

"Betwixt This World and That of Grace": George Herbert and the Church in Society

by Christopher Hodgkins

I

Much as George Herbert's early biographers idealized him as a devoted celebrant of Britain's national church, so they portrayed him, at least in his last years, as correspondingly estranged from "the world." Izaak Walton describes how Herbert's embracing of the one required his reluctant but final rejection of the other:

[Then died] *Lodowick Duke of Richmond, and James Marquess of Hamilton* and not long after him, King *James* died also, and with them, all Mr. Herbert's Court-hopes: So that he presently betook himself to a Retreat from *London*, to a Friend in *Kent*, where he lived very privately. . . . In this time of Retirement, he had many Conflicts with himself, Whether he should return to the painted pleasures of a Court-life, or betake himself to a study of Divinity, and enter into Sacred Orders? (to which his dear Mother had often persuaded him.) . . . [For] ambitious Desires, and the outward Glory of this World, are not easily laid aside; but, at last, God inclin'd him to put on a resolution to serve at his Altar.¹

Walton's Herbert moves from one pole of conventional hagiography to the other: from "this world," the societal world of power, money and pleasure, to a haven of spiritual security, a sanctuary for the heavenly "world of grace" on earth. Much as a medieval "religious" would enter a monastery, Herbert the English protestant saint enters

¹ Izaak Walton, *The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Robert Sanderson*, ed. George Saintsbury (London: The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1962), 276-77.

the cloister of the British church, represented, significantly, by the solitary eminence of the "Altar."

Admittedly, the spiritual poles which define Walton's Herbert are not the dramatic extremes of the classic "saint's life"—the debauched young heir transformed suddenly into a ragged mystic. However, the dualistic pattern of the traditional saint's life still gives Walton's narrative its structure and provides his explanation for Herbert's inner conflicts and outward actions. In Walton's unambiguous terms, Herbert enters the church because he knows that he will be closer to God as a priest than as a privy counsellor. That God personally frustrates Herbert's "court-hopes" in order to ensure Herbert's holiness only emphasizes this dualism between heavenly and earthly employment and reconfirms the British church's uniqueness as an inviolably sacred and sanctifying space, distinct from society and unstained by "the world."

Nevertheless, two over-ruling facts ultimately make it impossible to view Herbert's entry into the priesthood as a retreat, either in a positive or in a pejorative sense. First, Herbert did not enter the rural ministry to find contemplative peace, because he knew that its exertions offered little of that. Nor did he flee to the church for safety from a disintegrating social order, for in fact the church shared intimately in that larger order and in its decay, which Herbert acknowledged and mourned. Instead, I will argue that Herbert chose the Bemerton ministry over possibly more lucrative or directly influential places in the church in order to revive publicly the fading Tudor social vision which seems to have helped to revive him personally: the godly calling in the godly commonwealth. Despite his moderate asceticism² and his anti-millennialist pessimism about the permanence of human efforts (a pessimism, as we shall see, unfashionable with all ecclesiastical parties in his day), Herbert felt called by God to do his part in building and rebuilding Christian England according to the Tudor humanist ideal. This ideal, explicit in *The Countrey Parson* and implicit in the didactic strategy of *The Temple*, made the church the chief agent of social cohesion and reconstruction.

Thus the priesthood provided Herbert with the significant "employment" and the "place" in the social and metaphysical order which he had so long sought, but which he could not embrace until

² For a fuller discussion of Herbert's asceticism, see Richard Strier, "George Herbert and the World," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11 (Fall 1981): 211-21.

he had abandoned his hopes for courtly fame and power. His new-found mission sent him into an institution which he saw as both the chief hope and the potential ruin of the nation. There he sought to exemplify the ideal servant of God and king, and then, in *The Countrey Parson*, to prescribe this model of service for all the pastors in the kingdom. Herbert saw this clerical "brotherhood" as laboring for salvation not only of souls, but also of families, farms, industries, laws, government, and the church itself—in short, of the entire social order. "Edification" was both the pastor's Christian and his patriotic duty.

Even a superficial reading of *The Countrey Parson* reveals a vision of the pastoral calling that is both rigorous and public. Herbert's parson is not only the busiest man in the parish, but also the one involved with the most people, and in profoundly personal ways. Whether preaching to the congregation, counselling a conscience-stricken parishioner, mediating a dispute, or exhorting idle yeomen and gentry to find and practice a calling, the rural minister weaves his presence and his person into the fabric of village life.³ To follow this ideal himself, Herbert did indeed forsake the bustling courtly world, "the way that takes the town" ("Affliction" [I], 47, l. 38), but only to immerse himself in a village world of equally intense social activity and, for him, far greater responsibility.

