

"BETWIXT THIS WORLD AND THAT OF GRACE"

"BETWIXT THIS WORLD AND THAT OF GRACE":
CALVINISM AND THE TORTURED SELF

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (1992)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: "Betwixt this World and that of Grace":
Calvinism and the Tortured Self

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. Chauncey Wood

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 89

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to understand the origin and outcome of the contradiction that is present throughout much of George Herbert's *The Temple*. The roots of this contradiction will be examined from the perspective of John Calvin's theology of grace. The doctrine of grace, from the Calvin's point of view, includes both an emphasis on the necessity and the ineffectuality of works for salvation. Herbert, like Calvin, was keenly aware of the difficulty of struggling between these opposing notions of grace and works. Hence, he experienced this contradiction as the "affliction" of his daily life, an affliction embodied in many of the poems throughout *The Temple*.

In seeking the origins of this contradiction in Herbert, we will look to his poetry, the Bible, as well as the works of John Calvin. An examination of the Church of England in Herbert's day and how it interpreted the doctrine of grace will add to our knowledge of how to read grace in *The Temple*. Having clearly defined contradiction in Herbert and how it relates to grace as he perceived it, the study will proceed to examine a number of poems specifically for the struggles they portray between the opposing notions of grace and works.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Chauncey Wood for his assistance and encouragement during the researching and writing of this thesis.

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PREFACE

Quotations in the following text from George Herbert's poetry will be from F.E. Hutchinson's edition *The Works of George Herbert*, with citations from poems referring to line numbers rather than page numbers. Unless otherwise noted, biblical references are from the edition which research has shown Herbert himself probably read most often: The Geneva Bible. All biblical citations note chapter and verse. Quotations from the works of John Calvin are from the John T. McNeill edition of *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (translated by Ford Lewis Battles) or, as noted in parenthetical references, to Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries*, edited by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance, translated by A.W. Morrison. For ease of reference, citations from Calvin's *Institutes* include book, chapter, and section, in that order. Citations from his *Commentaries* include volume and page number.

INTRODUCTION

Since its first publication in 1633, George Herbert's volume of poems entitled *The Temple* has continued to challenge readers with its self-contradictory style. This study will seek to show that this contradiction is intrinsic rather than opposed to Herbert's religious beliefs, especially the doctrine which Herbert experienced as grace, a doctrine deeply rooted in the Protestant doctrine of grace as it had been articulated by John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* a century before. Calvin explains that "when we say that grace was imparted to us by the merit of Christ, we mean this: by his blood we were cleansed, and his death was an expiation for our sins" (2.17.4). For Calvin, however, being saved by grace rather than works does not mean that Christians can abandon acts of righteousness. Calvin maintains that Christians will demonstrate good works as a necessary sign of their regeneration in Christ. He elaborates: "no good comes from us except in so far as we have been regenerated, but our regeneration is entirely and without exception from God, [and] there is no reason why we should claim an ounce of good works for ourselves" (2.3.8). Hence, Calvin emphasizes both the necessity and the

ineffectuality of works in his theology of grace. Juggling these two contradictory notions of a free grace not based upon works and in contrast a notion of good works based upon grace results in a sometimes turbulent struggle, a struggle which Herbert portrays repeatedly throughout the pages of *The Temple*. This study will examine Herbert's struggle and its roots in John Calvin's understanding of grace as embodied in the Church of England of his day, the Bible, the works of Calvin himself, and Herbert's own poetry. After establishing a clear definition of Herbert's terms, a number of his poems will be closely read for how this contradictory notion of grace versus works becomes embodied in the poems of *The Temple*.

Despite extensive effort within the past fifty years to re-establish the spiritual and theological context in which Herbert's complex poems were penned, few scholars have examined the source of this paradox of grace as a paradigm for understanding *The Temple*. This may result from a desire to find in Herbert a single point of view, a resolution to the contradiction in his poetry. For Herbert, as we will discover, this contradiction represented his life's "affliction," an affliction he knew to be keenly aching and arduous. Readers of *The Temple* often seek resolutions to this contradiction rather than studying why Herbert chose not to resolve it himself. As Sybil Lutz Severance points out in her insightful study of "Artillerie," "We praise

Herbert's intricate art, and then, perhaps, inevitably, we make straight the paths of his poetry with our theses. Still, the lyrics of *The Temple* retain their mystery, that quality which Sir Philip Sydney saw as the essence of poetry" (Severance 109). This mystery, revered by Herbert, is acknowledged by the apostle Paul as the core of the Christian message. He says: "And [pray] for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel"¹ (Ephesians 6:19). Perhaps Herbert did not feel compelled to find resolution to the contradiction in his poetry because the "mystery" Paul speaks about was central to his Christian faith. In *The Temple*, therefore, speakers as well as readers live the precarious existence of irresolvable paradox, suspending themselves between the two opposing realities of grace and works, struggling to find a place in the space in between where realities do not converge but co-exist in contradiction. To find a resolution to the "mystery" Herbert presents as the Christian life would be to enforce a meaning which Herbert did not intend upon the text. Readers must rather discover that knowing Herbert intimately may mean suspending themselves as Herbert did "betwixt this world and that of grace."

¹The King James Version is used here because of its choice of the word "mystery" to describe the gospel message in this context. The Geneva Bible uses the word "secret" here which shares one of its meanings with "mystery," but is seldom used in this sense today.

I. THE PARADOX IN PERSPECTIVE

Joseph Summers' *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* marks the first complete attempt at examining Herbert's religious perspective and poetry in its religious context. He, more than any other Herbert scholar before him, understood that "it is impossible fully to perceive or respond to Herbert's aesthetic achievement without an understanding of the religious thought and experience which is both its subject and its inspiration" (Summers 27). Summers insists that this results from the change in perspective among critics allowing poetry to be read in its cultural context, maintaining that "there seems, today, a more general willingness on the part of both critics and scholars to recognize the 'impurity' of language and the inevitable 'impurity' of the literary work of art: it is difficult any longer to pretend that the ideas and beliefs of a poet are of no importance in determining our response to his aesthetic structure." (Summers 27). Summers demonstrates with force that Herbert was above all Protestant in his theology; hence, Summers' contributions are invaluable for a study that reads Herbert from the theological perspective of Calvinism.

