[124] The firm ground for the anchor seems to be as much the repentance, issuing in a holy life, as the mercies of God. But in 1641 Henry Denne had spoken against "that doctrine, so often heard in your pulpits, that Repentance washeth away sin. [The Scripture says] *...the bloud of Jesus washeth us from all sin.* How then doth Repentance wash away sins?" [125]

---

[121] *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist*, Bk. II, 36.
[122] *The Doctrine of Repentance*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, 7, 96-7.
[123] Allison, 106, 109.
[124] *Works*, ed. Heber, 1828, 260, in Allison, *Moralism*, 68.
[125] *John Baptist*, 48.

Herbert was careful not to contribute to the growing tendency to replace burdens of merit, which Luther had removed, upon the sinner. Particularly, he could see that on this approach, the work and glory of Christ were diminished in favour of the work and glory of the human. 'Affliction' (II) points out that "mens tears", even in the aggregate, would "discolour thy most bloudy sweat". It is worth looking at more of 'H. Baptisme' (I), because it removes the attention from "my sinnes" or even my repentance, and places it on Christ:

> As he that sees a dark and shadie grove,
> Stayes not, but looks beyond it on the skie;
> So when I view my sinnes, mine eyes remove
> More backward still, and to that water flie,
> Which is above the heav'ns, whose spring and vent
> Is in my deare Redeemers pierced side.
> O blessed streams! either ye do prevent
> And stop our sinnes from growing thick and wide,
> Or else give tears to drown them, as they grow. ... (ll. 1-9)

Christ's death, not the "tears", are the basis of pardon. The tears are given, a result of a new relationship purchased by the death of Christ, and are not a work to procure justification. Herbert's metaphor in this first part of the sonnet is double. The rivers from Christ's side form a barrier to the forest of sins which would otherwise obscure the sight of heaven. The water of baptism is equated with the watery fluid which came from the spear-wounds in Christ's side, indicating a work accomplished by death. Baptism is not the ground of acceptance with God, nor are the subsequent tears. Therefore original and actual sin are, as the "antinomians" also taught, impotent to condemn:

> What ever future sinnes should me miscall,
> Your first acquaintance might discredit all. (ll. 13-14)

Richard Strier argues credibly that this sonnet deliberately contradicts the Roman doctrine of sacramental penance, confirmed by the Council of Trent as the basis of forgiveness for "future sinnes", that is, sins committed after baptism.[126] It is important to see, however, that Herbert is not proposing baptism as a sacramental substitute for penance *as a basis for forgiveness*. A sign is not a basis, but points to that basis: the work of Christ on the Cross. "My deare Redeemers pierced side" (l. 6) is still the effectual plea "above the heav'ns" for sin. Baptism is a lifelong reminder

("mine eyes remove / More backward still", ll. 4-5) of a status given by Another. As the baptismal candidate's name is written in the Parish Register, so has it been written in "the Book of Life" (ll. 10, 12). As so often, Herbert's teaching is to present the work of Christ, not to demand conditional action, and to use the representative "I", not the pupillary "you". This sonnet well describes the effect of a non-merited, achieved justification. This effect is not a carelessness about sins, as the teaching of the "antinomians" was mistakenly thought to provide. Rather, the death of Christ, here remembered and applied in baptism, "stops" or "drowns" sins. The drowning tears are given by Christ, and are the result of his redeeming work. They are not the meritorious, grace-procuring work of the sinner trying to "write" his own salvation, in Catholic penance or in covenantal preparation, but are the result of knowing one's status of "written".

Phineas Fletcher, roughly contemporary with Herbert, wrote, as did Herbert elsewhere, on the tears of Mary Magdalene and of "my" tears, but with quite different intent:

> Drop, drop, slow tears, and bathe those beauteous feet,
> Which brought from heaven the news and Prince of peace.
> Cease not, wet eyes, his mercy to entreat;
> To cry for vengeance sin doth never cease.
> In your deep floods drown all my faults and fears;
> Nor let his eye see sin, but through my tears. [127]

In this approach to repentance, the work and glory of Christ are minimised if not irrelevant. The finished victory of Christ has become weaker than sin's "vengeance", and the "faults and fears" of the penitent are drowned not in the blood of Christ but in his own tears. The righteousness of Christ is not that which hides sin from the eyes of God, but the tears – the work – of the sinner. And Christopher Harvey, whose *Synagogue* was bound together with *The Temple* for two hundred years, writes in imitation of Herbert but sadly misses not only his poetic talent but his theology.[128]

---

[126] "Herbert and Tears", *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 221-247.

[127] Phineas Fletcher, 1582-1650, "Drop, drop, slow tears", set to music by Orlando Gibbons, 1583-1625, in this version Oxford University Press, 1973. For Richard Strier's comment on 'Marie Magdalene' (173) see his "Herbert and Tears"; for my comment, see "Decorum" chapter.

[128] Ilona Bell, "In the Shadow of the Temple", *Like Season'd Timber*, ed. E. Miller and R. di Yanni, Seventeenth-Century Texts and Studies, New York, Peter Lang, 1987; Daniel Doerksen, "The Laudian Interpretation of George Herbert", *Literature and History* 3 (2) (1994): 36-54.

His poem on tears of repentance, 'Said I Not So', was still being attributed to Herbert by anthologists up to the early twentieth century. But

> Renew thy vows, and if thou keep the last
> Thy God will pardon all that's past ...
> Vows made with tears cannot be still in vain

contradicts the theology of *The Temple* and the Reformation.[129]

The tears of repentance do moisten many a Herbert poem. It is necessary to remember Herbert's own distinction between losing the *sense* of the love and presence of God, and really losing the love of God: the latter is a position not contemplated in *The Temple*. In the fiction-world (drama and image) of the "present" of many poems, what feels real to the speaker is not the true situation. Herbert is not a "Caroline Divine" in theology, as he has been said to be.[130] His poems do not teach moral reformation as a necessity before Christ will receive, or re-receive, the sinner, nor that repentance and faith are works. He is closer to the understandings of Luther and Calvin, of Cranmer and of Sibbes, and of Denne, Eaton, and Crispe, concerning the prior grace of God in justification. But what then of 'Vanitie' (II) (111)? These lines might suggest a similarity to Harvey's conditional theology after all:

> O heare betimes, lest thy relenting
> May come too late!
> To purchase heaven for repenting
> Is no hard rate. (ll. 7-10)

This urging of the reader is not in Herbert's usual style of generalising experience into a pseudo-autobiographical form. Yet it still presents the situation as it *feels* to the one being preached to. It is also entirely biblical. The persuaded reader only later realises that "relenting" and "repenting" was by God's prevenient grace. Such preaching is entirely in accord with true "Calvinism" and with the paradox of responsibility. "God breathes faith into us only by the instrument of his Gospel", said

---

[129] Christopher Harvey, but attributed to George Herbert in *The Library of World Poetry, Being Choice Selections from the Best Poets*, ed. Wm. Cullen Bryant, NY, Avenel Books, 1870. I thank Catherine Turnbull for this instance. See also Ilona Bell, "In the Shadow of the Temple", 1987; Daniel Doerksen, "The Laudian Interpretation", 1994.

[130] McAdoo associates Herbert with the theological school of Cosin and Andrewes (*Caroline Moral Theology*, 146 and passim); Horton Davies finds him "a high Anglican counterpart to Richard Baxter" (*Worship and Theology in England*, London, Eerdmans, Vol. I, 102-4).

Calvin; "Paul points out that 'faith comes from hearing'". [131] Herbert does not take the extreme, and unbiblical, view, held by some in the seventeenth century, that God will save, or sanctify, without means; why then the Scriptures, and why write didactic poetry? "Lord, in thee / The *beauty* lies in the *discovery*" (Sonnets at age 17, H. 206).

"To purchase heaven for repenting" is a metaphor in the dramatic "now", and does not refer to the static basis of salvation. The poem as a whole is an argument about value. True "delights" and what is truly "sweet" is neither "eyes" nor "gold" (ll. 2, 3, 6 ,12). In this context, "purchase" is an apt image, and not a doctrinal comment. An emphasis in "The Church" as a whole is what Richard Strier calls "the rejection of bargaining".[132] Comically in his "threatenings", boldly in his grasp of the covering of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and sadly in his realisation that he cannot even thank God commensurately, nor return his love adequately, Herbert reiterates the nature of the "purchase": "Your suit is *granted*" ('Redemption', 40). Jeanne Clayton Hunter, in an article on the connection between the Covenant of Grace and Herbert's mercantile metaphors, also points out that the context of "The Church" forbids us to imagine that the price is actually our repenting, though it may feel like that.[133] Herbert's other uses of "exchange" imagery emphasise that Christ's "drops of bloud paid the full price / ...to make us .../ fit for Paradise" ('Sunday", 75, ll. 54-6).

Once again it is the pre-existing condition of the heart of the reader which determines whether that reader is taught and is delighted. Herbert is not urging repentance as a meritorious work of which lifeless stone is somehow capable. Repentance in *The Country Parson* is shown as essential, but impossible without the prior grace of God. "The essence of repentance ... consisteth in a true detestation ... abhorring, and renouncing sin, and turning unto God in truth of heart, and newness of life: Which

---

[131] *Institutes* 4. 1. 5, and see R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centred Evangelism,* London, Baker Book House, 1961, and J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, London, Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1966.

[132] *Love Known*, ch. 2. This chapter deals with the contractual implications of the "covenant theology" of Perkins, Ames, Preston, and Sibbes (although I would prefer to exclude Sibbes from this group), and with 'The Pearl', 'Obedience', 'Artillerie' and 'Assurance'. See also Jens Moller, "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 46-67.

[133] "Salvation Under Covenant", *Praise Disjoined: Changing Patterns of Salvation in Seventeenth-Century English Literature*, ed. W.P. Shaw, New York, Peter Lang, 1991.

acts of repentance are and must be found in all Gods servants" (H. 279). Only "God's servants" can repent.

'Vanitie' (II) is also close to Jesus' words: "unless ye repent, ye shall all ... perish" (Luke 13:3). What could be more conditional? But Jesus also said: "No man can come to me [repent], except the Father ... draw him" (John 6:44). The equal strands of responsibility and election are inseparable throughout the Scriptures.[134] Just so does Herbert both require repentance and admit its impossibility unless God write on the stony heart and so change it to flesh, "new, tender, quick" ('Love Unknown', 129).

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility as a double truth, double only to the limited human reason, shapes Herbert's method of teaching. The reader's delight in identifying with a representative experience is increased by the comfort of discovering that experience is not the ultimate truth. What "seems" to be the speaker's case often is contradicted by what "is" the eternal aspect of the case. In Herbert's poems of affliction, for example, which are not limited to his five poems entitled 'Affliction', he exemplifies the unhappiness of the sinning Christian, who experiences the apparent absence or displeasure of God. Has the speaker not wept enough? This unhappiness is only rarely unresolved, however; *The Temple* is a structure built on an achieved foundation. The poems often appear to be working themselves out, a life in process, but their immediacy is a rhetorically didactic device. The end is known before the beginning, for Herbert's aesthetic depends upon the completed acts of salvation history. The authority is not of the present solving self, but of that which is "written" already. The poems do not all end in a before-known "loved", but the implication is there always.

Herbert teaches and delights also by poetic form, and his choice of form is also motivated by the tension of his theology, human effect "versus" God's causation,

---

[134] Pharaoh's heart was "hardened" so that he could not repent, yet he was condemned for it. The Gentiles were enabled to repent so that they might be "grafted in" to the original Israelite olive tree,whose branches were broken off for that purpose but also because they would not repent. The new "branches" were told that their inclusion was not of their doing, yet if they did not "continue" they would also be broken off. Exodus 7:3, 14, 16; Romans 9-11 (compare 9:16 with 11:19-22).

action within election. A predestinarian theology is often distorted by its misunderstanders into a personless determinism. Election in the Bible is "in Christ" and glorifies Christ. Human futures are "determined" only in relation to Christ. Relationship is the theme of the Bible and of *The Temple*. Therefore Herbert's teaching is by songs, and these songs are personal, not necessarily of his experience exclusively, but "about a person", representative. Didactic poetry of the time often used couplets, a form whose closure every two lines does not easily allow for development, struggle, or relationship. Herbert's teaching is usually in lyrical and dramatic form: the atmosphere is love and praise rather than direct instruction. Aspects of relationship are overheard, or glimpsed through small windows. The mode of much of "The Church" is of a character in a play, not schoolroom rules on a board to be copied. Yet this analogy is inadequate. The author of the play is much more in evidence in Herbert's poetry than in most stage dramas – and the author is not the writer, a statement difficult to make of *Astrophil and Stella* or of other lyric collections. Moreover, this is a love in which the reader can share; unlike the reader of other lyric sequences, Herbert's reader "is" the participant. The reader is delighted to be taught that the speaker's problems are already solved, that the stasis of the love of Christ resolves the drama of the poem. So it is an encouraging method of instruction: "as I have been and will be, so may you".

Love begets love. With Crispe and others, Herbert saw that only the personal experience of the love of God motivates repentance and obedience. Faith that is "truly active through love", Luther said, "finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith".[135] Richard Hooker said: "Fear is impotent [and] worketh no man's inclination to repentance, till somewhat else have wrought in us love also".[136] Only the forgiven sinner is grateful; only delighted gratitude makes possible delighted obedience. Crispe said, echoing the biblical terms used often by Herbert concerning hearts and writing, that there is

---

[135] The Freedom of a Christian" in Dillenberger, 74.
[136] *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Keble's edn., VI.3, 2-3, Vol. III, Part I, 9-10.

> no person … hath received Christ, but after he hath received Christ, he is created … unto good works, that he should walk in them; … he takes away their stony hearts, and gives them hearts of flesh; he writes his law in their inward parts, and puts his feare into their hearts, that they do not depart from him … sanctification of life is an unseparable companion with … justification by the free grace of Christ.

