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**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

**The Temple of Communion: George Herbert and Dialogism**

by

**Shiao Choong Chong.**



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta

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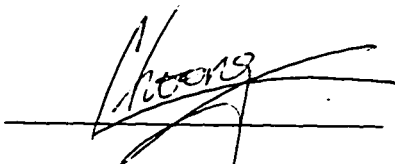
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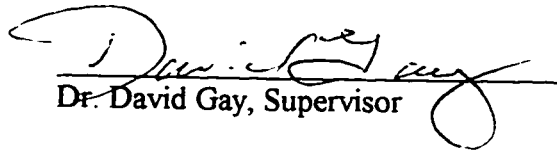
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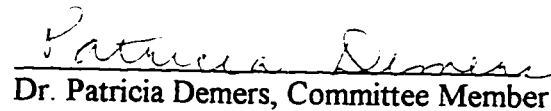
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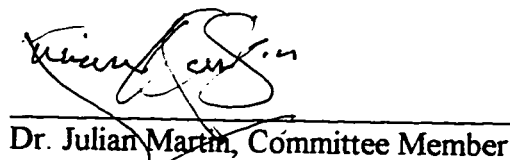
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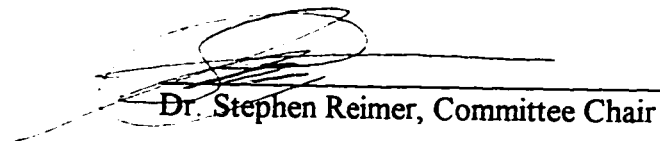
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JUNE 20th. 1997

*To my parents*

*Chong Hoi Thong and Lim Lit Tho*

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis argues that a “dialogical” principle, derived from the Christian spiritual concept of “communion with God,” informs all of George Herbert’s poetry. Best explored by employing Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, this dialogical principle manifests itself in the poetry’s conceptions of selfhood, in its emphasis on intertextual dialogues, and in its vision for a religious poetics. Self-identity, for Herbert, is not achieved in any autonomous “self-fashioning” projects but, paradoxically, by rejecting such projects and embracing a God-given identity found in dialogue with God -- the biblical paradox of losing one’s life in order to find it. Similarly, Herbert’s poetry depends on its dialogues with prior texts, the Bible and liturgy, to establish meaning and significance. Analogous to his conception of the self’s collaboration with God in identity formation, Herbert sees religious poetry as a means to commune with God, as a gesture towards “co-authorship” with him.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNION AND DIALOGISM, HERBERT AND BAKHTIN.....	1
CHAPTER 1.	
FINDING THE SELF: IN DIALOGUE WITH GOD IN HERBERT'S <i>THE TEMPLE</i> .....	20
CHAPTER 2.	
"IN ANOTHER MAKE ME UNDERSTOOD": BIBLE, LITURGY AND THE SELF IN <i>THE TEMPLE</i> .....	47
CHAPTER 3.	
A POETICS OF COMMUNION: GEORGE HERBERT'S POETIC VISION .....	82
CONCLUSION.....	120
WORKS CITED.....	126

## Introduction: Communion and Dialogism, Herbert and Bakhtin.

Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine . . . -- George Herbert

For there is a communion of men with God . . . -- John Calvin.

The very being of [humanity] is a *profound communication*. *To be* means to *communicate*. . . . Life is dialogical by its very nature. -- Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>1</sup>

“We do stand,” observes Earl Miner, “at formidable distance from the writers of the seventeenth-century, and we do require various means to interpret its literature” (xiv). Simply put, this thesis is another attempt at overcoming this distance, yet another means to interpret seventeenth-century literature. Isabel Rivers concisely describes the contours of this distance and suggests possible solutions to the problems faced by readers of sixteenth and seventeenth-century literature:

The modern reader approaches Renaissance poetry severely handicapped. He does not share the intellectual preconceptions of the Renaissance author; he has not read the books that formed his mind; he does not ask the same metaphysical or moral or aesthetic questions; though he may use the same vocabulary, he does not assign to it the same meaning. These handicaps exist, but they can be surmounted. One solution is to attempt to ignore such differences and concentrate instead on those aspects of the poetry that the modern reader can regard as perennial and interpret in the light of his own interests. This approach seems to me mistaken. It is arrogant, in that it supposes that the habits of the mind of the present are fundamentally more important than the habits of mind of the past; it elevates the consciousness of the modern reader above the poem. It is limiting, in that it restricts the amount of a work that the reader can grasp; by ignoring difficulties in effect it

hinders the reader's capacity to reach and hence enjoy the literature of the past. I [believe] that the precondition for enjoyment is understanding, that Renaissance poetry is in many ways alien to the modern reader and difficult for him to understand, but that the necessary understanding can be achieved by the recovery of the context within which the poetry was written. (1)

I agree with Rivers' diagnosis of the existing handicaps but I do not wish to dismiss too quickly the approach of bringing our own present interests to a text. Although it is true that ignoring the differences between us and a Renaissance text is inexcusable, ignoring our own concerns and interests is not preferable either.

Understanding, for Rivers, amounts to a recovery of the poem's intellectual and sociological context. Through this recovery we can delineate the era's questions and concerns to which the texts were attempting to respond and, thus, find the meaning of the poem. But this is only its meaning for its time. How does the poem speak to *our* concerns and questions? How does a Renaissance text become meaningful to us? As the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argues, understanding "is not at all a question of an exact and passive reflexion, of a redoubling of the other's experience within me (such redoubling is, in any case, impossible), but a matter of translating the experience into an altogether different axiological perspective, into new categories of evaluation and formation" (Todorov 22). "Meaning," according to Bakhtin, "always answer[s] some questions" (Todorov 54). For a Renaissance text to be meaningful to us it needs to be in dialogue with present concerns. I am, therefore, attempting to find ways for the poetry of George Herbert (a seventeenth-century Anglican poet-priest) to engage postmodern concerns about the self, the relations between self and authority structures, and the relation of language to both.

The religious poetry of the seventeenth-century, including Herbert's, was concerned with relating language and literature to religious and theological issues. In attempting to give Herbert's

poetry a voice (so to speak) to join in the present dialogues on issues of the self. I also wish to remain faithful to the theological and spiritual concerns in Herbert's poetry. I am, therefore, employing Bakhtin's theory of dialogism as a critical idiom that allows me to find the balance between both aims -- a critical idiom that is true to both the concerns of the past and the present. the writer and the reader, or in Herbert's terminology, an idiom that not merely accurately *informs* us of the spiritual-theological concepts of Herbert's age but also *inflames* our thoughts in our present concepts of the self, of authority, and of the relationship between them.

Within this larger goal, my specific thesis is that a fundamental principle informs all of George Herbert's poetry. This principle, originating from the Christian spiritual concept of "communion," is best translated in Bakhtinian terms as a dialogical principle. This is the principle that privileges relational inter-dependency over individual autonomy where answers to questions of meaning and significance can only be found within relationships, especially mutual or reciprocal relationships. This dialogical principle manifests itself in Herbert's poetry in its conceptions of selfhood, in its grounding of textual meaning within relationships between texts, and in its vision for a religious poetics. Herbert's sense of self is realized only in relation to God and to the church. Self-identity, for Herbert, is not achieved in any autonomous "self-fashioning" projects. Paradoxically, self-identity emerges by renouncing any such projects and embracing the identity that God has given. This is the biblical paradox implied in Matthew 16.25: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Herbert's poetic creations depend on their dialogues or interactions with the prior utterances of the Bible and liturgy for their meaning and significance. Herbert, therefore, sees religious poetry as a means to commune with God, as a gesture towards "co-authorship" with God, which is analogous to the self's "co-authorship" of its identity with God.

Bakhtin's theory focuses not only on literature but also, more comprehensively, on anthropological, psychological and sociological issues. It is a "philosophical anthropology" (Clark and Holquist 3). Thus, Bakhtin's theory allows for literary studies to engage with anthropology and sociology. In this sense it provides a contemporary critical idiom to address issues of selfhood in Herbert's poetry. But is Bakhtin's theory appropriate for seventeenth-century religious poetry and for Herbert's poetry in particular?

First of all, I suggest that there is an inherent tendency towards dialogue, namely dialogue with God, in the seventeenth-century devotional lyric. Devotional lyrics often approximate prayer in their tendency to be structured as addresses to God. Perhaps this is due largely to the influence of two biblical models: the Psalms and the Song of Songs. Barbara Lewalski shows (by citing John Calvin) that the book of Psalms was used as a compendium of poetic models for the seventeenth-century religious lyric because of "the idea that they present an epitome of human emotions, a searching analysis or anatomy of the soul of each and every Christian" (42). In addition, the dialogic nature of the Psalms were acknowledged by commentators in the seventeenth-century. For example, John Diodati (1643) "analyzed the subject matter of the Psalms according to speaker and forms of address: 'In some Psalms God speaks to his Church . . . In other places the Psalmists speak . . . unto God, . . . or to the faithful . . .'" (Lewalski 43-44). The Song of Songs, or Canticles, also provides a model for devotional poets. The Rheims-Douay Bible describes the book as a "Sacred Dialogue between Christ and his spouse" (qtd. in Lewalski 66). Similarly, the *Dutch Annotations* describe it as "A Dialogue between Christ, as the Bridegroom, and his Church, as his Spouse or Bride, under the type and figure of Solomon and his Spouse or Bride" (qtd. in Lewalski 60). Both biblical books exercise an influence on Herbert's poetry. As Lewalski observes,

[Herbert] seems to have attempted to provide in "The Church" just such a compendium of lyric kinds as the Book of Psalms was thought to contain . . . the dialogic / dramatic

element in Solomon's epithalamium seems to provide [for Herbert] points of reference for tracing the development of the intricate, ever-shifting relationship between speaker and his sometimes present, sometimes absent Friend. (51, 68)

I will explore further in the following chapters the significance and contours of this dialogic aspect in Herbert's poetry. For now my point is that there is an inherent dialogic tendency -- spurred by the dialogic nature of their biblical models -- in the religious lyrics of the seventeenth-century that justifies employing Bakhtin's dialogic theory as a means to explore them.

Engaging Bakhtin with Herbert may seem anachronistic to some because of the gulf of three centuries separating them. But I am trying to show that a certain conception of relationship within the Judeo-Christian tradition of the English Renaissance is so similar to Bakhtin's dialogic conception that Bakhtin's formulations best help to illuminate the Renaissance concept. I am not saying that Herbert is Bakhtinian before Bakhtin's time. Rather, I believe Bakhtin and Herbert both draw inspiration from a common Judeo-Christian tradition. Bakhtin's biographers, Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, argue that Bakhtin's thought is deeply influenced, albeit indirectly, by his Russian Orthodox Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This is especially so in Bakhtin's thought on the relations between self and other. Bakhtin is unique in framing the problems of self / other relations in terms of authorship. And the way Bakhtin frames it suggests a Christian influence. More specifically, "The relevance of theology for Bakhtin," according to Clark and Holquist, "is shown by the parallels between his thought and the recurrent themes of Christianity, for even in secular epochs questions about the nature of creativity, authorship, and authority continue to pose problems that, in religious epochs, were addressed by thinkers who sought to understand God's authorship of the world" (Clark & Holquist 82). It is precisely these parallels that I intend to employ to translate Herbert's theological and spiritual categories into a (Bakhtinian) critical idiom that can engage present concerns on the self.

## II

Any study of the religious poetry of the seventeenth-century in general, and George Herbert in particular, requires a consideration of its religious Judeo-Christian context. Unfortunately, such considerations often narrow their focus to theological and denominational issues. For instance, the debates within George Herbert criticism resemble the “religious wars of the seventeenth-century” between Protestants and Catholics, Puritans and Anglicans, Calvinists and Arminians.<sup>4</sup> An MLA Special Session (1986) was even titled, “George Herbert’s Theology: Nearer Rome or Geneva?” (Veith 19). I wish to emphasize instead the concept of “communion” in Herbert’s spirituality rather than engage myself too deeply in these theological debates.

Reducing religious devotion and belief to theological propositions is a narrow view of religious experience. Propositions and creeds do contribute to religious beliefs but the religious experience, as a whole, reaches beyond rationality into the realms of psychology and even sensuality. As James White suggests, “the life of the religion of which Herbert speaks is not doctrinal or propositional . . . but experiential” (White 46). The theological assertions of Christians, according to White,

are attempts to explain, to themselves, what it is that they are doing; they make and repeat them knowing that they will be imperfect, incomplete, distorted. The life of the church is the life of community and ritual, of prayer and conversation, not the creed in which we try to explain and order that life. (White 46-47)

But religious experience should not be reduced to liturgies and rituals in the community either. Private devotions, prayers, spiritual exercises and, not the least, emotions contribute as much to the whole religious experience.

I suggest the concept of communion as a window into the realm of Herbert’s spirituality. Communion here refers specifically to the soul’s communion with God, a mystical union with God.



The desire for communion with God is expressed by Herbert in such statements as "Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine" ("Clasping of Hands" *Works* 156; line 1) and "O show thy self to me, / Or take me up to thee!" ("Home" *Works* 107-09; lines 5-6). But communion also involves the communion of the saints as one body in Christ. It relates, therefore, to both social and divine relationships. The term, communion, also has specific application to the Eucharist, also known as the Holy Communion. There, communion embraces the ideas of communal participation in the body and blood of Christ, as well as, the intimate fellowship between God and his people. Communion with God also involves communication with him. This is what John Calvin means when he says, "For there is a communion of men with God." Here, the concept expands to include prayer, dialogues with God, speaking to him and listening to his Word that is embodied in the Bible and in preaching. This, in turn, involves questions about language, the (in)sufficiency of language to convey meaning to / from God. The concept of communion, therefore, involves, at its heart, the intimate relationship with God from which it expands to embrace areas of theology, liturgy, community and language. By bringing together associations with liturgy, the Bible and theology, and by suggesting sociological and psychological connotations, as well as establishing a link to language and linguistics with its etymological root in "communication," this concept of communion with God is, perhaps, one of the best openings into Herbert's realm of religious experience.

The mystical union of the soul with God has been interpreted before as "a self-diminishing action in the course of which the individual lets go, one by one, of all the ways of thinking, seeing, and saying that sustain the illusion of his independence, until finally he is absorbed into the deity whose omnipresence he has acknowledged" (Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts* 157). Stanley Fish, in particular, is one recent scholar who cites Acts 17.28 -- "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" -- to claim that "the goal of the Christian life" is to lose one's "independent will" (*Living Temple* 135). But part of the apostle Paul's point in that statement is that it is *we* who

“live, move, and have *our* being.” Being *in* God does not negate human agency but is its precondition. As Debora Shuger argues:

The self is not consumed in the crisscrossings of divine initiative. Both Aquinas and Luther are explicit on this point. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas argues that the Holy Spirit makes us lovers of God and leads us to fulfill his precepts; he then immediately adds: “For all that, one must bear in mind that the sons of God are driven not as slaves, but as free men. For . . . we do that freely which we do of our very selves. But this is what we do of our will. . . . But the Holy Spirit so inclines us to act that He makes us act voluntarily, in that He makes us lovers of God.” Luther makes the same distinction between external compulsion and the necessity of immutability, so that “when God works in us, the will is changed under the sweet influence of the Spirit of God. It desires and acts not from the compulsion, but responsively of its own desire and inclination.” While Luther denies free will, he does not make God a pre-Cartesian ghost in the machine. God’s inner activity on the heart and will does not destroy the self but is the condition of its freedom and creativity. (*Sacred Rhetoric* 232)

The soul’s communion with God is the precondition or context for the self’s agency. In fact, communion with God is the context for the self’s being: “For in him we . . . have our being.”

Herbert himself seems to subscribe to this view. Izaak Walton, his biographer, records the following death-bed request by Herbert: “Sir, I pray deliver this little book to my dear brother Farrer, and tell him he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could *subject mine to the will of Jesus my master*: in whose *service* I have now found *perfect freedom*” [emphasis mine] (281). Notice the paradox of “perfect freedom” in the “service” of Jesus “my master.” Herbert can find liberty of soul in the subjection of

his will to God's will because he understands the relationship with God as the precondition of human agency and, hence, freedom; paradoxically, one submits in order to be free.

The mystical union of Christ and believers, therefore, does not erase the distinctions between self and God but sustains them. Self and God *co-exist* as independent entities yet are united in an intimate relationship akin to the unity of head and body. I prefer, therefore, the term "communion" to "union" in describing this concept of one-ness with God. It is not a fusion but a communion of personalities. The goal of Christian religious experience, its heart and its motivation, is communion with God.

### III

In order to translate this spiritual concept into a critical idiom that can relate at once to both literary and anthropological categories, I have chosen to employ Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and monologism. Bakhtin's theory is congenial to a study of literature in relation to deep religious experience because it involves intersections between the fields of linguistics and literature to psychology and sociology. "Dialogue," for Bakhtin, "is more comprehensively conceived as the extensive set of conditions that are immediately modeled in any actual exchange between two persons but are not exhausted in such an exchange. Ultimately, dialogue means communication between simultaneous differences" (Clark & Holquist 9). Thus, Bakhtin "conceives the old problem of identity along the lines not of 'the same as' but of 'simultaneous with'" (Clark & Holquist 9-10).

This "communication between simultaneous differences" parallels the concept of communion with its unity of differences. The self and God *co-exist* simultaneously as distinct entities in relation with each other; the self's identity is not absorbed into God's. Bakhtin's conception of the self echoes even more the Christian concept of communion with God as the precondition of selfhood:

I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help. The most important acts, constitutive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a 'thou'). Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of self. . . . The very being of man (both internal and external) is a *profound communication*. *To be* means to *communicate*. . . . To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. . . . I cannot do without the other. I cannot become myself without the other, I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception). (Todorov 96)

In opposition to Descartes' emphasis on the thinking ego in the formation of the self -- "I think, therefore I am" -- Bakhtin's focus lies in social communication -- presumably he might say, "*We speak, therefore I am*." In contrast to both, Herbert, with his divine emphasis, would probably respond, "*God speaks, therefore I am*." What Bakhtin and Herbert share in common here is an emphasis on the *necessity* of the other -- human for Bakhtin, divine for Herbert -- in the formation of self-identity. And this parallel between Bakhtin and Herbert allows for an appropriation of Bakhtin's analysis of social relationships towards an analysis of the divine-human relationship on which Herbert's poetry focuses.

This necessity for the other, however, is not always recognized. Although, ontologically, the self exists in relation to the other, epistemologically, the self often denies its need of the other. There are, therefore, two epistemological perspectives: dialogism and monologism:

Ultimately, *monologism* denies that there exists outside of it another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an equal footing, another and equal *I (thou)*. For a monologic outlook (in its extreme or pure form) the *other* remains entirely and only an *object* of consciousness, and cannot constitute another consciousness. No response

capable of altering everything in the world of my consciousness, is expected of this other.

The monologue is accomplished and deaf to the other's response; it does not await it and does not grant it any *decisive* force. Monologue makes do without the other; that is why to some extent it objectivizes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *last word*. (Todorov 107)

Similarly, for Herbert, although the self "has its being" only from God, it can, and often does, deny its need for the divine other.

In an interesting passage in the *Country Parson*, Herbert advises Parsons to do the following in counseling those who doubt God's mercy:

But if he sees them neerer desperation, then Atheisme; not so much doubting a God, as that he is theirs; then he dives unto the boundlesse Ocean of God's Love, and the unspeakable riches of his loving kindnesse. He hath one argument unanswerable. If God hate them, either he doth it as they are Creatures, dust and ashes; or as they are sinfull. As Creatures, he must needs love them; for no perfect Artist ever yet hated his owne worke. As sinfull, he must much more love them; because notwithstanding his infinite hate of sinne, his Love overcame that hate; and with an exceeding great victory, which in the Creation needed not, gave them love for love, even the son of his love out of his bosome of love. So that man, which way soever he turnes, hath two pledges of Gods Love, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; the one in his being, the other in his sinfull being: and this as the more faulty in him, so the more glorious in God. And all may certainly conclude, that God loves them, till either they despise that Love, or despaire of his Mercy: not any sin else, but is within his Love; but the despising of Love must needs be without it. The thrusting away of his arme makes us onely not embraced. (CP 283)

For Herbert, the sinner does not work towards a relationship with God. Every human created in the image of God, by virtue of his / her creation, is already in God's love. The soul finds itself already in relation with God. But the monologic impulse is precisely to deny this relation, this communion, to thrust away God's embracing arms. Ontologically, there is no escaping God's "Ocean of Love." But, epistemologically, the sinner's attitude and perspective can effect his standing within God's loving relationship: "the despising of Love must needs be without it."

#### IV

Love is the defining quality of this communion between God and the self. And Christ's death on the cross epitomizes God's love for humanity. God gave himself in Christ to humanity who, in return, give of themselves to God, as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12.1). Love marks the communion between God and humanity as a reciprocal relationship, a relationship of mutual giving and sharing, in Bakhtin's terms, a dialogic relationship. It is a relationship where individual differences are not erased but embraced into a common bond of love. But this dialogic communion is not between two equals but between God, the ultimate authority, and the finite self, who is subject to God. Can a hierarchical relationship such as this be dialogic, be mutual and reciprocal? Are not hierarchies inherently monologic, with its tendency to erase differences, to create a hegemony, to silence all contrary voices?

The seventeenth-century does not share our modern distrust of authority structures. Authority, for them, is not *necessarily* monologic, but can function dialogically to its subjects. Authority structures need not unite by erasing differences. As Francis Bacon says, "they be two things, unity and uniformity" (*Essays* 12). Indeed, Bacon takes pride in Christianity's apparent ability to entertain differences within its fold:

the Christian faith [holds and preserves] the golden mediocrity in this point between the law of the heathen and the law of Mahumet, which have embraced the two extremes. For

the religion of the heathen had no constant belief or confession, but left all to the liberty of argument; and the religion of Mahumet on the other side interdicteth argument altogether . . . whereas the Faith doth both admit and reject disputation with difference. (*Advancement of Learning* 202; II. xxv. 4)

If the dialogic relationship between God and humanity is the ideal standard for all earthly hierarchical relationships, then authority structures could be seen to possess *potential* to enrich and empower, just as Herbert could find “perfect freedom” in subjection to Christ.

Herbert himself shares in this perception of authority. As Christopher Hodgkins argues, “in his emphasis on vigilance [over the parishioners], Herbert is imagining the country parson not as a prison warden, but as a parent and spiritual physician” (235). These two analogies are the same ones used to describe God’s relationship to believers: the heavenly father and the divine physician. The purposes of parental and medical authorities are not to oppress and silence its subjects but to empower, enrich and build up those under their authority -- to heal the sick, to nurture the young. Ideally, then, power relations are not monologic but dialogic, not silencing but encouraging dialogue.

## V

It is within this dialogical, though hierarchical, communion with God that the self finds its identity. Human identity emerges from this dialogue with God, from within the communion with Christ. John Milton suggests that humans are “Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose” (*PL* 261; Bk. III, 122-23). I shall use this metaphor, in a different sense than Milton does, to suggest that Herbert does not see himself as the sole author of his self-identity. Instead, the writing of the self is a *collaborative* effort between God and the self.

The word “author,” as the OED documents, has various meanings and uses in the seventeenth-century, such as, creator, inventor, originator, one who begets such as a father, one

who has authority, one who increase, instigator and writer. Milton evokes all of these various nuances of meaning when he employs the metaphor of authorship for human agency within God's foreknowledge. Marshall Grossman, in *Authors To Themselves*, argues that self-authorship for Milton involves "the peculiar relationship of Adam and Eve's life history to the always already-written text of divine providence" (2-3). "The Christian," according to Grossman, "fathers himself by actions conformable to a providential text that God not only foresees but also reveals -- in the form of a set of narrative patterns" (3). Self-authorship, therefore, is a process of conforming personal history to a pre-written providential history by means of judgment and choice.