This reading, however, owes even more to the work of William Halewood, who, in the nineteen-seventies, carefully examined *The Temple* from the perspective of Calvin's and especially Augustine's theologies. Halewood attempts to identify the "opposites which engaged the imaginations of seventeenth-century poets and to describe the characteristic interaction of these opposites in their poems" (Halewood 15). These opposites result, Halewood notes, from the powers of motion and counter motion:

Man's determination to go one way is negated by God's determination that he shall go another, and the decisiveness in the poems of God's determination is a dramatization of his reconciling power. This point is not contradicted by the vigor of human assertiveness in the poems, which discovers itself in the end to be both doctrinally justified and a necessity of dialectic strategy. (24)

Halewood also points out the Protestant tendency to emphasize shock and surprise. He maintains that Protestants tend to regard the human situation as "paradoxical and improbable in every significant circumstance--that is, in every circumstance relating to salvation--and the ways of God amazing in their contradiction of reasonable expectations" (96). Halewood's sensitivity in *The Poetry of Grace* to the contradiction inherent in Protestant belief and Herbert's poetry influenced this study of contradiction in *The Temple* more than any other critical work.

Helen Vendler paid special attention to the affliction so apparent in Herbert's poems, but she devised a different

source for the contradiction than Halewood. Vendler grappled with paradox in Herbert's poetry and termed Herbert's method "the reinvented poem." She writes that "Herbert's poems, even those which seem most serene, often do not proceed tranquilly on their way but suffer abrupt changes of direction--changes differing from similar ones in other poets by being relatively invisible, since they bear no signals like 'nevertheless' or 'but' or 'yet' which usually mark an alteration in perspective. Herbert's method in these poems is one of tacit accretion of successive (and often conflicting) points of view, with the principle of accretion often masking the conflicts. . . ." (Vendler 3). As Helen Vendler explains, contradiction in Herbert can also be seen as result of a conscious re-writing, representing a thought process in which he moves from one extreme to another, to emphasize to his readers where the truth actually lies (often at the end of the poem). As she states in "The Re-invented Poem," Herbert's "poems do not 'resolve' these extremes into one attitude; rather they permit successive, and often mutually contradictory, expressions of the self as it explores the truth of feeling. At any moment, a poem by Herbert can repudiate itself, correct itself, rephrase itself, rethink its experience, re-invent its topic. In this free play of ideas lies at least part of Herbert's true originality" (56). Vendler's observation is true enough, for any paradox in Herbert's poems is seldom resolved,

explaining why the poems present such an enigma to their readers. For Vendler, this re-writing has mostly to do with Herbert's "ever-present alternative spring[ing] from his conviction that God's ways are not his ways. . . . one may want one thing today and quite another on the Last Day, for instance" (26). Vendler, therefore, perceives that affliction in *The Temple* is caused by the tension between "diffidence and protest," but she does not attempt a theological explanation for the tension between these, only suggesting that it results from an overly active guilty conscience² (55).

In *God's Courtier: Configuring a Different Grace in George Herbert's Temple*, Marion White Singleton ventures another reason for Herbert's constant contradiction of himself. She notes that "God's courtier is a pattern for his age because he enacts continuous mending and making; because his world, the place of his service, never can be transformed into a Temple. . . . He speaks to his age by modelling struggle as well as serenity" (Singleton 11). Singleton sees paradox in Herbert as a result of feeling himself to be an unfinished product in God's eyes. This observation, although not central to Singleton's study, does hint at the possibility of reading the paradox in light of

²Vendler explains that "Herbert may have invented this sort of God to embody the demands that his own conscience put upon him, a conscience formed by that 'severa parens,' his mother" (Vendler 55).

Calvin's understanding of sanctification,³ the consequence of grace whose process is not unlike Singleton's "mending and making." Calvin understood sanctification as the process through which the "Holy Spirit . . . dwells in us and by his power the lusts of our flesh are each day more and more mortified; we are . . . consecrated to the Lord in true purity of life, with our hearts formed to the obedience of the law" (*Institutes* 3.14.9). Calvin is quick to point out, however, that the struggle with the sinful nature is integral to the process of sanctification: "But even while the leading of the Holy Spirit we walk in the ways of the Lord, to keep us from forgetting ourselves and becoming puffed up, traces of imperfection remain. . . ." (3.14.9).

In the last decade, however, while many have followed the call to re-establish the religious context in which Herbert lived and wrote, few have furthered Halewood's landmark research on the contradiction or "opposites" present in *The Temple*. In *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century English Lyric*, Barbara Kiefer Lewalski asserts that the individual-typical speaker of *The Temple* is clearly Calvinist in theology; however, Lewalski is concerned less with the theology of *The Temple* than the way that Herbert's religious beliefs shape his 'poetics' from

³In his introduction to the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, editor John T. McNeill explains Calvin's use of the term sanctification as "the process of our advance in piety through the course of our life and in the pursuit of our vocation" (*Institutes* xi).

the rhetorical and aesthetic traditions available in Protestantism. More recent efforts at establishing theological context include Chana Bloch's incredibly detailed biblical analysis of Herbert's poems *Spelling the Word*, which examines each phrase in the light of the biblical allusions which were Herbert's lifeblood. She believes that "readers of *The Temple* . . . cannot get past the title page of the volume without some knowledge of Scripture . . . if they expect to enjoy Herbert's poetry with anything like its full resonance" (Bloch 1). Gene Veith examines *The Temple* under the lens of Reformation spirituality (the title of his book) and finds in the Reformation theologians Herbert's spiritual mentors. Veith defends his study of Herbert's theology, insisting that "George Herbert, measured by any standard--his craftsmanship, his mastery of language, his poetic and religious subtlety, the profoundness of his spiritual experience--may well be the greatest of all religious poets. As such, he deserves to be studied in his own terms" (Veith 20). In *Love Known* Richard Strier looks at all of Herbert's poetry from the perspective of one central Protestant doctrine: justification by faith. He maintains that "The more deeply we understand the theology of the poetry the more deeply we understand its human content. The two are one" (Strier xxi). Critics like Chana Bloch, Gene Veith, and Richard Strier have contributed much to a more intricate

understanding of the nature of Herbert's Christianity from both a biblical and theological perspective. However, their studies have more or less failed, except in passing references, to grapple with the affliction which presents itself so clearly in so many of the poems in *The Temple*, namely the tension which Herbert felt resulting directly from the paradox inherent in his understanding of grace versus works. Given Herbert's religious inclinations toward Calvinism and the theological paradox his poems present, this study will demonstrate that an examination of Herbert's affliction from a Calvinist perspective of grace is conducive to a better understanding of *The Temple*.