Only the person who knows himself accepted without desert is able to live a truly holy life:

> Beloved, let me tell you, that the rarest self-deniall, the frequentest prayer … , the greatest study, the most beating down of the body …; reckon what other graces you can, they come all short to build up a man in obedience to the will of Christ … [137]

Robert Lancaster's preface to John Eaton's *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification* summarises Eaton's variously-illustrated point that

> [only love, as demonstrated by] free justification is mighty for the working of faith and true prayer, and all good life and godly conversation.[138]

Herbert's speaker sometimes audaciously "reminds" God that this is God's own way of working, that, psychologically, fear does not work but forgiveness does. In 'Repentance' (48), while there is no excusing sin -- rather, it is "my most foul transgression" (l. 15) -- God is "told" that

> When thou for sinne rebukest man,
> Forthwith he waxes wo and wan:
> Bitterness fills our bowels; all our hearts
> Pine, and decay,
> And drop away,
> And carrie with them th'other parts. (ll. 25-30)

In 'Grace' (60), it is only the freely given love of God (on the "crosse") which can engender love in return, and so the overcoming of tenacious sin:

> Sinne is still hammering my heart
> Unto a hardnesse, void of love:
> Let suppling grace, to crosse his art,
> Drop from above. (ll. 17-20)

---

[137] *Christ Alone Exalted*, London, 1643, Sermon IV, 89, 87.
[138] London, 1642, introduction unpaged.

"O do not grinde me!" says the speaker of 'Sighs and Grones' (83), knowing, however, that fatherly chastisement is not an eternal grinding. God will "look not on my desert", which is "the turn'd viall of thy bitter wrath" (ll. 18, 2, 20). Threatening hell cannot achieve godly living. "Man is but grasse, / He knows it, fill the glasse" ('Miserie', 100). Nor can "the Philosophers", who, said Eaton, "gave many goodly precepts of righteousnesse; but they could not bestow that righteousnesse upon any."[139] Rather,

> The bloudie crosse of my deare Lord
> Is both my physick and my sword. ('Conscience', 105, ll. 23-4)

'Discipline' (178), whose title seems to assume the necessity of works to appease the anger of God, in fact tells God what is more effective than works. Yet what it asks for has already been given:

> Then let wrath remove;
> Love will do the deed:
> For with love
> Stonie hearts will bleed. (ll. 17-20)

'Affliction' (IV) (89), 'Complaining'(143), 'Longing' (148), and 'The Search' (162) operate in a similar way. Love, not fear, provides repentance; that love has been given, through the Cross; the poem apparently is reminding God of this, but in fact it is the reader being taught. So through the delightful "deceits" of the lyric form, and the delightful matter (that all the "work" has been done, and I am "loved" already), Herbert teaches just what the early "antinomians" were teaching.

4. A lover's tears

The love lyric is essential to Herbert's theology of dynamic relationship. A lover -- either lover -- can be hurt. But the relationship between Christ and his loved one is not capable of permanent damage. 'A Parodie' (138) points out both these things. Similarly, the first "antinomians" taught that loving God (by a holy life) came from being first loved, and was that love's necessary proof.[140] Their opponents chose to

---

[139] *Honey-Combe*, 21.

[140] In the eighteenth century, John Newton commented on Tobias Crispe that "this author is branded an antinomian by many, but I know not why unless for exalting the power and grace of Christ." *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, D. Bruce Hindmarsh, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, 336.

ignore this emphasis. Stephen Geree thought that "the veriest Atheist and Epicure … would … hug this Gospel"[141] and Thomas Watson said: "what sins do they care not to commit, as long as they hold they are *ab aeterno* justified whether they repent or not".[142] Some recent writers have made the same assumptions.[143] In a commendable zeal for "a holy people" (I Peter 1:14-21, 2:5; Titus 2:14), the critics of the "antinomians" forgot that holy living comes only through forgiveness. Denne points out to his imaginary dying interlocutor that Jesus in Matthew 7 said "first make the tree good, then his fruit [will be good]". [144] Herbert's speaker grieves over a Lover hurt, and yet knows that his "loved" status will not change. This knowledge empowers him not to sin.

Souls joy, when thou art gone,
And I alone,
Which cannot be,
Because thou dost abide with me,
And I depend on thee;

Yet when thou dost suppresse
The cheerfulnesse
Of thy abode,
And in my powers not stir abroad,
But leave me to my load:

O what a damp and shade
Doth me invade!
. . .
Ah Lord! Do not withdraw,
Lest want of aw
Make Sinne appeare;
And when thou dost *but shine less cleare,*
Say, that thou art not here.

And then what life I have,
While Sinne doth rave,
And falsly boast,
That I may seek, but thou art lost;

---

[141] Geree, *Doctrine of the Antinomians*, no paging: introductory section.
[142] *A Body of Divinity*, London, Banner of Truth, 1974. This was first published posth. 1692, but written c. 1660; this is still much later than Crispe and Herbert, but as an explanation of the disputes which led to the formulation of the Westminster Catechism and Confession, it is entirely relevant to Herbert's theological milieu.
[143] Christopher Hill, for example, tends to confuse the early "antinomians" with later, true antinomians and sectarians, in his survey of their theology. *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, chs. 9 and 10.
[144] Henry Denne, *A Conversation between a Sick man and a Minister,* London, 1643, 27.

. . .
I half beleeve,
That Sinne sayes true; but while I grieve,
Thou com'st and dost relieve. [145]

Sin says "falsly" that the speaker has been deserted; actually "thou dost but shine less cleare". Sin in the life of the believer does not once more put him under the displeasure and desertion of God. Crispe said: "There is not one sin you can commit, after you receive Christ, that God can charge upon your person", for he has put it all upon his Son, and will not ask twice for payment. This is a statement about status, not experience: it is not denying the need for repentance. Luther's statement is stronger still: "where no law is [as basis for justification], there can be no transgression".[146] 'A Parodie' makes clear that the Lover returns "while I grieve", not "because I grieve". "Do not mistake", said the attacked Crispe; "I have not said, God is not offended with the sinnes beleevers commit; but, God stands not offended with the persons of beleevers. He hath that everlasting indignation against sin as ever ... [but] never doth punish any beleever, after he is a beleever, for sin".[147] Herbert's love-song form underlines the theological truth that it is the believer, the already-loved one, who cares about apparent desertions. The form is didactic as much as the content: it teaches that the context is a love-relationship, not the attempt to propitiate a distant God by anxious self-effort.

'Ephes. 4.30' (135) similarly shows that only being loved already can motivate true grief for sin. Relationship, again, is the context of this teaching. The speaker is amazed that God is "griev'd" and "doth grone" over a "worm". Herbert has established by the title and sub-title that the didactic representation here is of one already regenerate. The full verse is: "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption". Grieving God is possible, but Heaven is sure. The status of "sealed" cannot come unstuck by sin. Yet the gentle long lines, interspersed with hiccupping short lines, suggest the uneasy emotional state of the ashamed, speaking through tears. At first it seems that those tears of repentance are

[145] Patrides' edition of Herbert (Everyman, 1974) includes the original, thought to be by William Herbert, earl of Pembroke. Its theme is similar to Donne's 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning'. Only the first ten lines of George Herbert's poem are similar in structure to the poem he parodies.
[146] *On Galatians*, Dillenberger, 101.

the ground of salvation. For five increasingly histrionic stanzas, the concentration is upon the speaker's grief, not that of the Holy Spirit. The complaining lute, the weeping spring which shames the inadequate weeper, are reminiscent of the deliberate overstatements of 'Grief', perhaps even of Crashaw. The reader supposes that his weeping can end the "night" of sin and of God's sorrow, can even cause death, the result of sin, to become life. But the sixth stanza corrects the unhealthy concentration in the second on the sinner's depth and sincerity of repentance.

> Then weep mine eyes, the God of love doth grieve:
> Weep foolish heart,
> And weeping live:
> For death is dry as dust. Yet if ye part,
> End as the night, whose sable hue
> Your sinnes expresse; melt into dew. (ll. 7-12)

> Yet if I wail not, since still to wail
> Nature denies;
> And flesh would fail,
> If my deserts were masters of mine eyes:
> Lord, pardon, for thy Sonne makes good
> My want of tears with store of bloud. (ll. 31-36)

The last two lines appear to make tears an alternative to the blood of the Cross, or to imply that I can, even must, go most of the way myself. But Herbert says that nowhere else, and he is not saying it here. "Want of tears" is true of everyone; and, "tears" and "bloud" are not of the same order. No amount of repentance can pay for sins, for that payment is the death of a perfect life. "Store of bloud" allows the inadequate weeper to know that he will see the "day of redemption". "It is dying, not crying, that must give satisfaction for sin", said Henry Denne; "to preach that teares do wash away sin out of the sight of God is Blasphemy against the precious Bloud of Christ". [148]

Herbert's didactic method may seem reminiscent of Horace's advice: "si vis me flere, dolendum est primi ipsi tibi ...".[149] If you, the speaker, wish to see me, the audience, weep, you must weep first yourself. Herbert takes Horace's advice insofar as he uses

---

[147] *Christ Alone Exalted*, Sermons I and II on John 14: 6, 8, 28, 31. Crispe backs up every statement likely to be controversial with many Scripture passages; I do not include all these.
[148] *John Baptist*, 48, 49.
[149] *Ars Poetica*, 99, in Vickers, *Criticism*, 15.

the rhetorically autobiographical "I" to teach, and his "own" repentances as exemplary encouragement to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). But if his poetic tears move an audience to tears, the purpose is not the praise of the poet's technique. There is a good deal of crying in 'Ephes. 4.30', but the poem's ending shows crying to be inefficacious; a result, not a cause. The poem points to Christ and away from speaker's or reader's tears -- and away from the poet. Such a rhetorical technique can have poetic fame as its goal as much as reader instruction or delight. When Sidney speaks of the moving effect of "Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back", and of "how he governeth himself in the ruin of his country; in the preserving of his old father ...[and] in leav[ing] Dido, though not only all passionate kindness, but ...virtuous gratefulness, would have craved other of him", he certainly wishes to move "to ...magnanimity and justice", but he also wishes poetry – and by extension, the poet – to be praised; for that is why he is writing.[150] But the tears of Herbert's speakers are the real ones of a love-relationship. They are not those of the able rhetorician. There are limits to applying the rhetorical "movere" to poetry addressed to an actual God, or to people in or needing a relationship with God. The ultimate aim in this case is the praise of God, not the praise of the poet.

Again this aspect can only be determined by an understanding of the theology which itself "moves" poet and poem. Some recent commentators have too willingly confused the rhetorical with the spiritual. Commenting on Daniel Featley's 1626 complaint that "sighs ... are the figures that move almightie God, and teares the ... most current Rhetoricke before him", Michael Schoenfeldt paints a Herbert so caught up in the persuasive deceits of the tropes of poetry that he cannot separate manipulation of earthly powers from manipulation of God. This to Schoenfeldt is deliberate and unavoidable: "Herbert was well aware of the way in which the plain style, in its deliberate attempt to show forth God's power rather than human craft, can be absorbed into the persuasive and artful discourse it purportedly repudiates."[151] This is applied to poetic tears as to poetic praise: "By equating the virtuously submissive activity of praise with the duplicitously ambitious practices of flattery,

[150] *Defence*, 41, 47.
[151] Featley, *Ancilla Pietatis*, 22, in *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1991, 177.

Herbert underscores the rhetorical intentions of his own devout utterances".[152] God, to Schoenfeldt, existed in Herbert's mind as an enlarged and invisible seventeenth-century monarch. With such a "God", there is certainly no escape from the circular layers of a repentance falsified by its rhetoric (as Herbert himself saw, but not in the cynicism ascribed to him, in such poems as 'Sinnes Round' and 'A Wreath'). In such a worldview it is impossible to conceive of anything put into words, in any form, which could not be construed as either deceived or deceiving. If Herbert's God is the wishful creation of a now-irrelevant discourse (Schoenfeldt's "*distant* past" [153]) then teaching, tears, *Temple*, and all comment thereon, are pointless.[154] But "at his peril" does such a reader go.

Elizabeth Clarke shows that the Counter-Reformation, particularly in its literature of tears, did not sufficiently distinguish between the sadness produced by, say, a poetic description of Christ on the Cross, and a true repentance brought about by the Holy Spirit.[155] But her assumption that in "Reformation spirituality" "the 'motions' of the Holy Spirit ...were the only certain guidance for what God truly willed" is mistaken.[156] Reformation spirituality looked primarily to the Bible, not to inward feelings – however interpreted – for guidance and for an understanding of the work of God. Separatists and "enthusiasts" certainly took the position not only that being moved might be the work of the Holy Spirit (most orthodoxy agreed with this) but that having such inner "moving" meant one might pass beyond the Scriptures and become an authority of one's own. Herbert, however, took quite a different position.[157] Nor is there a "conflation of the two discourses", the rhetorical and the spiritual, in Herbert.[158] While the writing of poetry cannot escape rhetorical features,

---

[152] *Prayer and Power*, 24. Schoenfeldt cannot see Herbert's God of love, only a "machinery of torture" (154 and Chs. 3 and 4). Herbert's "preoccupation", however, is not with "the imposition of pain" but with God's undeserved love. Pain there is, but not "as an instrument of power" (117). The preoccupation with pain and power describes, I suggest, that particular reader and not *The Temple*.

[153] *Prayer and Power*, 18, my emphasis.

[154] Similarly, Debora Shuger can find only a societally-constructed "self" in *The Temple,* and can understand a relationship with God, and its tears, only in terms of a comparison of the early modern "pneumatic self" with the modern "psychiatric self": "both being marked by deprivation, solitude, and the need to be loved" (*Habits*, 1990, 119). Julia Guernsey's Herbertian speaker is similarly described (*The Pulse of Praise,* Newark, University of Delaware, 1999).

[155] *Theory and Theology*, 16-23.

[156] *Theory and Theology*, 22.

[157] Herbert corrects Juan de Valdes in this tendency to "slight" the Scriptures, which Herbert sees will "overthrow all means [including the Bible] and set up *Enthusiasmes*." H. 306, 310, 317.