Furthermore, strong evidence in Herbert's poetry suggests that he felt deep ambivalence about the established church of his day as a bastion of godliness. His poetic treatments of the church's current condition seem at times to contradict each other, and in fact lean towards the negative. On the one hand, "The British Church" (109) serenely praises the establishment as uniquely preserved in its ecclesiastical purity. On the other hand, this celebratory lyric is far outnumbered by poems that lament the decline not only of Christendom in general but also of the British church in particular, even to the point of dreading its impending demise. Specifically, "Church-rents and Schisms" (140), "Decay" (99), and "Whitsunday" (59) seem to include England when mourning the present ravages of institutional

³ For examples of this extensive activity, see Herbert's description of pastoral duties throughout *The Countrey Parson*, in George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 223–90. See especially in chapters VII (preaching); V, XV, XXIV and XXXIV (comforting); VIII (mediating); and XXXII (exhorting to a calling). From this point on, all references to the Hutchinson edition will be given parenthetically. *The Countrey Parson* will be designated as CP.

and spiritual decline in "Asia," Europe, and "Africk." Moreover "The World" (84) predicts that inevitably "Sinne and Death" will destroy the church's entire frame before Christ's return and the Last Judgment.

However, the poem most specifically—and urgently—pessimistic about the spiritual future of England is "The Church Militant" (190–98). This long didactic prophecy, written before Herbert took deacon's orders in 1624,⁴ asserts that the "late reformation" (l. 226) in Europe and England is fading rapidly, so that now

Religion stands on tip-toe in our land,
 Readie to passe to the *American* strand.
 When 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;
 When *Sein* shall swallow *Tiber*, and the *Thames*
 By letting in them both, pollutes her streams:
 When *Italie* of us shall have her will,
 And all her calendar of sinnes fulfill; . . .
 Then shall Religion to *America* flee.

[ll. 235–44, 247]

Herbert's national church, no longer a "double-moated" sanctuary, instead seems doomed to be overwhelmed by papal corruption and is already backsliding from the reformed faith towards Rome. In such grim circumstances, the godly poise themselves to flee for the new world.⁵

⁴ See Hutchinson, 543.

⁵ The question of whether Herbert ultimately sympathized with "the Great Migration," led by John Winthrop to Massachusetts Bay in 1630, is fascinating but probably unanswerable. "The Church Militant" itself cannot refer directly to the Migration, since Herbert wrote it as early as 1619 and no later than 1624 (see notes 4 and 7 above and below). However, Herbert completed *The Temple* in 1633, and by then must have known of the puritan expedition. Thus his decision to leave "The Church Militant" intact, with its notorious mention of "the *American* strand," suggests sympathy with the "errand into the wilderness," at least insofar as it seemed to confirm his theory of religion's westward flight. Doubtless the New England colonists saw Herbert as a kindred spirit. They frequently quoted "The Church Militant" as a prophecy, though they usually ignored the lines predicting that the Americans "have their period also and their times / Both for their vertuous actions and their crimes" (ll. 261–62). See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1975), 104–05. Perhaps most important for our present discus-

If Herbert held to these views at the time of taking orders, it is highly unlikely that he embraced the clerical life as a permanent withdrawal into an otherworldly haven of rest and order. Indeed, the pessimism of "The Church Militant" raises quite a different question about his motives: why would he so nearly consign his church to destruction, and then enter its service? Only fifteen years before John Lilburne called God's elect to "come out" of the irredeemably corrupt English Babylon⁶ (and four years *after* a shipload of separatists actually did so on the "American strand" at Plymouth Plantation), Herbert entered the church as a deacon, apparently disturbed by some of the very trends which enflamed the puritans. If Amy Charles is correct that Herbert composed "The Church Militant" before 1619,⁷ then he held these pessimistic ecclesiastical views nearly all his adult life, even while defending episcopacy against the puritans, serving faithfully as a parson, and writing the most-quoted of poems praising his church's *via media*.⁸