II. THE AFFLICTION OF GRACE

The affliction caused by this contradictory view of grace and works is not unique to the writings of George Herbert; one of the first of Christ's followers, the apostle Paul, articulated the struggle between works and grace in his letters to the first Christians in Rome. He wrote, "For I delight in the Law of God, concerning the inner man. But I see another law in my members, rebelling against the law of my mind, & leading me captive unto the law of sin, which is in my members" (Romans 7:22-23). This struggle leads to immense frustration for the Christian, a frustration expressed by Paul as well as Herbert: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then I myself in my mind serve the Law of God, but in my flesh the law of sin" (24-25). Paul defines the affliction which is so prevalent in Herbert, and we hear in his despondent plea, "O wretched man that I am," Herbert's pain. But as we will note in Herbert, after the imbroglio of frustration usually comes a moment of calm acceptance, not a denial of the affliction itself, but a recognition that the problem will not ever be overpowering. We experience this as Paul remembers: "Now

then there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, which walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the Law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, hath freed me from the law of sinne and of death" (Romans 8:1-2). The affliction which led Paul to write this highly strained passage led Herbert to similar extremes of frustration, such as in "The Crosse." Herbert mourns with Paul: "To have it my aim, and yet to be / Further from it then when I bent my bow; / To make my hopes my torture, and the fee / Of all my woes another woe, / Is in the midst of delicacies to need, / And even in Paradise, to be a weed" (25-30). Although Herbert is all too aware of the ceaseless struggle of the Christian still tormented by a sinful nature, like Paul, he knows that God is in control and, ultimately, sin will not conquer him. Upon remembering this, like Paul, comfort engulfs him but not without a confession of what he calls the "contrarieties" of the Christian life. He acknowledges: "Ah my deare Father, ease my smart! / These contrarieties crush me: these crosse actions / Doe winde a rope about, and cut my heart: / And yet since these thy contradictions / Are properly a crosse felt by thy sonne, / With but foure words, my words, *Thy will be done*" (31-36). Herbert concedes that the contradictions between grace and works are unavoidable parts of the process of sanctification. Chana Bloch confirms this when she says that "For Herbert, as for Paul, the human predicament in its very

darkness is the 'foil' that sets off grace." This is because Herbert is dealing not with the predicament of works, but rather with an affliction of self-will: the enormous difficulty of putting off the old man" (Bloch 159).

Moreover, the way Herbert chooses to present the problem proposed by Paul in Romans is reminiscent of Calvin's understanding that text. Calvin remarks on the struggle Paul presents: "Who would have such strife in himself but a man who, regenerated by the Spirit of God, bears the remains of his flesh about with him" (*Institutes* 2.2.27). Moreover, in his commentary on that text, Calvin maintains that believers "are so divided, however, that although they aspire to God with the special desire of their hearts, seek heavenly righteousness, and hate sin, they are drawn back again to the earth by the remnants of their flesh . . . they fight against their own nature and feel their own nature fighting against them." Calvin elaborates on the reason for this inner rebellion: "[Believers] condemn their sin . . . because they abhor them with genuine feeling of heart and detest their conduct in committing sin. . . . *Regeneration only begins in this life.* The remnants of the flesh that remain always follow their corrupt affections, and thus arouse the struggle against the spirit" (*New Testament Commentaries* 8:149, emphasis mine). This struggle between the sinful and the sanctified self is the essence of the affliction dwelt upon in so many of the poems in *The*

Temple. Herbert's speakers struggle between the desire to see the fruits of their new life in Christ and yet the tenacious, sinful nature prevents them from bearing fruit and claims it for personal merit when fruit does appear.

In order to understand the contradiction in *The Temple*, it is necessary to define more clearly Herbert's view of grace. In *The Temple*, hardships in life are called afflictions, and not surprisingly, George Herbert has five poems with that title. Each of these "Affliction" poems gives us contrasting perspectives on corresponding problems, problems that are all associated with the arduousness of accepting God's grace as freely given and wholly unearned. Herbert's speakers are men of discontent, men who know that God's grace is there to be had for nothing, but who would rather contend for it themselves. In Protestant circles, grace is sometimes colloquially referred to as "getting what one does not deserve." In this sense, grace functions contrary to reasonable expectations of human behaviour where people get what they deserve for their actions. Herbert's speakers struggle with a paradox, a paradox which represents for them the "affliction" of grace, causing them to suffer because they cannot meet God on their own terms. This is exactly what happens in the poem "Affliction I," where the speaker recounts the unhappy saga of a long, drawn-out depression, which is described in the following segment of that poem:

meek, / In weaknesse must be stout" (55-62, emphasis mine). Grace requires that in order to receive God's grace he must not be strong but weak; yet it takes great strength for the speaker to accept his calling to be weak. He wishes he were a tree, for at least a tree is given the privilege of bearing its own fruit. In fact, the speaker is so dissatisfied with meekly submitting to God's grace that he exclaims: "Well, I will change the service, and go seek / Some other master out" (53-65).

Similarly, in "Affliction II" the speaker laments the labouriousness of accepting his redemption freely, bought dearly by God's own son. He pleads:

Kill me not ev'ry day,
Thou Lord of life; since thy one death for me⁴
Is more than all my deaths can be,
 Though I in broken pay
Die over each houre of Methusalems stay.