My own interpretation of Herbert's conception of the self approximates Grossman's interpretation of Milton's self-authorship. But where Grossman focuses on narrative patterns, I focus on communication within relationships. Grossman argues that Milton conceives of self-identity as rooted in a personal narrative that largely conforms to God's providential history. I am arguing that for Herbert self-identity is rooted in a personal communication, or communion, with God. While Milton seems to emphasize story / narrative, Herbert emphasizes prayer / dialogue. This is consonant with Milton's preference for the narrative poem and Herbert's preference for the lyric.

These two, "narrative" and "dialogue," are not exclusive of each other. Indeed, part of my analysis relies on the narrative pattern of salvation in the Bible. But while "narrative" allows for a single narrator, "dialogue" necessarily entails a collaboration between, at least, two parties. With this in mind, I suggest that Herbert sees authorship of the self as a *co-authorship* between God and the self. Hence, I shall use the term "self-authorship" not in the way Milton does but to mean the self's attempt to write its own identity apart from God. The self can only author its true identity, which in Christianity is as a child of God, only in collaboration with God, hence, a co-authorship. To attempt to self-author one's identity apart from God is ultimately an act of sedition against



God's authority. Yet the tendency for self-authoring is inherent in humanity. It is the tendency towards individual autonomy rather than interdependency which co-authorship implies. Francis Bacon links this desire for autonomy with the fall:

As for the knowledge which induced the fall, it was . . . not the natural knowledge of creatures, but the moral knowledge of good and evil; wherein the supposition was, that God's commandments or prohibitions were not the originals of good and evil, but that they had other beginnings, which man aspired to know; to the end to make a total defection from God and *to depend wholly upon himself*. [emphasis mine] (*Advancement of Learning* 38; I. vi. 6)

Thus, a tension exists between an inherent desire for autonomous self-authoring and a desire for co-authoring within the communion with God.

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that in the Renaissance, individuals pursue a project of self-fashioning to fashion for themselves an identity. He describes self-fashioning as involving two processes: one, of submission to an absolute power or authority, and secondly, destruction of a perceived alien, or a threatening Other (Greenblatt 9). The end result of such fashioning is "a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving" (Greenblatt 2). A Christian scheme of self-fashioning, therefore, may take the following form: identify oneself with God / Church and distinguish oneself from, or oppose, the Devil / Flesh.

In contrast to Greenblatt's dichotomies of submission / destruction and authority / alien, my thesis explores the dichotomies of autonomy / communion and self-authoring / co-authoring. While Greenblatt's formulation focuses more on the tensions between *external* forces on the self, my own formulation focuses more on the *internal* tensions of opposing epistemologies.

Greenblatt's work, therefore, leans towards a sociological horizon; this thesis leans more, though not exclusively, towards the psychological.

Both Grossman and Greenblatt's works tend to emphasize the self's agency, in self-authoring within a providential framework and in self-fashioning within the opposition of an authority and an alien. Both (Grossman's) self-authoring and (Greenblatt's) self-fashioning, therefore, function like long-term projects for the self to achieve its identity. In contrast, co-authoring one's identity is not so much a project but more of a direct consequence of communion with God. It is not something that one *achieves* but rather something one *receives* as a gift from the divine other. It is part of the mystery of the *imago dei*, the image of God in humanity. It is a Christian belief that one can only regain one's true identity, lost through the fall, in this communion with God. Self-authoring projects are self-delusional, doomed to failure. Although identities can be, and are, authored by one's own efforts, it can never be the identity of a prelapsarian self, the identity of an exalted child of God. The Christian doctrine of *imago dei* presupposes that the human self only finds its true worth as a child of God, a bride of Christ, a servant of the Lord. These are the true identities of human selves. And these cannot be found by the self's own seeking, or authoring. It can only be found in communion with God. Or rather, God finds the soul, and in finding the soul, the soul finds itself in communion with God. Yet the pull of self-authoring, as it was with Adam and Eve, remains strong.

This tension parallels Bakhtin's concept of the struggle between monologic and dialogic perspectives. Monologism attempts to silence the voice of others and pretends to be the last word. Dialogism embraces other voices, indeed, depends on other voices to sustain the perpetual dialogue that infuses meaning and identity to the self. The difference is that while Bakhtin orients the dialogue towards the social, Herbert orients it towards God. But the parallels and similarities allow

for reinterpretation or translation of Christian spirituality into perspectives on self-formation and relations between self and authority.

## VI

These new perspectives may provide us with new means to interpret George Herbert's religious lyrics. In the following chapters, I will explore the significance of this dialogic perspective, this concept of communion and co-authoring, in Herbert's poetry. The three chapters function as three windows, or openings, into Herbert's *The Temple*. Each one suggests different ways in which dialogism and communion function in his poems. And yet, these different ways cohere to a certain degree.

Chapter One explores the tension between monologism and dialogism in poems related to self-identity, especially poems related to the vocational identity of priesthood. In effect, Chapter One identifies Herbert's conception of the self as a self in dialogue, in communion, with God. For Herbert, it is in relinquishing any projects of self-authoring and embracing the relationship with God that one finds one's self. It is the paradox of losing one's self, renouncing autonomy and self-assertion, in order to find it. Herbert can only find "perfect freedom" in submission to Christ. Similarly, the identity of a priest can only be found in relation to God, can only be received from God, not achieved or authored by one's own efforts. In fact, attempting to self-author oneself a priest is precisely the way to lose that identity.

The second chapter focuses on the inter-relations between authoritative words, such as the Bible and liturgy, and the self. Here, I further explore the suggestion that authority can function dialogically, promoting dialogue, in its relationship to the (subjected) self. Authoritative words need not silence or preempt the words of the self. Instead, it is by engaging these authorities that the self finds its own voice. Chapter Two, therefore, explores the intertextual relations between

Herbert's poems, the Scriptures and Anglican liturgy, namely *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Intertextuality, according to Leland Ryken,

is built around the concepts of a pre-text and an intertext. The pre-text is any previous work that a writer assumes as a necessary framework for his work. The real meaning of the new work is not self-contained but consists of what lies *between* the texts. In such instances, the object of critical attention is the interaction that takes place between the two texts. (19)

Intertextuality, in essence, is a textual version of dialogism. Just as Herbert's dialogism directs itself towards the divine, his intertextuality focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on religious pre-texts, the Bible and the Anglican Prayer Book.

My third and final chapter examines Herbert's theory of poetry. Here dialogism or communion functions as a unifying vision which pulls Herbert's opposing streams of thought on poetry together. Herbert's didactic impulse orients his poetry towards the role of preaching, while his desire to praise induces him to view poetry as an offering of praise to God. But both conceptions can be held simultaneously by Herbert because of their common gestures towards poetry as a means to commune with God. In this conception of poetry, Herbert attempts to find ways to facilitate a co-authorship with God. As with the self's collaboration with God in the authoring of its identity, Herbert invites God to supplement his own writings and imaginations by means of extensive intertextual dialogues with God's Word, with liturgy, and with God's authorship of the self.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Herbert, George. "Clasping of Hands" line 1. *The Works of George Herbert*. Ed. F. E. Hutchinson. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1941. 157.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Ed. John T. McNeill. Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1960. Book III. xx. 2. 851

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book." *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, appendix II. Emerson edition, 1984. Quoted in Tzevan Todorov. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Trans. Wlad Godzich. U of Minnesota P, 1984. 96-97.

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<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are from the King James Version, or the Authorized Version, 1611.

<sup>3</sup> Discussions on the influence of Christianity on Bakhtin's thought can be found, specifically, in pages 80-87 of their biography.

<sup>4</sup> See Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. "The Religious Wars in George Herbert Criticism: Reinterpreting Seventeenth-Century Anglicanism." *George Herbert Journal* 11.2 (1988): 19-35.

## Chapter 1. Finding the Self: In Dialogue with God in Herbert's *The Temple*

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. -- Matthew 16.25

Jesus' words here present the fundamental paradox in Christian spirituality. Those who seek to hold on to their lives are those who stand to lose them, and those who give their lives over to Christ are precisely the ones who gain them. The context suggests a distinction between worldly life and spiritual life. For in the following verse, Jesus asks: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16.26). Juxtaposed as opposing states, "world" refers to social and material matters, and "soul" refers to matters of spirituality, such as salvation. Hence the paradox is partially explained if we paraphrase the verse as: those who seek to further their worldly lives will lose their spiritual lives, and vice-versa. We can, therefore, interpret the preceding verse -- "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" -- as the denial of the self's tendency to pursue the worldly life, and not denial of the self *per se*.

I suggest that this orientation of the self to either the worldly or the spiritual is also an orientation to either asserting individual autonomy -- saving one's own life -- or embracing a dialogic relation -- losing one's life for the other. The Bible conceives of human self-identity as ultimately rooted in humanity's dialogic relation with God, as evidenced in the creation of humanity "in the image of God" (Genesis 1.27) and the covenantal promise between Israel and God -- "I will be your God and ye shall be my people" (Jeremiah 7.23). A dialogic relation is a reciprocal relationship, that is a relationship of mutual sharing and giving where each party

privileges the interests of the other over self-interest. In this relationship differences between parties are not erased but embraced in an intimate unity. And it is within this communication between differences that meaning and identity emerge. Thus, self-identity is not self-contained within the individual but is dependent on, indeed is a gift from, the other. For Christianity, the ultimate dialogic relation is between the believer(s) and God.

The fall of Adam and Eve is a fall away from this reciprocal relationship with God wherein human identity and selfhood find their true meaning. And this fall is precipitated by an act of disobedience on the part of Adam and Eve, an act of asserting their autonomy, desiring to “be as gods” (Genesis 3.5). Rather than receiving, or accepting, the identity that God has given them, as human beings in his image, they choose to exercise their own power to fashion their own identities, to be like the God who fashioned them. As Francis Bacon interprets the fall:

As for the knowledge which induced the fall, it was . . . not the natural knowledge of creatures, but the moral knowledge of good and evil; wherein the supposition was, that God’s commandments or prohibitions were not the originals of good and evil, but that they had other beginnings, which man aspired to know; to the end to make a total defection from God and to *depend wholly upon himself*. [emphasis mine] (*Advancement of Learning* 38; I. vi. 6)

The root of the fall is a desire for autonomy, rejecting any interdependent relationships with God. Reconciliation to God, then, involves obedience and submission, as much as the original fall involved disobedience and rebellion.

But obedience and submission do not negate the self’s agency. As the Matthew passage above shows, one’s life or self is not denied. For the “finding of one’s life” ultimately affirms selfhood. Thus, the biblical dichotomy is not between self-affirmation and self-effacement. Instead, the dichotomy is between on the one hand, asserting one’s autonomy in a project of self-authoring

or naming one's own identity and on the other, relinquishing that project and finding oneself instead in the reciprocal relationship with God, receiving one's name from God himself.

I begin with this Biblical "place" because it illuminates the place of the self in George Herbert's poetry. Herbert criticism has oscillated between seeing Herbert's poetry as affirming the self and effacing the self.<sup>1</sup> Stanley Fish, in *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, sees Herbert's poems as presenting the "undoing of the self as an independent entity . . . [the] undoing of the poem as the product of a mind distinct from the mind of God" (158). Fish argues that Herbert ultimately realizes the illusion of any self-independence from God. The end result, then, is a dissolution of the self into God and of the poem into God's Word. But my analysis of Matthew 16.25 above suggests otherwise. It is precisely through surrendering any projects of asserting self-independence and embracing a dialogic relation with God that the self finds its dignity and its identity. Union (or identifying oneself) with God, here, does not erase the self's personality nor absorb it into God's personality. "Identity," as Northrop Frye suggests, "is the opposite of similarity or likeness, and total identity is not uniformity, still less monotony, but a unity of various things" (qtd. in Gay 329). I argue, therefore, that Herbert's spirituality, ultimately, affirms the self rather than negates it.

But I wish to stress that this affirmation of the self can only be achieved, paradoxically, through giving up the project of self-affirmation and, instead, letting God affirm the self. One's tendency, however, is to write one's own story, to fashion one's own selfhood. But the Christian way of life, for Herbert, is to relinquish this project of self-writing or self-authoring and accept God's writing, so to speak, of oneself. And, paradoxically, the self actually finds its story in that which God writes. Through this process one is, then, elevated as a co-author with God, engaged in a partnership of life-writing. The self's participation in this process, therefore, is active not passive.



I prefer to call the self's identification with God "communion" rather than "union." In this chapter I suggest that the heart of Herbert's religious experience is this longing to commune with God, to be in God's presence, to join in an intimate and reciprocal relationship with him. And it is in this communion with God rather than in any self-asserting projects that Herbert finds his self. But the tension exists between this longing for communion and an equally strong longing for autonomy, a struggle between an impulse to self-author one's identity and an impulse to co-author it with God. I wish to clarify this tension by employing Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and monologism. And I will show how this conception of self-identity can illuminate Herbert's poetry by focusing on three poems centering on the nature and identity of the priesthood, namely, "The Collar," "The Priesthood" and "Aaron."

## I

In modern theory, Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and monologism come closest to Herbert's paradigm of selfhood, and are useful to clarify these conceptions of the self. For Bakhtin, self-consciousness, and hence, self-identity, emerges not from the assertion of autonomy but from a communion with another:

I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help. The most important acts, constitutive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a 'thou'). Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of self. . . . The very being of man (both internal and external) is a *profound communication*. *To be* means to *communicate*. . . . To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. . . . I cannot do without the other, I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception). (Todorov 96)

Similarly, for Herbert, *to be* means to *commune with God*. *to be* means to be for God rather than for one's own self. It is only through this relationship with the divine other that true self-understanding arises. As John Calvin says, "it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face" (*Institutes* I.1.2). We find ourselves only in the divine other.

Bakhtin also notes an inclination to deny the dialogic relation and instead assert individual autonomy. Bakhtin calls this inclination monologism, a perspective that attempts to assert one's power over the other by denying the other any decisive force to affect oneself:

Ultimately, *monologism* denies that there exists outside of it another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an equal footing, another and equal *I (thou)*. For a monologic outlook (in its extreme or pure form) the *other* remains entirely and only an *object* of consciousness, and cannot constitute another consciousness. No response capable of altering everything in the world of my consciousness, is expected of this other. The monologue is accomplished and deaf to the other's response; it does not await it and does not grant it any *decisive* force. Monologue makes do without the other; that is why to some extent it objectivizes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *last word*. (Todorov 107)

A dialogic relationship is reciprocal but a monologic one resists reciprocity. Monologism inclines towards asserting the I's autonomy, the I's invulnerability to the other. Dialogism, however, affirms the I's need for the other in order to be whole.<sup>2</sup>

Bakhtin's monologism and dialogism are very close to the biblical concepts of "worldly" and "spiritual" selves, of the "old man" and the new. The old man (derived from the Old Adam) is estranged from God, rejects God and attempts to live independently from God but the new man is

in Christ (the New Adam) even as Christ is in him, reconciled to God, living in a reciprocal relationship with the divine other.<sup>3</sup>

Bakhtin's ideas provide a theoretical framework to approach and (re)view Herbert's paradigm of the self. Herbert's spirituality does not negate self but, ultimately, affirms the self through a dialogic relation with the divine Thou (God). This dialogic relation is dangerous and unpredictable because the I is vulnerable to God's actions upon it. The "natural" inclination is to flee this relation, this vulnerability, and to assert one's own independence from God, to pretend to have the last word against him. But it is precisely this route (monologism) that leads to death, to self-negation. George Herbert's spirituality functions within this paradigm.

In "Clasping of Hands," Herbert expresses the intricate reciprocal relationship a Christian has with God:

Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine,  
 If mine I am: and thine much more,  
 Then I or ought, or can be mine,  
 Yet to be thine, doth me restore:  
 So that again I now am mine,  
 And with advantage mine the more,  
 Since this being mine, brings with it thine,  
 And thou with me dost thee restore.

If I without thee would be mine,  
 I neither should be mine nor thine.

Lord, I am thine, and thou art mine:  
 So mine thou art, that something more

I may presume thee mine, then thine.  
 For thou didst suffer to restore  
 Not thee, but me, and to be mine,  
 And with advantage mine the more,  
 Since thou in death wast none of thine,  
 Yet thine as mine didst me restore.

O be mine still! still make me thine!

Or rather make no Thine and Mine! (*Works* 157)

For Herbert, the heart of the Christian faith lies in this reciprocal relationship expressed in terms of mutual possession, "thou art mine, and I am thine" (1). And this relationship is seen to be ultimately advantageous to the self. Indeed, "If I without thee would be mine, / I neither should be mine nor thine," suggests that the self is nothing, worthless for either self-possession or God-possession, if the self is apart from this relationship or if the self asserts its own autonomy and efforts (9-10). The poem's ending, "Or rather make no Thine and Mine!" does not express a desire to obliterate the distinction between self and other. Instead, it expresses a desire for an intensity in the relationship whereby the matter of possession becomes irrelevant -- nothing is seen in terms of either "mine" or "thine" but everything is ours. The ending also renounces the project of self-assertion in both extremes of giving entirely to God (Thine) or in claiming everything as one's own (Mine). Both acts presume the self acting on its own resources, using only one's own hands, as it were, in giving or in claiming. But the *via media* is the mutual clasping of hands, of both human and divine hands.

"Clasping of Hands" does not blur the distinctions of self and other but affirms the self within an intricate relationship with the divine other. Apart from this relationship the self is a worthless object, neither to be possessed by itself nor by God. But within the dialogic relationship

the self is an exalted subject that can claim possession, so to speak, of itself, God, and everything else. The two hands do not become one, indistinguishable, but are joined together in a mutual embrace.

The primacy of this dialogic relation with God can illuminate Herbert's poetry, especially in relation to the place of the self. A reading of three poems dealing with the priesthood -- "The Collar," "The Priesthood" and "Aaron" -- will show the centrality of this dialogic relation to Herbert's conception of the self, especially the self as priest.

## II

The priestly vocation, for Herbert, only finds its fulfillment in a dialogic relationship with God. One does not assume the priestly role in an attitude of self-service. Herbert does not name himself or give himself the identity of a priest. This identity can only be received by accepting God's calling / naming. As the book of Hebrews makes clear:

And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.  
 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him,  
 Thou art my Son, to day I begotten thee. And he saith also in another place, Thou art a  
 priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (Hebrews 5.4-6)

Even Christ cannot claim the priestly vocation on his own except by being called and named by God. Only by responding to and embracing the dialogic relationship with God is Herbert empowered to fulfill the duties of a priest. By submitting himself to God's transforming power, the priest is empowered to transform sinners. The priest has authority to call others to Christ only because he first responds to God's call. Herbert's authority, power and identity as priest reside not in himself, but in his relationship with God.

"The Collar" is a poem about a disgruntled priest who cherishes hopes of leaving the ministry. But at the height of his rebelliousness, he is brought back into submission to God by

hearing "one calling, *Child!*" (*Works* 153-54: 35). Recent criticism has debated the extent to which the poem's conclusion resolves its conflict. Michael Schoenfeldt, for example, points out that the speaker's political rejoinder, "*My Lord*" (36), is incongruent with God's paternal calling (the speaker calls God "Lord" instead of "Father," which seems like a more appropriate response to "Child"). Schoenfeldt sees this incongruity as an assimilation and redirection of "the momentum of rebellion generated in the poem's previous thirty-five lines" (110). I suggest, however, that the concluding dialogue between the priest and God is highly appropriate.

The poem begins with the speaker asserting, "No more. / I will abroad" (1-2). The next fourteen lines explain and justify the speaker's decision to discontinue his service and leave the ministry. He asks a series of rhetorical questions that increases in intensity:

What? shall I ever sigh and pine?

My lines and life are free; free as the roe,

Loose as the v'inde, as large as store.

Shall I be still in suit?

Have I no harvest but a thorn

To let me bloud, and not restore

What I have lost with cordiall fruit?

Sure there was wine

Before my sighs did drie it: there was corn

Before my tears did drown it.

Is the yeare onely lost to me?

Have I no bayes to crown it?

No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?

All wasted? (3-16)

There are numerous biblical allusions in these lines of complaint. The word "rode," for example, puns on both "road" and "rood," Christ's cross. Thus, for the speaker to assert that he is as "free as the rode" is both affirmative and ironic. Words such as "harvest," "thorn," "bloud," "fruit" all have biblical allusions while "wine" and "corn," of course, alludes to the elements of the Eucharist. Critics, however, differ in their interpretations of the function of these sacred images within a voice of rebellion. Do they show the radical extent of the speaker's rebellion as blasphemy (turning God's word against God) or do they show God's grace in restraining the speaker's rebelliousness? Or does the poem, as Schoenfeldt suggests, swerve "indecisively between both possibilities, allowing the terrifying possibility of blasphemy to supply the vehicle for submission" (106)? I think one must remember that these terms are used in the context of justifying a rejection of the priesthood. Thus, even in vehemently rejecting the priesthood, the speaker's rhetoric is still bound to the religious discourse of the priest, suggesting a deep affinity to the priesthood, deeper, perhaps, than the expressed sentiment of its rejection. James Boyd White is perhaps correct in perceiving that "What the speaker really wants here is not freedom . . . but restoration, and restoration specifically by bread and wine . . . which is what the church has promised him but, he feels, not delivered" (13). What the speaker is dissatisfied with is not the ministry itself but the lack of rewards, results and recognition -- "no harvest," "no bayes," "no flowers" -- that seem to accompany it.

This voice of dissatisfaction, however, is joined in dialogue by a true voice of rebellion:

Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,

And thou hast hands.

Recover all thy sigh-blown age

On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute

Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage.

Thy rope of sands.

Which pettie thoughts have made, and made to thee

Good cable, to enforce and draw,

And be thy law,

While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.

Away; take heed:

I will abroad. (17-28)

This voice is more radical than the first because there are hardly any biblical allusions in its rhetoric other than the allusion to the fall: "there is fruit, / And thou hast hands" (16-17). This reference to the fall of Adam enforces the perception of this voice as a true voice of rebellion, satan-like in its rhetoric. Like the serpent in Eden, this second voice promises the rewards that the first voice craves: "Recover all thy sigh-blown age / On double pleasures" (19-20). And like Milton's Satan, this voice recognizes the power of the mind to create a false reality:

Thy rope of sands.

Which pettie thoughts have made, and made to thee

Good cable, to enforce and draw,

And be thy law. (22-25)

Here, the priest's collar is perceived as a collar of bondage. But the restraint is also seen as illusory, "a rope of sands," from which one should easily break free. It is this voice, more than the first, that strongly suggests forsaking the priesthood: "Forsake thy cage" (21). Where the first voice only *threatens* to leave -- "I will abroad" [emphasis mine] (2) -- the second voice is *imperative* -- "Away" (27). It reminds the first voice of its own threat: "take heed: I will abroad" (27-28). It is this second voice that makes explicit what the first hinted at:

He that forbears



To suit and serve his need,

Deserves his load. (30-32)

This second voice is the voice of monologism, of promoting self-interest by means of independent autonomous action, asserting that “[one] hast hands” to pluck “fruit” for oneself (18). This is self-interest *via* self-service rather than through the way of serving others. Thus, to such a perspective, if the speaker abstains from pursuing the path of self-service, he deserves whatever burden he loads himself with from taking the servile path.

The first voice only expresses dissatisfaction at the apparent lack of self-benefits in the ministry of the priesthood. The complaints of this first voice implies it harbors hope for restoration. This, in turn, suggests the voice’s reluctance to depart the priesthood. In contrast, the second voice regards the priesthood itself as a problem, a collar of restraint, a cage that imprisons one’s free “lines and life” (4). The second voice may be referring directly to the sacred images of the first: “free as the rode” is not truly free when it is translated “free as the cross” (4). Instead of restoring the priesthood, the second voice counsels the first to reject and forsake the priesthood itself consonant with the second voice’s lack of biblical allusions in its own discourse, save for the allusion to ultimate rebellion, such as the fall. This voice asserts the self to exercise its own power. It is the mind that enforces the restraint of the collar, making it “good cable,” and the mind can throw it away. In this sense, then, the second voice is “more fierce and wilde” than the first (33).