However, this seeming contradiction between optimistic nationalism and apocalyptic pessimism becomes far less stark when we look more precisely to the sources of these attitudes. For even at his most adulatory, Herbert never claims that the Church of England is the best of all churches in actual practice but rather seems to believe that it is, in theory, the best of all ecclesiastical ideals. Indeed, his pessimism can be explained in large part as his disappointment in the present-day church for not fulfilling these ideals. As much as Herbert decries the imminent triumph of sin and the Roman "Antichrist" (l. 206) in "The Church Militant," he never blames the coming national apostasy on the British church's distinctive principles of royal supremacy, episcopal government, and church-state union. Indeed, he praises England for at least "[g]iving the Church a crown to keep her state" (l. 90), which, as Malcolm Mackenzie Ross and Richard

sion, the Laudian regime seems to have suspected Herbert's sympathy with New England; in 1633 the vice-chancellor of Cambridge, by then under Laud's control, nearly refused to license *The Temple* because "The Church Militant" contains those suggestive lines. See Hutchinson, 546-47.

⁶ John Lilburne, *Come out of her my people* (London: 1639), title page.

⁷ Amy M. Charles, *A Life of George Herbert* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 82.

⁸ Since "The British Church" appears only in the Bodleian Manuscript and in those after it, Herbert almost certainly wrote it after he wrote "The Church Militant." See Hutchinson, 109, textual note.

Strier have noted, is "good Hooker."⁹ Herbert sees this idealized church structure—inherited from the Tudors, established and protected by a godly monarch and Parliament, overseen by godly bishops, and meticulously maintained and expanded by a brotherhood of godly parsons—as the plan most likely to advance the reformation and save the commonwealth. He can mourn its departing (or departed) glory only because he retains a vision of that glory in his mind's eye. And the ecclesiastical and social order which he mourns he can also hope to restore.

II

Herbert's model for such social edification and reconstruction is essentially that of the Tudor commonwealth. This model, though established and promulgated through *The Book of Homilies* under Edward VI and Elizabeth, was first articulated in England by the increasingly protestant humanists of the Henrician reformation, Thomas Starkey and Thomas Cranmer. Starkey's *Dialogue Between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset*, which was not published until modern times, enjoyed major influence in manuscript form on later Henrician social theory, and most significantly on Cranmer, who under Edward VI sought to put Starkey's program into action. In Starkey's *Dialogue*, Lupset defines the guiding principle of the well-ordered Christian nation, where

all labours, business and travail, of wise men handled, in matters of the common weal, are referred to this end and purpose: that the whole body of the commonality may live in quietness and tranquility, every part doing his office and duty, and so (as much as the nature of men will suffer) all to attain to their natural perfection.¹⁰

Furthermore, the anonymous author of *The Homily of Obedience* explains that the order of this perfect social body is innately hierarchical, since

every degree of people in their vocation, calling and office, hath appointed unto them their duty: . . . some are in high degree, some in low, some Kings

⁹ See Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, *Poetry and Dogma: The Transformation of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 146; and Strier, "George Herbert and the World," 233.

¹⁰ Thomas Starkey, *A Dialogue Between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset*, ed. Kathleen M. Burton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), 24–25.

and Princes, some inferiours and subiects, Priests, and lay men, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor, and every one haue need of other.¹¹

Like Richard Hooker after them, these writers appropriate the New Testament ecclesiastical metaphor of the church as "the body" and apply it to the nation as a whole, making the well-ordered church identical with the well-ordered state. Hooker claims that

A church . . . is a Society; that is, a number of men belonging unto some Christian fellowship, the place and limits of which are certain, . . . as the Church of Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, England.¹²

By this he means that the church is the *only* society, or rather that political society at large constitutes the church.¹³ We see this same fusion clearly in *The Countrey Parson* itself, where Herbert writes that

[The Parson's] children he first makes Christians, and then Commonwealths-men; the one he owes to his heavenly Countrey, the other to his earthly, *having no title to either, except he do good to both* (239, emphasis mine).

Ecclesiastical membership becomes a condition of citizenship, and vice versa, while Christian charity is expressed, at least ideally, by the quiet and faithful discharge of one's calling within the earthly commonwealth.