If all mens tears were let
Into one common sewer, sea, and brine;
What were they all, compar'd to thine?
 Wherein if they were set,
They would discolour thy most bloody sweat.

Thou art my grief alone,
Thou Lord conceal it not: and as thou art
All my delight, so all my smart:
 Thy crosse took up in one,
By way of imprest, all my future mone.

The speaker in "Affliction (II)" would rather pay the price of his salvation himself than to take it freely from God,

⁴In his edition, F.E. Hutchinson disrupts the structure of stanza one by indenting the second line which begins "Thou Lord of life. . . ." Here, I have restored the 1633 structure.

even if it would cost his death each hour in a life as long as Methuselah's. This explains why, at end of the poem, the speaker, pondering Christ's sacrifice, cries: "Thou art my grief alone, / Thou Lord conceal it not: and as thou art / All my delight, so all my smart" (11-13). For God's "crosse took up in one" by way of imprest or advance payment all that the speaker could ever pay in his lifetime (14-15). Nothing remains for the speaker to do, and this purposelessness constitutes his "affliction."

A comparable conflict appears in "Affliction III," where the speaker is beset with grief because Christ's "life on earth was grief":

My heart did heave, and there came forth, O God!
 By that I knew that thou wast in the grief,
 To guide and govern it to my relief,
 Making a sceptor of thy rod:
 Hadst thou not had the part,
 Sure the unruly sigh had broke my heart.

But since thy breath gave me both life and shape,
 Thou knowst my tallies; and when there's assign'd
 So much breath to a sigh, what's then behind?
 Or if some yeares with it escape,
 The sigh then onely is
 A gale to bring me sooner to my blisse.

Thy life on earth was grief, and thou art still
 Constant unto it, making it to be
 A point of honour, now to grieve in me,
 And in thy members suffer ill.
 They who lament one crosse,
 Thou dying dayly, praise thee to thy losse.

The speaker in "Affliction (III)" feels guilty that Christ suffered for that which humans rightly deserved, and thereby, he refuses to live contentedly in the lavishness of

God's grace. When he says, "thou art still / Constant unto it, making it to be / A point of honour, now to grieve in me, / And in thy members suffer ill," he shows that he cannot accept God's grace as a gift, but feels he must pay for it in some other way (15-17). He believes that if he can feel the same grief Christ felt perhaps he will have done something to get what he deserves. If only the speakers in these poems could ever feel they had done enough! But they never can.

In "Affliction V," the speaker seems to have arrived at a certain acceptance of his affliction.

My God, I read this day,
That planted Paradise was not so firm,
As was and is thy floting Ark; whose stay
And anchor thou art onely, to confirm
And strengthen it in ev'ry age,
When waves do rise, and tempests rage.

At first we liv'd in pleasure;
Thine own delights thou didst to us impart:
When we grew wanton, thou didst use displeasure
To make us thine: yet that we might not part,
As we at first did board with thee,
Now thou wouldst taste our miserie.

There is but joy and grief;
If either will convert us, we are thine:
Some Angels us'd the first; if our relief
Take up the second, then thy double line
And sev'rall baits in either kinde
Furnish thy table to thy minde.

Affliction then is ours;
We are the trees, whom shaking fastens more,
While blustering windes destroy the wanton bowres,
And ruffle all their curious knots and store.
My God, so temper joy and wo,
That thy bright beams may tame thy bow.

Acquiescing to the reality that affliction will remain as

long as his sinful nature still troubles him, the speaker yields to the inevitability of affliction in the Christian life when he concludes, "Affliction then is ours" (Affliction V 19). He only asks that God "so temper joy and wo, / That thy bright beams may tame thy bow," meaning that he hopes God will mix affliction with joy and that he may experience God's grace and not only his discipline (23-24).

The most explicit image Herbert ever uses to describe this affliction of grace, however, appears in the opening stanza of "Affliction (IV)":

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

Herbert defines his affliction tangibly in this poem when in a moment of clairvoyance he sees his predicament more clearly than ever before: "Once a poore creature, now a wonder, / A wonder tortur'd in the space / Betwixt this world and that of grace" (4-6). This poem will be examined more closely later in this study, but for the moment, it will be considered for this one image alone. Here Herbert pictures the speaker of the poem suspended in the universe between two disparate worlds. Note the interesting comparison between his past and present states: he was once a "poore creature," and now he has become a "tortur'd wonder." Readers might pause to consider which situation could be worse. Why does Herbert envisage such a choice?

Perhaps the enigma of this image holds the key to the affliction present in much of *The Temple*. For while Herbert deems himself a new man in Christ, in his life he continues to struggle with the sinful nature which always tries to live according to works. Many other poems throughout *The Temple* deal with the stress produced by this "affliction," the source of which becomes striking when we read Herbert's poems in light of his understanding of grace. Herbert uses the word grace only thirty times in *The Temple*, although this does not include the multitude of other occasions where images of grace are used and not explicitly named, as readers will notice in several of the poems this study will examine. Still, the references Herbert makes directly to grace give a clearer picture of what grace means for him. Excluding those references where grace refers to charm or suppleness of movement, Herbert most often uses grace in the sense that Calvin understood it, as God's free, unmerited favour shown in opposition to the human desire to claim works as merit or as a means of achieving a closer relationship with God. Consider "Good Friday" where the speaker is talking about people getting what they deserve: "How shall I measure out thy bloud? / How shall I count what thee befell / And each grief tell" (2-4).⁵ In "Good

 5

"Good Friday"

O My chief good,
 How shall I measure out thy bloud?
 How shall I count what thee befell,

Friday" the speaker wants to know exactly the extent of Jesus' suffering that he can make a tantamount sacrifice. He goes on to ask, "Shall I thy woes / Number according to thy foes" and "shall each leaf / Which falles in Autumne, score a grief?" (5-10). The speaker is seeking some equation which will put him in a favourable relationship with his Saviour. He concludes, "let each houre / Of my whole life

And each grief tell?