[158] *Theory and Theology*, 24.

relationship with God makes rhetorical tears real. If to Sidney and Spenser fictitious exemplars were "more doctrinable" than history or precepts -- "so much more profitable and gratious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule"[159] -- how much more effective (for the "groning" reader) must be a real example of a walk with a real God. The failures which occur in historical actuality and which disturbed Sidney must be documented in this system too, for honesty is of its essence. But since there is no presumption of pleasing God by "the vain confidence of self-righteousnesse, and civil honesty, of which our Saviour pronounceth that it is utterly unavailable to Gods kingdom, Matthew 5:20",[160] the failures of self-effort in Herbert's exemplary lyric poetry become, and produce in the reader, the greater praise of the all-achieving grace of God.

5. Security

The Temple does not present repentance as a meritorious work. The foundation to that Temple is far more secure than any laid by human effort. 'Perseverance' and 'Assurance' teach the delight ("unspeakable comfort", Article 17) which comes from a biblical and Christ-centred understanding of predestination. 'Church-lock and key', 'The Water-course', and 'Businesse', despite first appearances, are also built on this foundation.

'Perseverance'(204)[161] has sometimes been misunderstood as the anxiety of a poet whose "words" are the basis of his eternal judgment. Rather, in this poem Herbert uses the writing of didactic poetry as a metaphor for, or example of, any work which attempts to substitute for the work of Christ. The poem exemplifies the struggle within every believer to hold by faith to the promises of God, when all subjective evidences point to damnation. If the basis of the poet-speaker's own acceptance with God is the accord between his life and his teaching, then he is in trouble: "Let not many of you become teachers, [for such] shall be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1). "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again"

[159] Sidney, *Defence*, 35; Spenser, *FQ*, ed. Hamilton, Letter to Raleigh, 737.
[160] Eaton, *Honey-combe*, 3.
[161] Williams MS; not included in Bodleian MS or in standard printed editions of *The Temple*. See Hutchinson's note, p. 548.

(Matthew 7:2). However, it is not (primarily) Herbert, but the speaker, who is worried, in order to provide an exemplar for a worried reader.

> My God, the poore expressions of my Love
> Which warm these lines and serve them up to thee
> Are so, as for the present I did move,
> Or rather as thou movedst me.
>
> But what shall issue, whither these my words
> Shall help another, but my judgment bee,
> As a burst fouling-peece doth save the birds
> But kill the man, is seald with thee.
>
> ffor who can tell, though thou hast dyed to winn
> And wed my soule in glorious paradise,
> Whither my many crymes and use of sinn
> May yet forbid the banes and bliss?
>
> Onely my soule hangs on thy promisses
> With face and hands clinging unto thy brest,
> Clinging and crying, crying without cease,
> Thou art my rock, thou art my rest.

At a time when preachers were telling their congregations to look inward, rather than to look at Christ, to find assurance, "my words ... crymes ... sinn" might well be thought to be "my judgment". Thomas Watson, for example, makes assurance depend upon repentance and sanctification.[162] If "words" which have taught others make the poet / preacher a hypocrite, how much worse must be God's judgment; "kill the man" (l. 8) is not too strong. But the end of the poem governs the remainder. The inward look does not provide the foundation for poet, teacher, or reader. That foundation is "thy promisses", not "my words"; "thy breast", not what is in my breast; "thou", not "my crymes" or "these lines".

"Serve them up to thee" and "help another" present the dual purpose of Herbert's poetry. The description of warmed-up food, last night's dinner, perhaps, is reminiscent of his poetic anxieties in 'Dulnesse', and more sadly, seems to suggest an unhappiness with his spiritual condition. But "as thou movedst mee" is not blaming God for the lukewarmness and lack of flavour and nutrition in his "expressions", as

[162] *A Body of Divinity*, 250, 252. This section also provides an illustration of assurance as the "reflex act of faith" and as the result of the "practical syllogism" (I love God, therefore I am loved of God) as described by Kendall in *Calvin and English Calvinism*.

Elizabeth Clarke suggests, but a reminder that all his writing originates in the loving action of God in Christ. Clarke misunderstands both the theology and the poetic mode of representative didacticism, calling 'Perseverance' "this dark poem" and "horrifying". Reading Herbert mistakenly in terms of the voluntaristic Baxter, she says "perseverance in this poem is problematic". It is far from problematic. The rhetorical *movere* is here seen as God's work; there is not a "desperate act of will" by the poet, or even the speaker, but a recognition that God's act is all that offers hope – but that "all" is more than enough. "Silence" is not, as Clarke proposes, the eventual outcome for the Christian poet who would not be a hypocritical teacher.[163] The choice is not between poetry, by which I might be condemned, and silence, but rather between seeing "my words", my acts, or even "my Love" as the basis for God's judgment, and the work and "promisses" of Christ. The end of the poem, and the end of life, is determined – not mechanically, but in "thou", in Christ – before the poem begins. The emotional drama of the third stanza is resolved by the static "thou art" of the fourth.

To Calvin, the simple act of looking to Christ for salvation, the Spirit-revealed "knowledge of God's benevolence towards us … in Christ", [164] constituted both faith and assurance, as in John 6:37: "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Herbert associates moving and being moved not just with emotion or inspiration or a particular work but with salvation itself, the coming to and persevering with Christ. So did Calvin: "It is those on whom heavenly grace has breathed who at length begin to seek after [God's loving-kindness] … they are moved and governed by his leading [so] that they follow him with unwavering intention."[165] Calvin said, further, that "Perseverance is exclusively God's work; it is neither a reward nor a complement of

---

[163] *Theory and Theology,* 276-80. Clarke is historically inaccurate when she elsewhere says " … Herbert's [generation] would have learnt that the guarantee of salvation … was the inner sense of spiritual 'motions'" (19) and that "the experience of motions is the quintessential Protestant experience … [g]iven the obedience of the Christian subject it can ensure perseverance" (210). Herbert's generation, if it knew nothing else, had "learnt" that the work of Christ was the guarantee of salvation, and that justification by faith was the quintessence of Protestantism. Clarke is confusing the basic English Reformation theology with the very aberrations discussed above, which replaced the objectively revealed work of Christ with subjectivity.

[164] *Institutes*, 3. 2. 7.

[165] *Institutes*, 2. 3. 10. The context is pertinent: "God's loving-kindness is set forth to all who seek it, without exception. … For the intermediate movement the Sophists dream up, which men are free either to accept or refuse, we see obviously excluded when it is asserted that constancy is efficacious for perseverance."

our individual act [and] would, without any doubt, be accounted God's free gift if a most wicked error did not prevail that it is distributed according to men's merit."[166] Herbert was writing at a time when the worried Christian was again being directed to look inward, to his holiness and repentance, rather than to the work of Christ.[167] Herbert knew that "my many crymes and use of sinn" would never "forbid the banes and bliss" (l. 11). The poem identifies, and identifies with, current anxieties, and then representatively directs the reader to an unshakeable rock on which he may rest.

If the "Caroline divines" and certain Puritans were right, then "my many crymes and use of sinn" do have greater authority than the death of Christ, to "forbid" its benefit in the case of sin after conversion. But Herbert's method of teaching was to appear to be working out a problem as he wrote, yet to know the answer beforehand. For three stanzas he appears to struggle with a problem, then resolve it in a fourth. So it is on the experiential level for the Christian. If Jeremy Taylor was right in saying that "our faith and sincere endeavours are ... accepted instead of legal righteousness. ... He is not a child of God, that knowingly and deliberately chooses anything that God hates. ... To resolve to [live in a holy fashion] and yet not to do it is to ... make our pardon hopeless and our hope fruitless", then writing poems to urge others to trust in Christ is a burst fowling-piece indeed. But what Herbert knew before he penned the first words of 'Perseverance' was that we will continue to "cling", simply because Christ's greater authority has promised that we will (for example, John 10:28-9). Our "clinging" is also the work of God. We "rest" by looking to him, not to "our faith and sincere endeavours".

'Perseverance' gives delight, for it teaches the reader to find assurance in the work of Christ, not in supposed evidences of his or her election (including repentance). It was not Calvin, but later "neo-Calvinists", from William Perkins on, who created in the reader a second-stage, reflexive anxiety about eternal security, and placed its solution in an answer to "am I elect?" rather than "has Christ come to save?".[168] A century of

---

[166] *Institutes*, 2. 3. 10, 11.

[167] "Again", because to depend on one's own efforts for eternal security was a characteristic of Catholicism.

[168] Compare John Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, esp. 122-7, 133-7, 151; Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society*, 12 ff; much of C. F. Allison,

books listed evidences, from Perkins' *Cases of Conscience* to Arthur Dent's *The Plaine Mans Pathway to Heaven* and William Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest.* [169] With these evidences the reader could assume himself elect, and if elect then unable to fall. But Calvin had said, in language echoed by both 'Perseverance' and 'Assurance':

> Satan has no more grievous or dangerous temptation to dishearten believers than when he unsettles them with doubt about their election ... [When a man] tries to ... find out what decision has been made concerning himself at God's judgment seat [he] casts himself into the depths of a bottomless whirlpool to be swallowed up; then he tangles himself in innumerable and inextricable snares; then he buries himself in an abyss of sightless darkness ... Now, what revelation do you have of your election? This thought, if it has impressed itself upon him, either continually strikes him in his misery with harsh torments or utterly overwhelms him. [T]hose engulf themselves in a deadly abyss who ... investigate God's plan apart from his Word ... [rather,] we should turn our eyes to Christ ... If we have been chosen in him [Ephesians 1:4 has been referred to], we should not find assurance of our election in ourselves ... it is his will we should be content *with his promises* [many quoted], and not enquire elsewhere. ... Let us therefore *embrace Christ*, who is graciously offered to us. ... He will reckon us in his flock and enclose us within his fold ... we shall ever remain safe because we have been made his once for all. [170]

God's eternal decrees are "seald with thee" ('Perseverance', l. 8), closed from human enquiry, and this includes the matter of the ultimate effectiveness of the speaker's words, and whether they are a cause of judgment of the speaker or not. Herbert agrees with Calvin, that we are to be "content with his promises", that is, with what *has* been revealed and what we *can* know. "How may I know that I am elect?" asks the anxious "enquirer" in Tobias Crispe's Sermon VII on the covenant. The answer is pure Calvin – and pure Herbert: "Take him ... on his word ... on a generall tender ... Christ hath promised, venture thy soule upon it, without seeking for further security". [171]

Moralism; and the whole argument of R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*. For a refutation of Kendall's view of Calvin on assurance, see Mark Dever, *Sibbes*, 165 ff, and accompanying references.

[169] William Perkins, *Cases of Conscience* ..., Cambridge, 1606, 1972; Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Mans Path-Way to Heaven*, London, 1601, facsimile edition, Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1974; William Guthrie, *Interest,* 1658.

[170] *Institutes*, 3.24.4-6, my emphasis.

[171] *Christ Alone Exalted*, 210 (Sermon VII).

Herbert's poems teach by the delight of relationship. Those "promisses" are not a matter of mere formal words to the speaker of 'Perseverance'. The third stanza pictures a wedding about to be prevented by the bride's personified sins. The distraught bride can only plead relationship (*my* rock, *my* rest) on the basis of "thy promisses" and "thou art", not "what I am in my holiness" or even "my repentance". Crispe continually points out, as does Herbert in 'The Holdfast' and elsewhere, that even such coming to Christ is the work of Christ. Calvin demonstrates from the Bible that those who cling to and exalt Christ will persevere because Christ's honour is involved. Herbert's teaching delights because under the struggle there is security.

Tobias Crispe was called an antinomian for agreeing with Calvin; George Herbert was not. Yet Crispe's concerns were Herbert's: "When poore beleevers are afflicted ... they are presently ready to suspect, God hath cast them off for their sins ...[but] there is no person ...hath received Christ, but [that] he is created in this Christ unto good works. ... He takes away their stony heart ... *that they do not depart from him.*"[172] Crispe found it necessary to emphasise what had been obvious to the earlier English church in its battles with Roman theology: since justification is the work of God through Christ, the believer would persevere in the faith. But now, warned John Eaton, teachers were "Popishly" "withdraw[ing] people from Christ" and demanding "a preposterous sanctification, repentance, [and] mortification" before believers could be sure of their faith.[173] This Herbert had in mind when he wrote 'Assurance'(155):

> O spitefull bitter thought!
> Bitterly spitefull thought! . . .
>
> Thou saidst but even now,
> That all was not so fair, as I conceiv'd
> Betwixt my God and me; that I allow
> And coin large hopes, but that I was deceiv'd:
> Either the league was broke, or neare it;
> And, that I had great cause to fear it.
>
> . . . wouldst thou unlock the doore
> To cold despairs, and gnawing pensiveness?
>
> But I will to my Father,

[172] ibid., 34 (Sermon II), 89 (Sermon IV), my emphasis.
[173] *The Discovery of the most daungerous Dead Faith*, London, 1641, no paging.

Who heard thee say it. O most gracious Lord,
If all the hope and comfort that I gather,
Were from my self, I had not half a word,
Not half a letter to oppose
What is objected by my foes.

But thou art my desert:
And in this league, which now my foes invade,
Thou art not only to perform thy part,
But also mine; as when the league was made
Thou didst at once thy self indite,
And hold my hand, while I did write.

Wherefore if thou canst fail,
Then can thy truth and I . . .
Yea, when both rocks and all things shall disband,
Then shalt thou be my rock and tower,
And make their ruine praise thy power.

Now foolish thought go on,
Spin out thy thread, and make thereof a coat
To hide thy shame . . .
What for it self love once began,
Now love and truth will end in man.

Richard Strier has associated the "league" with the teaching current in England of Covenant, or Federal, Theology.[174] "Federal" is from *foedus* (treaty or league). Although the idea of covenant is biblical, the covenant of grace had become far less of "grace" in the handling of some of Calvin's "followers". Rather than Christ alone being the mediator and fulfiller of the covenant, the covenant of grace was said to apply to the sinner only as he or she fulfilled certain conditions, such as a sufficiently tearful repentance accompanied by good works. The "league", promising salvation, could be "broke" by the believer's sin; there could be no, or only uncertain, assurance of salvation. Herbert, however, like Luther, Calvin, Crispe, Denne, and Eaton, saw assurance as pertaining to the work of Christ, not to any human "desert". Christ was the fulfiller of the covenant of works and the only dispenser and guarantee of the new one. The Christian life goes on as it began: the sinner looks to the work of Christ and not to his own. Christ came to the sinner in the first instance, "when the league was made". "Thou didst … thy self indite" (ll. 29-30) is deliberately ambiguous. Christ

did the writing on the treaty himself *and* wrote himself into it as the guarantee. His death is sufficient for every ensuing sin: "Thou art not onely to perform thy part / But also mine" (ll. 27-28). "Love and truth" (42) have their apex and fulfilment in the Incarnation and substitutionary Passion. The last line means "man" and "Man": in this identification is the only assurance.