Thus, as John N. Wall, Jr. writes, protestant humanist social theory both departs from and preserves the medieval synthesis:

This [humanist] vision . . . of an ordered, hierarchical society, in imitation of God's self-revelation in the order of nature . . . was radical, in that it substituted worldly activity aimed at changing society for the passive devotion typical of medieval images of the Christian life. At the same time, it was conservative, in that it sought no major change in the structure of society, only the perfection of a structure implicit in the existing state of affairs.¹⁴

If we grasp this earthly orientation of the Tudor church, we understand to a great degree how Herbert's ecclesiastical ideals differed

¹¹ Church of England, *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Elizabeth I (1547-1571). A Facsimile Reproduction of the Edition of 1623* (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), 1:69.

¹² Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 3.1.14.

¹³ See George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Holt and Co., 1937), 441.

¹⁴ John N. Wall, Jr., "Godly and Fruitfull Lessons," in John E. Booty, ed., *The Godly Kingdom of Tudor England* (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981), 67.

from those of the Laudian party with whom Walton aligns him. For while Walton richly details "the excellencies of the active part" of Herbert's life,¹⁵ this activity consists almost entirely of Herbert's observing the many feasts, rites, and outward ceremonies of the church and explaining them to his congregation.¹⁶ In other words, Walton's *Life* nearly equates holy activity with liturgical activity.

In contrast Herbert's pastoral manual, while clearly advocating liturgical worship, mainly stresses the parson's involvement in the mundane affairs of his people's existence. Like the Tudor humanists, Herbert wishes to transform his parish, and indeed all of England, by permeating and perfecting established social structures with reformed faith and practice. Walton's Herbert sanctifies the community mainly by bringing them within the physical and liturgical structures of the church; Herbert's parson edifies the community at least as much outside these structures as within them.

Herbert's most detailed statement of this protestant humanist social vision appears in Chapter XXXII of *The Countrey Parson*, "The Parson's Surveys" (274–78). These plans are just as much intended to build up the commonwealth as the church, since the best interests of church and state are, for Herbert, identical. The parson ensures that everyone in his cure, whether yeoman, gentleman or nobleman, finds "ingenuous and fit employment" that benefits first family, then neighbors, then "Village or Parish" (note the practical identity between secular and sacred jurisdictions), and ultimately the nation at large.

Herbert is particularly concerned that gentlemen and heirs of great houses fulfil their God-given role of conscientious, benevolent leadership both locally and nationally. These men his parson exhorts to serve not only as Justices of the Peace—"no Common-wealth . . . hath a braver Institution," he writes—but also as members of Parliament. "There is no School to a Parliament," he exclaims, and in his enthusiasm prescribes behavior far beyond the power of any country parson to supervise: the rural M.P. "must not only be a morning man, but at committees also; for there the particulars are exactly discussed, which are brought from thence to the House but in general." About the court Herbert is not so enthusiastic; his country gentlemen may go "sometimes," but soberly, as to "the eminent place both of good and ill." These words do not seem those of an ascetic

¹⁵ Walton, 307.

¹⁶ Walton, 295–307.

hostile to earthly activity. Neither, politically, do they seem those of a Caroline absolutist exasperated with Parliament.

Clearly, the parson still accepts the social hierarchy and the stratification of "callings" which it implies. However, he abides no slackers in the great social chain, reserving his sternest exhortations for the idle "gallants" and "younger Brothers" of the upper classes. To these dangerously "loose" members of the body politic, who "unlawfully" spend their days "dressing, Complementing, visiting, and sporting," the parson commends instead the study of civil law, mathematics ("the only wonder-working knowledge"), fortification, and navigation, all of which benefit the nation. The more adventurous, he says, should channel their energies into the "noble" and "religious employment" of colonization across the seas, or of travelling "into *Germany*, and *France*, and observing the Artifices, and Manufactures there" in order to "transplant them hither . . . to our Countrey's advantage."

To find such a specific social blue-print in a pastoral manual is surprising only if we had assumed that a parson's calling precludes concern for government, industry, class relations, and national security. But to Herbert's parson, such exhortations to public utility and mutual responsibility are required by his prophetic role. He is

a lover of and exciter to justice in all things, even as *John the Baptist* squared out to every one . . . what to do. . . . [A]s the Husbandman labours for [the gentleman], so must [the gentleman] fight for, and defend [the husbandman], when occasion calls. This is the duty of each to other, which they ought to fulfill.

"Each to other," the watchwords of the Tudor commonwealth, bind the unequal classes with equally strong bonds of obligation. The parson, as God's "Vicegerent" (225), works to keep "the whole body of the commonality" in proper health, each member productive in his place.