Shall I thy woes
Number according to thy foes?
Or, since one starre show'd thy first breath,
Shall all thy death?

Or shall each leaf,
Which falls in Autumne, score a grief?
Or can not leaves, but fruit, be signe
Of the true vine?

Then let each houre
Of my whole life devoure;
That thy distresse through all may runne,
And be my sunne.

Or rather let
My severall sinnes their sorrows get;
That as each beast his cure doth know,
Each sinne may so.

Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write
Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight;
My heart hath store, write there, where in
One box doth lie both ink and shame.

That when sinne spies so many foes,
Thy whips, thy nails, thy woes,
All come to lodge there, sinne may say,
No room for me, and flie away.

Sinne being gone, oh fill the place,
And keep possession with thy grace;
Lest sinne take courage and return,
And all the writings blot or burn.

devoure . . . Or rather let my severall sinnes their sorrows
 get; / That as each beast his cure doth know, / Each sinne
 may so" (13-20). The least he asks for is that he get what
 he deserves for each of his individual sins so that the
 punishment might bring his cure. In the first five verses of
 the poem, the speaker recounts his efforts to find
 forgiveness through works--attempts to get what he rightly
 deserves. The sentiment expressed in the last three verses
 turns on the sentiment of the first five.⁶ Finally, the
 speaker realizes that what Good Friday really means is
 getting what one does not deserve. Christ received whips,
 nails, wounds, and woes for his innocence; sinful humans
 receive the grace of God for their guilt. He confesses at
 last: "Sinne being gone, oh fill the place, / And keep
 possession with thy grace." Grace is that which God provides
 when he has chased away all the sinfulness, all the
 dependence upon works, and all human attempts to find one's
 own way to God.

In addition to getting what one does not deserve,
 grace functions as the great equalizer, making all believers
 equally holy in the eyes of God. In "Faith" Herbert says, "A
 peasant may beleeve as much / As a great Clerk, and reach

⁶Here, I regard lines 21-32 in Hutchinson's edition as a second section of "Good Friday," although a version of these lines appears in W as a separate poem entitled "The Passion." Even if Herbert originally intended these sections to be read separately, the connection between them cannot be denied. Christ's passion is a necessary part of Good Friday, and I believe Herbert's ambiguity implies that the one cannot be read without the other.

the highest stature. / Thou dost make proud knowledge bend & crouch, / While grace fills up uneven nature (28-32). Once more grace presents itself as something imputed, filling a void in man which he is incapable of filling himself, for as the speaker believes: "If blisse had lien in art or strength, / None but the wise or strong had gained it" (25-26). Here Herbert stresses how when one begins to feel lowest in one's depravity, God fills up the "uneven nature" after which he "make[s] the sunne / Impute a lustre, and allow them bright; / And in this shew, what Christ hath done" (34-36). God transforms humans from within, allowing his grace to flow forth and perform that which is impossible for those not sanctified in Christ.

Correspondingly, in "The Temper (II)" Herbert compares "the grosser world" which lives according to works --the law--and the "diviner world of grace" where God raises sinful man to become a "new creature" each day (5-8). The speaker pleads in the following verse of this poem for the Lord to "Fix [his] chair of grace, that all my powers / May also fix their reverence," demonstrating that only when God reigns in his heart is he able to honour him through "good works" as he should. Otherwise, his works are "unruly" (9-12).

In "Grace," the imparting of grace, which "drop[s] from above," brings transformation, reviving dead stock, enlightening dark houses, refreshing like the dew, turning

the grave to glory, suppling the heart and taking away its hardness, and filling a void with love. Finally, grace can transform an unworthy sinner into someone worthy enough to face God himself.

In "The Windows," which deals with the clerical order, we see grace as something which transforms a "brittle crazie glasse" into a transcendent "window." Here, the speaker-priest is keenly aware of his own inability to speak God's word clearly to his people. He discovers that he does not have to speak God's word; rather, because of grace, God can speak through him.

Hence, readers realize it is impossible to understand grace in any of Herbert's poetry apart from his concept of works. It would be simple to assume that works are not important to a person who has been saved by grace, where salvation does not depend upon acts of righteousness or merit. However, the speakers in Herbert's poems consistently lament the lack of fruit--good works--in their lives. They feel the constant temptation to go it alone, to seek inside themselves that which will satisfy God. Is this compulsion merely an act of self-assertion or is it an inevitable part of living the Christian life as Herbert and Calvin understood it? For both of them, saved by grace means saved to good character, and yet the sinful self remains an impediment. The resulting tension or paradox is that even though a Christian is not saved by works, he must

demonstrate them. These works do not result from a person's own effort, but they result from Christ's fruit imparted by grace. Hence, one may better understand the speaker's despair in "The Collar" when he laments, "Have I no harvest but a thorn. . . . Is the yeare onely lost to me? Have I no bayes to crown it?" (7-14). He seeks the fruit of his sanctification in Christ, but he mistakenly looks for fruit resulting from his own goodness, not God's. The distinction is fine. Works are necessary but not possible on one's own. Where grace is essential, works are nothing; nevertheless, the evidence of a person's being saved by grace is works. Hence, this emphasis on works needs to be seen in the perspective of grace, and a tension results, for a person tends to regard his or her works as a personal achievement. This is what Herbert struggles with throughout the poems of *The Temple*--an emphasis on works always goes hand in hand with the problems caused by self-intent which together work against free, unmerited grace.