Perkins said that "the ... dutie necessarie to salvation, is Repentance". This phrasing implies an unbiblical causation.[175] Salvation is assured only if we have "a conscience sanctified and renewed by the Holy Ghost ... discerned ... by the greefe of the heart for offending God ... a resolute purpose ... in all things to obey God ... by doing the workes of the Spirit, with joy and chearefulnesse. ... [T]he sanctification of the heart, wil suffice to assure us." [176] R.T. Kendall points out that Perkins' system makes the assurance of pardon of sin to be "upon the condition of man's repentance, and ... ultimately requires 'a descending into our owne hearts', the introspection Calvin warns against." [177] Herbert gives a similar warning. 'Assurance' does not say that repentance, and the other "conditions" Perkins mentions, are not necessary. Repentance will follow trust in "my rock and tower". Indeed the poem is itself a repentance -- for having looked for "hope and comfort" from introspection. It is a pattern to the reader for how to deal with the "bitter thought ... that all was not so fair". But the ground of salvation in the poem is "thy truth". This truth is the promises "indited" first in the Word and then on the heart, writing which make the sinner able to call God "my Father" (l. 19), the One upon whose "saying" (l. 20) the league depends. "If all the hope and comfort that I gather / Were from my self" (ll. 21-22a), Herbert's didactic method would fall to the ground. His formal delights depend on the theological delight of being able to say "I will to my Father" and his Word ("thy truth") (ll. 19, 32). His use of lyric and word play are otherwise pointless, his representative exemplars a cruelly mocking fiction, and his implying an underlying stasis a deceit, for if the authority in salvation is ultimately within the *human* breast, it

---

[174] *Love Known*, 107-113.
[175] The Westminster Confession, ch. XV, puts it less ambiguously: "Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace ... not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof ... yet ...none may expect pardon without it." Compare The Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 75: "They whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, ... have the seeds of repentance unto life ... put into their hearts." Edinburgh, Free Church of Scotland, 1966, 65, 166.
[176] *Cases of Conscience*, 62, 77.

is that to which we "cling" (compare 'Perseverance', ll. 14-15) and there is left only the drama -- the fiction -- of human control.

In *The Pauline Renaissance in England*, John Coolidge argues that "the sense in which [the Covenant] is conditional allows [the preacher] still to use the good old anxieties for all they are worth". He quotes George Downame, a contemporary of Herbert:

> what stronger bridle to curb our unruly flesh ... than to be assured that if we live in sin ... we are in the state of condemnation? What sharper spur ... when we are ready to faint ... than to consider that our sanctification ... is the only means whereby we may come to the assurance of our election and salvation? [178]

Lines 21-24 of 'Assurance' show what Herbert thought of such bridles and spurs. Downame places security upon the sinner's authority and "writing". John Cotton, opposed to Downame and accused of antinomianism, agrees with Herbert: a trust that is "only built upon such changes as they find in themselves ... will in the end vanish utterly away".[179] Crispe explained that while God has "everlasting indignation against sin", he is never "offended with the persons of beleevers". "The New Covenant", said Crispe, "is without any conditions whatever on mans part". Assurance, and life's writing, depend on the work of Christ, the "rock" when all earthly solidities fail ('Perseverance', l. 16; 'Assurance', ll. 31-36). If you are doubting, said Crispe in further echoes of both 'Perseverance' and 'Assurance', "doe but catch hold of him ...he shall forsake himselfe and deny his truth, if he ... throw thee off." [180]

The Horatian dictum, and what the Renaissance theorists made of it, has taken on deeper layers in Herbert's theological poetic. Not only has Herbert transformed traditional didactic poetry into a representational speaker-mode, but the "delight" of his teaching is as much in the content as in the structures, wit, and imagery. Further, those formal features depend upon the theological delight: the doubleness of wit, for

---

[177] *English Calvinism*, 74, 75; compare 51 ff.
[178] Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, 125-126.
[179] Coolidge, 134. For Cotton's "antinomianism", see Kendall, ch. 12.
[180] *Christ Alone Exalted*, 28 (Sermon II), 159 (Sermon VI), 255 (Sermon VIII).

example, depends upon the active-passive doubleness of the believer's world.[181] Each poem thus makes a small picture, both moving and still, of the reader's life. It contrasts what is going on at the surface level with the pre-resolved structure of the love and faithfulness of God. The believer both writes and is written. 'Perseverance' and 'Assurance' are therefore more than interesting texts for the New Historicist examination of an outmoded discourse of belief. Without the reality of two modes of existence, these poems (and many others) could not be written. Herbert was perhaps far more aware than today's cultural materialist of the mind's tendencies to self-deceit or of the possible control of that mind by others' will to power. "Bitterly spiteful thought" it is, that my life-writing might be authoritative, that I am, or some other human power-structure is, God after all. If my word is all, I will not produce a poem which simultaneously evokes two worlds, for I will know only one. But lines 29 and 30 of 'Assurance' makes the writing God's as much as mine. "Mine and thine" become inextricable ('Clasping of hands', 157). So does Herbert comment not only upon covenant theology but upon the process of writing poetry and writing life. The name is signed, the poem written, by a hand which is enclosed in a larger hand. As the texts of *The Temple* are within the larger text of the Bible, so is the life of the believer, with its apparently authoritative will, enclosed within the will of God, who did also "indite" himself in the death of Christ as the guarantee that such an enclosing is "love and truth".

'Church-lock and key' (66) seems to subject God to the authority of sin, making him unable and unwilling to hear a repentant cry:

> I know it is my sinne, which locks thine eares,
> And bindes thy hands,
> Out-crying my requests, drowning my tears;
> Or else the chilnesse of my faint demands. (ll. 1-4)

The apparent theology is even more chilly than the apathetic prayers. My sin is louder than my tears of repentance. God is unable to hear anything but the authoritative shouting of my rebellion; unable to do anything unless and until I am sinless. This

[181] For somewhat related ideas, see Earl Miner, "Wit: Definition and Dialectic", *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry,* ed. W. Keast, New York, Oxford University Press, 1971, and William Shullenberger, "*Ars Praedicandi* in Herbert", *Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse*, ed. C. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1987.

was not what Christopher Hodgkins calls "the Old Conformity".[182] Cranmer and the other authors of the Homilies had followed Luther and Calvin in expounding, for example, Ephesians 2:1 as presenting the sinner as a dead body in regard to doing works pleasing to God. [183] Now, some, following Beza, had changed the order of salvation, putting repentance before faith.[184] The effect of this was to render God powerless to save until the "dead body" makes himself clean and fit for God. Then he will be heard. The power this gives to the unregenerate human, and the impotence attributed to God, is almost Arminian, and suggests too the "perfect act of charity elicited by a well disposed sinner" required by the Council of Trent before "justification" can occur.[185] And it gets worse:

> But as cold hands are angry with the fire,
> And mend it still;
> So do I lay the want of my desire,
> Not on my sinnes, or coldnesse, but thy will. (ll. 5-8)

Another "bitterly spiteful thought": if God, not my sin, is sovereign, and all is predestined, it follows that I must be this way because of his will. Either I am greater than God, or God seems the author of evil.

Herbert is not, however, departing from from the Bible or even from Calvin. He is again teaching by a speaker who represents the anxieties of some of his readers, and who struggles through to a happy conclusion. Though it is true that "if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18) – "out-crying my requests" -- it is not as Jeremy Taylor said, that "God can never accept an unholy prayer", meaning the prayer of a believer for whom "every deadly sin destroys the reward of seven years' piety".[186] Psalm 66:19 goes on to say: "But verily thou hast heard me", and it may be that the two verses together are the basis for this poem. "Thou *hast* heard me" – "for his blouds sake": this is the "stasis" or "God-achieved"

---

[182] *Authority, Church and Society,* 11 and *passim.*

[183] The first and second Homilies, "Of the Misery of All Mankinde", and "Of Salvation", the latter known to be Cranmer's, use many passages from the Old and New Testaments to underline the "dead" status of man. Rickey and Stroup edn., 1968.

[184] See R.T. Kendall's comments on Beza (*English Calvinists*, 29 ff); compare Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists".

[185] *New Advent Catholic Encyclopaedia* Online: "The Catholic View of Salvation". Also see *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Columbia, Catholic University of America, 1967, vol. 8, pp. 72, 83, on Trent and the preparatory input by the sinner which allows justification.

[186] Allison, *Moralism*, 80.

level of the poem; the experiential level is, sometimes, that God seems deaf and bound. 'Church-lock and key' agrees with Taylor's "He that would pray with effect must live with care and piety" [187] up to a point, and that point is whether our "care and piety" – which must fail – is the basis of our access to God, or whether that basis is the one God himself provided, the death of Christ. "Care and piety", like the "care and pains" in 'Dialogue' (114), can do nothing about "stains" (ll. 5-8).

'Church-lock and key' moves from the intellectual coldness of the discussion of the scope of God's will (ll. 5-9) to the real problem: how can God listen to me, a sinner? The answer is that the loudest cry, heard through the thickest locked door, is that of the "bloud" of Christ. Herbert points out the existence of "loud" in "bloud": sins, like stones in a river, make the river of Christ's blood plead the more loudly. The more sin, the more effectual the death of Christ – a very "antinomian" thing to say.

> Yet heare, O God, onely for his blouds sake
> Which pleads for me:
> For though sinnes plead too, yet like stones they make
> His blouds sweet current much more loud to be. (ll. 9-12)

In Christ we can be heard, even in our sinfulness: "Being justified by faith, we have access …[For] God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:1,2,8). The stark choices presented in the first two stanzas are false. We do not need to look at the quality of our repentance or at God's eternal decrees, for God will hear on another basis. That which unlocks the "door" is the victorious bloodshedding of Christ, not a warming of the sinner's "faint demands" (l. 4) or a scholastic argument about the origins of sin (ll. 7-8).

The profitable pleasure of Herbert's teaching is in this poem's method – a direct appeal to God – and in its matter, the understanding of access to God through the blood of Christ[188] (and in its startling *felix culpa* conclusion, ll. 11-12). The first two stanzas appear to make God's acceptance wait upon my choosing to repent, or a sufficiency of tears, or hot enough desires. But the poem *is* the (imitated) repentance from the start. The speaker cannot "know" these truths unless God's hands, never

---

[187] McAdoo, *Caroline Moral Theology*, 164.
[188] Hebrews, chs 4, 8, 9, 10.

bound by human sin, have acted already. The form indicates the initiatory action of God. Even the speaker's attributing his own sin to God (a wry look at the complications of true antinomianism and its later child, hyper-Calvinism) makes the current of the shed blood of Christ speak more loudly still. The remarkable poetic accomplishment lies in the fact that this method would not be possible without the matter. No such poem could be made to a righteous God by a sinner except on the basis of the blood of Christ. The delight of Herbert's poetic teaching method depends upon this theology.

Some critics of 'The Water-course' (170) have distorted what Herbert is teaching and diminished its delight. The doctrine of predestination has been thought to be undelightful indeed.[189] Article 17, however, emphasises its "sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort", just as the related doctrine of justification by faith is "very full of comfort" (Article 11). Whatever depends upon the "writing" of God is secure. 'The Water-course' does not teach that fallible human authority might control salvation. In 1626, William Prynne wrote at great length against the "dangerous and pernicious mists of Poperie and Arminianism" which were increasingly confusing people about perseverance.[190] 'The Water-course' establishes that God is the authority in salvation, not the reader's tears.

> Thou who dost dwell and linger here below,
> Since the condition of the world is frail,
> Where of all plants afflictions soonest grow;
> If troubles overtake thee, do not wail:
> For who can look for less, that loveth { Life?
> Strife?
> But rather turn the pipe and waters course
> To serve thy sinnes, and furnish thee with store
> Of sov'raigne tears, springing from true remorse:
> That so in purenesse thou mayst him adore,

[189] For example, John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

[190] Prynne could still refer to God's sovereignty in salvation and continuance as official orthodoxy: "Our Articles, our reverend and learned writers; our religious Professors: and our Divinitie Schools; our reverend Ministers ... have always cried down as blasphemous, Papisticall and heritical [the belief that Christians can finally fall away]; and there is not one approved writer of our English Church, that did ever dare as yet to publish it as the doctrine of our Church." *The Perpetuitie of a Regenerate Mans Estate*, London, 1626, prefatory section, no paging.

Who gives to man, as he sees fit, { Salvation / Damnation. [191]

It is to misread to imagine the reader choosing which of the first ("life" / "strife"), then of the second ("salvation" / "damnation"), pair of plants to water. The water, "tears", is in the first case a result of, not powerful over, "life" and "strife", and in the second case, is not the producer of "salvation" or "damnation": this power belongs to "him … who gives …as he sees fit". [192] The context of the poem is instruction in the case of too much sorrow over the inevitable afflictions of this life.

Bruce Johnson, in trying to construct, if not an Arminian, at least a "theologically inconsistent" Herbert, has made both mistakes: "the turning of the pipe … re-routes the water, and the tears that would have fallen down the spout named 'Damnation' now flow into 'Salvation'." [193] The semi-equality of the final terms, though, means that on this argument the tears would also be "sov'raigne" in "Damnation". This is illogical. Further, it is God who is sovereign in the final line. He is to be adored (l. 9) because he has already given to the reader "salvation"; the other category of reader will not feel "true remorse". The "tears" of line 8 are to help us to "adore", not to enable us to choose eternal life or death. Nor has Johnson paid sufficient attention to the first stanza, which sets the context for the poem. The power of choice is only between tears over one's troubles, and tears over one's sins. The didactic thrust is that this life is "frail" and must be full of troubles. He who "loveth Life" will cry over his sins, not his circumstances. Since "salvation" and "damnation" are God's business, repentance, leading to adoration, is the way to use the "water-course". As both the "antinomians" and the Articles point out, "pureness" can only come from something which is "give[n]", not earned.[194] Johnson correctly points out that "sov'raigne tears" should be used not in despair but in "true remorse", but he confuses cause and effect when he says "[t]hose God sees fit for salvation are those who have repented".