However, as important as this divinely-ordained social cohesion is to Herbert, it serves the yet greater end of advancing the church. True to his Elizabethan roots, Herbert believes that the progress of the protestant faith is bound up with England's national destiny. In "The Church Militant" Herbert explains more specifically how the "new Plantations" can be considered a "religious employment." Their colonization, and the resulting technical advancement of the colo-

nized peoples, will pave the way west for the gospel. He writes that throughout church history, imperial

Prowesse and Arts did tame
And tune mens hearts against the Gospel came:
Which using, and not fearing skill in th'one,
Or strength in th'other, did erect her throne. . . .
Strength levels grounds, Art makes a garden there;
Then showres Religion, and makes all to bear.
[75-79, 87-88]

Although "The Church Militant" speaks sharply against imperialist greed,¹⁷ Herbert does not hesitate to claim that in God's providence even the colonists' evil motives and actions create inroads for God's kingdom. Indeed, Herbert even credits the conquering forces of Spain with levelling such a path in South America (l. 265).

III

Despite the decidedly political edge of such statements, few of Herbert's readers have found a social vision expressed in the main body of his poetry, "The Church." Indeed, until recently the opinion of Herbert's turn-of-the-century editor George Herbert Palmer has prevailed, that

[i]n religion Herbert, with most of the devout men of his time . . . is . . . an individualist. The relations between God and his soul are what interest him. . . . Any notion of dedicating himself to [others'] welfare is foreign to him. Perhaps his poem THE WINDOWS comes nearest to expressing something like human responsibility. But such moods are rare. Usually his responsibility is to God alone; and this, passionately uttered in AARON and THE PRIESTHOOD, is the farthest point to which his self-centered piety carried his verse. The mystic forgets himself in the thought of God; the philanthropist, in the thought of human needs. To Herbert—at least to the

¹⁷ Lines 251-54 state that

gold and grace did never yet agree:
Religion always sides with povertie.
We think we rob them, but we think amiss:
We are more poore, and they more rich by this.

poet Herbert—the personal relationship of the soul to God is the one matter of consequence.¹⁸

As one-sided as such a conclusion may seem in the light of *The Country Parson*, we should not dismiss it lightly, for many careful readers of Herbert's work have shared it¹⁹—and with some cause. Few of the poems in "The Church" deal with church or society as a body of people. Instead, nearly all portray the individual, as Palmer says, in personal conversation with God.

Yet integration of "The Church's" lyrics into the social vision of *The Country Parson*, while not initially easy, is indeed possible if we bear in mind the generic distinctiveness of the two works. The pastoral manual is straightforward didactic prose and therefore teaches by explicit precept how the pastor should edify church and society. On the other hand, the poems in "The Church" belong to the genre of personal devotional lyric, a "private mode"²⁰ virtually defined as individual, intimate expression to God. However, it is a mistake to hear the individual voice of the lyric speaker as excluding other voices. Indeed, as Barbara Kiefer Lewalski has written, this voice is probably inclusive. She argues that "the great biblical model" for the religious lyric is the Psalmist,²¹ whose voice frequently includes all the grieving or rejoicing voices of God's people.

Chana Bloch has demonstrated that throughout "The Church" Herbert depends heavily on scripture, and especially on the Psalms, for a language that "prevails against the pretensions of human speech." Even more importantly, Herbert also turns to the Bible for specific stratagems and scenarios that interpret his experience. Bloch writes, for example, that

[t]he speaker of "The Quip" [110–111] makes no attempt to match the scoffers' repartee with the "quick returns of courtesie and wit" ("The Pearl. Matth. 13.45" [88–89, l. 12]), as we might expect him to do. He declines to speak in his own defense, and even in declining he does not choose his own words. His "quip," repeated four times over—"But thou shalt answer, Lord, for me"—is a quotation from one of the penitential psalms: "For in thee, O

¹⁸ George Herbert Palmer, ed., *The Life and Works of George Herbert*, 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1907), 2:111.

¹⁹ Including Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, 147–48.

²⁰ Earl Miner, *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3–47.

²¹ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4.