The concluding four lines not only re-establish the submission of the speaker to his master, but also oppose the monologism of the second voice with a dramatization of dialogism:

But as I rav’d and grew more fierce and wilde

At every word,

Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Child!*

And I reply’d, *My Lord.* (33-36)

Regardless of the ontological status of the caller -- if he exists or is merely a figment of the speaker's imagination -- the phrase "Me thoughts" does not undermine this dialogue between the speaker and the caller. As John Wall observes, the uncertainty of the caller's ontological status places a primacy on faith, and marks the confident reply as an act of faith (209).

The dialogue at the end of "The Collar" implies a naming process. The one word "child" could create a complete reversal in the speaker's attitude because the speaker, especially as a priest, recognizes the profound significance of that name, "child," in (re)defining his identity and relation to the caller. The speaker replied "my Lord" denoting the caller as Christ, the one that every tongue confesses as Lord.

John R. Roberts has noted the biblical significance of the term "child." He notes that in the Greek translation of the Bible (with which Herbert would be familiar), there are two Greek terms for servanthood: "doulos," which denotes a slave, used in a pejorative sense, and "pais" which denotes "a favored servant, or a child that stands in an intimate relationship with the Lord" (Roberts 201). In the gospel of Matthew, both senses of the term "pais" are used in reference to Christ: in Matthew 12.17-18, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant [pais], whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased," and Matthew 3.17, "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son [pais], in whom I am well pleased." Christ, then, is the child-servant of God.

In Philippians 2.4-11, the apostle Paul uses Christ as the example of Christian humility and submission:

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as

a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Roberts uses this passage to support the theological point that Christ's sonship entails a perfect obedience as servant to the Father's command. But I think there is more that this passage can offer to a discussion of "The Collar." In this passage we find the spiritual movement of exaltation through humiliation. Paul uses the example of Christ to encourage believers to not only look on their own things but also "on the things of others." He calls them to discard a monologic self-serving attitude for an attitude of serving others, of self-giving, as exemplified by Christ -- a giving of one's self that extends to death. But it is precisely through this giving of his self that Christ is glorified and exalted as Lord.

This exaltation of Christ is linked with the giving of a name. Naming, in the Bible, as Roberts points out, entails defining one's identity (199). Abram's name was changed into Abraham, as was Saul's into Paul, and Simon's into Peter, each marking a new self-identity analogous to the renewal of the "old man" (Old Adam) into the new (Christ / New Adam). The one call "Child" is charged with these biblical resonances and the reply "My Lord" alludes to Philippians 2 whereby the speaker confesses Christ as Lord and, simultaneously, follows Christ's example of humility and submission in obedience. The implication is that like Christ the speaker too will be exalted through his submission.

Michael Schoenfeldt notes that the speaker's reply is not the "anticipated and corresponding term, 'My Father'," suggesting that the speaker retreats from the identity of sonship to which God calls him into an identity of servanthood (110). Schoenfeldt suggests that this is a

strategy whereby the speaker attempts to assert his own self-identity. The speaker attempts to salvage remnants of his autonomy by taking less than what God is giving, remaining a servant when God calls him a child. Schoenfeldt, therefore, sees the speaker's rebellious tendencies in the earlier parts of the poem as being redirected rather than erased.

But Schoenfeldt undervalues the fact that the speaker is a priest and that "The Collar" is primarily a poem about rejection and acceptance of the priesthood. Replying to God's call of "Child" with "My Father" may be more appropriate for the lay Christian but the reply "My Lord" is far more relevant and appropriate for a priest, especially one who was on the brink of rebellion. In *The Country Parson*, Herbert defines the pastor's / priest's role as "the Deputy of Christ for the reducing of Man to the Obedience of God" (225). The word "reducing" may seem harsh but what is left unsaid is assumed by Herbert of his readers who function within the same paradigm of spirituality as he does, namely that a reduction into obedience to God entails a corresponding exaltation into glory with God—the same spiritual movement embodied in Philippians 2. As Herbert goes on to clarify: "For first, Man fell *from* God by disobedience. Secondly, Christ is the glorious instrument of God for the *revoking* of Man." [emphasis mine] (CP 225). Human identity is defined within an exalted relationship with God. It is through human disobedience that humanity fell from this high status, away from God. And Christ came as the servant / instrument to recall humanity to its previous position. "Revoke" originates from the Latin term *vocare*, "voice." The "revoking of Man" is, thus, a recalling of humanity by a voice calling humanity back into the privileged relationship which they have forsaken. And the *vocation* or "calling" of the priest is to continue Christ's work of recalling humanity into the exalted relationship. It is in this context that one should understand the "reducing of Man to the Obedience of God."

It is also from this context of calling that the concluding lines of "The Collar" / "Caller" (a pun intended, I believe, by Herbert himself) gain their power and significance. The speaker's

internal dialogue in the preceding thirty-three lines suggests that he perceives the priesthood as unappreciated slavery and the priest's collar as a collar of bondage and servitude. But, as noted, Christ's call of "Child" names the speaker not as a slave but as a "pais," a favoured child-servant of God, analogous to Christ's son-servant relationship to the Father. The one word "Child" is also a calling or recalling of the speaker into the exalted relationship with Christ and into the priestly vocation.

It is, therefore, imperative for the speaker to reply with "My Lord" rather than with "My Father." For the dialogue reestablishes his identity and authority as priest and not simply as a child of God. To reply "My Father" would indeed imply an attempt by the speaker to negotiate room to fix his own identity, accepting only the identity of a child and not of a servant-priest as well. But the reply "My Lord" expresses the speaker's acceptance of the calling, the vocation, of priesthood to which he has been called and is recalled. Furthermore, to reply "Lord" to "Child" is not unprecedented. In John 21.5-7, Christ calls out to his disciples, "*Children*, have ye any meat?" and John said to Peter, "It is the *Lord*" [emphasis mine]. It is important to note that this interaction occurs in the context of Peter being called into Christ's service, a similar context to the ending of "The Collar."<sup>4</sup>

The simple dialogue at the end is able to counteract the dissatisfaction and rebelliousness of the earlier thirty-three lines because of the immense empowering significance that it brings with it. With the simple "Child," all the assertions of the second voice are swept aside and revealed as false, for the priest's collar, through the naming of "Child," is defined as a collar of authority, the insignia of a privileged child-servant. Through the empowerment of the dialogue, the monologism proposed by the second voice is revealed as a false way to self-affirmation because it is precisely through the dialogue with God that the speaker finds his identity, is empowered and is exalted as a favored child-servant of God.

## III

If the speaker in "The Collar" begins with a faulty perception of the priesthood as an unprivileged position of slavery, the speaker in "The Priesthood" begins with an equally faulty perception of the priesthood as a powerful judge. The speaker fixates on the element of power in the priesthood:

Blest Order, which in power dost excell,  
 That with th' one hand thou liftest to the sky,  
 And with the other throwest down to hell  
 In thy just censures; fain would I draw nigh.  
 Fain put thee on, exchanging my lay-sword

For that of th' holy Word. (*Works* 160-61; 1-6)

The speaker defines the priest's duty in terms of "just censures" which has the power to "lift to the sky" and "throw down to hell." This power inherent in the priest as judge attracts the speaker: "Fain would I draw nigh [and] put thee on." He is clearly fixated with power and the exercise of power. Even his lay occupation is defined in terms of power, a "lay-sword," a military and political metaphor.

But the speaker then realizes his own unworthiness to assume the powerful role of priest:

But thou art fire, sacred and hallow'd fire;  
 And I but earth and clay: should I presume  
 To wear thy habit, thy severe attire  
 My slender compositions might consume.  
 I am both foul and brittle; much unfit

To deal in holy Writ. (7-12)

The priesthood is still seen in terms of power -- fire -- but now so powerful that the speaker's own weaknesses prevent him from assuming the role. It is important to note that the speaker presumes that he has the autonomy to decide if he should put on any role he wishes. The speaker assumes that he, who is "but earth and clay," has the power to put on the priesthood at will. The poem, beginning with stanza two, charts a gradual transformation in self-awareness and change in perception of the priesthood.

The speaker becomes aware that it is only through a transformation of the self, analogous to the making of earthen vessels by fire, that he can be fit to enter the priesthood. And this transformation is not of his own achievement but of the very power invested in the priesthood itself, the "force of fire" used by the skillful hands of God (14). The potter and clay image of stanzas three and four alludes to Romans 9.18-21:

Therefore hath [God] mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.  
 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?  
 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Emphasizing the complete sovereignty of God's will and power over his creatures, this passage stresses the powerlessness of humanity. Humanity cannot even bargain or argue with God concerning their identities and roles. To be vessels of honour or dishonour is entirely the prerogative of the potter, God.

Through meditating on this analogy, the speaker comes to the realization of the true nature of the priesthood:

But th' holy men of God such vessels are,  
 As serve him up, who all the world commands:

When God vouchsafeth to become our fare.

Their hands convey him, who conveys their hands.

O what pure things, most pure must those things be,

Who bring my God to me! (25-30)

He recognizes here that the priesthood is not defined in terms of making judgment or exercising power but in terms of service, of feeding Christ's flock, of a lack of power. Instead of a glorious attire that may consume the wearer, the priesthood is seen as a vessel that serves God up for the people's consumption.

The speaker glimpses at the reciprocal intimacy that truly defines the priesthood, as epitomised by the Eucharistic supper: "Their hands convey him, who conveys their hands." The priest conveys God even as God conveys him. Both are conjoined in service to the people: God serving himself up as "our fare" while the priests become vessels for serving God to the congregation. But despite the lowly service, the priests do not lose their honour. In fact, it is precisely through this humble service that the priests are exalted as "pure things." The speaker has come to the realization that the glory of the priesthood is not the exercise of power in judgment but the intimate partnership with God in humble service.

Because of this insight, the speaker finally understands what he must do in order to be a priest:

Wherefore I dare not, I, put forth my hand

To hold the Ark, although it seem to shake

Through th' old sinnes and new doctrines of our land.

Onely, since God doth often vessels make

Of lowly matter for high uses meet,

I throw me at his feet. (31-36)



Here the speaker renounces his previous presumptuous attitude, exemplified in stanza one, of being able to put on the priesthood as he puts on an attire. He recognizes his presumptuousness as equivalent to Uzzah's presumptuousness in holding up the Ark even though Uzzah was not a Levite (2 Samuel 6.6-7). Instead, he realizes God's complete sovereignty and submits himself under God's transforming power. Rather than desiring the power that can "throwest down to hell" (3), the speaker throws himself at God's feet. He subjects himself to God's power rather than laying hold of power; he assumes the place of the clay in the hands of the potter.

The concluding stanza of the poem, however, suggests that the speaker falls back to his previous fixation with power albeit redirected into the form of submission:

There will I lie, untill my Maker seek  
 For some mean stuffe whereon to show his skill:  
 Then is my time. The distance of the meek  
 Doth flatter power. Lest good come short of ill  
 In praising might, the poore do by submission

What pride by opposition. (37-42)

Michael Schoenfeldt correctly observes that the line, "The distance of the meek / Doth flatter power," suggests that the "deferential display of the distance separating mortals from God is exposed as another tactic for trying to close that distance. Even when hurling himself at the feet of his God, Herbert suggests, one attempts to flatter divine power, and so, in some sense, to partake of it" (183-84). The speaker sees submission as a means to gain power for oneself. But this is in opposition to Romans 9 where the clay has no input in God's decision to make it into either a vessel of honour or dishonour. The speaker, here, presumes that one can flatter God in the same way one flatters political superiors in court. But such submissiveness, such flattery, is not genuine submission. As one of Herbert's *Outlandish Proverbs* suggests, "A flatterers throat is an open

Sepulcher" (*Works* 341), which is an allusion to Psalm 5.9. The way of flattery, like the way of opposition, is the way of death. It is still the self attempting to fashion its own identity, albeit the identity of a servant rather than receiving its identity from God. It is an exercise of power rather than a relinquishment of power. Monologism is here revealed in the form of self-abasement.<sup>5</sup>

"The Priesthood" portrays a speaker who reverts back to the monologic perspective he begins with despite having glimpsed the dialogic possibility. It dramatizes the stranglehold that monologism has on a person. Even in a submissive pose, one can turn that into a strategy to further one's own project of self-authoring. Once submission becomes an exercise of power it no longer engages in dialogism because it seeks to silence the decisive force in God's voice. Flattery is a strategy for gaining the last word in determining one's identity.

#### IV

In contrast to the speaker of "The Priesthood," the speaker in "Aaron" successfully understands that the fulfillment of the priestly qualifications lies not in oneself but in another, Christ. And through embracing a dialogic relation with Christ the speaker is empowered to fulfill the previously impossible qualifications.

The poem opens with the speaker describing the attire of "true Aarons" who are ideal priests:

Holiness 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. (*Works* 174; 1-5)

This description alludes to the ceremonial garments of Aaron the High Priest in Exodus 28. This description of the external garments serves also as a standard of a priest's character. As Chana

Bloch notes, the Geneva Bible's gloss on Exodus 28.30 suggests that the Urim and Thummim, signifying light and perfection, worn on the breast also signifies knowledge and holiness. "shewing what vertues are required in the Priests" (136; note 40). What is worn *on* the priest signifies what should be *in* the priest.

Precisely because of this significance of the outward garments as character standards, the speaker begins to examine his internal self in the second stanza:

Profanenesse 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. (6-10)

The speaker finds himself falling far short of the standards required by the priesthood. On his own resources, the speaker only finds "a noise of passions" that rings him for dead, "unto a place where is no rest," or no peace. Looking inward at his own strengths, therefore, only leads to self-condemnation. The speaker realizes he has no power within himself to fulfill his vocation; he is a "poore priest." On his own, he is unable to be who he is called to be, an Aaron.

An inward looking monologism only serves to highlight the inability of the self on its own to fulfill its priestly identity. The speaker, thus, begins to look without, towards another:

Onely another head  
 I have, another heart and breast,  
 Another musick, making me live not dead,  
 Without whom I could have no rest:  
 In him I am well drest. (11-15)

The “another” here, as the next stanza shows, refers to Christ. The speaker acknowledges that only in Christ is he “well drest.” The dress imagery in “Aaron” engages in dialogue with “The Priesthood.” Where the speaker in “The Priesthood” uses the clothing imagery to refer to the abstract order of the priesthood in all its power, the speaker in “Aaron” uses the imagery to point to a person, Christ, whose earthly ministry is underscored by a service of self-giving, even giving to the point of death. To put on Christ, here, in “Aaron,” has a very different connotation than the putting on of the self-consuming attire in “The Priesthood.” To put on Christ is to put on the identity of a servant. This difference in clothing imagery differentiates the outlooks of the speakers of “The Priesthood” and “Aaron,” perhaps foreshadowing the success of the latter and the failure of the former in becoming their desired identities. The speaker of “The Priesthood” ends where he begins, longing for the priesthood, while the speaker in “Aaron” ends as an Aaron, a fulfillment of the desired identity.

This fulfillment of identity can only happen when a dialogic, reciprocal relationship with Christ is embraced, symbolised by the clothing imagery:

Christ is my onely head,

My alone onely heart and breast,

My onely musick, striking me ev'n dead;

That to the old man I may rest,

And be in him new drest. (16-20)

The “another head” becomes “my onely head.” Where Christ is still apart from the speaker in stanza three, in stanza four, the speaker identifies himself with Christ. The self, here, claims possession of Christ: “Christ is *my* onely head” [emphasis mine]. But, Christ as head, heart and breast also possesses the self. Just as Christ lives in the self (line 24), the self is also in Christ (line 20). The mutual possession and intricate relation here allude back to “Clasping of Hands.”

Putting on Christ does not allow the self to exercise power over Christ but rather subjects the self to Christ's transforming power. Christ's music strikes the self dead (line 18). But it is not the self *per se* that is struck dead, but the old man: "That to the old man I may rest" (19). "Rest," which so far has signified "peace" and "rest from strife," here means "die." Thus, it is not the I that is obliterated but the old man, that is the I's tendency towards self-independence and rebellion against God.<sup>6</sup> By embracing Christ, the self is able to die to the old man exemplified in stanza two. And it is the old man that prevents or obstructs the self from fulfilling its priestly character.

Through the death of the old self and an intimate relation with Christ, the speaker can conclude:

So holy in my head,  
 Perfect and light in my deare breast,  
 My doctrine tun'd by Christ, (who is not dead,  
 But lives in me while I do rest)  
 Come people: Aaron's drest. (21-25)

In this final stanza, the speaker fulfills the character standards of the priesthood symbolized by the ceremonial garments in stanza one. What is "on the head" in stanza one, is now "in my head" in stanza five. This is achieved through the reciprocal relation with Christ who "lives in me while I do rest." This achievement is not the self's but Christ's.

"Rest" in line 24 is a triple pun. It could mean "die," "trust" or "inactivity." As "dying" it refers back to stanza four, as Richard Strier points out. For Strier, both instances of "rest" are phrases for "regeneration, spiritual 'death and resurrection'" (133). But Strier's overall reading of "Aaron," I find, falls too heavily on the side of spiritual death, ignoring the resurrection. The self is not obliterated, as Strier sees it, but rejuvenated. Regeneration is the rebirth of the self.

“Rest” could also mean “trust” in line 24, as in “resting on Christ.” This meaning distinguishes Christ “who lives in me” from the I who “do rest” on him. Simultaneously, it stresses the reciprocity between the I and Christ. As Helen Vendler points out, the line alludes to Galatians 2.20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (119). Paul’s statement presents a double paradox: I die with Christ, but live; yet it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me. Both the self and Christ share death and life together.

To read “rest” as “trust” is very close to reading “rest” as “inactivity.” Michael Schoenfeldt reads “[Christ] lives in me while I do rest” as “implying that God’s presence can only be manifested by means of the self’s inactivity” (165). However, I wish to suggest further that it is precisely when the self rests from its own self-striving and relinquishes its own project of self-authoring that it embraces God’s presence and rests on God. Through this process of resting *from* one’s striving and resting *on* God’s working, the self is authored into that which it seeks and is called.

When the speaker ends the poem by saying, “Come people: Aaron’s drest,” he acknowledges that he has fulfilled his priestly identity; he *is* an Aaron. The priest has found his self by losing it for Christ. By abandoning the self’s own striving for becoming an Aaron and by embracing Christ instead, the speaker achieves that which the self is unable to achieve on its own. The speaker’s calling to the people to come at the end of the poem also alludes to the calling at the end of “The Collar,” bringing us full circle. While the call in “The Collar” is from Christ to the priest, the call in “Aaron” is from the priest, the Deputy of Christ, to the people. In the former, the call establishes the identity of the self as priest. In the latter, the call acknowledges that identity and fulfills the duties expected of it, revoking / recalling humanity to Christ. Only by responding to Christ’s voice can the priest be a voice to others.

This chapter focuses on the relation between the self and an almighty God. The relation can be characterized as a dialogic relationship. It is not a relationship that silences the self. Instead, the self finds its authentic voice only in dialogue with God. God's voice, calling and naming the self, does not silence the self but invites the self to respond, to call back, naming God as its Lord and Father, an act that simultaneously accepts God's naming of the self as Servant and Child.

This relationship of reciprocal naming and calling, however, is strained by the self's tendency to reject the dialogue. The self prefers to find its own voice by silencing God's voice, by negating his naming and calling with attempts at self-naming and self-calling, with monologues to itself. And such projects of self-naming come in various guises, as either self-aggrandizement or self-abasement. The project of self-naming, regardless if the name is "Servant" or "Lord," is ultimately a project of rebellion as it rejects God's naming. As Bakhtin puts it, "I receive my name from the other, and this name exists for the other (to name oneself is to engage in usurpation)" (Todorov 96). Ironically, this act of self-naming is an act of self-condemnation for invariably one cannot name oneself apart from God. The act itself names the self as a rebel, a sinner, after Adam and Eve. Only by relinquishing any ambitions of self-naming and by embracing God's naming does the self receive an authentic name, and more, a space for authentic self-naming, that is, through responding and naming the other. By naming God "My Father" I name myself "Thy Child."

Herbert's poems, of course, do not only deal with the issue of self and the divine other. An analogous issue in Herbert's poetry is that of the relation of the text and prior authoritative texts. How does *The Temple*, as a text within the religious devotional tradition, relate to the two main authoritative texts of that tradition, namely the Bible and liturgy, as embodied in *The Book of Common Prayer*? How does Herbert's poetry find its own voice in relation to the divine voice of the Bible and the ecclesiastical voice of *The Book of Common Prayer*? Or does it remain only as an echo, replicating the voices of authority? The next chapter attempts to explore these questions.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> For example, Stanley Fish (*Self-Consuming Artifacts*) and Barbara Harman (*Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry*) argue that Herbert's poetry is ultimately self-effacing or self-consuming. Helen Vendler (*The Poetry of George Herbert*), Barbara Lewalski (*Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyrics*) and Terry Sherwood (*Herbert's Prayerful Art*), however, would argue that the self is ultimately affirmed in Herbert's poetry.

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Martin Buber (*I and Thou*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Scribner's, 1970) has certain concepts that strongly echo as well as illuminate both Bakhtin's theory and Renaissance spirituality. Buber makes a distinction between two kinds of selves, egos and persons:

Egos appear by setting themselves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons. One is the spiritual form of natural differentiation, the other that of natural association. The purpose of setting oneself apart is to experience and use, and the purpose of that is "living" -- which means dying one human life long. The purpose of relation is the relation itself -- touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life. (Buber 111-13)

Buber's concept of egos and persons parallels Bakhtin's concepts of monologism and dialogism: egos appear as one attempt to be monologic, to reduce the other into an object, while persons appear as one embraces the other through association, embracing a dialogic relation. Buber's language also strongly alludes to the ways of death and life in Christian spirituality, where egos die an illusory life but persons are "touched by a breath of eternal life." True selfhood, as a person, can only be achieved via relation, whereas the way of autonomy only brings forth an ego, a shell of a self, an illusion of living.

Buber also helps clarify the different ways of self-affirmation:

What has to be given up is not the I, as most mystics suppose: the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an I and You. What has to be given up is not the I but that false drive for self-affirmation which impels man to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things. (Buber 126)

Buber, here, clearly states that even in a relationship with the divine (the "highest" relationship) one's selfhood, one's self-identity, is never given up. Instead, what needs to be given up is a false sense of self-affirmation, the way that reduces others into objects, things that one can have and control, or in Bakhtinian terms, monologism. The world of relation, for Buber, is "dangerous" and "unpredictable." But it is only in the world of relation that authentic selfhood can be found, where persons, rather than egos, appear.

<sup>3</sup> One must not overemphasize the transcendence of God to the extent of negating any possibility of human reciprocity. Christian spirituality is centered on the incarnation and death of Christ. It is precisely because God has given himself to humanity, through Christ's death, that humanity can give themselves back in return. One can even say it is a case of mutual submission: God submitting himself through Christ as one who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20.28), and in return, Christians submit themselves to serve God.

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that "The Collar" alludes to this passage as well.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to the ending of "Clasping of Hands" where both extremes of "Thine and Mine" are renounced -- both total relinquishment and total possession are forms of control, are monologicistic, in opposition to a dialogic relation that affirms the I even as it affirms the Thou.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Strier, *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983 argues that in "Aaron," the "self is obliterated" (133). My reading of "Aaron" differs from Strier's on this point.



## Chapter 2. “In Another Make Me Understood”: Bible, Liturgy and the Self in *The Temple*

Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring,

And in another make me understood. -- “H. Scriptures II” (11-12)

Various scholars have examined the intertextual relationship between George Herbert’s poetry and the Bible. References have been made to the biblical allusions, the borrowing of themes and the use of biblical metaphors in Herbert’s lyrics. Their affinity to the Psalms, especially, has been studied.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, various scholars have also drawn attention to the relations between Herbert’s poems and Anglican liturgy.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I wish to examine these intertextual relations in conjunction with the process of self-affirmation, or self-realization, which was touched on in Chapter One. Intertextuality is the relationship between a work and its pre-text(s). A pre-text is a prior text which the author regards as a necessary framework for his work. The work’s meaning, therefore, does not reside within the text alone but lies in the relationship between the texts. How a text interacts with its pre-text(s) determines its meaning. The pre-texts for Herbert’s poetry are the Bible and *The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*.