III. GRACE IN *THE TEMPLE* AND THE CHURCH

To understand how Herbert, a seventeenth-century priest in the Church of England, understood grace, it is necessary to return to the writings of John Calvin regarding grace and its relation to works. There remains little doubt today that the Church of England in Herbert's day was influenced by Calvin's beliefs regarding issues of sin and salvation. What needs clarification is how this particular set of beliefs resulted in poetry as paradoxical and strained as Herbert's. By arriving at an understanding of grace as it was viewed by Herbert, readers will come to more fully appreciate the tension under which he constantly lived. For as much as Herbert believed grace was free, unmerited favour, wholly undeserved by human effort, he could not let go of the demands upon himself to show the fruit of his salvation. If we return to the Protestant theology with which Herbert was most acquainted, we find a surprisingly similar strain in John Calvin. Calvin explains: "There is no doubt that whatever is praiseworthy in works is God's grace; there is not a drop that we ought by rights ascribe to ourselves. If we truly and earnestly recognize this, not only will all confidence in merit vanish but every

notion" (*Institutes* 3.15.3). Yet at the same time Calvin makes statements such as this: "For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. . . ." (3.16.1). In his *A History of the Christian Church (Fourth Edition)*, Williston Walker points out that it is essential to note that Calvin's view of grace is distinct, especially from Luther's, because it "left room for a conception of 'works' as strenuous as any advanced by the Roman church, though very different in relation to the accomplishment of salvation" (Walker 474). The criterion set before Christians is God's law as contained in the Bible not as a way of earning their salvation but as an expression of their desire to live according to God's will which they, as people saved by grace, should desire to perform. Walker maintains that "this emphasis on the law as the guide of Christian life was peculiarly Calvin's own. It has made Calvinism always insistent on character, though in Calvin's conception one is saved to character rather than by character" (474, emphasis mine). Because of this, one will find in Calvin, as one finds in Herbert, a more conscientious emphasis on the necessity of good works in the Christian life, not as a means of obtaining grace, but rather as a sign of its infusion in one's life. This close relationship between grace and works will be central to this study and will enlighten the struggle which takes place in a number of

Herbert's poems in *The Temple*. Calvin was extremely aware that there would be confusion regarding the relationship between works and grace. Even the titles of various sections in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* identify possible misunderstandings. One is entitled, "No trust in works and no glory in works!"; another reads, "Works are God's gift and cannot become the foundation of self-confidence for believers" (*Institutes* 3.14.18). Calvin was well prepared for those who would scoff at Reformation theology, questioning whether sinners saved solely by grace and not works would have any motivation to perform good works whatsoever. This partially explains why Calvin felt compelled to provide a systematic explanation of his doctrines--in order to answer critics and to avoid misrepresentation in the future. When Calvin asks in his *Institutes* (a question often posed to him by his opponents), "Does the doctrine of justification by faith do away with good works?" he replies with an emphatic "No!" (3.16.1). Works are an essential part of the process of salvation through grace: "Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them [grace and works] at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works since our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness

(3.16.1, emphasis mine). Elsewhere, he reinforces:

"Therefore, as we ourselves, when we have been engrafted in Christ, are righteous in God's sight because our iniquities are covered by Christ's sinlessness, so our works are righteous and are thus regarded because whatever faith is otherwise in them, is buried in Christ's purity, and is not charged to our account" (2.17.10). And again, he emphasizes that "For our part we deny that there is any question here of attaining righteousness. We agree that good works are required of righteousness, but we do not allow them the power of conferring it, since at God's tribunal they must draw back" (*New Testament Commentaries* 3:287). Hence, works are a result of and necessarily follow from salvation by grace. A Christian must demonstrate good works as evidence of the saving grace of God, but these works come because of and are made perfect through God's grace. Calvin does not ask the question of grace or works; rather, he maintains that each is integral to the other. He explains: "It is our duty in return to be aroused by so great a promise, to take courage not to weary in well-doing . . . and to receive God's great kindness with true gratefulness. . . . Good works, then, are pleasing to God and are not unfruitful for their doers. But they receive by way of reward the most ample benefits of God, not because they so deserve but because God's kindness has of itself set this value on them. . . ." (*Institutes* 3.15.3). The key to the struggle in

Herbert's poetry, then, lies in this Protestant and particularly Calvinist understanding of grace which was predominant in the Church of England during the time following the English Reformation.

The theologians of Herbert's day were struggling with this same issue. In *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation*, Charles H. and Katherine George summarize the opinions of various prominent theologians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries on the relationship between grace and works. As Ussher, a theologian with whom Herbert was most certainly acquainted, inquires "'Are good workes so needful, that without them we cannot be assured of salvation? Yes,'" he answers himself, "'for though good workes doe not worke our salvation in any part; yet because they that are justified are also sanctified, they that doe no good workes doe declare that they neither are justified or sanctified, and . . . cannot be saved'" (George 47). The Georges note that another respected theologian in Herbert's day, Lancelot Andrewes, states that "'We hold good works necessary to salvation, and that faith without them saveth not'" (47). Similarly, William Gouge concurs, "'We teach a necessity of practising, of doing good workes. . . . And we acknowledge them to be so necessary, as without them we cannot be saved'" (47-48). Hence, the Georges affirm in their detailed study of the church of Herbert's day that the "English Protestant

insistence on the necessity of good works could readily provide the basis for an emphasis on acts of faith and precision of behaviour which would rival the utmost legalism of Judaism and the utmost perfectionism of the Catholic tradition" (48). In fact, "The Protestant saint had not annihilated sin; he did not even maintain steady dominion over it; he was merely in a position, thanks to the grace vouchsafed him by God, to engage in more or less equal combat with it" (49). Therefore, repentance for sins and the practice of good works are essential in the Christian life for Calvinists as much as Catholics. Only the basis for good works is different: for the Catholic good works are something a person does for salvation, for the Calvinist they are something a person does because of salvation. William Perkins explains this in his *Workes*, a theological text prominent in the seventeenth-century Church of England: "'A good worke is a worke commanded of God, and done by a man regenerate in faith, for the glorie of God in man's good'" (47). Good works, therefore, are possible only for those who have received the grace of Christ.