Lord, have I put my trust: thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God" (Ps. 38:15). . . . [T]he psalm verse . . . stands emphatically apart from the taunting voices of the world, refusing to engage them on their own terms but appealing instead to a different order of reality.²²

Bloch notes that other poems besides "The Quip" depend on the Psalms in similar ways, for example, "Jordan" (I) ("My God, My King"), "The Posie" ("Lesse then the least / Of all Gods mercies"), and "The Forerunners" ("Thou art still my God").²³ Even though many of the lyrics do not include such explicit psalmic references as refrains, the great emotional range of "The Church" enables the reader to treat the lyrics much as Calvin does the Psalms—as "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul: for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not represented here as in a mirror."²⁴ While Herbert's poems, like the Psalms, are often marked by the author's particular circumstances, they nevertheless invite us to read ourselves into the text.

IV

From this generic perspective we can better understand the public purpose of "The Church." As Camille Slight's has observed, these lyrics are unified by a didactic strategy.²⁵ This strategy generally works, not by stating explicit precepts, but by dramatizing crucial scenes along the protestant spiritual pilgrimage, scenes in which the reader can find his experience mirrored and thereby gain comfort or learn vicarious lessons. The individual speaker of the poems, while not *the* protestant everyman, nevertheless is typical of the "church" as a whole—that is, the invisible church, the entire body of the elect struggling to trust God in the face of a hostile world. Furthermore, these lyrics often portray virtues and vices that contribute, respectively, to societal edification or disintegration. It is significant that Herbert's social consciousness appears most prominently throughout

²² Chana Bloch, "Spelling the Word: Herbert's Reading of the Bible," in *Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne*: Essays on George Herbert, eds. Claude J. Summers, Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 18.

²³ Bloch, 17.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), xxxvi–xxxvii.

²⁵ Camille Wells Slight's, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3, 186, 194–95.

In Herbert's poignantly repeated wish we see his imagined relief from the psychic pain of his idleness. Trees, with their natural place in the order of things, produce their useful commodities without the agonized self-consciousness of human toil, especially the toil of the academic over his "lingring book" ("Affliction" (I), l. 39).

Furthermore, the context of these lines reveals Herbert in the process of rejecting the courtly values which he had followed to this failure. These "court-hopes," though disappointed, still smoulder in his bitterly competitive, commercial language. "Employment" (II) claims cynically that

Life is a businesse, not good cheer;
 Ever in warres.
 The sunne still shineth there or here,
 Whereas the starres
 Watch an advantage to appeare.

[16–20]

Herbert likens the heavens to the Jacobean court, where his own "quick soul" had long watched for "an advantage to appeare" and had sought to "trade in courtesies and wit" (ll. 3–5). But to the budding courtier's dismay, "The Man is gone, / Before we do our wares unfold" (ll. 27–28). Unawares, the vigilant courtly pitchman loses his goods—his full, mature potency—and must leave the corridors of power, his stratagems thwarted. Herbert here expresses a despair made almost complete by the lines that follow: "So we freeze on, / Untill the grave increase our cold" (ll. 29–30). Because he does not cry out to God at the poem's end—an uncharacteristic and therefore striking departure for him—"Employment" (II) expresses without relief the desolation brought by pursuing a courtly place through courtly competition and self-display.

"Affliction" (I) (46–48), while expressing the same frustrated desire for courtly glory and using the same language of ambitious striving for a "place," pulls back from the final despair of "Employment" (II) by addressing its complaint to God. Throughout the lyric Herbert half-confronts and half-avoids his past misreadings of God's character.²⁶ He acknowledges that in his youth he was foolish to think of

²⁶ Helen Vendler has noted instructively that "Affliction" (I) "depends on a series of inconsistent metaphors for a single phenomenon, God's treatment of his creature." In the poem Herbert portrays God variously as a seducer, a sovereign, an enchanter, a

the Lord as a mere "King of pleasures" presiding over a courtly "world of mirth" (ll. 13, 12). However, until the final lines he speaks not as a penitent, but as a well-meaning dupe, and to God as his seducer. From this temporarily warped perspective he sees all of God's gifts—the early joys, the "Academick praise" (l. 45)—as baits to false optimism. God has "enticed" (l. 1) Herbert's heart, raising his expectations of smooth spiritual and political advancement, so that "argu'd into hopes, my thoughts reserved / No place for grief or fear" (ll. 15–16). Then God cruelly "didst betray" (l. 39) him to disease and banishment in academe. The passionate, heartbroken reversal of the concluding couplet breaks this spell of bitterness while heightening the pathos of exclusion: "Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot, / Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" (ll. 65–66).