I wish to explore these intertextual relations by asking whether sacred authority, as embodied in the Bible and the *BCP*, restricts and suffocates the poet’s individual creative freedom, or whether authority enriches and empowers self-expression. Is a religious poet, by virtue of his creed, bound by didactic and doctrinal obligations, and constrained to replicate the truths of sacred authority? Or is Herbert empowered to find his own voice and individuality through those sacred truths? In other words, are authoritative religious texts monologic or dialogic in their relationship

to the individual, and in this case, the individual's self-expression in lyrical religious poetry? As I have argued previously (see Introduction), I do not think that authority structures are necessarily monologic. Analogous to the discussion of the self's relationship to the divine other in the previous chapter, I argue that Herbert's creative freedom is empowered, enriched and stimulated through a dialogic intertextual relation between his poetic efforts, the Bible and the liturgical texts in the *BCP*. I will attempt to show this through a close analysis of "H. Scriptures (I) and (II)," "The H. Communion," "The Altar" and "Love (III)."

## I

Both "H. Scriptures" I and II suggest that the Bible ministers to the believer rather than subjects the believer to itself. The Bible's authoritative status as a sacred text notwithstanding, it serves the welfare of the individual by being a source of spiritual healing and self-understanding. Yet, because of its status as sacred text, the believer approaches it in humility and reverence. It is a case of mutual submission, a reciprocal or dialogic relation between authoritative text and submissive believer.

"H. Scriptures I" clearly presents the simultaneously authoritative and ministering nature of the Bible:

Oh Book! infinite sweetnesse! let my heart  
 Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,  
 Precious for any grief in any part;  
 To cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain.  
 Thou art all health, health thriving till it make  
 A full eternitie: thou art a masse  
 Of strange delights, where we may wish & take.  
 Ladies, look here; this is the thankfull glasse,

That mends the lookers eyes: this is the well  
 That washes what it shows. Who can indeare  
 Thy praise too much? thou art heav'ns Lidger here,  
 Working against the states of death and hell.  
 Thou art joyes handsell: heav'n lies flat in thee.  
 Subject to ev'ry mounters bended knee. (*Works* 58)

The poem is full of metaphors that underline the benefits the Scriptures give to the believer. The Bible is described as "precious for any grief;" it can "cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain;" it is "a masse / of strange delights, where we may wish & take." Herbert emphasizes not on the authority of the Bible to enjoin obedience to its laws and truths but on its ability to heal griefs and pains, and to delight the heart. The believer, in fact, is empowered with the freedom to pick and choose, to "wish & take," any of the Book's "strange delights" as a cure for any particular grief and pain.

The following lines continue this train of thought of the Bible as a book of spiritual healing:

Ladies, look here; this is the thankfull glasse,  
 That mends the lookers eyes: this is the well  
 That washes what it shows. (8-10)

The Bible is "the thankfull glasse" that not merely reflects the looker's image but also "mends the lookers eyes." Likewise, it is a well "that washes what it shows." Once again, healing, in terms of mending and washing, is emphasized as the primary function of Holy Scriptures.

In lines 11 and 12, however, the Bible is described as "heav'ns Lidger here / Working against the states of death and hell." "Lidger," as F. E. Hutchinson points out, refers to a resident ambassador in a foreign land (496). This political metaphor points to the Bible's function as

heaven's representative: it works towards the spiritual welfare of the believer against the opposing "states of death and hell" (12). In fact, the Bible is "joyes handsell" (13), which means, a "pledge" of the joys of heaven that the believer will receive. Thus, the Bible is not merely working to bring about spiritual healing but is itself the pledge of the fulfillment of that healing.

The poem's final metaphor provides it with a powerful climax and does more than merely restate the function of the Bible as an instrument of spiritual renewal or healing. Herbert explores the inherent paradox in claiming the authoritative Bible as the Christian's instrument of renewal: the authority to which the believer submits is in turn serving the believer's welfare. The poem's final lines, "heav'n lies flat in thee, / Subject to ev'ry mounters bended knee" (13-14) suggest a mutual submission between the Bible and the believer. Heaven, embodied in the Bible, lies subject to the believer. The authoritative sacred text, whose commandments the Christian is bound to, subjects itself to the service of the believer. But the believer, likewise, has to approach the Bible in humility and reverence, on "bended knee." It is only by bending that the believer can mount up to heaven. It is Herbert's genius to recognize the paradox here that is analogous to the finding of one's self by losing one's self (Matthew 16:25). Only when both parties subject themselves to each other do both fulfill their goals: the Bible in bringing the sinner to heaven, and the sinner in finding heaven.

I call this mutual subjection between authority and subject a dialogic relation between the two. The Bible, as the textual embodiment of divine authority, does not, in Herbert's thought, exercise power by subjecting the believer; instead it empowers the believer to rise to new spiritual heights, even as he willingly subjects himself to its authority. Herbert probably derives this insight from the analogy between God's Word, the Bible, and the Word, Jesus. In "H. Scriptures I," Herbert conceives of the Bible functioning in a way similar to Jesus' express purpose: "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27); Christ, the master, acts as a servant to his disciples.

“H. Scriptures II” moves the argument forward from the Bible as a healing source to the Bible as an aid in the process of self-understanding:

Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine,

And the configurations of their glorie!

Seeing not onely how each verse doth shine,

But all the constellations of the storie.

This verse marks that, and both do make a motion

Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie:

Then as dispersed herbs do watch a potion,

These three make up some Christians destinie:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,

And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing

Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring,

And in another make me understood.

Starres are poore books, & oftentimes do misse:

This book of starres lights to eternall blisse. (*Works* 58)

In *A Priest to the Temple*, Herbert promotes, as a means for interpreting Scripture,

a diligent Collation of Scripture with Scripture. For all Truth being consonant to it self, and all being penn'd by one and the self-same Spirit, it cannot be, but that an industrious, and judicious comparing of place with place must be a singular help for the right understanding of Scripture. (*CP* 229)

The same concept informs the writing of “H. Scriptures II.” In the poem, Herbert speaks of the combinations, configurations and constellations of “this book of starres.” Herbert, in effect, espouses an intertextual approach to reading the Bible when he writes, “This verse marks that, and

both do make a motion / Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie." This intertextual reading, however, leads not only to an understanding of the text but also to self-understanding -- these intertextually connected verses "make up some Christians destinie."

This, however, should not be understood as a Biblical predetermination or predestination of the Christian's life. Herbert immediately qualifies the above statement with the following lines:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,

And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing

Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring.

And in another make me understood. (9-12)

The statement, "which my life makes good. / And comments on thee," refers to another statement in *The Country Parson*:

But for the understanding of [Scripture]; the means he useth are first, a holy Life, remembering what his Master saith, that *if any do Gods will, he shall know of the Doctrine, John 7*, and assuring himself, that wicked men, however learned, do not know the Scriptures, because they feel them not, and because they are not understood but with the same Spirit that writ them. (CP 228)

Herbert, here, exposes another paradox: the believer's life is to some extent "made up" by reading Scripture, yet, that same Scripture can only be understood when the believer's life "makes good" Scripture's truths, and acts as a commentary on Scripture. Here, the reader's life becomes another text in dialogue with the Bible. Once again, a certain reciprocity occurs between the Bible and its reader. Scripture affects the reader's life even as the reader's life affects his / her reading of Scripture. Thus, the "Christians destinie" is not simply received monologically from the Bible but emerges from an intricate dialogical reading process.

It is also important to note that self-understanding does not arise from looking inward but, paradoxically, from looking outward: "And in another make me understood." Only through another does the self understand itself, suggesting that the other acts as a mirror from which the self sees its reflection. This suggestion alludes back to the looking glass image of "H. Scriptures I," reinforcing the dialogical nature of the relationship between the self and the Bible. The Scriptures, Herbert seems to be suggesting, functions as another "thou" who seeks to dialogue with the believer through the reading process, a reading process which, as shown above, is itself dialogical. Herbert does not espouse "objective" readings of Scripture but calls for a reading process whereby subjectivity becomes the focus and aim of reading.

The meaning of a Biblical text, then, does not reside in itself but resides in its intertextual relations with other Biblical texts, and its dialogical relation with the reader's life-text. "H. Scriptures" I and II provide the paradigm for understanding the nature of intertextuality in Herbert's poems. If Herbert sees self-understanding as an intertextual process between a reading of the Bible and a reading of the self, it is probable that he perceives self-expression as, likewise, an intertextual dialogue between the voice(s) of authority and the voice of the self. I hope to show through a reading of "The H. Communion" that the relationship between liturgy and the self is as equally dialogic as with the self's relation with the Bible.

## II

The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is the central liturgical event in Anglican liturgy. Herbert's "The H. Communion" explores the significance of this liturgy to the Christian. The poem is actually composed of two parts, each almost a poem in itself. And the two parts enter into dialogue with each other, answering each other. As John E. Booty notes, "the first [part is concerned] with the descent of the divine to the Christian and the second with the ascent of the

Christian to heaven" (87). In addition to an internal dialogue, the poem is in dialogue with the *Book of Common Prayer* which outlines the order for the administration of the Supper.<sup>3</sup>

The poem begins with the assertion that Christ presents himself to the participant "Not in rich furniture, or fine aray, / Nor in a wedge of gold" (1-2) but in the humble elements of bread and wine (*Works* 52-53). The first stanza emphasizes the fact of Christ giving himself, conveying himself to the sinner:

Thou, who for me wast sold,

To me dost now thy self convey;

For so thou should'st without me still have been.

Leaving within me sinne: (3-6)

Christ "wast sold" for the sinner's sake, and in the Eucharist, conveys his own self to the sinner that the participant may ingest it, for if Christ is without, then sin will still be within the participant. This emphasis on Christ's self-giving for the sake of the sinner early in the poem parallels the emphasis in the *Book of Common Prayer* on Christ as God's gift to humanity in the liturgy for Holy Communion: "[God] has given his Son our Savior Jesus Christ, not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance" (*BCP* 256). In delivering the bread and the cup to the participants, or communicants as they are called, the Priest is required to say the following:

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was *given for thee*, preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life: and take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died *for thee*, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.

[and]



The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was *shed for thee*, preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life: and drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was *shed for thee*, and be thankful. [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 264)

The emphasis of the liturgy is clearly on what Christ has done for Christians, on Christ's self-sacrifice and self-giving. But this emphasis on Christ's work is balanced out in the *Book of Common Prayer* by the congregation's offering of themselves in return after the reception of the Eucharist:

O Lord and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants . . . *offer and present* unto thee, O Lord, *ourselves, our souls and bodies*, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee . . . [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 264)

Thus, the liturgy embodies the acts of mutual self-sacrifice and self-giving between human and divine. As John Booty observes, "this sacrament involves deep mutual participation" from both human and divine parties (87). Francis Bacon also observes that liturgy is strongly reciprocal in nature: "For the liturgy or service, it consisteth of the reciprocal acts between God and man; which, on the part of God, are preaching of the word, and the sacraments, which are seals to the covenant, or as the visible word; and on the part of man, invocation of the name of God . . . prayers or confessions" (*Advancement of Learning* 211; II. xxv. 22).

Herbert's poem, though emphasizing Christ's sacrifice for and work within the sinner in the first part, lacks the counterbalancing emphasis on human work or on the reciprocal offering of the self as embodied in the Anglican liturgy. The second part of "The H. Communion" focuses, instead, on the benefits of Christ's work, namely a restored communion between heaven and earth. Herbert seems to put emphasis more on faith rather than works for it is by faith that one receives the benefits from Christ and not by human works.

Herbert chooses to focus on another element in the liturgy, namely that of the close union and fellowship between Christ and the believer, restored through the merits of Christ's death. The Prayer Book teaches that the Eucharist establishes this "holy fellowship" between the congregation and Christ (*BCP* 265):

[if] we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood, then *we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, we be one with Christ, and Christ with us . . .* (*BCP* 258)

Grant us therefore (gracious Lord) so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and *that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.* [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 263)

Both of these statements in the Prayer Book describe this intimate fellowship by using a dwelling image: Christ dwelling in us, and we dwelling in him. Herbert may be alluding to the dwelling image of the *BCP* when he refers to the soul's "subtile rooms":

Onely thy grace, which with these elements comes,

Knoweth the ready way,

And hath the privie key,

Op'ning the souls most subtile rooms; (19-22)

Only Christ has the key to enter and dwell in the soul's most secret rooms, and Christ does this through the Eucharist.

When the second part of the poem uses the simile of moving from one room to another to describe the accessibility of heaven from earth (Garden of Eden), it establishes a direct line of dialogue with the first part:

For sure when Adam did not know

To sinne, or sinne to smother,

He might to heav'n from Paradise go,

As from one room t'another. (33-36)

Before Adam's fall, there was no barrier between Heaven, God's dwelling place, and Paradise, Adam's dwelling place. The unhindered access between the two realms suggests a close fellowship or communion between God and humanity. Sin, however, broke this close communion, until Christ's death reconciles and restores the fellowship. The rending of the curtain that divides the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the Jewish temple at the death of Christ symbolizes the breaking down of barriers that divide humanity from God (Matthew 27.50-51). The Eucharist, therefore, embodies this reconciliation since it embodies Christ's sacrificial death:

Thou hast restor'd us to this ease

By this thy heav'nly blood;

Which I can go to, when I please,

And leave th' earth to their food. (37-40)

In the bread and wine that represent the body and blood of Christ, Herbert finds a special closeness between the believer and Christ. In the Lord's Supper, the Christian has as much access to the divine as Adam did before the Fall. The Eucharist, therefore, is truly a "holy communion" between God and humanity. In the Holy Communion, Christ enters and dwells in the Christian's most inner rooms, and the Christian can dwell in God's dwelling place, Heaven, "as from one room [to] another."<sup>4</sup>

Herbert, therefore, emphasizes mutual dwelling as an image of the reciprocal relationship between God and believers, instead of mutual self-giving as in the liturgy of the *BCP*. Herbert probably has John 15 in mind: "Abide in me, and I in you. . . . Henceforth I call you not servants; . . . but I have called you friends" (verses 4, 15). In the *BCP*, the aspects of the mystical fellowship (Christ in us and we in him) only occur in the liturgy *before* the reception of the bread and the cup.

During and after the reception of the elements, the attention of the *BCP* is directed towards service and offering. For Herbert, the most important aspect of the liturgy is the close fellowship of Christ and believers, not the aspects of mutual service or self-sacrifice. As in John 15, Herbert emphasizes friendship and not servanthood. This emphasis is consonant with Herbert's focus on rejecting autonomy as discussed in Chapter One. For to claim that Christians can offer themselves in return to God, to reciprocate Christ's offering of himself, is, to a certain extent, claiming self-worth for themselves. Even the Prayer Book qualifies this act of self-offering to God: "we be unworthy . . . to offer unto thee any sacrifice" (*BCP* 264). As in "Clasping of Hands," the close communion between Christ and believers makes the question of giving and taking irrelevant; there is "no Thine and Mine" to take or give (*Works* 157; 20). As John Calvin says, "whatever is [Christ's] may be called ours" (*Institutes* 4.XVII.2). Heaven has become as much the Christian's dwelling place as God's, just as the Christian's innermost rooms have become as much Christ's dwelling place as the soul's.<sup>5</sup>

It is informative that Herbert feels free to depart from the emphasis of the Prayer Book and focuses instead on other elements less emphasized in the liturgy. In the chapter on "The Parson Praying," in *The Country Parson*, Herbert probably had in mind the protests of the Puritans against set prayers, such as those found in the Prayer Book, when he writes that "we speak not as Parrats, without reason, or offer up sacrifices as they did of old, which was of beasts devoyd of reason" (*CP* 232). Many Puritans protested against prescribed forms of prayers and worship, preferring spontaneous individual prayers. As John Milton writes, "Even the Lord's Prayer is a pattern or model, rather than a formula to be repeated verbatim either by the apostles or by the churches today. So it is clear that the church has no need of a liturgy: those who prompt and assist our prayers are divine helpers, not human" (*On Christian Doctrine* 670). Herbert's charge to his congregation, then, to pray not as "parrots," devoid of reason, responds to such protests by

Puritans against using prescribed prayers. The heart and mind, not merely the mouth, are to accompany the reading of prayers.

Herbert's approach to prescribed prayers and liturgy as a priest informs his approach to liturgy as a poet. In "The H. Communion," Herbert does not feel obligated to replicate the emphasis and themes of the *BCP*. Although the Prayer Book is the ecclesiastical authoritative text, Herbert does not allow it to dictate the direction and emphasis of the poem. Instead, Herbert enters into dialogue with the liturgical emphasis of the *BCP*, highlighting that which he finds to be truly important. As with the self's relation to the Bible, the poetic self enters into dialogue with liturgy in order to find its own voice. Despite their authoritative status, the Bible and the *BCP* do not function in a monologic way for Herbert. A close reading of two more poems, "The Altar" and "Love (III)," the first and last poems in the poetic sequence called "The Church," will reveal the biblical and liturgical intertextual dialogues that inform and infuse meaning to Herbert's poems.

### III

"The Altar" is the first shaped poem one encounters in *The Temple*, the second being "Easter-Wings." As Michael Schoenfeldt observes, the shape of the poem resembles a classical altar, rather than a communion table, or the Eucharistic altar (166). This is strange considering that the poem's title and inclusion in "The Church" would have alerted contemporary readers to the communion table, which is the only "altar" they usually expect to find in an Anglican church. Furthermore, the classically shaped altar of the poem contradicts its own allusion to Old Testament altars of unhewn stones (lines 3-8). The shape of Herbert's poem, "The Altar," does not resemble either the communion table or the Old Testament altar of stones but it does disconcertingly resemble the shape of a capital "I":

A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant reares,  
 Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:  
 Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;  
 No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.  
 A H E A R T alone

Is such a stone .  
 As nothing but  
 Thy pow'r doth cut.  
 Wherefore each part  
 Of my hard heart  
 Meets in this frame,  
 To praise thy Name:  
 That, if I chance to hold my peace,  
 These stones to praise thee may not cease.  
 O let thy blessed S A C R I F I C E be mine.  
 And sanctifie this A L T A R to be thine. (*Works 26*)

Michael Schoenfeldt suggests that the poem's shape exposes the inherent tensions and contradictions within a devotional poet's attempts at praising God *via* poetry: "The altar of self-immolation supplies the site of self-advertisement" (165). This is so because a proper sacrifice of praise must be accompanied by humility and self-effacement, yet, the majesty of God compels one to invest the self into giving every effort to produce a sacrifice worthy of God. I suggest, however, that the "I" of the poem's shape can be seen as the sign of self-fulfillment received through a dialogic relation with God. This interpretation only becomes evident through analyzing the intertextual dialogues of the poem with biblical and liturgical sources.

Chana Bloch has noted the various Biblical allusions in the poem. Bloch shows how Herbert combines two different themes from the Bible to produce his own statement (64). The altar made of stones, which "No workmans tool hath touch'd," is a reference to Deuteronomy 27.5-6:

And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God.

But the broken heart imagery alludes to Psalm 51.16-17:

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else I would give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.  
 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

According to Deuteronomy, to raise a *broken* altar would be an irreverent act towards God since it is explicitly prescribed that the altar must be made of *whole* stones. But when the altar is made of a heart instead, then a broken heart is precisely the most suitable offering to God. Herbert has skillfully conflated the altar of sacrifice and the broken heart which *is* the sacrifice. The altar, thus, becomes not merely the site of the offering but is itself the offering.

The poem becomes even more complex when Herbert also conflates the altar that is the heart with the poem that is shaped as an altar: "each part / Of my hard heart / Meets in this frame, / To praise thy Name:" "this frame" refers to the poem. Thus, the poem itself is both the site of offering as well as "the sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13.15) that is offered. The poem as altar suggests a structural product but the poem as heart suggests an expression of the self. Since Herbert conflates them together, it should not be surprising that the structural shape of the poem resembles not only an altar but also the letter "I" -- the structure reflects the self.

But does Herbert's artful shaping of the poem and conflation of various biblical sources contradict his own avowed aim to praise God's name and not his own, since the poem's craftsmanship and its shape draw attention to the self? Does it also contradict his claim that "No workmans tool hath touch'd" his altar? Michael Schoenfeldt thinks it does. Schoenfeldt sees the shape and opening lines of the poem as broadcasting "the abilities of its human maker," yet, "the next couplet . . . sacrifices the claims for human craftsmanship made in the opening" (161-62). I think that Schoenfeldt, however, misses a subtle distinction that Herbert draws in the poem.

The first and second couplets of the poem do not contradict each other. The first line claims for human agency the rearing of the altar as a whole, whereas the third line claims for God's providence in the framing of the *parts* that form the altar: "Whose *parts* are as thy hand did frame" [emphasis mine]. This distinction between the parts and the whole of the altar refers back to the Old Testament altars of stones -- the separate stones that make up the altar have not been cut by

any iron tool, thus, framed by nature, the hand of Providence, yet, the artifice of the whole altar is assembled by human hands. The third and fourth couplets, therefore, state that the "HEART alone / is such a stone, / as nothing but / [God's] pow'r doth cut." And each part of this heart that is cut and broken by God "meets in this frame [the poem / altar], / to praise [God's] Name." The repetition of the rhyme "frame" in lines three and eleven draws attention to this distinction: God frames the parts, which makes up the frame (the whole) that is Herbert's poem.

"The Altar," then, is a product of *creative partnership* between human and divine makers, a *co-authorship*. It does not try to relinquish human agency nor assert its autonomy. Once again, Herbert does not see God's authority as effacing human agency in a monological way but sees God as creating room for human self-expression. In fact, the altar, and the poem, cannot be framed without the parts that God has framed. As with the Scriptures and with liturgy, Herbert sees God's providential power as enriching and empowering the self. Thus, the various biblical texts to which Herbert alludes are the works of God but Herbert assembles them together, conflating their ideas, to form a statement of his own voice.

But the question that still needs to be asked is whether the poem's attention to the self, *via* its "I" shape, undermines its express purpose to praise God's name? John N. Wall correctly notes that the "I" of the poem's shape can also refer to the "I" of the poem, "Jesu," where the engraved pieces of a broken heart are arranged to re-spell "JESU," but to the speaker's "broken heart [Christ] was *I ease you*" (9) (Wall 206). In the Bodleian manuscript of Herbert's *The Temple*, the "I" and "J" are identical. And the poem itself suggests that the two letters are interchangeable. The "I" of the "The Altar" is thus, both the "I" of the self and the "I" of Jesus Christ. As the "I" of the self, it refers to the altar, the heart, the poem that is offered as the poet's sacrifice of praise to God. As the "I" of Christ, it refers to Christ's redeeming sacrifice that is alluded to in line 15. The poem,



thus, achieves its purpose of praising God, even in its shape, as it ultimately draws attention to Christ. And through praising Christ the self is affirmed.<sup>6</sup>

This theme of mutual self-offering or self-sacrifice, as noted above, is an integral part of the liturgy of Holy Communion. It is true, as Joseph H. Summers points out, that the word "altar" "is never applied to the Communion Table nor is the Holy Communion ever called a 'sacrifice'" (141). But the Lord's Supper does draw attention to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Furthermore, Stanley Stewart has also pointed out that the reference to the triumphal entry of Luke 19.40 in lines 13-14 -- "I tell you that, if these [disciples] should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" -- indirectly points to the Eucharist since the triumphal entry only shortly preceded the Passover whence the Lord's Supper was instituted (92).

As already noted above, the central part of the liturgy of Holy Communion, as found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, involves participation in a mutual self-sacrifice between God and humanity. As Christ has offered himself as a redemptive sacrifice for humanity, an act embodied in the Eucharist, Christians, on receiving the Eucharist, offer themselves in return to God, as "a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice" (BCP 264). The final couplet of "The Altar," therefore, re-enacts this mutual self-offering: "O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine, / And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine." Only when Christ, God's sacrifice, is received by the altar does the altar become sanctified, a holy and reasonable sacrifice, to be offered back to God. The altar, and hence, the poem and the heart, is not worthy to be an offering to God in and of itself. Only in relation to Christ, does it become an object of worth.