---

[191] For the handwritten brackets, which cannot be correctly reproduced here, see Mario di Cesare, ed., *The Temple, A Diplomatic Edition of the Bodleian MS Tanner 307*, Binghamton, NY, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995.

[192] Compare the readings of Jeanne Clayton Hunter, *Notes and Queries* 34 (3) (Sept. 1987): 310-312 and Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church and Society*, 16-17, especially the latter's comment on Louis Martz's interpretation.

[193] " Theological Inconsistency", 1-18, especially 5-6.

Herbert is not as inconsistent as such readers would like him to be. 'The Reprisall's' "Could not thy griefs sad conquests me allow?" is not, after all, inconsistent with the "sov'raigne tears" of 'The Water-course'. The true "conquest" is that by the initiating, authoritative Christ. Herbert's theological didacticism does not swing, Vicar of Bray-like, accommodatingly from poem to poem. He is perhaps not so "generously ambiguous" as Martz, and some others since, would propose.[195]

The language of repentance can easily sound meritorious: "those crystal tears, wherewith my sin and weakness was bewailed, have procured my endless joy". [196] These are the words of the Richard Hooker who, commenting on the Roman church's teaching that "if they work more and more, grace doth more and more increase, and they are more and more justified", argued that "they make it [a] righteousness which is ours", and spoke of God's "accepting [the sinner] in Jesus Christ as ... more perfectly righteous than if he had fulfilled the whole law" (he quotes II Corinthians 5:21).[197] Herbert too needs to be read carefully. 'The Sacrifice' seems to teach that tears are meritorious, and to function as a poem which produces those tears:

> Therefore my soul melts, and my hearts deare treasure
> Drops bloud (the onely beads) my words to measure:
> O let this cup passe, if it be thy pleasure: . . .
>
> These drops being temper'd with a sinners tears
> A Balsome are for both the Hemispheres:
> Curing all wounds, but mine; all, but my fears:
> Was ever grief [like mine?]
> ('The Sacrifice', ll. 21-28)

Although the "bloud" is primary, the tears of repentance seem to effectuate the sacrifice. But the poem goes on to say:

> Weep not, deare friends, since I for both have wept
> When all my teares were bloud ... (l. 149-50)

In 'Affliction' (II) (62), Herbert not only denies the efficacy of human tears, but finds that they diminish the glory of the suffering of Christ:

---

[194] See particularly Articles 12 and 17.
[195] "The Generous Ambiguity of Herbert's *Temple*." *A Fine Tuning: Studies of the Religious Poetry of Herbert and Milton*, ed. M. Maleski, Binghamton, NY, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989.
[196] "A Learned Sermon of the Nature of Pride", *Works*, Keble edn., Vol. III, Part II, 759.

... thy one death for me
Is more then all my deaths can be ...

If all mens tears were let
Into one common sewer, sea, and brine;
What were they all, compared to thine?
Wherein if they were set,
They would discolour thy most bloody sweat.

Thou art my grief alone ... (ll. 2-11)

'The Sacrifice' is not properly understood unless "Was ever grief like mine?" is read as pre-emptive: "there can never be meritorious grief like mine". "Onely let others say, when I am dead, / Never was grief like mine" (ll. 251-2) suggests that up to, and including, Herbert's times, there would be those who would seek or claim a "grief like mine", that is, meritorious. 'The Thanksgiving' and 'The Reprisall' (and in the Williams MS 'Love', H. 201) demonstrate the desire to find something in oneself – an adequate repentance, for example, as 'Love' describes in its second stanza – to which one can point as equalling Christ's sacrifice. This is the "delight", not Horatian and poetic so much as prideful, referred to in 'Dialogue' (114, see above). The "tempering" in 'The Sacrifice' of the Saviour's blood with the sinner's tears is an indication that the gift of repentance has been given. A Sidneian poetic rhetoric, of tears or of heroism, teaches "do this"; Herbert's poetic theology teaches that "it is done".

'Businesse' (113) also seems to be placing the reader in a position of power over his salvation, and to be urging tears as meritorious. But as with 'The Water-course', the context of the choice is the key:

Canst be idle? canst thou play,
Foolish soul who sinn'd to day?

Rivers run, and springs each one
Know their home, and get them gone:
Hast thou tears, or hast thou none?

If, poore soul, thou hast no tears,
Would thou hadst no faults or fears!
Who hath these, those ill forbears. (ll. 1-8)

---

[197] "A Learned Discourse of Justification", *Works*, Keble edn., Vol. III, Part II, 608-10.

So far, and with the addition of the proverbial-sounding "Lesser pains scape greater ones" (l. 14), tears over one's sins appear to be the instrumental factor in salvation. But after line 14, the context becomes clearer. As the title indicates, the "foolish soul" is one who is so preoccupied with earthly wealth that he has no time to worry about his eternal welfare. His choice is not sovereign over his salvation, but is indicative of his state. After line 14 the attention is no longer on the human tears and sighs but on Christ:

> If he had not liv'd for thee,
> Thou hadst di'd most wretchedly;
> And two deaths had been thy fee.
>
> He so farre thy good did plot,
> That his own self he forgot.
> Did he die, or did he not? (ll. 20-25)

The atmosphere is still that of gain and loss, of "work", "fee", of "gold" and "silver". Christ's death is represented in terms of the true gain, and as in Christ's "kingdom" parables of the pearl or of the lost coin, the person of "businesse" is shown to be infinitely foolish if he attends to earthly matters and neglects the matter of his soul. Lines 29-30 are striking:

> And hath any space of breath
> `Twixt his sinnes and Saviours death?

It is not the medieval topos of "one may die at any minute", although that is implied. It is the Saviour's death, not one's own, in question. If Herbert's poetry were indeed "the soul attempting to make itself worthy of the Sacrifice", as Louis Martz said, [198] then "space of breath" would be essential so that one could sufficiently qualify oneself for coming to Christ. But this couplet displays the immediacy of effectiveness for sin of the death of Christ (there is only an "and" between sinner and Saviour) as well as the cause of that death being "his sinnes".

The tetrameter triplets give an uncomfortable sense of a teacher slightly frustrated with his pupil, particularly as there are nine questions, all "rhetorical" and some phrased dialectically ("Hast thou sighs, or hast thou not?"). Many of these end with

---

[198] *The Poetry of Meditation*, 295.

the negative option, making the reader feel somewhat attacked. The irregularly interspersed couplets re-inforce this sense that this is common knowledge, which to ignore is idiocy. It is a departure from Herbert's more usual method of teaching, which is to present "his" failings and joys; this approach is well suited to an interviewee who, one imagines, would have no time for lyric softnesses or compassionate identification. The hard-headed businessman is being shown, with not much poetic "delight" except for that of the rhetorical trick itself, the fact that he is "idle" over what really counts, and has no "space of breath" for anything than the purely temporal. The poem does not present meritorious tears, but rather, a Christ who "di'd for thee". Faith must be given first before someone can "in heart … kneel"; but he is still a "foolish soul" if he does not. This is the Bible's paradoxical balance, and Herbert's.

The tears of repentance in Herbert's poetry are not, on the one hand, the rhetoric of a praise-seeking poet; nor are they, at the other extreme, doctrinally giving power to the reader whose sufficiently briny sorrows will force God's hand. Herbert stresses the importance of a true repentance, one which has more thought to the 'Agonie' to Christ caused by sins, and to a holy God offended, than to heavenly gain for the reader (though this latter is not absent). But he does not, like Harvey, like Crashaw, and like those strange bedfellows, the "Federal" theologians of Calvinism and the "Caroline Divines" of Arminianism, imply that repentance, or any human work, is the ground of acceptance with God; and in this he is similar to the "antinomians" of the mid-seventeenth century. The "delight" of Herbert's use of the Horatian dictum is thus in a theology of "all of grace", which shows itself in both the method and the matter of each poem.

CONCLUSION

Psal. 29. In his Temple doth every man speak of his honour.

Title page of *The Temple* (1633)

The Temple demonstrates the authority of God in salvation and over language. George Herbert wrote poems as God had written in Christ and then in Herbert, so that the writing of God might have authority over every reader of the poems. The terms of contemporary literary ideas became, in his hands, expressions of the working of God in initiating and maintaining His church.

Writing was a metaphor to Herbert of the work of God on behalf of fallen mankind. Yet neither this metaphor nor the Reformation theology on which it is based presuppose a human instrument not fully acting nor fully responsible. The double status of many of the poems of *The Temple* is genuine: the experience-level of the speaker is as true as the all-encompassing purpose of God. That is, the free and responsible agency of humanity is a factor in the predestinating of all things by God. The logic of human language breaks down at this point of ultimate paradox, which is why Luther, Calvin, and Herbert all taught that our concern is only with the revealed dealings of God with fallen humanity; we are not to "cut and carve / Divinities transcendent sky", however sharp the edge of wit of the reasoning human.

Within these limits given to human reason (evidenced by our inability to reconcile predestination and responsibility) Herbert writes so that his readers will repent, believe, obey, trust, while knowing that all this has been "written" on the Cross. Because of the genuineness of the Bible's expectations for human action, and because the only true freedom for a created being is to recognize the will-binding problem of sin and its God-provided solution, there is real writing, real representative imitation, real inventing, real teaching, all in a new decorum and with a new reason for delight. Silence and the disabling of writing are not the outcome of Herbert's belief in the doctrines of grace. The opposite is true: Herbert's recognition of the authority of God in salvation and in language is that which makes the invention of poetic language the "hony of roses", and provides the "thousands of notions" which express the delight of the "discov'ry" of Christ, the true purpose of language.

The idea of a poetic determined by the doctrines of grace, of writing which is both a metaphor for and motivated by the pre-writing of God, needs much more exploration and elucidation. There may be others besides George Herbert who have had such a poetic. In general, though, those who came after Herbert either lacked his insight into the double nature and purpose of language (and his ability with it) or rejected his theology. More work needs to be done on the connection between theological approaches and views of language. Unfashionable though it might be, it is as valid to say that language is theological as to say that theology is (purely) language.[1] And more work needs to be done to test or contest this hypothesis in regard to Herbert himself.

I have said that Herbert used the terms of literary criticism of his time both as the critics and apologists used them and as metaphorical comments, negative and positive, on the process, initiated and accomplished by God but as seen and felt by the sinner, of becoming a Christian and living as (and teaching as) a Christian. I have attempted to demonstrate that he combined these concepts not only in overtly using the terms but in his whole approach to writing, as far as we can gather it from the poems themselves. I have assumed, therefore, an awareness on Herbert's part of the current critical debates. I have also proceeded on the assumption that while poetry is not intended to be taken as theological pronouncement or discussion, there is a distinct theological basis to the poems, to the process of writing them, and to Herbert's attitude towards poetry, and that we can discover this basis (to some extent) despite the ambiguities of poetry and the slipperiness of language. Indeed that very ambiguity is part of Herbert's understanding of the gift of language. How language functions – or how it should function -- is itself an imitation of the ways of God in creation, new creation, and revelation. This aspect too asks for a great deal more work beyond my sketchy suggestions.

Some statements made long ago by Herbert Grierson (of Herbert and Vaughan) form an antithetical summary of much of what I have proposed about Herbert's English poetry:

---

[1] For a comprehensive survey of recent theory, and a proposal for a view of language and literature on a Christian premise, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text?*, Leicester, IVP Apollos, 1998.

> It is less didactic and Scriptural than most Protestant poetry. Despite their often quaint imagery the dominant note is simplicity and sincerity of feeling. It is their own personal experience they are trying to record. The poet's tone is more moderated, more reserved, and less didactic [than that of Southwell, Crashaw, or Fletcher], because he is speaking to himself and to God rather than to a larger audience. ... The most characteristic Anglican is Herbert, and this not in virtue of his doctrine ... of which there is little obtruded in *The Temple*, but of his feeling. His theme is the humanist aspect of Christianity, Christ's sacrifice, not as a doctrine of substitution and imputed righteousness, but as a history of human goodness and suffering ...[2]

My thesis disagrees with almost every statement. The seemingly experiential lyric format of "The Church" is didactic, does aim at a larger audience, and is representative rather than autobiographical. "Doctrine" informs every poem and all poetic method. That doctrine is indeed one of "substitution and imputed righteousness". Herbert presents no "history of human goodness"; quite the reverse. And Herbert is the supremely Scriptural poet.

Much more recently, Richard Strier has, by contrast, associated poetry and belief:

> The simultaneous respect for and criticism of experience which Eliot called wit, Herbert would have called faith, the Christian temper.[3]

This helpful comment concludes a book which did much to clarify both Herbert's poetic and Protestantism. The remark identifies poetic wit as that attitude to life which sees its doubleness. Criticism of experience can only satisfactorily be made on the basis of a belief in the unchanging nature of a loving God. Such a belief is indeed the cause of Herbert's wit. Faith results from the action of God, as does Herbert's understanding of language: God is the authority for both. I would only add that faith is, of course, more than a witty attitude to life's circumstances. I have tried to demonstrate the unity of Herbert's Reformation faith and his poetry, and that the "simultaneous respect for and criticism of experience", the doubleness of so many

---

[2] *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century: the world, the flesh, and the spirit*, The Cornell Messenger Lectures for 1926-7, London, Chatto and Windus, 1929, 214-5.

[3] *Love Known*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1983, 252.

poems, results from the singleness of Herbert's authority: the love, work and word of God.