This paradoxical ending fuses the language of unrequited love with that of disappointed courtiership. Yet it transcends both of these vocabularies by acknowledging how thoroughly inadequate, even dangerous, his analogies have been. Throughout the poem he has struggled to understand the nature of his early "love" for God but has found that this love was shot through with the "fiercenesse" of self-interest. He concludes by pleading that God would enable him to "love" Him in a manner worthy of the name—with a love that depends, not on uncertain hopes and human circumstances, but on the sure ground of God's recreative, sovereign grace. The fact that this plea is in the negative—that Herbert is willing to be excluded utterly from human and divine benefits rather than be a hypocrite—underlines his longing for a pure and simple love, free from mercenary motives.²⁷

The fear of being "clean forgot" appears also in "Employment" (I) (57). This fear is in one sense even more pathetic here than in "Employment" (II) and "Affliction" (I), because Herbert feels excluded not only from the court but from the whole created order:

All things are busie; onely I
Neither bring hony with the bees,

wage-paying master; then as a sender of sickness and famine, a cruel physician, and even a murderer. See Helen Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 42.

²⁷ My view parallels that of Barbara Leah Harman, who writes that the speaker of "Affliction" (I) "would rather be forgotten than be false" with God. "George Herbert's 'Affliction' (I): The Limits of Representation," in *ELH*, 44 (1977): 267–85, especially 279.

Nor flowres to make that, nor the husbandrie
To water these.

I am no link of thy great chain,
But all my companie is a weed.

[17-22]

Yet this lament takes Herbert one step further in his redemptive rejection of "court-hopes." He is pleading no longer for secular glory as evidence of God's blessing, but for nothing more (or less) than lowly preferment in the kingdom of heaven:

Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain
To my poore reed.

[23-24]

The conception of "place" expressed here differs fundamentally from that in the poems discussed above. Those value "place" on a scale of rank and power, the highest and strongest being best. Conversely, "Employment" (I) values "place" as mere inclusion in an overall harmony. The only joy sought is that which comes from playing one's part—any part—in an order that praises and pleases God. Unlike the pleasure of courtly superiority and conquest, this joy can be shared with fellow-subjects, and with the divine Sovereign himself. Indeed it must be shared; for by implication the "one strain" of praise will please the heavenly King—and the true worshipper—only if it blends submissively with the rest of the heavenly "consort." To seek to raise one's strain above the others would be to spoil the harmony and therefore the unique joy of inclusion.

Herbert expresses this hard-earned and easily forgotten²⁸ wisdom in "Submission" (p. 95):

How know I, if thou [God] shouldst me raise,
That I should then raise thee?

²⁸ "The Church" deliberately portrays the Christian's relapses into worldly ambition and ingratitude. The humble "Employment" (I) is soon followed by the bleak and bitter "Employment" (II), then eventually by the repentant "Submission," which in turn gives way to a number of angry complaints, most notably "The Collar" (153-54). "The Flower" (165-67) offers a maturer, more resolved understanding of the soul's mutability and utter dependence on God's grace—"We say amiss, / This or that is: / Thy word is all, if we could spell" (ll. 19-21)—yet even this celebration of God's love ends with an admonition to vigilance against "self-raising": "Who would be more, / Swelling through store, / Forfeit their Paradise by their pride" (ll. 47-49).

Perhaps great places and thy praise
Do not so well agree.

[13-16]

In 1619 Herbert had written in a flush of pride to Danvers that the "dignity" of the Cambridge Orator's place—"the finest in the University"—had "no such earthiness in it, but it may well be joined with Heaven" (369-70). In "Submission" he has come to abandon his hopes for the even finer place at court to which he thought the Oratorship would lead. He has also come to admit that such a place might not have "joined" him with heaven, but rather cut him off from it.