This concept and the poem's use of "mine" and "thine" anticipate another poem, "Clasping of Hands." As I have shown in the previous chapter, "Clasping of Hands" expresses the intense relationship between God and the Christian in terms of mutual possession. In "Clasping of Hands," the self apart from God is unworthy for possession by either God or the self: "If I without thee

would be mine, / I neither should be mine nor thine" (9-10). And the poem ends with a prayer for an intensity of mutual possession whereby the terms "Thine and Mine" become irrelevant (20). Such intensity of mutual possession occurs when a "holy fellowship" is established between Christ and the believer through the Eucharist: "we be one with Christ, and Christ with us" (*BCP* 265, 258). And thus, the "I" of the altar / poem / heart is also the "I" of Jesus.

I have suggested that in "The H. Communion" Herbert de-emphasizes the aspect of mutual offering in favor of close communion, expressed in terms of mutual dwelling, in order to safeguard against implicit claims for self-worth. Why, then, does Herbert focus on the language of mutual self-offering in "The Altar"? This question is partly answered by the qualification that the altar that is the poem, needs to be sanctified by the reception of Christ, in order to be worthy to be offered to God.

Another alternative answer, however, is that Herbert *does* emphasize close communion between Christ and the Christian over service and sacrifice in "The Altar." As I have noted, within the context of an intense communion between God and the believer, questions of possession, "Thine and Mine," and hence of giving, become irrelevant. "The Altar" gestures towards this communion with its structural shape -- the "I" of the self and the "I" of Christ are one. Only within this context of communion, and literally within this framework of the united "I"s, does Herbert speak of mutual self-sacrifice, or mutual self-offering, of "mine" and "thine." The poem, as a whole, is an expression of longing for worthy service and offering to God. But the poem's shape undermines that longing or, perhaps more accurately, fulfills that longing by signifying the intimate communion between the self and Christ. For the context of communion transforms the acts of obligatory service into acts of love, which is their true fulfillment, since "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13.10). Just as the New Testament's emphasis on love does not obliterate the Old

Testament's focus on law but rather fulfills it, the poem's "I"-shape fulfills, rather than undermines, the poem's expressed desire to praise God.

The poem, however, does begin with a "broken ALTAR" and ends with a *longing* for communion. Yet, the shape of the altar that greets the reader is not broken but whole and complete. And the I-shape suggests that the communion between Christ and the self is *already* fulfilled. This disjunction is between the speaker's self-interpretation or self-perception and God's gracious act of acceptance. As in "A true Hymne," -- "when th' heart sayes (sighing to be approved) / *O, could I love!* and stops: God writeth. *Loved*" (*Works* 168: 19-20) -- the desire or longing for love and communion is accepted by God as a done deed. This difference between self-perception and God's acceptance anticipates "Love (III)," which is a dramatization of the conflict between the soul's self-perception of unworthiness and Love's unconditional acceptance.

In addition, the poem's title, "The Altar," alludes to the Old Testament with its sacrifices and offerings for reconciliation between God and humanity. But the poem itself points to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament with its emphasis on the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. In this regard, the poem also points towards "Love (III)," a poem that is strongly Eucharistic. Furthermore, it seems highly appropriate that "The Church" begins with a poem whose title recalls Old Testament liturgy (sacrifices and burnt offerings) and ends with one whose title and content recalls the New (love and the Eucharist).

#### IV

Herbert uses the social relationship between a host and a guest as the governing conceit for "Love (III)":

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,

Guiltie of dust and sinne.

But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,  
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
 If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:  
 Love said, You shall be he.  
 I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,  
 I cannot look on thee.  
 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame  
 Go where it doth deserve.  
 And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?  
 My deare, then I will serve.  
 You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:  
 So I did sit and eat. (*Works* 188-89)

The poem puns on the unspoken "host" as a host to a guest and as the Host, the Communion bread. Michael Schoenfeldt, in exploring this conflation of social and spiritual relationships, suggests that the poem employs the language of social courtesy as a medium whereby the speaker and Love maneuver for power and superiority.<sup>7</sup> In the discourse of courtesy, acts of generosity function to enforce hierarchical relations -- the one who receives kindness is in debt to the benefactor. The speaker's self-deprecation and deference to Love's invitation, then, "attempts to demarcate some part of himself as neither subject to nor dependent upon" Love (Schoenfeldt 210). The poem,

therefore, is "a picture of the [spiritual conflict] betwixt God and [the] soul" (Walton 281). The poem ends with the soul's defeat in this "contest of courtesy" (Schoenfeldt 205). Stanley Fish sees in this defeat the soul's loss of an independent will. The speaker's self, according to Fish, "has been killed with kindness" (*Living Temple* 135).

Both Schoenfeldt and Fish over-emphasize the struggle for power and devalue the expression of love implied in the title of the poem. This is not to deny that a struggle occurs between the speaker and Love. But the struggle that I wish to emphasize is that between the soul's assertion of his autonomy and Love's attempts to save the soul from his own folly. In opposition to Fish, I suggest that Love, far from attempting to kill the speaker's self with kindness, exalts the speaker's self into a new identity at the end of the poem.

A. B. Chambers shows how "Love (III)" is in dialogue with the order of the Holy Communion in the *Book of Common Prayer* (65-68). The main relevant passage is the exhortation for negligence in communion:

We be come together at this time, dearly beloved brethren, to feed at the Lord's Supper, unto the which in God's behalf I bid you all that be here present, and beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that ye will not refuse to come thereto, *being so lovingly called and bidden of God himself*. Ye know how grievous and *unkind* a thing it is, when a man hath prepared a rich feast, decked his table with all kind of provision, so that there lacketh nothing but the *guests* to sit down; and yet they which be called without any cause most *unthankfully* refuse to come. Which of you in such a case would not be moved? Who would not think a great injury and wrong done unto him? Wherefore most dearly beloved in Christ, take ye good heed lest ye, withdrawing yourselves from this holy supper, provoke God's indignation against you. . . . *If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come: wherefore then do you not repent and amend?* When God

calleth you, be you not ashamed to say you will not come? . . . They that refused the feast in the Gospel, because they had bought a farm, or would try their yokes of oxen, or because they were married, were not so excused but counted *unworthy* of the heavenly feast. . . . I call you in Christ's behalf, I exhort you, *as you love your own salvation*, that ye will be partakers of this Holy Communion. And as the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up his soul by death upon the cross for your health; even so it is your duty to receive the communion together in the remembrance of his death, . . . And whereas you offend God so sore in refusing this holy banquet, I admonish, exhort, and beseech you that unto this unkindness ye will not add any more. Which thing ye shall do, if ye stand by *as gazers and lookers* on them that do communicate, and be no partakers of the same yourselves. For what thing can this be accounted else, than a further contempt and unkindness unto God? . . . Wherefore, rather than you should so do, depart you hence, and give place to them that be godly disposed. [emphasis mine] (*BCP 254-56*)

This long quotation is necessary to show the numerous echoes and allusions to it found in "Love (III)." Chambers notes that Herbert places the speaker in the category of "self-excommunicates," those who refuse to partake of the Communion (66). But instead of being asked to leave, as in the Prayer Book, Love constantly presses the soul to stay and partake of the feast.

There should not be much doubt that Love is a personification of God or Christ. The Bible claims that "God is love" (1 John 4.8, 16). Herbert himself addresses God as love in the *Country Parson*: "Oh Lord . . . thou art Love" and "But thou Lord, art . . . sweetnesse, and love" (*CP 233, 288*). Thus, Herbert draws a correspondence between God, who lovingly calls and bids the sinner to the Supper, and Love, who "bade [the soul] welcome." This helps establish the Eucharist as an interpretive context for the poem.

The soul, in "Love (III)," acts out the role of the self-excommunicate who says to himself, "I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come" (*BCP* 255). At Love's invitation, the soul "drew back, / Guiltie of dust and sinne." The soul claims his own unworthiness to participate in the feast, citing his unkindness and ungratefulness as reasons to depart from the supper. He feels unworthy to even look at Love, or to be a mere "gazer and looker" at the banquet, recalling the exhortation of the Prayer Book. The soul, then, seems to adhere to the protocol of the *BCP* to depart from the Supper if one is not partaking. But, ironically, the very qualities which the soul cites for his unworthiness, unkindness and ungratefulness, are the very same adjectives the Prayer Book uses to describe the act of refusing God's invitation: unkind and unthankful. Even in the very act of justifying his refusal of Love's invitation, the soul merely adds to his unkindness and ungratefulness.

The soul's objections and self-deprecations seem like acts of courtesy and humility or expressions of guilt and shame but the Prayer Book allows for no such excuses to reject God's offer: "If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come: wherefore then do you not repent and amend? When God calleth you, be you not ashamed to say you will not come?" (*BCP* 255). The grievous sinner, which the soul perceives himself to be, has no reason to be ashamed to come to the Table. In fact, he should be ashamed for *not* coming. The immediate remedy for the soul's sense of unworthiness is to repent and amend. Withdrawing from the Supper, which is what the soul chooses to do, is precisely what condemns the soul as unworthy -- "They that refused the feast in the Gospel, because they had bought a farm, or would try their yokes of oxen, or because they were married, were not so excused but counted *unworthy* of the heavenly feast" [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 255). In this context, the soul's actions of self-deprecation, which on the face of it seem to be acts of humility and self-denial, are revealed as self-condemning acts, as

acts of rebellion: as Richard Strier observes, "Love (III)" dramatizes "the steps by which self-denial becomes self-assertion" (74).

Michael Schoenfeldt correctly observes that although "It is an unkind and ungrateful act to refrain from partaking of the rich feast which the Lord has prepared; . . . it is [also] a perilous venture to approach such a table unworthily" (220). Schoenfeldt, therefore, surmises that "Access to the Eucharist, like the approach to figures of political power, is dangerous, full of great peril and potentially great rewards" (221). But I think Schoenfeldt over-emphasizes the danger.

The Prayer Book calls the people to "Amend your lives, and be in perfect charity with all men, so shall ye be meet partakers of those holy mysteries" (*BCP* 258). But this should not be understood as a call for a life of perfect virtue as the prerequisite for Communion. According to the *BCP*, "it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in God's *mercy*" [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 257). All the "dust and sinne" cannot prevent anyone from partaking the Communion if they only repent from them, confess them, and trust in God's mercy in forgiving them. As a matter of fact, a general confession is made at every Lord's Supper in preparation for the Eucharist:

We do earnestly repent, and be heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us most merciful Father, for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake; forgive us all that is past. (*BCP* 259-60)

And, immediately after, forgiveness is assured by the priest:

Almighty God our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them which with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him: Have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strength [sic] you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*BCP* 260)



As if that is not enough to assure the people of God's forgiveness, Scriptural passages are read to comfort them:

Come unto me all that travail and be heavy laden and I shall refresh you. . . .

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins. (*BCP* 260)

In addition, the prayer following the preface to the Eucharist states that God is "the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy" [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 263). The forgiving and merciful nature of God emphasized in all these passages tempers the inherent danger in approaching the Eucharist.

My point is that the soul's perceived need in "Love (III)" to self-excommunicate is not caused by the nature of the Eucharist itself but by his own doing. Becoming a worthy partaker of the Lord's Supper lies not in one's ability but in God's mercy, which, the Prayer Book stresses, is easily accessible. Indeed, when Love declares that "You shall be he," Love *declares* the soul as a worthy guest: the soul's guilt of "dust and sinne" has been forgiven. The danger of eating the feast unworthily, though real, does not in itself produce in the sinner an anxiety on how to *behave* appropriately. The above passages from the *BCP* stress not the outward behavior or manner of the recipients, as socio-political protocols would, but the *inward* sincerity of heart. The greatest danger, then, is an insincere heart, one which does not trust in God's mercy.

This is precisely the soul's condition in "Love (III)." The soul's objections reveal a masking of spiritual pride that refuses to trust Love's merciful acceptance of him as the worthy guest. As Schoenfeldt remarks, "In stubbornly professing his unworthiness and thus contradicting his Lord's declaration that 'you shall be he,' [the soul] asserts a kind of worthiness and pride -- the worthiness to judge his own unworthiness, the pride of 'hinking humility to be his own' (217). The source of the conflict lies not in Love's welcome, in the condescension of a superior to an inferior

provoking a power struggle, but in the soul's pride in refusing to accept mercy and grace, preferring to *earn* his place at the table.

The soul's perspective is ultimately monologic. He prefers to define himself apart from Love's offer of communion. Rejecting the possibility of co-authoring his identity with Love / Christ, the soul prefers the choice of self-authoring, even when the identity authored is that of an excommunicate. In contrast, Love's invitation to the feast offers the prospect of finding the self within a dialogic relationship, since the Eucharist, as already noted earlier, establishes a close communion between God and mortal. Love attempts to persuade the soul away from his path of self-condemnation into salvation in Christ. As the Prayer Book states, "I call you in Christ's behalf. I exhort you, *as you love your own salvation*, that ye will be partakers of this Holy Communion" [emphasis mine] (*BCP 255*).

That the soul's perspective is monologic, and thus egocentric, can be seen from his numerous self-focused statements: "*I* the unkinde, ungratefull? . . . *I* cannot look on thee. . . . *I* have marr'd them: let *my* shame / Go where it doth deserve. . . . then *I* will serve" [emphasis mine]. In contrast, Love's focus throughout the poem is directed towards the speaker: "observing [*him*] grow slack . . . questioning / If [*he*] lack'd any thing. . . . [declaring] *You* shall be [the worthy guest]," taking *his* hand, bearing *his* blame and, finally, serving *him* -- "*You* must sit down . . . and taste my meat" [emphasis mine]. Stanley Fish, however, sees Love's actions as less than wholly benevolent. "On its face, the statement [that 'You shall be he'] seems generous," remarks Fish, "but in terms of what the speaker desires -- an earned place -- it is hard and unyielding because it denies him any part in the disposition of his own case" (*Living Temple* 133). But what the speaker desires is not only unattainable -- the place cannot be earned -- but self-destructive. To frustrate the speaker's desire for an earned place, therefore, is precisely the loving act of saving him from himself.

When the speaker objects, "I cannot look on thee." Love replies, "Who made the eyes but I?" Richard Strier notes that "the speaker 'cannot look on' Love because of his own unwillingness to be looked upon" (79). This is a mark of Herbert's ability to plumb the psychological depths of the human heart. The soul's shame of his guilt results in the shame of being recognized, which in turn manifests itself in the unwillingness to recognize another. The aversion of eyes is, therefore, an admission of guilt. What this suggests is that the soul's sense of his own unworthiness is genuine, not simply a courteous gesture for the sake of the "contest of courtesy." In other words, the speaker's acts of rebellion and self-assertion are, to a certain extent, unwitting. The soul is not fully aware of the consequences of his actions. Like Adam and Eve who thought they were doing what seems beneficial to themselves in eating the fruit, the speaker genuinely believes that he is better off withdrawing from the feast, fearing lest he brings damnation on himself.<sup>8</sup> The soul is deceived by his own judgment. Trusting in God begins with mistrusting one's own judgment.

Once again, I stress that it is not the nature of the Lord's Supper itself that causes the speaker's anxiety and withdrawal from the feast. The remedy for his anxiety is easily accessible and, in fact, already given when Love pronounces the soul as a worthy guest. But the speaker is caught in a monologic perspective. Within this monologism, the most logical path is to abstain from the meat. For monologism sees the self as the only active subject, as the absolute or sole author of all things -- only the self alone can make itself worthy, earn its place at the table. And since the self is unable to make itself worthy, the speaker chooses what seems, logically, the path of self-preservation -- not to eat damnation on oneself. Ironically, of course, the speaker's refusal to eat is precisely the act that brings self-damnation.

The soul, then, does not engage "in forms of self-deprecation [in order to] allow his host the opportunity to perform the beneficent action of lifting him up" (Schoenfeldt 216). He is not, as Schoenfeldt suggests, humbling himself in order to be exalted, according to the injunction of Luke

18.14: “for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Such acts of humility can only be feigned humility and not genuine. As one of Herbert’s *Outlandish Proverbs* states, “Humble hearts have humble desires” (*Works* 321). Acting lowly in order to gain advancement is far from a “humble desire.” It seems moot to me to feign humility before an omniscient God (or at least a “quick-ey’d Love”) to gain advancement. The false humility would doom the project to failure from the start. True humility desires not advancement.<sup>9</sup> I suggest, therefore, that the speaker’s courteous objections function to keep himself out of the feast rather than to find a place in it.

Love’s rhetorical reply, “Who made the eyes but I?”, puns on “eye” and “I.” In addition, Chana Bloch suggests that the guest’s initial reaction echoes those of Old Testament prophets being summoned by God to his service, especially Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 4.10-11 (104). God’s reply to Moses’ excuse of non-eloquence is particularly relevant to “Love (III)”: “Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?” (Exodus 4.11). In response to the soul’s shame of his self, Love seems to be replying, “I made the selves, the “I”s, including yours. Should not I know if you are worthy or not to be a guest here?”

But the speaker is not appeased by Love’s reply. The soul is still too fixated on his sins and his shame: “Truth Lord, but I have marr’d them: let my shame / Go where it doth deserve.” This is the first and only occurrence of the word “Lord” in the poem. The term “Lord” stands out in juxtaposition to the oft repeated “Love.” This juxtaposition strongly suggests a disjunction between the speaker’s past and present perceptions of Love. As narrator, telling the story in retrospect, the speaker names God as Love, repeatedly without fail. But during the dialogue between Love and himself, the speaker calls out, not Love, but “Lord.” Unlike “The Collar” (*Works* 153-54), where the speaker’s “My Lord” signals an act of submission, the soul’s “Lord” in

“Love (III)” marks another misperception by the soul. Perhaps, the soul perceives Love / God in the same terms as Fish and Schoenfeldt do, a Lord and Master bent on establishing his power by means of condescension and benevolence. But, in hindsight, the speaker recognizes God as Love. Not a Lord fixated in exercising power but a Lover bent on saving lives, offering himself in the process to establish an intimate communion between equals.

Love implies as much in replying, “And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame”<sup>75</sup>? Referring to Christ’s death on the cross, bearing the sins of the world, Love counters the soul’s focus on hierarchy, decorum and justice by redirecting his attention to God’s love, mercy, self-sacrifice and grace. The lesson does not seem to be lost on the speaker when he acquiesces to serve the meal: “My deare, then I will serve.” But this is still an effort at self-naming, accepting the role of servant rather than the identity of an honored guest with which Love has named him.

As we have seen, Herbert emphasizes in “The H. Communion” the close communion between God and humanity, rather than the aspect of service and obedience. Commenting on the Lord’s Supper, John Calvin insists that “God has received us, once for all, into his family, to hold us not only as servants but as *sons*” [emphasis mine] (*Institutes* 4.XVII.1). The *Book of Common Prayer* teaches the same in the administration of Holy Communion: “[Christ] who did humble himself, even to the death upon the cross for us miserable sinners, which lay in darkness and shadow of death, that he might make us the *children* of God” [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 258). But the Bible is most emphatic in insisting that Christians are no longer servants of God but children of God: “Wherefore thou art *no more a servant, but a son*; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” [emphasis mine] (Galatians 4.7). Within the close communion with Christ, the believer’s status and identity are elevated to sonship and co-heir with Christ -- positions of equality and not subordination.

The speaker in "Love (III)," however, chooses subordination because he still depends on his own sense of decorum and justice over against Love's declaration of grace. As Stanley Fish remarks, in Love's scheme of things, "The question of merit is adjudicated; it is simply set aside" (133). But the soul's monologic perspective fails, or refuses, to see that Love and the soul are operating within opposing conceptual frameworks. The speaker could not perceive how he is worthy to sit and dine with his creator, least of all, be served by him. His logic compels him to choose a subordinate position. Love, however, has been attempting throughout the poem to show the faultiness of the soul's logic, gradually drawing the speaker to perceive how misleading is his monologic perspective, by means of rhetorical, almost catechetical, questions.

The poem's ending does indeed signal the defeat of the soul, and Love's triumph: "You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: / So I did sit and eat" (17-18). But this is less sinister than Fish perceives, for the soul's defeat does not mark the subjection and humiliation of the self or the self's death by kindness. What is killed is not the speaker's self but the speaker's monologic perspective, the self's fixation on self-authoring. Once again, Herbert dramatizes the paradox of finding one's life in losing it. If the soul had been successful in carving out his own identity, in separation and opposition to Love, he would have named himself an excommunicate, or at best, a servant at God's table when Love has already named him a worthy guest. But, paradoxically, in defeat and submission, perhaps even reluctant submission, the speaker's self is exalted and affirmed. In the act of sitting and eating, the self marks its submission and acceptance of Love's calling and naming. This is the same process of identity forming through dialogic relation with God that "The Collar" dramatizes in the speaker's rejoinder of "My Lord" to God's call. "Child" (see Chapter One).

In the *Country Parson* Herbert writes, "The Feast indeed requires sitting, because it is a Feast; but man's unpreparedness asks kneeling. Hee that comes to the Sacrament, hath the

confidence of a Guest, and hee that kneels, confesseth himself an unworthy one, and therefore differs from other Feasters: but hee that sits, or lies, puts up to an Apostle" (*CP* 259). For Herbert, the *ideal* posture for partaking the Lord's Supper is actually sitting. But humanity's sinfulness demands kneeling to signal the communicant's unworthiness. This humble posture also marks the Lord's Supper apart from ordinary feasts. Furthermore, a sitting posture would be presumptuous on the communicant's part, putting up to a lofty position and identity. Yet, Herbert ends "Love (III)" with the speaker, at Love's request, sitting and eating at the table, rather than kneeling. As the posture of kneeling sets the Eucharist apart from other meals, this posture of sitting sets this Communion supper apart from other Holy Communions, signaling its fulfillment of the ideal. By requesting the soul to sit rather than kneel, Love exalts the self into a position of honor.

A relevant Biblical passage to this ending is Luke 22.25-30:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. . . . And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In this passage, Jesus shows that the spiritual kingdom of God operates within a different set of norms and values from that of the world. The conventional hierarchical structures of power are radically subverted in God's kingdom. Christ, the King of Kings, serves his subjects rather than being served by them. Lowly subjects are exalted into positions of honor. Christ's disciples are exhorted to function within this new, or different, set of values. In other terms, Christ offers a

different socio-political paradigm, one that centers on love and mutual service, in opposition to the existing, dominant paradigm based on fixed hierarchies and exercises of power.

Correspondingly, this is precisely what Love does in "Love (III)." The speaker functions within the conventional paradigm of fixed hierarchies and decorum, focusing on subordination and service, while Love constantly undermines and opposes that paradigm, offering his own alternative set of values. As one of Herbert's *Outlandish Proverbs* says, "Love rules his kingdom without a sword" (*Works* 339). Love's hierarchical structure is one that undermines hierarchy, the greater serving the younger. The poem's ending, therefore, also signals the victory of the kingdom of God, where subjects sit, eating and drinking as honored guests, served by their King. A kingdom centered on love and not power, operating within dialogic relations and not monologic ones.

One final intertextual dialogue should be explored. I have earlier suggested a correspondence between the speaker's psychological state and Adam and Eve's. I believe that Herbert, in "Love (III)," enters into dialogue with Genesis 3. The poem is a parody, or reversal, of the temptation and fall of humanity. In "The H. Communion," Herbert suggests that the Eucharist restores the communion between God and humanity to its state before Adam's fall. In "Love (III)," Herbert dramatizes this restoration, in the dialogue between Love and the sinner.