As we can see from the above quotations, Calvin's understanding of grace and works had significant influence on the Church of England during the lifetime of George Herbert. It is important to notice, then, that Calvin's doctrines which had the most influence on the church in England were not those having to do with church government

or liturgy but rather with the crucial matters of sin and salvation. Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 not so much because of theology but for essentially political reasons. As a result, the church that emerged from the English Reformation lacked ties to any particularly rigid system of beliefs or doctrines. Initially there was a certain amount of freedom and flexibility in interpreting the Scriptures and an openness to various movements taking place on the continent and at home. As a result, the Church of England was influenced by a number of emerging theological movements, some of which would eventually cause more radical groups to secede from the Church of England. Henry VIII's advisor and Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who was largely responsible for the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*, became very much involved in the Reformation movement and some Calvinist tendencies clearly manifest themselves in the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Church of England, especially those articles dealing specifically with sin and salvation. A close examination of the articles themselves is excellent evidence for the influence of the Protestant Reformation on the Church of England. A.G. Dickens in *The English Reformation* (Second Edition) agrees, maintaining that the articles "form a decisively Protestant interpretation of the faith. The saying that the Church of England has Calvinist Articles alongside a Catholic liturgy simplifies the facts, yet it

has a rough and ready justice in relation to articles xii, xvii and xviii" (Dickens 280). Similarly, Halewood points out in *The Poetry of Grace* that "among the great Reformers, it is Calvin, of course whose influence worked most strongly in the English Reformation . . . as revealed for example, in Articles IX through XVIII of the *Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England*" (Halewood 56). Lewalski points out that as the tenth of the *Thirty-nine Articles* explains: "The drama of man's spiritual restoration, his regeneration, must then be understood wholly as God's work, effected by the merits of Christ and apprehended by a faith which is itself the gift of God; failure to recognize one's utter dependence upon grace, or laying claim to any kind of merit or desert for any of one's own works is a dangerous sign of reprobation." (Lewalski 16). Similar to the interpretation of the grace/works dichotomy in Calvin's *Institutes*, the Twelfth Article distinguishes between works done to gain grace and works done because of grace. Notice the emphasis on good works as the necessary "fruits" of salvation in the following passage of the twelfth article:

Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit. (Article XII)

The author of the *Articles* stresses the fact that works are

acceptable not because of what one has done but because the grace of Christ covers the impurities of one's sin.

Similarly, the "fruit of the Spirit" is contrasted with works done without the grace of Christ in the following article:

Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the very nature of sin.
(Article XIII)

This article clearly articulates a Calvinist interpretation of good works in that only when one has received God's grace through Jesus Christ do works that were tainted before become pleasing in God's sight.

Other articles most obviously influenced by Calvin include the Seventeenth Article which deals specifically with a Calvin's understanding of predestination and election. Few would dispute that this article finds its source in the writings of John Calvin, who is known best of all for his hard-line view of predestination. As Charles H. and Katherine George maintain in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation* regarding the article on Predestination: "On these doctrines, the English Protestantism of the period under survey can be located . . . probably nearer in general to Calvinism than Lutheranism" (George 54). The article which describes the process of salvation reads like a

summary of Calvin's *Institutes*: "Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by the Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity" (Article XVII).

Hence, despite controversies in the Church of England regarding church liturgy, government, and the sacraments, Veith agrees that "During Herbert's lifetime . . . Calvinism was the norm, both for episcopalian factions and for presbyterian ones" (Veith 27). Moreover, Richard Hooker, theologian and author of the late sixteenth century volumes *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, writes about grace in vein a similar to that of Calvin, despite his well-known opposition to Puritanism⁷:

Then what is the fault of the church of Rome? Not that she requireth works at their hands that will be saved: but that she attributeth unto works a power of satisfying God for sin; and a virtue to merit both grace here, and in heaven glory . . . Salvation therefore by Christ is the foundation of Christianity: as for works they are a thing

⁷The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* clarifies Hooker's opposition to the Puritans: "His opposition to the Puritans, who held to the literal following of the Scriptures as an absolute in the sense that whatever was not expressly commanded in Scripture was unlawful, led him to elaborate a whole theory of law" (654). Hooker believed that "Puritans were wholly mistaken in regarding the Bible as a mechanical code of rules; for not everything that is rightful finds precise direction in the Scriptures" (654).

subordinate, no otherwise necessary than because our sanctification cannot be accomplished without them.
(Hooker 61)

Hooker clearly defines the problem of juggling notions of grace and works. The issue is not whether works are required; rather, the issue is whether God or man receives the credit for them. Hooker merely restates that which Calvin had debated loudly with the Roman Catholic Church during the Reformation.

Hence, we can see that with the abundance of recent research on the topic, one no longer has to defend oneself for making Protestant claims on seventeenth-century writers like George Herbert. Veith queries why it seemed in the past "to be such an audacious claim that Protestant poets writing in a Protestant country by and large turned out religious lyrics of a Protestant character" (14). In fact, today, such a claim hardly seems audacious. Rather, if one views English church history in its seventeenth-century theological context, reading the documents prominent in the church of that day, one cannot escape the conclusion that the Church of England in the seventeenth century was influenced by the theology of Calvin. Many people fail to recognize that Anglicanism, especially in the seventeenth century, was part of the Reformation movement. Yet as Veith points out, a close look at the *Thirty-nine Articles* and the works of some prominent theologians of the church of the day shows, "the Church of England was saturated with Calvin's theological

contributions," concluding that the reason for so much anxiety about reading Herbert in light of Calvin's theology results "not so much [from] a misunderstanding of Herbert, it seems, as [from] a misunderstanding of seventeenth-century English Calvinism" (16, 23). This confusion surrounding Calvinism may result from scholars associating Calvinism solely with the movements of Puritanism⁸ and the dissenters. There was, however, a widespread acceptance of certain Calvinist doctrines outside of more radical religious groups. Veith confirms: "For most English Protestants of the time, Calvin simply articulated, in a highly systematic way, what they knew of the Reformation gospel, that God takes the initiative in saving sinners from

⁸The same confusion which often surrounds Calvinism also surrounds the movement called Puritanism. Walker, in *A History of the Christian Church* (Fourth Edition), outlines the main characteristics of the group of Christians who came to be called Puritans during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