However, it is also significant that "Submission" does not categorically deny the compatibility of "great place" and heavenly virtue. The court is, after all, "the eminent place *both* of good and ill" (277, emphasis mine). It is indeed difficult to imagine how a Stuart official might have obtained a high position without practicing the aggressive, flattering, deceitful "courtship" which Herbert found so spiritually deadly, but Herbert seems to have believed it possible for some virtuous "Mark-men" to do so. Such men must be constant against the "force" and "fawning" of court life, its "ruffling windes," "glittering looks," "close tentations," and ever-changing fashions ("Constancie," 72, ll. 4, 7-8, 22). The tentative "perhaps" in line 15 of "Submission" suggests that "places" are not corrupt as such, but that men seek and use them corruptly. Herbert knows his particular weakness for the "close tentations" offered by power, and has come to see his own exclusion from the royal graces as a deliverance from evil.

v

These poems of "place" and "employment" all teach, whether by positive or negative example, that a humble sense of office and duty in a larger social and metaphysical order is essential for individual happiness. The qualities of constancy, diligence, submission, and harmonious participation celebrated by these and many of Herbert's other lyrics are fundamentally social virtues, applying between persons. Throughout "The Church" the Person with whom Herbert "has society" is primarily God himself; however, the inwardness of the lyrics need not and should not be read as indifference to human

However, while Herbert repeats and further articulates the Elizabethan mandate to build the godly commonwealth, he did not share the predominant millennialist optimism of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English protestants,³¹ who generally believed in the inevitable, progressive triumph and permanence of their efforts. William Lamont has demonstrated how John Foxe's enormously influential *Acts and Monuments* conditioned generations of Englishmen—not only separatist puritans but also the cultural mainstream, including bishops, nobility, and monarchs themselves—to believe their nation destined to crush the Roman "Antichrist" and bring in the reign of Jesus Christ.³² Conversely, Herbert predicts that Rome will prevail and force the flight of true religion to America.

A juxtaposition of Herbert's sturdy, if not quite full-blooded, humanism³³ with his historical pessimism reveals the complexity of his mature attitude towards life in this world. He was at once joyful and stoic; immersed in the private griefs and trials of a whole parish, yet intimate with no one but, perhaps, his wife and Ferrar; convinced of imminent collapse, but committed to enormous constructive effort; full of foreboding, and of hope. Few contemporaries of Herbert described this complex mentality as well as did New England's John Cotton:

There is another combination of virtues strangely mixed in every lively, holy Christian: and that is, diligence in worldly businesses, and yet deadness to the world. Such a mystery as none can read but they that know it.³⁴

While Cotton did not share Herbert's institutional pessimism, they did share this seasoned indifference to the earthly outcome of their labors. To the extent that Herbert was an ascetic, it was in this sense.³⁵ Having loved the world and its glories with a passionate, even fierce, ambition, and having had his advances rejected, he fell at times to loathing both the world and himself. However, in his brief maturity he seems to have learned to love both self and the world again, though differently, with "weaned affections"—to use another

³¹ See Ernest Tuveson, *Millenium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), 75–85.

³² William Lamont, *Godly Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 13–27; see especially 23–24.

³³ See Ross, Chapter 6, "George Herbert and the Humanist Tradition," 135–57.

³⁴ John Cotton, as quoted in Perry Miller, ed., *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 171.

³⁵ See Strier, "George Herbert and the World," 211–21.

New England phrase—no longer for their own sakes, but for the sake of their Creator.³⁶

Herbert would not set his heart on the institutional church that he loved, any more than he would on any other earthly institution or thing. He believed that in a world bound to decay no success is lasting, even the success of those who had settled and established the ecclesiastical order under Elizabeth. Reward and full success, he believed, will be realized only in heaven, where the diligent Christian's seemingly futile labors will be remembered by God and transformed into permanent, glorious gain. Beyond the confusion and collapse of the present and the disasters of the future lies complete divine restoration on "the last and lov'd, though dreadfull day" ("Home," 108, l. 58).

Yet in the present, where most of Herbert's spiritual and social concern centered, his renewed sense of a calling to rebuild the church provided positive relief from the worst of his torments, as described in "Affliction" (IV) (89–90):

Broken in pieces all asunder,
 Lord, hunt me not,
 A thing forgot,
 Once a poore creature, now a wonder,
 A wonder tortur'd in the space
 Betwixt this world and that of grace.
 [1–6]

Herbert's ecclesiastical ideal gave him meaningful "employment" in which he would no longer be "forgot"; it also gave him a model for re-integrating his own fragmented inner "body politic," which seems to have mirrored disintegrating English society itself.³⁷ Because the brokenness of the old social order had so imprinted itself on him, Herbert could not seek restoration for himself without seeking to restore that public order as well. He did not expect any human constructions or reconstructions to last forever. He only desired a space to comfort and encourage those who, like him, were diligent in this world for the sake of another.

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³⁶ On "weaned affections" see Miller, 172.

³⁷ See Ross, 137, 141.