References in the poem to eyes looking and bearing blame could also allude to the repeated references in Genesis 3 of the opening of eyes and of Adam and Eve's blaming game after they have eaten of the fruit. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve's eyes "were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3.7). The opening of their eyes correlates to their recognition of shame. Likewise, the speaker of "Love (III)" manifests his shame in refraining from looking at Love. In contrast to Adam and Eve's blaming of each other and the serpent, the speaker blames himself for marring his eyes but Love cuts through the scapegoating cycle by bearing the blame.



The poem's ending, "So I did sit and eat" echoes the repeated refrain of eating in Genesis 3: "she took of the fruit thereof, and *did eat*, and gave also unto her husband with her, and *he did eat*. . . . she gave me of the tree, and *I did eat*. . . . The serpent beguiled me, and *I did eat*" [emphasis mine] (Genesis 3.6, 12-13). In Genesis, the eating brought damnation but the eating in "Love (III)" marks the life of salvation in Christ; in the former, eating disrupted the close relationship between God and humanity, resulting in the expulsion from Paradise, while in the latter, eating restores the intimate communion between divine and mortals, resulting in an easy access to heaven, "As from one room t'another" ("The H. Communion" 36).

Love's "sweetly questioning" and persuasion divinely parodies the serpent's "subtil" questioning and beguiling of Eve. Where the serpent presents Adam and Eve with the choice of monologism, of self-authoring -- making oneself wise and becoming as gods -- Love offers the soul the way of dialogism, finding one's identity in communion with God. The final poem of "The Church" then, with its New Testament Eucharistic context, is a parody of the Fall in the first book of the Old Testament.

## V

For George Herbert, the self finds its identity in relationship with God. But this chapter suggests that this identity formation is anchored within the inter-relations of the Bible, liturgy, and the self. The relationship with God and its process of identity formation, for Herbert, does not take place in a mystical dimension but occurs, concretely, in a three-way dialogue between the voices of God (as embodied in the Bible), the Church community (as embodied in liturgy) and the self. This spiritual dialogue finds a corresponding relationship in poetic self-expression. Herbert's poetic productions are probably best described as works that are *co-authored* by the inspirations of God, community and poet. Herbert's poems establish their meanings within a dialogue with the pre-texts of Scripture and liturgy.

Is this concept of co-authoring, however, present in Herbert's poems that concern themselves with poetic creation, such as the "Jordan" poems? Do we find in Herbert's expressions on poetics a concept corresponding to this poetics of dialogue? In the next chapter, I turn my attention to Herbert's poems that deal with the issue of poetics and poetic creation.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> One study that exclusively devotes itself to the intertextual relations between the Bible and *The Temple* is Bloch, Chana. *Spelling the Word: George Herbert and the Bible*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. Bloch's work extensively traces the intertextual connections between *The Temple* and the Bible. Her final chapter focuses on the role of the Psalms in structuring and influencing Herbert's poems.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Wall, John N. *Transformations of the Word: Spenser, Herbert, Vaughan*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988 and Chambers, A. B. *Transfigured Rites in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*. London: U of Missouri P, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Booty, John E. ed. *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*. Toronto: Associated UP, 1976. Herbert probably used the 1604 edition of the Prayer Book. But other than minor changes, the liturgical forms in the two editions are identical. All further references to this text will be cited as *BCP* followed by page number.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert's emphasis on the Holy Communion's establishment of this "holy fellowship" (*BCP* 265) is so similar to John Calvin's that it demands a comparison:

Godly souls can gather great assurance and delight from this Sacrament [Holy Communion]; in it they have a witness of our growth into one body with Christ such that whatever is his may be called ours. As a consequence, we may dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which he is the heir, is ours; and that the Kingdom of Heaven, into which he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from him: . . . that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, *by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us*: . . . [emphasis mine] (*Institutes* 4, XVII.2).

Calvin also stresses the benefits of Christ's sacrifice for believers embodied and signified in the Eucharist. The image of Christ's descent and our ascent is particularly reminiscent of Herbert's "The H. Communion." Herbert seems to agree with Calvin's stress on the communion between Christ and believers over the obligations of service. Indeed, Calvin's passage emphasizes that believers are "sons of God with [Christ]" rather than servants of God. Quotation is from Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2 vols. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. The Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> John 14.2-4: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Herbert's dwelling image may also allude to this passage. The context of this passage also highlights the communion of Christ and his believers, for in response to Thomas' question of "how can we know the way [to heaven]?" (v. 5), Jesus answers, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (v. 6). By knowing Christ, by being in communion with him, one knows and finds the way to heaven.

<sup>6</sup> Another possible allusion is to the "I" of the "I AM" in Exodus 3.14. Whether the reference is to Christ or to the I AM, or I suspect to *both*, the point is still the close communion between God and humanity as reflected also in "The H. Communion" -- Christ in us and we in him.

<sup>7</sup> See Schoenfeldt, Chapter Five: "Standing on Ceremony: The Comedy of Manners in "Love (III)," *Prayer and Power*.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 3.6: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof." Eve took the fruit only when she was persuaded, or convinced, that it was good for her.

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<sup>9</sup> In "Humilitie" (*Works* 70) Herbert dramatizes what the virtue is. In the poem, the different virtues were all fighting over the "Peacock's plume" (17). Finally,

Humilitie, who held the plume, at this  
Did weep so fast, that the tears trickling down  
Spoil'd all the train: then saying, *Here it is*  
*For which ye wrangle . . .* (25-28)

Significantly, prior to the fight, all the other virtues have already received their gifts -- for example, the hare's ears to Fortitude and the fox's brain to Justice. Humilitie, the only virtue without a gift, gave away what was probably rightfully his, in order to keep the peace. For Herbert, humility seeks not rewards nor advancements.

### Chapter 3. A Poetics of Communion: George Herbert's Poetic Vision

My God, a verse is not a crown,  
 .....

But it is that which while I use

I am with thee . . .                      -- "The Quidditie" (1, 11-12)

Discussions of Herbert's poetics, or poetic theory, have revolved mainly around a few themes, such as defining Herbert's plain style, Herbert's art of preaching or homiletics, and Herbert's language of devotion -- where language becomes a means to offer oneself to God or where language itself becomes the offering for God.<sup>1</sup> These different points of departure often lead scholars to different conclusions about the nature of Herbert's poetics, so much so that Joost Daalder ("Herbert's 'Poetic Theory'") suggests that Herbert does not have a consistent poetic theory but instead entertains a number of possible theories at once. I agree with Daalder that Herbert may not have as systematic a poetic theory as many scholars would like but I do think that Herbert has a unifying vision that pulls his different strands of thought on poetry together.

Herbert's religious poetry aims to address both divine and mortal readers. This dual direction results in two slightly different conceptions of poetry. As poetry addressed to Christian readers, Herbert's art of poetry approximates his art of preaching since his didactic impulse predominates. As poetry addressed to God, however, Herbert inclines himself towards poetry as a devotional offering to God, a sacrifice of praise. But these two conceptions of poetry gesture towards one unifying vision, namely poetry as a way to commune with God, to be in dialogue with him. In this conception, poetry approximates prayer. For "praying's the end of preaching" ("The

Church-Porch" *Works* 410) and prayer incorporates praise and worship. But prayer also aims beyond praise and instruction; it aims towards an intimate reciprocal relationship: "The greatest reward is that we enjoy [God] and that all of us who enjoy Him may enjoy one another in Him" (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 28; I. xxxii).<sup>2</sup>

## I

In "The Dedication," the very first poem one encounters in *The Temple*, the concept of poetry as an offering to God is prominent:

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. (*Works* 5)

This poem identifies a certain tension inherent in the human act of praising an omnipotent God. The poet presents his poetic accomplishments to God as an offering of praise, yet they are not his own but properly belong to God in the first place: "for from thee they came, / And must return" (2-3). What follows after in the poem is a distinction between what was previously identified together: "Accept of *them* and *me*, / And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name" [emphasis mine] (3-4). The poem begins with an identification between the poet and his poetic accomplishments -- "my first fruits" -- but moves towards a distinction between them -- "them and me" -- and making them compete with each other in praising God. But how does the poet compete in praising God when the very medium with which he praises, poetic language, belongs and comes from God, and is that with which he competes? Furthermore, would not God's Word preempt and silence the self's attempts to praise?

“Praise,” according to Francis Bacon, “is the reflection of virtue; but it is as the glass or body which giveth the reflection” (*Essays* 159). Poems, then, can praise God by reflecting God’s virtues. Likewise, the poet can praise God by reflecting God’s virtues in his own life, in his actions. The theological concept of *imago dei*, humanity in the image of God, also contributes to a perception whereby humanity *can* praise God by imitating God’s virtues in their lives. This concept of reflection as praise also illuminates the concept of returning to God what is originally his. The poet’s poems of praise, in order to be praise, must come from and return to God just as a reflection returns one’s image to oneself.

In addition, Augustine claims that “the word of God is not another’s to those who obey it . . . They make their own those things which they themselves could not compose when they live in accordance with them” (*On Christian Doctrine* 167-68; IV. xxix). In this way, the self is not reduced to silence by God’s preemptive word. The poet makes God’s word his own when he lives according to it. Thus, the poet can claim that which came from God as “*my* first fruits” [emphasis mine]. And having gained ownership, the poet can offer them back to God as *his* offering. A reciprocal relationship, therefore, results. In effect, then, the distinction between “thine” and “mine” collapses into “ours.”<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, the “striving” to see “who shall sing best [God’s] name” becomes more a friendly inducement of each other towards pleasing God and less a contention for superiority. As Herbert states, “it is a good *strife* to go as farre as wee can in pleasing [God]” [emphasis mine] (*Country Parson* “The Author to the Reader” 224).

Even within this “Dedication” to God, however, Herbert never loses sight of his human readers:

Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:

Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain. (5-6)

Herbert is concerned not only with praising God but also with turning “to the advantage of any dejected poor soul” (Walton 281). This dual direction modulates Herbert’s whole poetic work. In “The Church-porch,” Herbert’s concern for his Christian readers drives his poetry in the direction of the sermon:

Thou, whose sweet youth and early hopes inhance  
 Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure:  
 Harken unto a Verser, who may chance  
 Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.  
 A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies,  
 And turn delight into a sacrifice. (*Works* 6; 1-6)

Gerald Wandio observes that

this combination of “delight” and “sacrifice” is . . . another version of [Philip] Sidney’s description of the poem as “a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight.” Herbert’s substitution of “sacrifice” for “teaching,” however, makes the poem serve the poet as well as the reader: while “teaching” suggests that the poet knows something the reader doesn’t, “sacrifice” -- meaning among other things “the offering of something . . . to a deity as an act of worship” -- suggests that the poem is also an offering from both poet and reader, and so serves a double function. [Herbert’s poems therefore] are written to instruct the reader as well as to please God. (100)

Wandio, however, does not clarify how the poem can become the reader’s offering as well as the poet’s. I suggest the poet’s words also become the reader’s when the reader “lives in accordance with them.” The poet makes God’s word and God’s gift of poetic composition his own by investing his life into them. Likewise, the readers make the poet’s offering their own by investing their lives to the teachings and truths in the poet’s poetic offering.

Furthermore, Romans 12.1 enjoins believers to offer their lives as sacrifices to God: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."<sup>4</sup> As sermons instruct and persuade Christians to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God, so do poems "turn delight into a sacrifice" by instructing and moving readers to present themselves to God.

The whole poem of "The Dedication," however, is an apostrophe to God, in essence, a prayer to him. Both aims of offering praise to God and moving readers to offer themselves are conjoined in the desire to communicate with God -- to speak to, and to be heard and answered by, the divine other. The relationship between these three -- praise, instruction and prayer -- forms the horizon of Herbert's explorations into poetic theory.

## II

"Jordan" (I) and (II) are the two poems that feature prominently in any discussion of Herbert's poetics.<sup>5</sup> By referring to the river Jordan, the titles of both poems suggest a number of possible biblical allusions: the Israelites entering the Promised Land by crossing the river Jordan after fleeing from Egypt (Joshua 3-4), the erection of altars from whole stones to God after crossing the Jordan (Deuteronomy 27), Elisha's command to Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan to cleanse his leprosy (2 Kings 5), and Christ's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan (Matthew 3.13-17; Mark 1.9-11). In addition, there is also the contrast between the classical river Helicon and the biblical Jordan, symbolizing classical pagan poetic inspiration and Christian poetic inspiration. All these references suggest ideas of transformation and renewal, from the classical sources to Christian ones, from the old covenant to the new, from sickness to health, from idolatry to the worship of God, and from the oppression of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. Even as they suggest transformation, however, these references also create distinctions and hierarchies: oppression and freedom, sickness and health, old and new. By naming these two poems



“Jordan.” Herbert seems to suggest that he is attempting to distinguish religious poetry from secular poetry (and privileging the former) and, perhaps, to transform or even redeem poetry in general.

An intention to transform poetry implies that there is a defect in poetry in the first place. In “Jordan (I),” Herbert perceives the poetry of his age to be too engrossed with “fictions onely and false hair” (1), neglecting the truth. From his early sonnets to his mother (recorded in Izaak Walton’s *Lives*), it is clear that this concern for truth is linked to religious truth, to the worship and praise of God: “Doth Poetry / Wear *Venus* Livery? only serve her turn? / Why are not *Sonnets* made of [God]?” (*Works* 206; 3-5). This link to the worship of God, in turn, suggests that secular poetry, especially love poetry, with its “dutie [to] a painted chair” (5), is guilty of idolatry. Furthermore, “Jordan (II)” implies that the tendency towards ostentation and self-display in poetic composition is also a flaw that needs correction.

The biblical allusions to Naaman’s washing and Christ’s baptism also strongly suggest a line of dialogue with the liturgy of baptism. Furthermore, the crossings of the Red Sea and the river Jordan are traditionally regarded as Old Testament types of the New Testament rite of baptism. Indeed, the *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)* specifically alludes to Christ’s baptism in the Jordan in its liturgy for Public Baptism: “by the baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, [thou] didst sanctify the flood Jordan and all other waters to the mystical washing away of sin” (270-71). According to the *BCP*, “baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Savior Christ, and to be made like unto him, that as he died and rose again for us, so should we which are baptized die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living” (276). Baptism, therefore, signifies a renouncing of corrupt inclinations and a corresponding dedication to virtuous living. Similarly, the “Jordan” poems suggest a renunciation

of secular love poetry with its ostentatious displays of wit and a commitment to a “plainer” style of poetry that offers love and praise to God.

Herbert, however, suggests a slightly different emphasis on baptism in his poems “H. Baptisme” (I) and (II) (*Works* 43-44). Particularly relevant to our discussion of the “Jordan” poems is the emphasis on child-likeness in “H. Baptisme (II)”: “O let me still / Write thee great God, and me a childe” (6-7). This coupling of child-likeness with baptism does not merely refer to the practice of infant baptism, nor to the liturgical reading of Mark 10.15 -- “Verily I say unto you, whosoever doth not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (*BCP* 271) -- in the *BCP* but also to the washing of Naaman: “Then went [Naaman] down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” [emphasis mine] (2 Kings 5.14). Cedric Brown and Maureen Boyd document how the story of Naaman was often interpreted in seventeenth-century England as a test of humility, of child-like obedience. Bishop Joseph Hall, a contemporary of Herbert, writes:

Nature is never but like herselfe: No marvel if carnall minds despise the foolishnesse of preaching, the simplicity of Sacraments, the homeliness of ceremonies, the seeming inefficacy of censures: these men looke upon *Jordan* with Syrian eyes; one drop of whose water set apart by divine ordination, hath more vertue, then all the streames of *Abana*, and *Pharpar*.” (qtd. in Brown and Boyd 149)

Abana and Pharpar are the rivers of Damascus to which Naaman compared the Jordan: “Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings 5.12). Baptism, for Herbert therefore, also signifies a child-like humility and submission to simple and seemingly foolish commands from God.

To "write thee great God, and me a childe" is perhaps Herbert's version of self-effacement -- not a negation of the self *per se* but an acceptance of a humble identity. It is the self that writes itself the identity of a child. And this identity is only found in relation to the "great God." Herbert cannot write himself a child without also writing down his parent-child relationship with God that defines the identity of a child. Before one objects to the inherent pride and self-exaltation in the claim to self-writing one's identity as well as God's, we must remember that Herbert begins the statement with an injunction to God, "O let me still." With this, Herbert acknowledges his inability to self-write, or self-author, his own identity apart from God's authoring. Herbert envisages a process of co-authorship between God and the self, a dialogic life-writing process. And such partnership in life-writing requires humility and co-operation on the self's part rather than self-assertion and pride. The implication for "Jordan" (I) and (II) from all these is that the religious poet needs to humble himself, to avoid self-assertive or vainglorious modes of writing, submitting to the advice of a "friend" in "Jordan (II)," an advice that seems, on the face of it, to negate the need of poetic composition itself, an advice that seems "foolish," as it goes against the norms of poetic practice.

In addition to alluding to the Bible, "Jordan (II)" clearly alludes to the first sonnet in Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*. What is less recognized is that "Jordan (I)" alludes to the third sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, as Gerald Wandio suggests.<sup>6</sup> I think that "Jordan" (I) and (II) together enter into dialogue with *both* sonnets one and three of Sidney's famous sonnet sequence, as, to a certain extent, *The Temple* as a whole is in dialogue with *Astrophil and Stella*.<sup>7</sup> In these two sonnets Astrophil is arguing, very much like the speaker of Herbert's "Jordan" poems, for a different kind of poetic composition, a different kind of love poetry.

Both sonnets involve a rejection of conventional means of composition and inspiration in favor of a poetics that centers on Stella as both its inspiration and subject matter. In the first sonnet, Astrophil's "Muse" admonishes him to "look in thy heart and write" (14) as the solution to his composition woes. While in the third sonnet, Astrophil describes his method of composition as copying out the lines of love and beauty that Nature has written on Stella's face. At first glance, it seems that these two modes contradict each other. Where one finds poetic inspiration from within -- looking in his heart -- the other finds inspiration from without -- reading Stella's face. This contradiction can be resolved if one assumes, along with Joseph Summers, that "what Astrophil will find in his heart is the image of Stella; and that image, properly contemplated, will provide the 'invention' for the poem" (211).

Here, Stella's face becomes a text from which Astrophil can read and copy Nature's handwriting. In effect, Stella's face functions as a poetic text from which Astrophil can imitate as an apprentice poet imitates an accomplished poet's work. As Ben Jonson defines such imitation:

The third requisite in our poet, or maker, is imitation: to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use: to make choice of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him till he grow very he, or so like him as the copy may be mistaken for the principal -- not as a creature that swallows what it takes in crude, raw, or undigested, but that feeds with an appetite, and hath a stomach to concoct, divide, and turn all into nourishment; not to imitate servilely . . . but to draw forth out of the best and choicest flowers with the bee, and turn all into honey, work it into one relish and savour, make our imitation sweet . . . (*Timber* 109)

Copying what Nature writes in Stella's face, therefore, is not mere transcription or plagiarism especially since what Nature writes are not mere words. Copying the text that is Stella's face

requires interpretation and translation. What Jonson describes above is the poetic imitation of other poets. Sidney, in his *An Apology for Poetry*, suggests another kind of imitation, that of Nature:

[Nature's] world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. . . . for any understanding knoweth the skill of the artificer standeth in that *Idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that *Idea* is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he hath imagined them. . . . Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature, but rather give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature, which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous to that first accursed fall of Adam: sith our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (*Apology* 276-77)

And "to imitate," according to Sidney, "borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be, but range only reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (*Apology* 278). For Sidney, then, imitating nature does not result in a commitment to realism. Rather, poetic imitation reaches towards the "divine consideration of what may be and should be," towards that perfection of nature which "our erected wits" enable us to know. In effect, poets deliver an imaginary world without the effects of Adam's fall, a "golden world." And such imitation, for Sidney, is the closest approximation to God's act of creation, which introduces a third kind of imitation -- the human creative process as an imitation of God's creative process in nature.

In the sonnets from *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney has combined two kinds of imitation -- of other poets and of nature -- into the one metaphor of Stella's face as a text of Nature's handiwork.

In copying what he reads in Stella's face, Astrophil at once imitates Nature as poet / writer and Nature as subject matter: he learns both style and substance from one text. The third kind of imitation, imitating God's creative process, which Sidney regards as an extension of the *imago dei*, -- God's image in humanity -- does not feature prominently in *Astrophil and Stella* but will for Herbert, albeit in a different form and emphasis.

It is sufficient to say at this point that the "Jordan" poems clearly establish a dialogue with the two sonnets from *Astrophil and Stella* in their similar espousals for poetic composition *via* copying / imitating a "text:" both the speaker of "Jordan" and Astrophil share a burden for an appropriate expression of devotion and love and for a right source of poetic inspiration. But the differences between them, not least in their different objects / subjects of love and devotion (God and Stella), are crucial to an understanding of "Jordan" (I) and (II), and to Herbert's poetics. Herbert's poetics may also be in dialogue with Sidney's poetics since his familiarity with Sidney's poems suggests a familiarity with Sidney's poetics. These intertextual dialogues with Sidney's works and with biblical and liturgical texts shall inform my readings of the "Jordan" poems.

### III

"Jordan (I)" begins with a series of rhetorical questions:

Who says 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? (1-5)

The overall emphasis of this first stanza is on truth as an appropriate subject matter for poetry. By asking "Is there in truth no beautie?" Herbert suggests an inherent relationship between truth and beauty. In other words, truth is not merely to be rationally grasped as something understandable

but also to be perceived by the senses as something pleasurable. Herbert challenges the common notion that truth is naturally “ugly” and needs to be beautified, dressed or “painted” up, in order to make it appealing.

The traditional Renaissance justification of poetry by its ability to teach and delight rests on this notion that the truth needs to be made delightful in order to be better taught. As Sidney states, poets “merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand which *without delight they would fly as from a stranger*, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved . . .” [emphasis mine] (*Apology* 278). Sidney, therefore, claims that poetry is superior to history in teaching because it can beautify truth to make it more appealing:

. . . if the question were whether it were better to have a particular act truly or falsely set down, there is no doubt which is to be chosen . . . But if the question be for your own use and learning, whether it be better to have it set down as it should be or as it was, then certainly is *more doctrinable the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon* than the true Cyrus in Justin . . . So then the best of the historian is subject to the poet; for whatsoever action or faction . . . the historian is bound to recite, that may the poet (if he list) with his imitation make his own, *beautifying* it both for further teaching and more delighting, as it pleaseth him . . .

[emphasis mine] (*Apology* 282-83)

Herbert argues, instead, that truth, in and of itself, is delightful and does not need beautifying.

Herbert’s position approximates Augustine’s:

Sometimes, when the truth is demonstrated in speaking, an action which pertains to the function of teaching, eloquence is neither brought into play nor is any attention paid to whether the matter or the discourse is pleasing, *yet the matter itself is pleasing when it is*

*revealed simply because it is true.* [emphasis mine] (*On Christian Doctrine* 137; Book IV. xii)

In Christian preaching, Augustine privileges matter over manner -- “it is a mark of good and distinguished minds to love the truth within words and not the words” (*On Christian Doctrine* 136; IV. xi) -- and clarity over eloquence -- “The speaker should not consider the eloquence of his teaching but the clarity of it” (*On Christian Doctrine* 133; IV. ix).

Herbert himself links a concern for truthful subject matter with a concern for appropriate style, not only in the second stanza of “Jordan (I)” but also in the first: “Is all good structure in a winding stair?” (3). Here, the speaker suggests simplicity and straightness as qualities related to truth and opposed to the “winding” qualities of deception and falsehood. This, in turn, alludes to “A Wreath”:

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 more 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. (*Works* 185)



In "A Wreath," Herbert clearly associates God's ways with simplicity and straightness: "crooked winding ways" lead to death. The poem itself is organized like the circularity of a wreath: the poem ending with where it began and the lines are interwoven by repeated words and phrases. The poem is a funeral wreath, particularly when it precedes the poem "Death" in the poetic sequence. Herbert, therefore, links or conflates truth and life with simplicity and straightness of expression.