The preceding chapters do not attempt an overarching theory of authority in literature. They attempt to demonstrate that Herbert's theory of literary authority depended on, indeed was the same as, his theory of soteriological authority. For him there had certainly been a death of the Author, and from that death came all his life as a writer. Perhaps he also believed in the death of the reader, with himself, his speakers, and his readers having to die to their own hermeneutic theories in order to obey and live by the written Word: "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit".[4] Just as Christ died so that he might live and bring forth the fruit of the church, so does the old man die, in Christ, so that the new man might bring forth – amongst other things – the fruit which is *The Temple*. "Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee; yet not mine neither", says Herbert, using as the first word of his work that which expresses all his understanding of life and of writing. Christ is to Herbert head, heart and breast, the "onely" provider of the music that is *The Temple* and of the clothing of the individual believing "temple": "that to the old man I may rest, / And be in him new drest". Herbert would have wished his readers to consider the human author dead, but not so that they, or the text, or the free play of indeterminate meanings, might rule. "My God, my king" is Herbert's understanding of authority, of authorisation, of authorship, or of agency, and his desire was that his readers live in that love-authority too. "You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat: / So I did sit and eat".

[4] John 12:24.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Herbert:

Herbert, George. *The Works of George Herbert*. Edited and with a commentary by F. E. Hutchinson. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941.

_____. *The English Poems of George Herbert*. Edited by C. A. Patrides. London, Everyman, 1974.

_____ . *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert*. Translated and edited by Mark McCloskey and Paul Murphy. Athens, Ohio University Press, 1965.

_____ . *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*. T. Buck and R. Daniel, printers to the University of Cambridge. 1634. (STC 13186)

_____ . *The Temple: A Diplomatic Edition of Bodleian MS Tanner 307*. With introduction and notes by Mario di Cesare. Binghamton, NY, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995.

_____ . *Remains, 1652. Sundry Pieces of that Sweet Singer of the Temple, Mr George Herbert*. Edited by Barnabas Oley. Facsimile edition. Menston, Scolar Press, 1970.

Other primary sources:

a Kempis, Thomas. *The Imitation of Christ*. Translated by Betty Knott. London, Collins Fontana, 1963.

Alabaster, William. *Sonnets*. Edited by G. M. Story and H. Gardner. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959.

Ancient Literary Criticism. Edited by D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by English Dominican Fathers. Revised by D. J. Sullivan. Edited by William Benton. 2 vols. Chicago, Britannica, 1952.

Ariosto. *Orlando Furioso*. Translated by John Harington, edited by Rudolf Gottfried. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1963.

Bacon, Francis. *The Essays or Counsells, Civill and Morall*. Edited by Michael Kiernan. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985.

_____. *The Advancement of Learning*. Edited with introduction, notes and commentary by Michael Kiernan. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000.

Baxter, Richard. *The Reformed Pastor* [1656]. Edited by William Brown, 1829. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.

Becon, Thomas. *The Demaundes of the Holy Scripture* [1563]. Facsimile edition. Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1979.

Bettenson, Henry. *Documents of the Christian Church*. Second edition. London, Oxford University Press, 1963.

Bible. *The Holy Bible*. The King James Version [1611]. Edited by A. W. Pollard. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1911.

_____. The Geneva Bible. London, 1589.

_____. The Geneva Bible. Facsimile of 1560 edition. Edited and introduced by Lloyd Berry. Madison, WI, 1969.

_____. The New Testament in Greek. The Nestle-Aland text, edited by K. Aland, M. Black, B. Metzger and A. Wikgren. Philadelphia and Wurttemberg, United Bible Societies, 1966.

Bolton, Samuel. *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* [1645]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965.

Breen, Quirinius, editor. "The Correspondence of Pico della Mirandola and Ermolao Barbaro." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1) (1952): 413-26.

Bridge, William. *A Lifting Up for the Downcast* [1648]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961.

Burroughs, Jeremiah. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* [1648]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964.

Calvin, Jean. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by F. L. Battles, edited by J. McNeill. Philadephia, The Westminster Press, 1960.

Camoens, Luiz de (Luis de Camoes). *The Lusiads* [1572]. Translated by Richard Fanshawe, 1655. Edited and introduced by Geoffrey Bullough. London, Centaur, 1963.

Casaubon, Meric. *Generall Learning*. Edited by Richard Sergeantson. Cambridge, Renaissance Texts from Manuscript, 1999.

Church of England. *Certaine Sermones or Homilies Appointed To Be Read In Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth* [1547-1571]. Facsimile of the edition of 1623, with an introduction by Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup. Gainesville, FL, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968.

_____. *Book of Common Prayer. With the Administration of the Sacraments ... according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter ... and the form of making, ordaining and consecrating of bishops, priests and deacons* [1662]. Oxford University Press, n/d.

_____. *The Elizabethan Prayer Book of 1559*. Edited by J. E. Booty. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1976.

_____. A Collection of Injunctions, Canons, Orders, Ordinances, and Constitutions Ecclesiasticall, With Other Publick Records ..., Chiefly in the time of King Edward VI, Queen Elizabeth, and King James. London, 1661.

Cinthio, Giraldi. *On Romances*. Translated and edited by H. L. Snuggs. Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1968.

Classical Literary Criticism: Aristotle, Horace, Longinus. Translated and edited by T. S. Dorsch. Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics, 1965.

Cowley, Abraham. *Davideis*. Edited by Gayle Shadduck. New York, Garland, 1987.

Crispe, Tobias. *Christ Alone Exalted*. London, 1643.

Daniel, Samuel. *The Brotherton MS* (Epistle to Prince Henrie, Epistle to Sir R. C., Epistle to the Lady Harington, The Fourth Epistle, The Prose Address). Edited by John Pitcher. Leeds, University of Leeds, 1981.

Davenant, William. Preface to "Gondibert, An Heroick Poem" [1650] ["To his much honour'd friend Mr Hobs"], *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. II: 1650-1685. Edited by J. E. Spingarn. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

Denne, Henry. *The Doctrine and Conversation of John Baptist*. London, 1642.

_____. *A Conversation Between a Sick Man and a Minister*. London, 1643.

Dent, Arthur. *The Plaine Mans Path-Way To Heaven* [1601]. Facsimile edition. Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1974.

Donne, John. *The Divine Poems*. Edited by Helen Gardner. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952.

_____. *Sermons*. Edited and with an introduction by Evelyn Simpson and George Potter. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1953-6.

Donno, Elizabeth, editor. *Elizabethan Minor Epics*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.

Downame (Downham), John. *The Christian Warfare*. London, 1612.

Dryden, John. *Selected Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Earl Miner. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1969.

Eaton, John. *The Discovery of the most daungerous Dead Faith*. London, 1641.

_____. *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone*. London, 1642.

Geree, Stephen. *The Doctrine of the Antinomians, by evidence of Gods truth, plainly confuted*. London, 1644.

Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Edited by D. Milman, M. Guizot and W. Smith. London, John Murray, 1903.

Gosson, Stephen. *The School of Abuse, Conteining A Plesaunt Invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters, and such like Caterpillers of a Comonwelth* ... London, 1579. Facsimile edition. Amsterdam, Theatris Orbis Terrarum, 1972.

Greville, Fulke.*The Remains: Being Poems of Monarchy and Religion*. Edited by G.A. Wilkes. London, Oxford University Press, 1965.

Guthrie, William. *The Christian's Great Interest* [1658]. Inverness, Free Presbyterian Publications, 1952.

Hall, Joseph. *Virgidemiarum*. Oxford, 1597. Edited by R. Clements. London, 1753.

Herbert, Henry. *Herbert's Golden Harpe or His Heavenly Hymne*. A transcription of Huntington Library MS HM 85. Edited by Chauncey Wood. Fairfield, CT, Special Studies and Monographs, *George Herbert Journal* 20 (1 & 2) (Fall 1996 / Spring 1997).

Hobbes, Thomas. Answer to Davenant's "Preface to 'Gondibert'" [1650]. *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*. Edited by J. E. Spingarn. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

Homer. *Odyssey*. Translated by Walter Shewring. London, World's Classics, 1980.

_____. *Iliad*. Translated by R. Fagles. New York, Penguin, 1990.

Hooker, Richard. *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker*. Edited by John Keble. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1836.

Hooker, Thomas. *Writings in England and Holland* [1626-33]. Edited by G. Williams, N. Pettit, W. Herget, S. Bush. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1975.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems and Prose*. Edited by W. H. Gardner, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1953.

Jewel, John. *An Oration Against Rhetoric*. Translated and edited by Wayne Rebhorn, *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000.

Johnson, Samuel. *The Life of Waller*. In *Selected Writings*. Edited by Patrick Cruttwell. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968 / 86.

Jonson, Ben. *Ben Jonson*. Edited by C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson. Oxford, Clarendon Press, vol. I first edition 1925, repr. corr. 1974, vol. VIII first edition 1947, repr. corr. 1970.

_____. Dedicatory Epistle, "Volpone." *Ben Jonson: Five Plays*. Oxford, World's Classics, 1988.

Laud, William. *A Speech Concerning Innovations in the Church*. London, 1637. Facsimile edition. Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1971.

Luther, Martin. *The Bondage of the Will*. Translated and edited by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston. Edinburgh, James Clarke and Co., 1957.

_____. *Selections from his Writings*. Edited by John Dillenberger. New York, Doubleday, 1962.

Marvell, Andrew. *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*. Edited by H. M. Margoliouth. 3rd edition. Revised by P. Legouis and E. E. Duncan-Jones. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971.

Mazzoni, Giacopo. *On the Defence of the Comedy of Dante*. Translated and edited by R. L. Montgomery. Tallahassee, Florida State University Press, 1983.

Milton, John. *The Reason of Church-Government* and *An Apology for Smectymnuus* in *Selected Prose*. Edited by C. A. Patrides. Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics, 1974.

Nashe, Thomas. *Workes*. Edited by R. McKerrow, 1904-8. Reprint, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1958.

Norden, John. *A Progress of Piety* [1596]. Reprint, The Parker Society, Cambridge, 1847.

Owen, John. *Works*. Edited by W. H. Goold, 1850-3. Reprint, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1975.

Peacham, Henry. *The Garden of Eloquence* [1593]. Facsimile and edition by W. G. Crane. Gainesville, FL, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1954.

Perkins, William. *The Whole Treatise Of The Cases of Conscience* ... [Cambridge 1606]. Facsimile edition. Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1972.

Petrarch, Francis. *Poems*. Selected and translated by A. Mortimer. Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1977.

Pope, Alexander. *Poems*. Edited by John Butt. London, Methuen, 1968.

Prynne, William. *The Perpetuitie of a Regenerate Mans Estate*. London, 1626.

Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria*. Translated by H. E. Butler. London, Loeb Classical Library, 1920.

Rutherford, Samuel. *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist. Opening the Secrets of Familisme and Antinomianisme* ... London, 1648.

_____. *Letters* [1664]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973.

Ronsard, Pierre. *La Franciade*, in Vol. 4, *Les Oeuvres de Pierre de Ronsard (Texte de 1587)*. Edited by I. Silver. Chicago, University of Chicago Press / Paris, Libraire Marcel Didier, 1967.

Ryley, George. *Mr. Herbert's Temple and Church Militant Explained and Improved.* Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 199. Edited by Maureen Boyd and Cedric C. Brown. New York, Garland, 1987.

Shakespeare, William. *The Sonnets*. Edited by D. Bush and A. Harbage. The Pelican Shakespeare, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

Sibbes, Richard. *Works*. Edited by A. B. Grosart, 1862-4. Reprint, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983.

Sidney, Philip. *A Defence of Poetry*. Edited by Jan van Dorsten. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966 / 93.

_____. *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The "Old" Arcadia)*. Edited by K. Duncan-Jones. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985.

_____. *Astrophil and Stella* and *Certain Sonnets*. In *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*. Edited by W. A. Ringler. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962.

Smith, Gregory G., editor. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1904.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. Edited by A. C. Hamilton. London, Longman, 1977.

Spingarn, Joel, editor. *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

Swift, Jonathan. *The Tale of a Tub and Other Works*. Edited by A. Ross and D. Woolley. Oxford, World's Classics, 1986.

Tasso, Torquato. *Ierusalemma Liberata, Done into English Heroicall Verse by Edward Fairfax, Gent., London, 1600, as Godfrey of Bulloigne or The Recovery of Jerusalem*. Critical edition by K. M. Lea and T. M. Gang. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981.

Temple, William. *Analysis of Sir Philip Sidney's "Apology for Poetry"*. Translated and edited by John Webster. Binghamton, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1984.

Vaughan, Henry. *The Complete Poetry of Henry Vaughan*. Edited by French Fogle. New York, Anchor (Doubleday), 1964.

Vickers, Brian, editor. *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999.

Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Translated by C. Day Lewis. Oxford, World's Classics, 1986.

Walton, Izaak. *Lives of Donne and Herbert* [1675]. Edited by S. C. Roberts, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928.

Watson, Thomas. *A Divine Cordiall (All Things for Good)* [1663]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998.

_____. *The Doctrine of Repentance* [1668]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987.

_____. *A Body of Divinity* [1692]. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965.

Weinberg, Bernard. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Westminster Confession of Faith, Catechism, and Directory. Edinburgh, The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1966.

Wordsworth, William. "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*". *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads.* Edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones. London, Methuen, 1963 / 71.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Don Cameron. *Mysterously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970.

Allen, M. C. "George Herbert's Pastoral Wit". *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995.

Allison, C. F. *The Rise of Moralism*. London, SPCK, 1966.

Anselment, Raymond. "Seventeenth-Century Adaptations of 'The Church-porch'." *George Herbert Journal* 5 (1981-2): 63-69.

Asals, Heather. *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by W. Trask. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953.

_____. "Figura". *Scenes From the Drama of European Literature*. New York, Meridian, 1959.

Baker, Courtland. "Certain Religious Elements in the English Doctrine of the Inspired Poet During the Renaissance." *English Literary History* 6 (1939): 300-321.

Baldwin, Anna, and Sarah Hutton, *Platonism and the English Imagination*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Bauer, Matthias. "Iconicity and Divine Likeness: George Herbert's 'Coloss. 3.3'". *Form Miming Meaning: Iconicity in Language and Literature*. Edited by M. Nanny and O. Fischer. Amsterdam, John Benjamin, 1999.