Correspondingly, falsehood and death conflate with "winding" and deceptive language. In "Sinnes Round," such language is also associated with sin.<sup>8</sup> Structured similarly to "A Wreath," this poem has stanzas connected by repeated lines and ends where it began, in a "round." By connecting "winding" language with personal sins, Herbert brings the personal dimension into the forefront of the discussion of poetic style and matter. Where Sidney thinks it is allowable for poets to feign truth for the sake of the readers, and Augustine thinks truth and clarity are important because of the speaker's responsibility to the audience, Herbert suggests that truth and clarity are important for the sake of the speaker's / poet's own spiritual health. Simplicity in one's language becomes a sign of purity in the heart.

The ninth line of "Sinnes Round." -- "They vent the wares, and passe them with their faults," -- seems to be alluded to by both "Jordan" (I) and (II). In "Jordan (II)" the speaker was guilty of "Decking the sense, as if it were to sell" (6) similar to the speaker of "Sinnes Round" whose "inflamed thoughts" vent -- in both meanings of the word: to discharge ("spit forth") and to sell -- their words which are like faulty wares. The speaker in "Jordan (I)," by asking "May no lines passe, except they do their dutie / Not to a true, but painted chair?" (4-5), implies the same sense of "passing [lines] with their faults" in "Sinnes Round," giving approval to the quality of a work. Furthermore, the "painted chair" metaphor alludes to the poem that immediately precedes "Jordan (I)," "The Temper (II)":

O fix thy chair of grace, that all my powers

May also fix their reverence:

For when thou dost depart from hence,

They grow unruly, and sit in thy bowers. (*Works* 56; 9-12)

In "The Temper (II)," the speaker complains of his oscillating emotions and spiritual condition.

Where the "grosser world" is fixed by God's "word and art" (5), the "world of grace," wherein the speaker spiritually lives, is daily being razed and re-created:

But thy diviner world of grace

Thou suddenly dost raise and race,

And ev'ry day a new Creatour art. (6-8)

In light of such oscillations, the speaker asks God to "fix [his] chair of grace," as to prevent any further inconstancy in his devotion to God. The speaker in "Jordan (I)," therefore, suggests that the "true" chair is God's "chair of grace," turning the truth-fiction dichotomy he started with into a religious dichotomy as well; doing duty to a "painted chair" now carries strong connotations of idolatry, giving devotion to a false throne, a false king besides God. Therefore, where in "Lines Round," the lines / words that are "passed" have inherent faults, the "fault" in "Jordan (I)" is in doing "dutie / Not to a true, but painted chair." Devoted to fiction rather than truth, to "mortall love" rather than "immortall Love" ("Love I" *Works* 54; 1, 5), secular love poetry is guilty of slighting God, of praising the creatures rather than the Creator.

The second stanza continues with the line of rhetorical questions:

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves

And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?

Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?

Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines,

Catching the sense at two removes? (6-10)

Here, the association of truth with simplicity and clarity that is implied in line three is made explicit. Herbert challenges the *necessity* of stock conventions, such as “enchanted groves,” “sudden arbours” and “purling streams,” in a verse. The meanings of such stereotypical verses are “vail’d,” causing readers to catch “the sense at two removes.” By implication, Herbert champions the cause of a poetic language that is clear and straightforward or “plain.”

With the use of “veiling,” the poem alludes to 2 Corinthians 3:

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use *great plainness* of speech: And not as Moses, which put a *vail* over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament: which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. [emphasis mine]  
(verses 12-16)

This passage, in turn, alludes to the Old Testament, Exodus 34.29-35, where Moses, upon coming down from meeting God at Mount Sinai, puts a veil over his shining face because the Israelites were afraid to come near him.<sup>9</sup> The 2 Corinthians passage seems to suggest that the ministers of the New Testament gospel, such as Paul, teach and preach plainly and clearly, and not obscurely or “veiled” like the ministers of the Old Testament, typified by Moses. But Moses put a veil over his face because of the fear of the Israelites, as a concession to their weakness. For Moses takes his veil off whenever he speaks with God alone. Paul, therefore, argues that it is the unbelief of the Israelites that have placed a veil over the law, or God’s truth, and have kept it there ever since. The law is *not* obscure in and of itself but *made obscure* by the readers’ unbelief. Only by believing in Christ can they do away with the veil, make what is hidden and obscure clear and plain. As John Calvin comments on this text:

[Paul] had said that when the Jews read Moses, a veil was thrown over their hearts. Now he continues that as soon as their heart is turned to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Who cannot see, as I said, that when he speaks of Moses, he is speaking of the law? Since Christ is the end (or fulfillment) of the law, the Jews ought to have accepted the truth that the law refers them to Christ; when they shut out Christ, they turned the law in another direction. Since in reading the law they wandered aimlessly, the law itself has become to them a *complicated* thing, like a *labyrinth*; and it will remain such until it is turned toward its fulfillment, who is Christ. If the Jews seek Christ in the law, God's truth will appear to them *clearly*; while they continue to seek wisdom without Christ, they shall lose their way in darkness and never arrive at the true meaning of the law. What is said of the law applies to the whole of Scripture: when it is not directed toward Christ as its one aim, it is tortured badly and *twisted*. [emphasis mine] (*Commentaries* 112)

In effect, the 2 Corinthians passage is interpreted as suggesting Christ is the hermeneutic key that will make the Holy Scriptures plain and straightforward, without which they will be obscure, "vail'd," twisting and "winding" like a labyrinth.

Where the biblical passage focuses on the reading process and places the responsibility of "veiling" on the readers, Herbert, in "Jordan (I)," focuses instead on the writing process, placing responsibility on the poet's shoulders. Just as readers who direct their reading of the Scriptures to a direction other than Christ put a veil over its meaning, writers who do duty to a "painted chair" rather than a true one, place a "veil" over their writing, forcing readers to "catch the sense at two removes." Herbert suggests, therefore, that just as Christ is the hermeneutic key to understanding the Bible, a devotion to truth, and ultimately God, is the key towards writing poems whose "sense" is not far removed.

In the third and final stanza of "Jordan (I)" the speaker seems to retract from his criticism of secular love poets implied in the first two stanzas, as he apparently grants their pursuits as legitimate as long as they also allow him freedom to practice his own art:

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:

Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:

I envie no mans nightingale or spring;

Nor let them punish me with losse of rime,

Who plainly say, *My God, My King*. (11-15)

But I suggest that, here, the speaker is, to a certain extent, sarcastic in his remarks as well as ambiguous. The "shepherds," who "are honest people," can refer to either the pastoral love poets who write in the conventional style and subject matter rejected in stanzas one and two, or to priests, or pastors, shepherds of Christ's flock like Herbert himself, who intends to write devotional poetry. In reference to priests, this statement advocates for their freedom to "sing," in their own way, their own songs of praise and love to God. But in reference to pastoral love poets, the statement has a slight sarcastic tone to it; for part of the point of the previous two stanzas is that such poets are *not* honest people, devoted to "fictions onely and false hair."

The next line -- "Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime" -- continues with the ambiguous vein of line eleven. On one level, the speaker appears to say that the pastoral love poets can continue to write in "riddles," with "vail'd" meanings, if they so wish and achieve their success in their own way, to "pull for Prime." In this reading, "Prime" refers to the card game *Primer*, and, hence, to "pull for Prime" means to draw a winning hand. But "Prime" could also refer to "elaborate choral services sung in Benedictine monasteries -- services which were virtually eliminated from *The Book of Common Prayer* because they were felt to obscure the word of God" (Yunis 22). According to Susan Yunis, "Prime, the Holy Office for 6.00 A.M., was condensed by

Cranmer into the Matins and Evensong of the 1549 and later 1552 editions of *The Book of Common Prayer*” by eliminating most of the original elaborate musical compositions in favor of “plain” reading of the Bible (22). With this alternative reading of “Prime,” the “shepherds” of line eleven may expand to include Roman Catholic poets / priests whose prayers, devotions and language may be too obscure or ornate for “plainer Anglican tastes” (Yunis 23).

This reference to Catholic rites suggests that Herbert’s plain style -- the plainness with which he says, “*My God, My King*”-- should be understood not only in relation to the ornateness of the secular love poets but also in relation to Catholicism’s elaborate liturgical styles. Leah S. Marcus shows how the poem “The British Church” informs a study of Herbert’s poetics:

I joy, deare Mother, when I view

Thy perfect lineaments and hue

Both sweet and bright.

Beautie in thee takes up her place,

And dates her letters from thy face,

When she doth write.

A fine aspect in fit array,

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.

.....

But, dearest Mother, what those misse,

The mean, thy praise and glorie is,

And long may be.

Blessed be God, whose love it was

To double-moat thee with his grace,

And none but thee. (1-12, 25-30)<sup>10</sup>

According to Marcus, "The British church stands alone, [for Herbert] in its integrity, double-moated with divine grace, in contrast to the painted pride of Catholicism, which shines too gaudily and only from the outside, . . . and to the lowly disarray of Genevan Puritanism, which cannot shine because it is not "dressed" with any form of outward liturgical order" (188). Herbert subscribes to the *via media* of the Anglican Church.

Herbert's metaphor for the Anglican liturgical style in "The British Church" is analogous to the Ciceronian metaphor for the rhetorical plain style. As Michael Gallagher observes, "Cicero, in a memorable phrase, had compared the plain style to a woman's attire: it would be more attractive insofar as it displayed a certain diligent negligence" (498-99). Even Augustine quotes Cicero approvingly in defining the plain style:

The desire of a person seeking such clarity sometimes neglects a more cultivated language, not caring for what sounds elegant but for what well indicates and suggests what he wishes to show. Hence a certain author [Cicero] who treats this kind of speaking says that there is in it "a kind of studied negligence." This, however, takes away ornaments in such a way that vulgarities do not result. (*On Christian Doctrine* 134; IV. x)

This association between the Anglican liturgical style with the rhetorical plain style suggests that Herbert's ideal of plainness in poetry is not a total rejection of ornaments or metaphors *per se* but a prudent use of them in service to the higher goal of edification and devotion.

This definition of "plainness" helps resolve the contradiction that some scholars perceive in "Jordan (I)." Mark Eaton claims that "while Herbert prescribes simplicity, he often . . . violates his own mandate" (13) and James White observes that while "Jordan (I)" argues for simplicity, "its performance works the other way, for the poem itself is complex, elegant, and ornate, and . . . carefully rhymed" (50). These scholars perceive plainness as simplicity, *lacking* ornamentation and elegance. I argue, however, that plainness for Herbert, as it was for Augustine and Cicero, is not plain in the absolute sense but only in the relative sense, *less* ornate and elegant than the ornate style because the ornamentation is employed to serve truth. Herbert loves the truth within words rather than the words themselves but neither does he love the truth without or apart from words, which is probably impossible! For Herbert, "Beautie and beauteous words should go together" ("The Forerunners" *Works* 176-77; 30).

In *The Country Parson* Herbert argues that the Parson should follow "the Apostles two great and admirable Rules":

The first whereof is, *Let all things be done decently, and in order.* The second, *Let all things be done to edification.* 1 Cor. 14. For these two rules comprize and include the double object of our duty, God, and our neighbour; the first being for the honour of God; the second for the benefit of our neighbor. (*CP* 246)

Therefore, Herbert perceives that the Anglican liturgical style, which is both orderly and elegant as well as "plain," satisfies both "rules" -- to honor God, and to edify the people. Likewise, the plain style satisfies both obligations: to edify with its clarity and emphasis on truth, and to honor God by being elegantly "dressed" but not overly so as to draw attention to itself.



The heart of the poetic concerns of "Jordan (I)" replicates the dual concern found in "The Dedication" -- poetry as praise and poetry as sermon. The poem's ending, "*My God. My King.*" clearly expresses the speaker's desire to praise and offer devotion to God. And the poem's emphasis on plain writing / speaking reveals its concern to teach, edify and persuade readers to truth.

Such association between poetry and rhetoric is not unprecedented. Sidney, for instance, conflates the classical aims of rhetoric -- to teach, delight and move -- with the poetic aims of teaching and delighting:

For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand . . . and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved . . . (*Apology* 278).

Furthermore, Ben Jonson reckons that "The poet is the nearest borderer upon the orator, and expresseth all his virtues, though he be tied more to numbers: is his equal in ornament and above him in his strengths" (*Timber* 110). The art of rhetoric, therefore, is strongly tied to the art of poetry. Consequently, the rhetorical art of "plainness," as conceived and practiced in oratory and preaching, should modulate Herbert's poetic art of plainness.

There were, in fact, two conceptions of plainness later in the seventeenth-century in England. Religious conformists and non-conformists accused each other of being obscure and each claimed to be plain. N. H. Keeble explains that

whereas "plainness" meant for the conformist the instruction of others by the clear exposition of moral duties, for the nonconformist to be plain was not to appeal dispassionately to universals but to encourage others by being authentic, true to the experience of grace within oneself. Plain style was for the former explicatory and

discursive, for the latter confessional and hortatory. It was what [was] called "the language of my heart." (249)<sup>11</sup>

Herbert's own homiletic theory suggests that his art of plainness has a closer affinity to the Puritans' "language of the heart."

In *The Country Parson*, Herbert advises the Parson that "the character of his Sermon is Holiness; he is not witty, or learned, or eloquent, but Holy" (CP 233). Notice how Herbert's description of the *sermon's* character slides into a description of the *Parson's* character: "his Sermon is Holiness; he is . . . Holy." Style of discourse, therefore, reflects the speaker's inner state. As Michael Gallagher observes, "Style [is understood] not only as a matter of rhetoric and language but as involving and revealing the personal values of the writer" (516). Furthermore, "all that Herbert has to say about 'showing Holy,'" according to Christopher Hodgkins, "identifies him with a preaching tradition . . . that sought the clearest and simplest signs for communicating the preacher's inner life to his hearers. This tradition assumed that inner reality preceded outward 'show' and militated against pulpit hypocrisy by insisting that words be matched by everyday deeds" (225). For example, one of the ways, according to Herbert, which a sermon can be "holy" is "by dipping, and seasoning all our words and sentences in our hearts, before they come into our mouths, truly affecting, and cordially expressing all that we say; so that the auditors may plainly perceive that every word is hart-deep" (CP 233). Here, plainness is clearly tied to expressing one's inner reality: "the language of my heart." As in "The Windows," "Doctrine and life" (11) must combine in the preacher for his preaching to be effective, for him to truly be "a window."<sup>12</sup>

This affinity to the Puritans' conception of preaching and plainness does not mean that Herbert associates himself with them: It only means that they share a common concern for the integrity of preachers, for outward behavior and speech to mirror the soul's inner state. It also means that they share an affinity to Augustine's homiletic theory: "the life of the speaker has

greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence" (*On Christian Doctrine* 164; IV. xxvii).

"Jordan (I)," therefore, ends with the *plain* saying of "*My God. My King.*" expressing the speaker's internal devotion. The plain poetry that Herbert espouses is not merely poetry that prudently and judiciously use metaphors in the service of religious truth but also poetry that sincerely expresses the heart and life of the poet -- the poet's internal "world of grace" ("The Temper (II)" 6).

#### IV

"Jordan (II)" focuses precisely on this internal language of the heart, with all its trials and struggles, as the poem narrates the speaker's faulty attempts at poetic composition and his realization, at the end, of a better way. "Jordan (II)" was originally titled "Invention." By renaming it "Jordan (II)," Herbert intends it to enter into dialogue with the first "Jordan" poem. Where "Jordan (I)" focuses on the style and subject matter of poetry, "Jordan (II)" concentrates on the matter of poetic composition. The ending of "Jordan (I)," may leave one asking what kind of poem can a plain assertion such as "*My God. My King.*" even though sincere and heartfelt, be? If the phrase "*My God. My King*" is merely a kernel of the heart's devotion that needs to be expanded into a full poem, then how does one compose such a poem? "Jordan (II)," I think, attempts to answer such questions.

The "lines of heav'nly joyes" mentioned at the beginning of the poem -- "When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention" (1), -- could very well refer to phrases like "*My God, My King.*" The speaker's initial reaction to the "lustre" of such lines is to adorn it:

Such was their lustre, they did so excell,

That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention; (2-3)

The speaker has responded inappropriately. As the Jews placed a veil over the brightness of the law, the poet is "veiling" his poem by adorning the excellent lustre of the "heav'nly joyes" with "quaint words," that is, ingenious or elaborate words, and "trim invention," ornate or well-arranged intellectual designs. In his second sonnet to his Mother, found in Izaak Walton's *Lives*, Herbert writes, "Lord, in thee / The *beauty* lies in the *discovery*," in contrast to the skin-deep beauty of "the best face" (13-14). Since "discovery" has the older meaning of uncovering and disclosing, Herbert is also suggesting that God's beauty lies not in adornment or embellishment but in plain manifestation. As with "Jordan (I)'s" suggestion -- "Is there in truth no beauty?" -- "heav'nly joyes" are in and of themselves beautiful and delightful without any adornment. They do not need to be beautified. What they do need, however, is "fit aray" that is "neither too mean, nor yet too gay" for their "fine aspect" ("The British Church" 7-8). The truth and heartfelt sincerity of the "heav'nly joyes" do need to be embodied in *appropriate* words and metaphors that will *clarify* their inherent beauty and lustre rather than "*quaint words*" to "*veil*" it. The speaker, here, has fallen into the Renaissance convention, as espoused by Sidney, to beautify truth / goodness, or to make it delightful; the very convention which "Jordan (I)" criticizes as doing duty to a "painted chair."

This misdirection of the speaker's enthusiasm, from the truth within words to seeking "quaint words," is made clear in the following:

My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,  
 Curling with metaphors a plain intention,  
 Decking the sense, as if it were to sell. (4-6)

These lines allude to "Sinnes Round":

My thoughts are working like a busie flame,  
 Untill their cockatrice they hatch and bring:

.....

My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.

Which spit it forth like the Sicilian Hill.

They vent their wares, and passe them with their faults (3-4, 7-9)

This suggests that the speaker's desire to "curl" and "deck" the sense, as if to sell it, or "vent" it, is motivated more by sin than by devotion to God. The verb "sell," in its biblical usage, also has connotations of idolatry and enslavement to sin. For example, in 2 Kings 17, the Israelites, after leaving God's commandments and making idols for themselves, "sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger" (verse 17). Thus, rather than raising a plain altar of uncut stones to God, as the Israelites were commanded to do after crossing Jordan (Deuteronomy 27), the poet is in danger of making an idol.

In "Dulnesse," Herbert contrasts the secular love poets' praise of their sonnet mistresses to his own praise of God's beauty:

The wanton lover in a curious strain  
                                 Can praise his fairest fair;  
 And with quaint metaphors her curled hair  
                                 Curl o're again.

Thou art my lovelinesse, my life, my light,

                                Beautie alone to me: (*Works* 115-16; 5-10)

"Curling" and "quaintness" are, therefore, associated with superficial and temporal beauty, as opposed to the true beauty of God, the "beautie which can never fade," the source of all earthly beauties ("Love I" 2). They are also associated with the idolatrous art of the "wanton" love poets.

Stanza two of "Jordan (II)" describes the speaker's continual, and increasingly frantic, efforts at composing:

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 lesse those joyes which trample on his head. (7-12)

Their similarity to Astrophil's efforts in sonnet one of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* -- "I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe" (5) -- suggests further that the speaker of "Jordan (II)" has clearly fallen into the same kind of poetic preoccupations; the same ones criticized by "Jordan (I)." But there are also slight differences between Herbert's poet and Sidney's Astrophil. While Astrophil seeks "fit words to paint the *blackest* face of woe," Herbert's poet seeks out *quaint* words, rather than fit words, to "veil" the *lustre* of "heav'nly joyes." By parodying Sidney's poem, Herbert reveals how two seemingly opposite purposes are actually based on a common perspective.

If the word "sunne" puns on "Son," Christ, then the "joyes which trample on his head" refers to the son's crown, his kingship. But the inherent violence suggested by the image of "trampling" on the head may allude to Christ's crown of thorns, his crucifixion. "When the reference to the crucifixion is understood," write Cedric Brown and Maureen Boyd, "it reveals another sense in the clothing of the son, that is, the purple or scarlet robe put on Christ to mock his kingship" (159). Ironically, then, in attempting "to clothe the sunne," rather than plainly revealing / "discovering" the sun's glory, the speaker, in effect, mocks rather than praises Christ's beauty. Furthermore, his fixation on seeking "rich" clothing, rather than "fit aray," to adorn plain truth

suggests that the speaker has gone to the extreme of finding adornments that are "too gay," like the painted beauties of the Roman Catholic church that Herbert criticizes in "The British Church."

The final stanza of "Jordan (II)" describes how the speaker continues on in his efforts until rebuked by "a friend":

As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,

So did I weave my self into the sense.

But while I bustled, I might heare 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.* (13-18)

The rising flames may refer to the flames of altars with burnt offerings to God. This is consonant with the speaker's desire to offer praise to God. But ironically, good intentions notwithstanding, his faulty method of weaving his *self* into the sense betrays his pride and self-occupation.

Interestingly, Herbert links being preoccupied with over-ornamentation together with being preoccupied with the self. This is, perhaps, an Augustinian influence since Augustine regards the ornate (moderate) rhetorical style as serving no function other than to exhibit one's abilities:

Thus in the subdued style he persuades his listener that what he says is true; he persuades in the grand style that those things which we know should be done are done, although they have not been done. He persuades in the moderate style that he himself speaks beautifully and with ornament. Of what use is this to us? (*On Christian Doctrine* 162; IV. xxv)

But before one reads this as a total rejection of ornamentation, Augustine himself concludes that "we use the ornaments of the moderate style not ostentatiously but prudently . . . using them in such a way that they assist that good which we wish to convey" (*On Christian Doctrine* 162; IV. xxv).

The flames that “do work and winde, when they ascend” could also refer to the “inflamed thoughts . . . working like a busie flame” (3) in “Sinnes Round.” There, the speaker of that poem alludes to the tower of Babel, confessing that “my sinnes *ascend* three stories high” [emphasis mine] (14). Therefore, the flames in “Jordan (II)” that ascend in their working could refer to the increasing sins or offenses with which the speaker is consumed in his presumptuous zeal to “clothe the sunne” with rich clothing of his own making, like the builders of the tower of Babel who were presumptuous in their hopes of reaching heaven on their own ability.

The “friend’s” advice, appropriately, suggests a method of composition that relies more on building from another’s work rather than wholly relying on one’s efforts:

*. . . How wide is all this long pretence!*

*There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn’ d:*

*Copie out onely that, and save expense.* (16-18)

The phrase “how wide” refers to how wide off the mark the speaker is from his original goal of praising God; whereas “long pretence” suggests the Pharisees, who “for a pretence make long prayers” (Brown and Boyd 158). These two phrases reveal the speaker’s misdirected focus on the adornment of his “heavn’ly joyes” as pharisaic hypocrisy, fixated on outward forms of holiness.

Found only once elsewhere in *The Country Parson*, the phrase “readie penn’ d” further connects Herbert’s poetics with his homiletics:

The Countrey Parson’s Library is a holy Life . . . For the temptations with which a good man is beset, and the ways which he used to overcome them, being told to another, whether in private conference, or in the Church, are a Sermon. . . . So that the Parson having studied, and mastered all his lusts and affections within, and the whole Army of Temptations without, hath ever so many *sermons ready penn’ d*, as he hath victories. . . .



for though the temptations may be diverse in divers Christians, yet the victory is alike in all, being by the self-same Spirit. [emphasis mine] (*CP* 278-79)

The Parson's own holy life is his library of "readie penn'd" sermons with which he can employ to preach to others. Similarly, "love" is the library of "readie penn'd" sweetness for the poet's employment.

For Astrophil, his library of love and beauty, written by Nature, is Stella's face, whose image is found also within his own heart. For Herbert, it is in the British Church's face where he finds beauty written down:

Beautie in thee takes up her place,

And dates her letters from thy face.