Bedford, R. D. *Dialogues with Convention*. London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.

Bell, Ilona. " 'Setting Foot into Divinity': George Herbert and the English Reformation". *Modern Language Quarterly* 38 (3) (Sept. 1977): 219-44.

_____. "Revision and Revelation in Herbert's 'Affliction' (I)". *John Donne Journal* 3 (1) (1984): 73-96.

_____. "Herbert and Harvey: In the Shadow of the Temple". *"Like Season'd Timber": New Essays on George Herbert*. Edited by E. Miller and R. diYanni, New York, Peter Lang, 1987.

Berger, Harry. "The Renaissance Imagination: Second World and Green World". *The Centennial Review* 9 (1965): 36-78.

Bergvall, Ake. *The "Enabling of Judgment": Sir Philip Sidney and the Education of the Reader*. Uppsala, University of Uppsala Press, 1989.

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Edinburgh. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966.

Bernardo, Aldo. "Petrarch and the Art of Literature". *Petrarch to Pirandello*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1973.

Bieman, Elizabeth. *Plato Baptized: Towards the Interpretation of Spenser's Mimetic Fictions*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Binns, J. W. *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England*. ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts. Leeds, Francis Cairns, 1990.

Blanch, A. M. "The development of ideas about conversion as seen in Protestant theology in England, 1520-1540." Unpublished thesis for the degree of Master of Arts, University of Sydney, 1982.

Blau, Sheridan. "The Poet as Casuist: Herbert's 'Church-porch'." *Genre* 4 (1971): 142-52.

Bloch, Chana. *Spelling the Word: George Herbert and the Bible*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

Bolgar, R. R. *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954.

Boyd, J. D. *The Function of Mimesis and its Decline*. New York, Fordham University Press, 1980.

Boyle, Marjorie. *Petrarch's Genius*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.

Burke, Sean. *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

Burrows, J. F. *Andrew Marvell and the Idea of Wit*. Sydney, The Wentworth Press, 1972.

Bush, Douglas. *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660*. Second edition. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962.

Butler, Christopher, and Alastair Fowler. *Topics in Criticism*. London, Longman, 1971.

Campbell, Lily B. *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1959.

Carnes, Valerie. "The Unity of George Herbert's *The Temple*: A Reconsideration." *English Literary History* 35 (1968): 505-26.

Catholic Encyclopaedia. Online (New Advent): www.newadvent.org

_____. *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*. Washington, Catholic University of America, 1967.

Chantry, Walter. *God's Righteous Kingdom: The Law's Connection with the Gospel*. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980.

Chuilleanain, Eilean ni. "The Debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 39 (3) (1988): 382-411.

Church, F. F., and George, T., editors. "Humanism, Scholasticism, and the Intellectual Origins of the Reformation." *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History*. Leiden, Brill, 1979.

Clarke, Elizabeth. "Herbert's House of Pleasure? Ejaculations Sacred and Profane." *George Herbert Journal* 19 (1995): 55-71.

_____. "Sacred Singer / Profane Poet: Herbert's Split Poetic Persona." *George Herbert: Sacred and Profane*. Edited by H. Wilcox and R. Todd. Amsterdam, Vu University Press, 1995.

_____. *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Clements, Robert. *Critical Theory and Practice of the Pleiade*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1949. Reprint, with new preface by author, New York, Octagon, 1970.

Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakspeare [sic] and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists. Edited by E. Rhys. London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1907.

Colie, Rosalie. *Paradoxia Epidemica*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966.

_____. *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973.

Coolidge, John. *The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970.

Cragg, G. R. *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1966.

_____. *Freedom and Authority*. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1975.

Cummings, Robert. "George Herbert's Language of Canaan." *George Herbert: Sacred and Profane*. Edited by H. Wilcox and R. Todd. Amsterdam, Vu University Press, 1995.

Curran, Stuart, editor. *Le Bossu and Voltaire on the Epic*. Gainesville, FL, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970.

Daalder, Joost. "Herbert's 'Poetic Theory'." *George Herbert Journal* 9 (2) (Spring 1986): 17-34.

Davies, Horton. *Worship and Theology in England*. London, Eerdmans, 1950 / 96.

Davies, Julian. *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism, 1625-41*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999.

De Grazia, Margrete. "The Secularization of Language in the Seventeenth Century." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 (1980): 319-26.

Dever, Mark. *Richard Sibbes*. Macon, GA., Mercer University Press, 2000.

Di Cesare, Mario. "Herbert's 'Prayer' (I) and the Gospel of John." *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne: Essays on George Herbert*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Pittsburgh, PA, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.

Doelman, James. "The Contexts of *Musae Responsoriae*". *George Herbert Journal* 15 (2) (Spring 1992): 42-52.

Doerksen, Daniel. "Recharting the *Via Media* of Spenser and Herbert." *Renaissance and Reformation* 8 (3) (1984): 215-25.

_____. "Things Fundamental or Indifferent: Adiaphorism and Herbert's Church Attitudes." *George Herbert Journal* 11 (1) (Fall 1987): 15-22.

_____. "The Laudian Interpretation of George Herbert." *Literature and History* 3 (2) (1994): 36-54.

_____. *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne, and the English Church before Laud*. Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press, 1997.

_____. "Show and Tell: Herbert, Richard Sibbes, and Communings with God." *Christianity and Literature* 51 (2) (Winter 2002): 175-90.

Dundas, Judith. "Allegory as a Form of Wit." *Studies in the Renaissance* 11 (1964): 223-33.

_____. "All Things Are Bigge with Jest: Wit as a Means of Grace." *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1994.

Dunn, Kevin. *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994.

Eco, Umberto. *The Search for the Perfect Language*. Translated by J. Fentress. London, Fontana, 1997.

El-Gabalwy, Saad. "George Herbert's Affinities with the Homiletical Mode." *Humanities Association Bulletin*, Canada, 21 (3) (1970): 38-48.

Ellrodt, Robert. "George Herbert and the Religious Lyric." *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Hamden, CT, Archon, 1979.

Empson, William. "Last Words." *Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 31, 1993, 11-12.

Ferguson, Margaret. *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defences of Poetry*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983.

Ferrell, Lori. "Kneeling and the Body Politic." *Religion, Literature and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688*. Edited by D. Hamilton and R. Strier. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Fichter, Andrew. *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982.

Fincham, Kenneth. *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-42*. Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993.

Findlayson, R. A. *The Story of Theology*. London, Tyndale, 1963.

Fish, Stanley. *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972.

_____. "Catechising the Reader." *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Hamden, CT, Archon, 1979.

Flesch, William. *Generosity and the Limits of Authority: Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992.

Freer, Coburn. *Music for a King: George Herbert's Style and the Metrical Psalms*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

_____. "George Herbert's Miserie: 'As If None Knew But He'." *QWERTY* 7 (Oct. 1997): 33-38.

George, C. and K. *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1640*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961.

Gilman, Ernest. *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Gless, Darryl. *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Goeglein, Tamara. "Utterances of the Protestant Soul in *The Faerie Queene*: The Allegory of Holiness and the Humanist Discourse of Reason." *Criticism* 36 (1) (Winter 1994): 1-19.

Goldberg, Jonathan. *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts*. New York, Methuen, 1986.

Gordis, Lisa. "The Exposition of Covenant Theology in George Herbert's *The Temple*." *Journal of Religion* 76 (3) (July 1996): 383-401.

Gottlieb, Sidney. "The Social and Political Backgrounds of George Herbert's Poetry." *The Muses Common-weale: Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1988.

Grant, Patrick. *The Transformation of Sin: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne*. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974.

Grassi, Ernesto. *Renaissance Humanism: Studies in Philosophy and Poetics*. Binghamton, NY, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1988.

Graves, Roy. "Herbert's 'The Collar'." *Explicator* 54 (2) (1996): 73-77.
Gray, Hanna. "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence." *Renaissance Essays*. Edited by P. O. Kristeller and P. P. Weiner. Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 1968.
Greene, Thomas. *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982.
Grierson, Herbert. *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1929.
Griffin, Jasper. *Homer on Life and Death*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980.
Guerin, Wilfred. "Herbert's 'The Pulley'." *Explicator* 53 (2) (1995): 70-72.
Guernsey, Julia. *The Pulse of Praise: Form as a Second Self in the Poetry of George Herbert*. Newark, NJ, New Delaware Press, 1999.
Guillory, John. *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1983.
_____. "The Image of Source in *The Faerie Queene*." *Modern Critical Views: Edmund Spenser*. Edited and introduced by Harold Bloom. New York, Chelsea House, 1986.
Guth, Hans. "Allegorical Implications of Artifice in *The Faerie Queene*." *PMLA* 76 (1961): 474-79.
Halewood, William. *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes and Structures in English Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970.
Hall, Basil. "Calvin Against the Calvinists." *John Calvin*. Edited by G. E. Duffield. Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology, Abingdon, Berkshire, The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966.
Hall, Vernon. *Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of its Social Content*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1945.
Hamilton, K. G. *The Two Harmonies: Poetry and Prose in the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963.
Harbison, E. H. *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.
Hardison, O. B. *This Enduring Monument: Praise in Literary Theory and Practice*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1962.
Harman, Barbara. *Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1982.
Harnack, Andrew. "Both Protestant and Catholic: George Herbert and 'To All Angels and Saints'." *George Herbert Journal* 11 (1) (1987): 23-39.
Hathaway, Baxter. *Marvels and Commonplaces*. New York, Random House, 1968.
Helm, Paul. *Calvin and the Calvinists*. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982.
Hill, Christopher. "Dr. Tobias Crisp, 1600-43" and "Antinomianism in Seventeenth-Century England." *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2: Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England. London, Harvester Press, 1986.
Hindmarsh, Bruce. *John Newton and the Evangelical Tradition*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996.
Hinman, Robert. "The Apotheosis of Faust: Poetry and the New Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century." *Metaphysical Poetry*. Edited by M. Bradbury and D. Palmer, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 11, London, Edward Arnold, 1970.

Hodgkins, Christopher. *Authority, Church and Society in George Herbert*. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1993.

_____. " 'Showing Holy': Herbert and the Rhetoric of Sanctity". *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1994.

Howell, Wilbur. *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971.

Huehns, Gertrude. *Antinomians in English History (With Special Reference to the Period 1640-1660)*. London, Cresset Press, 1951.

Hulse, Clark. *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981.

Hunter, Jeanne Clayton. "Herbert's The Water-Course: Notorious and Neglected." *Notes and Queries* 34 (232) (3) (Sept. 1987): 310-12.

_____. "Salvation Under Covenant." *Praise Disjoined: Changing Patterns of Salvation in Seventeeth-Century Literature*. Edited by W. P. Shaw, New York, Peter Lang, 1991.

Hutton, Sarah. "Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse, Aristotelian." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1978): 635-52.

Javitch, Daniel. *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978.

Johnson, Bruce. "Theological Inconsistency and its Uses in George Herbert's Poetry." *George Herbert Journal* 15 (2) (Spring 1992): 1-17.

_____. "The Audience Shift in George Herbert's Poetry." *Studies in English Literature* 35 (Winter 1995): 89-103.

Johnston, George Burke. *Ben Jonson, Poet*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1945.

Jones, R. F. *Ancients and Moderns*. St Louis, Washington University Studies, 1961.

Kelliher, W. Hilton. "The Latin Poetry of George Herbert." *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Connecticut, Archon Press, 1979.

Kendall, R. T. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979.

King, John N. *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982.

_____. *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

Kristeller, P. O. *The Classics and Renaissance Thought*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1955.

_____. *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanistic Strains*. New York, Harper and Bros., 1961.

_____ and P. P. Weiner, editors. *Renaissance Essays*. Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 1968.

_____. *Collected Essays*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

Kuiper, R. B. *God-Centred Evangelism*. London, Baker Book House, 1961.

Lake, Peter. *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

_____. "Calvinism and the English Church, 1570-1635." *Past and Present* 114 (Feb. 1987): 32-76.

_____. *Anglicans and Puritans?* London, Unwin Hyman, 1988.

_____. "The Laudian Style." *The Early Stuart Church 1603-1642*. Edited By K. Fincham. Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993.

Lampe, G. W. H. *Reconciliation in Christ*. London, Longman, 1956.

Leach, Elsie. "John Wesley's Use of George Herbert." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 16 (1953): 183-202.

Levao, Ronald. "Sidney's Feigned Apology." *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*. Berkeley, University of California, 1985.

Lewalski, Barbara. *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979.

Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1942.

_____. *Sixteenth-Century English Literature Excluding Drama*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1954.

_____. *Studies in Words*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960 (Canto edition, 1990).

_____. "Historicism." *Christian Reflections*. Edited by Walter Hooper. London, Geoffrey Bles, 1967.

_____. "God in the Dock" (1948). *Undeceptions*. Edited by Walter Hooper. London, Geoffrey Bles, 1971.

Low, Anthony. *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics and Culture from Sidney to Milton*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Lupton, Lewis. *A History of the Geneva Bible*. In 25 vols. London, Fauconberg Press, 1966-94.

Lynch, Kathleen. "George Herbert's Holy Altar, Name and Thing." *George Herbert Journal* 17 (1) (Fall 1993): 41-60.

McAdoo, H. R. *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*. London, Longman, Green & Co., 1949.

McEachern, Claire. *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

McGrath, Alister. *Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

_____. *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.

_____. *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1993.

MacLaughlin, Martin. *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.

Mahood, M. M. "Something Understood: The Nature of Herbert's Wit." *Metaphysical Poetry*. Edited by M. Bradbury and D. Palmer. London, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 11, Edward Arnold, 1970.

Malcolmsom, Cristina. *Heart-Work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999.

Marcus, Leah. "George Herbert and the Anglican Plain Style." *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne: Essays on George Herbert*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.

Martin, Anthony. "George Herbert and Sacred 'Parodie'." *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996): 443-70.

Martz, Louis. *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1954.

_____. "The Action of the Self: Devotional Poetry in the Seventeenth Century." *Metaphysical Poetry*. Edited by M. Bradbury and D. Palmer. Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 11, Edward Arnold, 1970.