When she doth write. ("The British Church" 4-6)

And, in "Dulnesse," Herbert claims that God is "Beautie alone to me" (10). It is God, as opposed to Nature, who writes down love and beauty for Herbert's poet. And his library is found in the Church. But in terms of "sweetnesse," it is the Bible that contains "infinite sweetnesse":

Oh Book! infinite sweetnesse! let my heart

Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,

Precious for any grief in any part; ("The H. Scriptures I" *Works* 58: 1-3)

Therefore, the Holy Scriptures and the Church with its liturgies together make up the religious poet's library.

The religious poet's method of composition is to copy / imitate the love and sweetness in this "library," just as Astrophil needs to copy what he finds in Stella's face and in his heart. Imitation, as explained above, involves three levels: imitation of another poet, imitation of nature, and imitation of God. The imitation of nature often includes imitation of human actions as part of nature. For Herbert, however, imitation means almost exclusively, the imitation of God:

But how then shall I imitate thee, and

Copie thy fair, though bloudie hand? ("The Thanksgiving" *Works* 35: 15-16)

Imitating God, here, is not in Sidney's sense of reflecting God's creative process but in the sense of imitating God's love and sweetness in the Scriptures and the Church, and of imitating God's actions of divine love towards sinful humanity, including the sinful poet himself. For God also writes, metaphorically speaking, on the heart of the individual: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8.10; Jeremiah 31.33). The poet's library is not merely without, in the Bible and the Church, but also within, in his heart and life. As in the sermons "readie penn'd," which are victories over temptations "by the self-same Spirit" working in all believers alike, the "poems," so to speak, of love, sweetness and devotion in the poet's heart and life -- the truth within him -- are written by the same Holy Spirit who writes in the Scriptures and the Church, "For all Truth [is] penn'd by one and the self-same Spirit" (*CP* 229).

Thus, the friend's advice to look to love for "sweetnesse readie penn'd" involves looking without, to Scriptures and the Church, and within, to his heart and life, analogous to Sidney's Astrophil who looks without, to Stella's face, and within, to his heart. But there is a focal point that unites both external and internal sources of inspiration, which is God, or Christ, himself. Christ "set[s] a Copy for Parsons" (*CP* 261). And "God is love" (1 John 4.16). And in "The Author's Prayer Before Sermon," Herbert writes, "But thou Lord, art patience, and pity, and *sweetnesse*, and *love*" [emphasis mine] (*CP* 288). As noted above, the liturgical rite of Baptism, to which the titles of "Jordan" (I) and (II) allude, focuses on the imitation of Christ: "baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Savior Christ, and to be made like unto him" (*BCP* 276). Christ is the focal point of the Scriptures, the Church and its liturgy, and the self. With this attention to Christ, the conceptions of poetry as preaching and

poetry as praise, which are twisted, conflated, and mingled in the two "Jordan" poems, both begin to gesture towards the conception of poetry as communion with Christ.

V

This conception of poetry is clearest in "The Quidditie":

My God, a verse is not a crown,

No point of honour, or gay suit,

No hawk, or banquet, or renown,

Nor a good sword, nor yet a lute:

It cannot vault, or dance, or play;

It never was in *France* or *Spain*:

Nor can it entertain the day

With my great stable or demain:

It is no office, art, or news,

Nor the Exchange, or busie Hall;

But it is that which while I use

I am with thee, and *most take all*. (*Works* 69-70)

Heather Asals notices that Herbert's concept of "use" refers to Augustine:

To enjoy something is to cling to it with love for its own sake. To use something, however, is to employ it in obtaining that which you love, provided that it is worthy of love. For an illicit use should be called rather a waste or an abuse. . . . The things which are to be enjoyed are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a single Trinity . . . (*On Christian Doctrine* 9-10; I. iv)

Poetry, then, is not  
And if used towards  
read the communication  
poetry itself is not  
mere moralism or  
not the role of the poet  
using it to be written

Augustine

employs a prescriptive  
Augustine prescribes  
"which will be used I will  
not in the field of Poetry  
*communio in Deo*

liturgy and the service

Focal point

should be... The  
uses poetry in its process  
means for the self to get  
previous claim we saw  
of God in showing the  
self's true nature as an  
poet's inspiration -- the  
relationship between the

But poetry, in an

Poetry, therefore, is not something to be loved for its own sake but "used" to help us love God. And if used towards loving unworthy things, it is rather "abused." Thus, where so many scholars read the denunciation of metaphors and indirection in "Jordan" (I) and (II) as a renunciation of poetry itself, I submit that Herbert merely suggests that poetry *used* towards the ends of praising mere mortal, and often fictitious, mistresses, *abuses* both God and poetry itself.<sup>13</sup> Poetry itself is not the root of the problem but rather poets whose hearts are misdirected and who abuse poetry by using it to serve wrong ends.

Asals concludes that "Poetry, quite simply, is the 'vehicle,' or 'vessel,' which Herbert employs as homesick wanderer *en route* to God" (Asals 59). But I think Asals reads too much of Augustine's homesick wanderer metaphor into Herbert. Herbert does not write that a verse is that "which while I use I *will be* with thee" but that "which while I use / I *am* with thee," here and now, not in the future. Poetry, for Herbert, is not only a vehicle to reach God but is itself *a site of communion with God -- while* he uses poetry, even as he composes by imitating love in Scriptures, liturgy and life, he *is* with God / Christ.

For the focal point of the Scriptures, of Church liturgy, and of the Christian self is, and should be, Christ. "The Quidditie" itself is structured as an apostrophe or prayer to Christ. Herbert uses poetry -- all its processes of composition, writing, interpreting and reading -- as a site and means for the self to gesture, or reach out, towards a dialogic communion with God / Christ. In the previous chapter, we saw that both Scripture and liturgy function dialogically for Herbert as voices of God in shaping the identity of the self. And in chapter one, we saw that Herbert understands the self's true identity as emerging from a dialogic communion with God. In all three sources of the poet's inspiration -- the Bible, liturgy and self -- the heart consists of Christ and a reciprocal relationship between the self and Christ.

But poetry, in and of itself, can only *gesture* towards this communion. As in "Dulnesse":

*Look onely; for to love thee, who can be,*

What angel fit? (27-28)

For the finite, sinful poet cannot of his own efforts achieve this communion with God; he can only gesture towards it, to look rather than love, to desire rather than consummate. But the desire, or gesture, itself is counted worthy by God. As in the case of repentance and salvation, the inward desires alone, without outward concrete proofs, are sufficient for God:

. . . the chief thing, which God in Scriptures requires, is the heart, and the spirit, and to worship him in truth, and spirit. Wherefore in case a Christian endeavour to weep, and cannot, since we are not Masters of our bodies, this sufficeth. And consequently . . . the essence of repentance, . . . alike in all Gods children (which as concerning weeping it cannot be, some being of a more melting temper then others) consisteth in a true detestation of the soul, abhorring, and renouncing sin, and turning unto God in truth of heart, and newnesse of life . . . (CP 279)

The very *process* of renouncing sin and turning to God is all God requires for in humanity, not the actual successful *completion* of such works themselves. This is, of course, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith, and not by works. Humanity can only gesture towards God, reaching out, but it is God who grabs hold of sinners, embracing them. Likewise, it is the gesture or attempt at communion with God, that devotional poetry should aim at. For any other aim, as in "Jordan (II)," would border on presumptuousness, idolatry and pride -- attempting to reach God by one's own works, one's own tower of Babel to the heavens.

Communion with God is not achieved by the poet's own efforts but by God accepting the poet's gesture as the deed done, by God supplementing the want:

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.* ("A True Hymne" *Works* 168: 17-20)

The devotional verse becomes, not literally but in spirit and truth, a site of co-writing, co-authorship, between God and the human poet. Only *co*-authorship can achieve *communion*. The want, or lack, of sweetness, truth, and love in religious poetry are all "readie penn'd," provided for in the Scriptures, liturgy, and the poet's life-story, which is itself co-authored by God and the self. By constantly entering into dialogue with these sources, Herbert attempts and gestures towards a co-authorship with God, and hence, towards communion.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Some studies that focus on Herbert's plain style are: Manley, Frank. "Towards a Definition of Plain Style in the Poetry of George Herbert." *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance*. Eds. Maynard Mack and George deForest Lord. New Haven: Yale UP, 1982. 203-17; Marcus, Leah Sinanoglou. "George Herbert and the Anglican Plain Style." *"Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne": Essays on George Herbert*. Eds. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1980. 179-93; Gallagher, Michael P. "Rhetoric, Style, and George Herbert." *ELH* 37.4 (Dec. 1970): 495-516. The following works concentrate on Herbert's homiletics in relation to his poetics: Hodgkins, Christopher. "'Showing Holy': Herbert and the Rhetoric of Sanctity." *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric*. Ed. John R. Roberts. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1994. 222-36; Entzminger, Robert L. "Doctrine and Life: George Herbert and the Augustinian Rhetoric of Example." *George Herbert Journal* 13 (1989-90): 37-47; Shullenberger, William. "The Word of Reform and the Poetics of the Eucharist." *George Herbert Journal* 13 (1989-90): 19-36.

And these are two of a number who argue for a devotional perspective on Herbert's poetics: Eaton, Mark A. "'Brittle Crazy Glass': George Herbert's Devotional Poetics." *Christianity and Literature* 43.1 (Autumn 1993): 5-20; Asals, Heather A. R. *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> The primary difference between praise and prayer is that where praise implies an offering from an inferior to a superior, prayer as communion gestures towards mutuality, reciprocity and equality.

<sup>3</sup> See discussion in Chapter One on "Clasping of Hands."

<sup>4</sup> The order for the Holy Communion in *The Book of Common Prayer* also stresses the offering of one's life as a living sacrifice to God. See discussion on "The H. Communion" in Chapter Two.

<sup>5</sup> The texts of the poems in full:

"Jordan (I)"  
 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?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves  
 And sudden arbours shadow course-spunne lines?  
 Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?  
 Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines,  
 Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:  
 Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:  
 I envie no mans nightingale or spring:  
 Nor let them punish me with losse of rime.  
 Who plainly say, *My God, My King*. (*Works* 56-57)

“Jordan (II)”  
 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.

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 lesse those joyes which trample on his head.

As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,  
 So did I weave my self into the sense.  
 But while I bustled, I might heare 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.* (*Works* 102-03)

<sup>6</sup> Wandio’s discussion of both poems is found in 102-08.

<sup>7</sup> The relationship between Herbert’s *The Temple* and Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* are explored by Summers, Joseph H. “Sir Calidore and the Country Parson” in *Like Season’d Timber: New Essays on George Herbert*. Eds. Edmund Miller and Robert DiYanni. New York: Peter Lang, 1987. 207-17, and Wall, John N. *Transformations of the Word: Spenser, Herbert, Vaughan*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988. Discussion of Herbert is on pages 166-272; specific discussions on Herbert, Sidney and the Petrarchan love tradition are in pages 224-37. Below are the two relevant sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella*:

1  
 Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,  
 That the dear She might take some pleasure of my pain:  
 Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,  
 Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain.  
 I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,  
 Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:  
 Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow  
 Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn’d brain.  
 But words came halting forth, wanting Invention’s stay,  
 Invention, Nature’s child, fled step-dame Study’s blows,  
 And others’ feet still seem’d but strangers in my way.  
 Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,  
 Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,  
 “Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thy heart and write”.



Let dainty wits cry on the Sisters nine.  
 That bravely maskt, their fancies may be told:  
 Or Pindar's apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,  
 Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold:  
 Or else let them in statelier glory shine.  
 Ennobling new found tropes with problems old:  
 Or with strange similes enrich each line,  
 Of herbs or beasts, which Ind or Afric hold.  
 For me in sooth, no Muse but one I know:  
 Phrases and problems from my reach do grow,  
 And strange things cost too dear for my poor sprites.  
 How then? even thus: in Stella's face I read,  
 What love and beauty be, then all my deed  
 But copying is, what in her Nature writes.

(*Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Writings*. Ed. Richard Dutton, New York: Fyfield Books, 1987. 29 and 30)

<sup>8</sup> Below is the text of the poem in full:

Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am,  
 That my offences course it in a ring,  
 My thoughts are working like a busie flame,  
 Untill their 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, where are lewd intentions:  
 My hands do joyn to finish the inventions.

My hands do joyn 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. (*Works* 122)

<sup>9</sup> "And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone: and they were afraid to come nigh him. . . . And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him" (Exodus 34.29-35).

<sup>10</sup> Marcus' discussion of "The British Church" is found on page 188. The poem is found in *Works* 109-10.

<sup>11</sup> His Chapter 8, "'Answerable Style': the linguistic dissent of nonconformity" 240-62, involves a discussion of the plain style.

<sup>12</sup> The text in full:

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?  
 He is a brittle crazie glasse:  
 Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford  
 This glorious and transcendent place.

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To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie.  
 Making they life to shine within  
 The holy Preachers: then the light and glorie  
 More rev'rend grows, & more doth win:  
 Which else shows watrish, bleak, & thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one  
 When they combine and mingle, bring  
 A strong regard and aw: but speech alone  
 Doth vanish like a flaring thing.  
 And in the eare, not conscience ring. (*Works* 67-68)

<sup>13</sup> For example, James White:

This poem [Jordan (I)] twists two lines of thought together: one asserts the speaker's right to his religious subject matter, namely "truth" against "fictions;" the other asserts the value of plain and simple speech, on whatever subject, against the ornate, the conventional, and the obscure . . . The conclusion to the first line of thought is that he is entitled to write poems, perhaps highly complex ones, the burden of which is religious . . . The conclusion of the second is that the proper form of such a poem is *no poem at all*, but the bare simplicity itself . . . [emphasis mine] (49)

and Joost Daalder:

But Herbert's supposedly plain expression is highly rhetorical in intent, for its seeming simplicity only makes us more aware of the fact that a poem which appears to be avowedly "ascetic" or "puritanical" has its opposite built into it. . . . But "Jordan (I)," I suggest, is a poem in which Herbert . . . is adopting both attitudes at once, and if he is apparently paradoxical, then that is what we should expect his art to be. (25-26)

As I suggest in my discussion of "The British Church," I do not think that Herbert is suggesting a "puritanical" style of poetry. The seeming paradox that Daalder finds in Herbert can be partially resolved by a redefinition of the plain style, such as I have done, and also to recognize the tension and mingling of the two conceptions of poetry I described, poetry as preaching and poetry as praising.

Asals' discussion of "The Quidditie" can be found on pages 57-58.

## Conclusion

Reading through this thesis, one may discover with each subsequent chapter that Bakhtin's theory of dialogism seems to recede further into the background. Chapter One is perhaps the most "Bakhtinian" of the three chapters, with its emphasis on the relationship of the self and the divine other. The concepts of dialogism and monologism appear in the forefront of the analysis of Herbert's poems, as a new way to interpret them. In Chapter Two, Bakhtin's theory comes into play in the concept of intertextuality and in illuminating a reading of "The Altar" and "Love III." But Chapter Three seems almost devoid of Bakhtinian terms and categories. They remain in the background as the concept of communion that is the ideal which Herbert aims at.

This, perhaps, is the way it should be. For our employment of Bakhtin to interpret Herbert is to hear Herbert's voice anew, not superimpose Bakhtin's voice over Herbert's. Appropriately, then, Herbert's own voice gains preeminence as each chapter explores further into his thought. Borrowing Bakhtin's voice, so to speak, to engage in dialogue with Herbert enables Herbert to speak and respond to new questions and contexts. My purpose is not to make Herbert subscribe to Bakhtin's theory. Rather, my thesis suggests that Herbert's concept of communion with God functions like a Christian, or more specifically Anglican, version of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, with similarities and differences. Communion with God is the driving principle in Herbert's poetic theory, in his poetry's intertextuality and conceptions of the self.

## I

Recent Herbert criticism suggests new ways of perceiving Herbert's conception of the self in relation to the self-effacing / self-affirming dichotomy of earlier critics. Debora Shuger, in *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance*, argues for the conception of the self as a *duplex persona* during the English Renaissance. Owing to the increasing perception of the withdrawal of

the sacred from the social realm into the private space of the individual's heart, the self is conceived as consisting of public and private aspects. The public, social self "is constituted by its role or 'office' within a hierarchical sociopolitical order [and exercises] authority and endeavors 'to bring all under obedience,'" while the private self, which is under Christ, "strives toward submission and love" (Shuger 95). This disjunction between public and private is not absolute since elements of the public are found in the private and vice-versa. In other words, the secular, social self seems to invade into the boundaries of the spiritual, private self -- for example, "the strategies of social climbing insinuate themselves into devotional practice" (Shuger 119) -- and vice-versa. Thus, the private self that strives for self-effacement, or self-denial, struggles with tendencies for self-affirmation, or self-interest, in Herbert's poetry.

Michael C. Schoenfeldt's work, *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship*, parallels Shuger's in its interest in the invasion of secular, social practices into the spiritual devotional realm. For instance, Schoenfeldt traces the entanglements and struggles in Herbert's poetry of the intrusion of "manipulative tactics of supplication" practiced in the social world into the devotional practices of prayer (13); the courtier's strategies of flattery and praise, which are used to manipulate power, transfer over to devotional practices of prayer. Schoenfeldt sees these tactics as self-affirming, providing the weak weapons for negotiating with the powerful, and thus, in tension with the devotional aim of submission to the all-powerful God.

Both Shuger and Schoenfeldt see traces of self-affirmation in Herbert's poetry as being provided by the invasion of secular and social tendencies / strategies into the spiritual. In contrast to previous critics, Shuger and Schoenfeldt locate self-affirmation as derived not from the spiritual but from the secular. They see self-affirmation as antithetical to the spiritual aim of self-denial. This thesis, however, suggests that self-affirmation is not inherently secular. Rather, the goal of the spiritual life is to commune with God, and through this communion, the self finds its fulfillment.

Self-denial, for Herbert, does not mean negation of the self but the rejection of a false way of self-affirmation, namely self-affirmation through asserting the self's independence or autonomy from God.

## II

Modern critics may be skeptical of the dialogic / reciprocal nature of the hierarchical relationship between God and the self. In fact, postmodern theories stress how *all* relationships are implicated in the exercise of power. For example, Julia Kristeva regards even love as implicated within the web of power: "Love probably always includes a love for power; no matter what it is, love brushes us up against sovereignty" (qtd. in Schoenfeldt 228). Although love relationships are often enmeshed in the struggles for power, I believe there is another side to love. John Donne defines love differently:

Love is a Possessory Affection, it delivers over to him that loves into the possession of that that he loves; it is a transmutatory Affection, it changes him that loves, into the very nature of that that he loves, and he is nothing else. (qtd. in Manley 214)

Here, love seeks not to exercise power over the other but, in the act of self-giving, relinquishes power to the other. In a mutually loving relationship there is mutual submission, mutual relinquishment of power and, hence, mutual empowering of each other. Such a conception of love is probably derived from God's love to humanity. In Christ, God demonstrates a love that is selfless, a love that drives God to give of himself, and drives him to become even a man through the incarnation. This thesis suggests that Herbert shares with Donne this ideal of love, a love that marks the hierarchical relationship between God and self as a dialogic relationship.

Power can both control and create. In Donne's and Herbert's conception of love, power can function more in a creative than in a controlling manner. Submission, as Herbert has shown in "The Priesthood," can be a means of exercising control by manipulating the other but submission

within the context of love, as Herbert conceives it, expects nothing in return: it serves and gives for the sake of the other. Such relinquishment of power inevitably exposes the self as vulnerable to the other's actions. It is the same kind of vulnerability, though less dramatic, displayed by Christ in his death on the cross. Such vulnerable relinquishment of power, however, makes possible a radical transformation of oppressive power. For resisting oppression and control by means of power merely replicates and re-directs such power. Herbert's conception of the self's dialogic, yet hierarchical, relationship with God suggests the possibility of transforming oppressive power into creative power, the prison warden into a loving parent. But such transformation can only occur within a mutual willingness on both parties to be servants, rather than masters, of each other. As with the examples of God, the Bible and liturgy, Herbert suggests that authority structures can direct their power to enable the self rather than to control and silence it. They can act as physicians, healing and helping the self find its voice, rather than as prison wardens who do violence to the self by creating confining categories of thought. God's dialogic authority, in its relation to Herbert's self and replicated in the intertextual relations between the Bible, liturgy and Herbert's poetry, is the model Herbert presents in his poetry for his readers.

### III

More, of course, could be and perhaps should be done. My study focuses almost exclusively on "The Church," the poetic sequence which forms the "body" of *The Temple*. An examination should be done on how dialogism illuminates the other two sections of *The Temple*: "The Church-porch" and "The Church Militant." A preliminary observation, however, can be made. It seems that Herbert intends the two long poems to enter into dialogue with "The Church." The differences between "The Church-porch," "The Church" and "The Church Militant" suggest, perhaps, a complementary nature in their arrangements.

“The Church-porch,” with its proverb-like stanzas and admonitions to correct outward behaviour, has obvious resonances to the Bible’s book of Proverbs. Its “plain” speaking, however, suggests another possibility. Chapter Three defined Herbert’s plain style as closer to the Puritans’ conception of plainness as truly reflecting the experience of grace within the heart. But the stress on moral duties and obligations of “The Church-porch,” however, suggests an affinity to the religious conformists’ plain style as religious instruction by clear, rational exposition of moral duties. “The Church-porch,” therefore, supplements the almost exclusive emphasis of “The Church” on the internal language of the heart with its, almost equally exclusive, stress on outward moral duties. Herbert’s “plainness” spans the divide between conformists and non-conformists later in the seventeenth-century: it is both rational and expository, as well as, experiential and confessional. But the fact that “The Church” remains the bulk of *The Temple* suggests where Herbert’s emphasis lies.

Both “The Church-porch” and “The Church” focus on the individual, or the individual in relation to God and God’s people. But “The Church Militant,” with its apocalyptic-like span of historical eras, stresses the corporate Church body’s salvation story, as opposed to the individual’s, though archetypal, salvation story in “The Church.” “The Church Militant” may also be in dialogue with the liturgy of the Holy Communion in *The Book of Common Prayer*. For a portion of the liturgy is devoted to a prayer “for the whole state of Christ’s *Church militant* here in earth” [emphasis mine] (*BCP* 253). This prayer includes a petition to God to “save and defend all Christian kings, . . . to the maintenance of God’s true religion and virtue” (*BCP* 254). “The Church Militant” has a similar stress in its narration of religion’s westward migration, fleeing from corruption and sin’s clutches. But the precise contours of these possibilities and lines of dialogue shall be left for further research, perhaps by better minds than mine.

Ironically, this study of how dialogism functions in Herbert's poetry may strike some as being too insistent on dialogism's pervasiveness in the poetry. In short, one may conclude, paradoxically, that Herbert is monologically dialogic! This may not be so ironic if we ponder that Bakhtin himself is perhaps guilty of the same charge, in his insistent stress on the dialogical principle. A certain amount of centripetal, or unifying, force may be inevitable (to use Bakhtin's terminology). And, for Herbert, the total lack of a unifying vision is perhaps undesirable. As with Francis Bacon, Herbert would like to avoid the two extremes of uniformity and discord, preserving "the golden mediocrity" (Bacon *Advancement of Learning* 202). As Bacon claims, "the garment of the church was of divers colours and yet not divided" (*Advancement of Learning* 205; II. xxv. 9). Diversity without division is perhaps Herbert's ideal as well.

Ben Jonson remarked that "some will say, critics are a kind of tinkers, that make more faults then they mend ordinarily . . ." (*Timber* 111). I confess that there were times during the writing of this thesis when I felt that I made more faults than I mended. But this study does not pretend to be the last word on George Herbert's poetry. If I have made more faults, I trust that others will mend them for me. This thesis aims to engage the critical dialogues in Herbert criticism. I hope to generate, rather than reduce, more dialogues in this area. For Bakhtin, the dialogues between texts, languages and voices never end but continue perpetually. Meanings never stay static: "Even *past* meanings, that is those that have arisen in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (completed once and for all, finished), they will always change (renewing themselves) in the course of the dialogue's subsequent development, and yet to come. . . . Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will celebrate its rebirth" (Todorov 110). But even never-ending dialogues must have intermittent pauses.



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