_____. "The Generous Ambiguity of Herbert's *Temple*." *A Fine Tuning: Studies of the Religious Poetry of Herbert and Milton*. Edited by M. Maleski. Binghamton, NY, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989.

Mazzaro, Jerome. *Transformations in the English Renaissance Lyric*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1970.

Mazzeo, Joseph. "St Augustine's Rhetoric of Silence". *Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1964.

Miller, Anthony. *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern Culture*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001.

Miller, Jacqueline. *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1986.

Miller, Robert. *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1977.

Milton, Anthony. "The Church of England, Rome, and the True Church: The Demise of a Jacobean Consensus." *The Early Stuart Church 1603-42*. Edited by K. Fincham. Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993.

Miner, Earl. "Wit: Definition and Dialectic." *English Seventeenth-Century Poetry: Modern Esssays in Criticism*. Edited by W. Keast. New York, Oxford University Press, 1962.

Mintz, Susannah. "Unstrung Conversations: Herbert's Negotiations with God." *Philologic Quarterly* 77 (1) (Winter 1998): 41-70.

Mollenkott, Virginia. "George Herbert's 'Redemption'." *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Hamden, Connecticut, Archon, 1979.

Moller, Jens. "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 46-67.

Morison, William. *Andrew Melville*. Edinburgh, Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1899.

Mosely, Charles. " 'A Sweetnesse Ready Penned': Poetry, Love, and Devotion in *The Temple*." *The Metaphysical Poets*. Edited by L. Cookson and B. Lowrey. London, Longman Critical Essays, n.d.

Mueller, Martin. *The Iliad*. London, George Allen and Unwin, 1984.

Mulder, John. *The Temple of the Mind: Education and Literary Taste in Seventeenth-Century England*. New York, Pegasus, 1969.

Murray, Iain. *The Puritan Hope*. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971.

Murray, John. *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*. Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1960.

Murrin. Michael. *The Veil of Allegory*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Munz, Peter. *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952.

Myers, Lillian. "The Dwelling Place of God: The Significance of Structure in *The Temple*." Unpublished dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Queensland, 1999.

Nestrick, William. " 'Mine and Thine' in *The Temple*." *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne: Essays on George Herbert*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press, 1980.

Nevo, Ruth. *The Dial of Virtue: A Study of Poems on Affairs of State in the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963.

Novarr, David. *The Making of Walton's "Lives"*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1958.

Nuttall, A. D. *Overheard by God*. London, Methuen, 1980.

Ong, Walter. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*. New York, Octagon, 1958.

Ottenhoff, John. "Herbert's Sonnets." *George Herbert Journal* 2 (2) (Spring 1979): 1-14.

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Edited by F. L. Cross. Third edition E. A. Livingstone. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Oxford English Dictionary. Second edition. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Ozment, Steven. "Humanism, Scholasticism, and the Intellectual Origins of the Reformation." *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History*. Edited by F. Church and T. George. Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 19. Edited by H. Oberman. Leiden, Brill, 1979.

Packer, J. I. *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*. London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1965.

_____. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. London, Inter-Varsity Press, 1966.

_____. *Honouring the Written Word of God: The Collected Shorter Works of J. I Packer*, Vol. 3. London, Paternoster Press, 1999. "The Adequacy of Human Language", 23-50; "The Bible and the Authority of Reason", 51-64.

_____. *Honouring the People of God: The Collected Shorter Works of J. I. Packer*, Vol. 4. London, Paternoster Press, 1999. "Luther Against Erasmus", 101-120; "Calvin the Theologian", 141-164; "Justification in Protestant Theology", 219-234; "Thomas Cranmer's Catholic Theology", 235-262; "Arminianisms", 279-308.

Page, Nick. *George Herbert: A Portrait*. Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Monarch Publications, 1993.

Pahlka, William. *St Augustine's Meter and George Herbert's Will*. Kent, OH, Kent State University Press, 1987.

Patrides, C. A. *George Herbert: The Critical Heritage*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

Pendergast, John. "Pierre du Moulin on the Eucharist: Protestant Sign Theory and the Grammar of Embodiment." *English Literary History* 65 (1) (1998): 47-68.

Philmus, Maria Rohr. "*The Faerie Queene* and Renaissance Poetics." *English Studies* 76 (6) (1995): 497- 519.

Plant, Sarah. " 'To Blazon Broad': Edmund Spenser's Celebration of the Rites of the Church of England in the Epideictic Poetry of *The Faerie Queene*." Unpublished dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Sydney, 1999.

Post, Jonathan. "Reforming The Temple: Recent Criticism of George Herbert." *John Donne Journal* 3 (2) (1984): 221-47.

Pritchard, Allan. "Additional Seventeenth-Century Allusions to George Herbert." *George Herbert Journal* 11 (2) (Spring 1988): 37-48.

Quint, David. *Origins and Originality in Renaissance Literature*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983.

Rajan, B. *Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth-Century Reader*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1947.

Ray, Robert. *The Herbert Allusion Book: Allusions to Herbert in the Seventeenth Century*. Texts and Studies, *Studies in Philology* 83 (4) (1986).

_____. "Herbert's Seventeeth-Century Reputation: A Summary and New Considerations." *George Herbert Journal* 9 (2) (1986): 1-16.

Raynaud, Claudine. "Blood, Ink, and Sin: Writing Sacrifice in The Temple." *QWERTY* 7 (Oct. 1997): 39-49.

Rebhorn, Wayne, editor and translator. *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000.

Rhu, Lawrence. *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1993.

Rickey, Mary Ellen. *Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert*. Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966.

Rivers, Isabel. *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*. London, Routledge, 1979.

_____. *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*. Volume 1: Whichcote to Wesley. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Roche, T. P. "Spenser's Muse." *Unfolded Tales*. Edited by G. Logan and G. Teskey. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989.

_____. Review of A. Raspa, *The Emotive Image: Jesuit Poetics in the English Renaissance*. *George Herbert Journal* 9 (1) (Fall 1985): 51-57.

Ross, M. M. *Poetry and Dogma: The Transformation of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*. New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press,1954.

Savoie, John. "The Word Within: Predicating the Presence of God in George Herbert's *The Temple*." *George Herbert Journal* 23 (1-2) (Fall 1999 / Spring 2000), 55-79.

Schoenfeldt, Michael. *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

_____. "The Poetry of Supplication: Towards a Cultural Poetics of the Religious Lyric." *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1994.

Seelig, S. C. *The Shadow of Eternity: Belief and Structure in Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne*. Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1981.

Semler, Liam. "The Protestant Birth Ethic." *English Literary Renaissance* 30 (3) (2000): 432-56.

Shuger, Debora. *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988.

_____. *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.

_____. *The Renaissance Bible*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

_____. " 'Societie Supernaturall': The Imagined Community of Hooker's Lawes." *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community*. Edited by A. S. McGrade. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Tempe, AZ, 1997.

Shullenberger, William. " 'Ars Praedicandi' in Herbert." *Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse*: *The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1987.

_____. "The Word of Reform and the Poetics of the Eucharist." *George Herbert Journal* 13 (1-2) (Fall 1989-Spring 1990): 19-36.

Singleton, Marion White. *God's Courtier: Configuring a Different Grace in George Herbert's Temple*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Silver, Isidore. *Ronsard and the Greek Epic*. St Louis, Washington University Press, 1961.

Slights, Camille Wells. *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981.

Sloane, Thomas. *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

Smith, Nigel. "George Herbert in Defence of Antinomianism." *Notes and Queries* 31 (3) (Sept. 1984): 334-5.

_____. *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989.

Soens, Lewis. *Sir Philip Sidney's Defence of Poetry*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970.

Sowerby, Robin. *The Classical Legacy in Renaissance Poetry*. London, Longman, 1994.

Stachniewski, John. *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

Steadman, John. *The Lamb and the Elephant: Ideal Imitation and the Context of Renaissance Allegory*. San Marino, CA, The Huntington Library, 1974.

Steele, Oliver. "Crucifixion and the Imitation of Christ in Herbert's 'The Temper'." *George Herbert Journal* 5 (1-2) (Fall 1981-Spring 1982): 71-74.

Stein, Arnold. *George Herbert's Lyrics*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968.

_____. "George Herbert: The Art of Plainness." *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1987.

Stewart, Stanley. *George Herbert*. Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1986.

_____. "Investigating Herbert Criticism." *Renascence* 45 (3) (Spring 1993): 131-158.

Stott, John. *The Cross of Christ*. London, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986.

Strier, Richard. "Changing the Object: Herbert and Excess." *George Herbert Journal* 2 (1978): 24-37.

_____. "Herbert and Tears." *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 221-47.

_____. "To All Angels and Saints: Herbert's Puritan Poem." *Modern Philology* 77 (1979): 132-45.

_____. "Ironic Humanism in *The Temple*." *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne: Essays on George Herbert*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.

_____. "History, Criticism, and Herbert: A Polemical Note." *Papers on Language and Literature* 17 (1981): 347-52.

_____. "George Herbert and the World." *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11 (2) (Fall 1981): 211-36.

_____. *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983.

_____. "Historicism New and Old." *The Muses Common-weale: Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1988.

_____. *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995.

Sullivan, Ceri. *Dismembered Rhetoric: English Recusant Writing 1580-1603*. London, Associated University Presses, 1995.

Summers, Claude. "The Bride of the Apocalypse and the Quest for True Religion." *Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse: The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1987.

Summers, Joseph. *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1954.

_____. "Stanley Fish's Reading of Seventeenth-Century Literature." *Modern Language Quarterly* 35 (1974): 403-17.

_____. "George Herbert and Anglican Traditions." *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1&2) (1992-3): 21-39.

_____. "Sir Calidore and the Country Parson." *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1&2) (1992-3): 40-50.

_____. "The Embarrassments of Paradise Lost." *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1&2) (1992-3): 140-55.

_____. "Reading." *George Herbert Journal* 16 (1&2) (1992-3): 246-262.

Swardson, H. R. *Poetry and the Fountain of Light*. London, Allen and Unwin, 1962.

Taylor, Mark. *The Soul in Paraphrase: George Herbert's Poetics*. The Hague, Mouton, 1974.

Teskey, Gordon. "From Allegory to Dialectic." *PMLA* 101 (1986): 9-23.

Tillyard, E. M. W. *The English Epic and its Background*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1954.

Todd, Richard. "The Passion Poems of George Herbert." *From Caxton to Beckett*. Edited by Jacques Alblas and Richard Todd. Amsterdam, Rodopic Press, 1979.

_____. *The Opacity of Signs: Acts of Interpretation in George Herbert's "The Temple"*. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1986.

Tracy, James. "Humanism and the Reformation." *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*. Edited by S. Ozment, St Louis, Centre for Reformation Research, 1982.

Tuve, Rosemond. *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1947.

_____. *A Reading of George Herbert*. London, Faber and Faber, 1952.

_____. "Herbert and Caritas." *Essays of Rosemond Tuve*. Edited by T. P. Roche. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970.

Tyacke, Nicholas. *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990.

_____. "Archbishop Laud." *The Early Stuart Church*. Edited by K. Fincham. London, Macmillan, 1993.

Vanderslice, John. "Herbert's 'The Thanksgiving'." *The Explicator* 56 (3) (1998): 175-7.

Vanhoozer, Kevin. *Is There A Meaning In This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. Leicester, Apollos / Inter-Varsity Press, 1998.

Veith, Gene E. *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*. London, Associated University Presses, 1985.

_____. "The Religious Wars in George Herbert Criticism: Reinterpreting Seventeenth-Century Anglicanism." *George Herbert Journal* 11 (2) (Spring 1988): 19-35.

Vendler, Helen. *The Poetry of George Herbert*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1979.

Vickers, Brian. *Classical Rhetoric and English Poetry*. London, Macmillan, 1970.

_____. "Rhetoric and Poetics." *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*. Edited by C. B. Schmitt and Q. Skinner. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 719-20.

Von Ende, Frederick. "George Herbert's 'The Sonne': In Defence of the English Language." *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*. Edited by J. R. Roberts. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1979.

Wallerstein, Ruth. *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Poetic*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1950.

Warfield, B. B. "The Alien Righteousness." *Faith and Life* [1916], London, Banner of Truth reprint, 1974.

Weatherford, Kathleen. "Silence and the Triumph of Poetry: Closure in Three Poems by George Herbert." *Orbis Litterarium* 48 (1993): 194-211.

Weinberg, Bernard. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Weinberger, G. J. "George Herbert's 'The Church Militant'." *Connecticut Review* 4 (1971): 49-57.

Weiner, Andrew. *Sir Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Protestantism*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1978.

Wengen-Shute, Rosemary. *George Herbert and the Liturgy of the Church of England*. Oestgeest, Drukkerij de Kempanaer, 1981.

White, Peter. "The *Via Media* in the Early Stuart Church." *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*. Edited by Kenneth Fincham. Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993.

Wilcox, Helen. " 'Heavens Lidger Here': Herbert's Temple and Seventeenth-Century Devotion." *Images of Belief in Literature*. Edited by David Jasper. London, Macmillan, 1984.

_____. " 'No More Wit Than a Christian': The Case of Devotional Poetry." *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995.

Willey, Basil. *Tendencies in Renaissance Literary Theory*. Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1922. Reprint, Folcroft, PA, Folcroft Library Editions, 1970.

Williamson, Karina. "Herbert's Reputation in the Eighteenth Century." *Philological Quarterly* 16 (1962) : 769-75.

Wimsatt, W. K., and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957.

Wood, Chauncey. "A Reading of 'Coloss. 3.3'." *George Herbert Journal* 2 (2) (Spring 1979): 15-24.

_____ . "Sin and the Sonnet: Sidney, St Augustine, and Herbert's 'The Sinner'." *George Herbert Journal* 15 (2) (Spring 1992): 19-32.

Young, R. V. "Donne's 'Holy Sonnets' and the Theology of Grace." *Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse: The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. Edited by C. J. Summers and T.-L. Pebworth. Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1987.

_____. "Herbert and Analogy." *George Herbert: Sacred and Profane*. Edited by H. Wilcox and R. Todd. Amsterdam, Vu University Press, 1995.

_____. *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2000.