For them, the Bible was the basic authority, superseding any claim of the church as interpreter or custodian of authoritative tradition. They would purge from the services what they believed to be remnants of Roman superstition and procure in every parish an earnest, spiritual-minded, preaching minister. In particular, they objected to prescribed clerical dress as perpetuating in the popular mind the thought of the ministry as a spiritual estate of particular powers and hence not consistent with the priesthood of all believers, to kneeling at the reception of the Lord's Supper as implying adoration of the physical presence of Christ therein, to the use of the ring in marriage as continuing the estimate of matrimony as a sacrament, and to the use of the sign of the cross in baptism as superstitious. Because they thus desired to purify the church, they came to be called 'Puritans' by the early 1560s. (Walker 544)

themselves" (23). Hence, when Herbert's poetry is said to have been influenced by the theology of the Reformation as many studies have already demonstrated, it does not infer that Herbert was a Puritan or a radical, but was rather simply espousing the prominent theology in the Church of England of his day. For these reasons, Strier agrees that "Herbert's poetry expresses the central Reformation doctrines so richly that this continuity can be demonstrated through it" (Strier xv).

IV. "AFFLICTION (IV)"

This struggle between grace and works causes a tension in many of Herbert's poems which must remain unresolved as long as the sinful self persists. Indeed, for the Christian, man's essentially sinful nature is only in the process of being transformed in this life, and, therefore, remains vexatious throughout it. This is because, as we have seen, even though a person is sanctified by the grace of God, he still continues to struggle in the world of works, where works are necessary but never good enough for God. Only when a person accepts God's grace does he or she become free to do good works. Herbert's personal struggle between the two opposing realities of grace and works is particularly evident in his poem "Affliction (IV)," which was examined for its central image earlier in this study and follows here in full:

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

My thoughts are all a case of knives,
 Wounding my heart
 With scatter'd smart,
As watring pots give flowers their lives.
 Nothing their furie can controll,

direction or the other'" (Veith 264n)⁹. However, the two worlds neither represent the sinful "flesh" and the sacred "spirit" or God's world (heaven) and momentary experience (earth). Such definitions imply a dichotomy between present sinfulness and a future God-like virtue attainable by man. This reading would demonstrate rather that the two worlds are both *present* realities, a necessary dialectic, one in which the Christian is "tortur'd" by the need to act and the need to accept God's action as his own. He is "tortur'd" by being obliged to do good works but unable to take any of the credit for them.

Hence, most readers would certainly agree that grace, or getting something one does not deserve, works against human reason. That, however, only adds to the difficulty of the present situation for Herbert's speaker--one in which one must constantly contend with sin. Despite this difficulty, a Christian must live with the assurance that the struggle will never be too much for him or her, as the Apostle Paul explains in his letter to the Romans, "if we be children, we are also heires, even the heires of God, & heires annexed with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we maye also be glorified with him. . . . Because the creature also shal be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious libertie of the sonnes of God"

⁹Quoted in Veith from Valerie Carnes' "The Unity of George Herbert's *The Temple*: A Reconsideration," *ELH* 35 (1968):523.

(Romans 8:17-21). Paul believes that Christians must suffer with Christ to share in his glory, but the suffering they experience is their inability to be like Christ. It is a suffering they must endure while they wait to be delivered from the bondage of corruption which is the sinful nature. That is why the speaker in "Affliction (IV)" feels "tortur'd"; he knows the future glory promised him through grace, but he also knows the present struggle that he must endure. Meanwhile, he will continue to be afflicted by having to live in two distinct realities simultaneously, for only in that place can he come to truly rely upon God and not himself.

For the speaker of this poem, the world of works is the reality of daily Christian life where one is called to live a life exemplifying the life of Christ. In that world a Christian is judged by his ability to show the fruit of his sanctification by grace. In that world, one lives according to the law, tries to discern God's will, and tries to love God above all else. Yet the world of grace contradicts and to a certain extent nullifies the other world of works. The speaker perceives himself to be so sinful that he is not capable of doing anything good. In fact, he realizes that any human attempt to be saved by works is futile. Hence, one can see "Affliction (IV)" as an illustration of Herbert's feeling of suspension between the two beliefs inherent in his particular understanding of the grace/works dichotomy.

First, one does not receive faith by works; second, one must still display works as evidence of faith by grace.

At the outset of the poem, the speaker feels desperate, "broken in pieces all asunder," and as helpless as an animal hunted, "a thing forgot." As Hutchinson points out in his edition, these phrases undoubtedly recall Psalm 31:12 which describe the Psalmist's "affliction" in this way: "I am forgotten, as a dead man out of minde: I am like a broken vessel." But the speaker remembers this as something from long ago. He is recalling a past time when he was "a poore creature" living only in the world of works, where he tried unsuccessfully to reach heaven by his own might. Elsewhere, in "Vanitie II," Herbert similarly refers to himself as a "poore silly soul" a person "whose hope and head lies low; / Whose flat delights on earth do creep and grow" (1-2). This "poor silly soul" is reprimanded late in that poem for living only with the reality of the present world: "The silly soul take heed; for earthly joy / Is but a bubble, and makes thee a boy" (17-18). Hence, we can see that the speaker's present situation differs from the time when he lived only in the world of works, but it is no less formidable. He explains, "Once a poor creature, now a wonder." We find the word "wonder" used in a similar way in Psalm 71:7 where the Psalmist says: "I am as a wonder unto

many, but thou art my strong refuge."¹⁰ The Psalmist uses "wonder" in the sense that the troubles of his life have been viewed by others as possessing some special significance. His role as a wonder is prophetic for others who see that God has been a refuge to him despite his miseries. Similarly, the "wonder" in this poem is displayed with prophetic significance for all Christians to see. The wonder is that even though one is "tortur'd" by current circumstances, God remains steadfast.

Readers must note, however, that the situation in which the speaker now finds himself appears no less threatening than before. Once hunted, he is now "tortur'd in the space / Betwixt this world and that of grace." This seems to be the speaker's affliction, to be caught between two necessary worlds: a world where he is plagued by his sinful nature and unable to do the works that God requires of him, and a world where grace forgives that which he can not do and accepts him just the same. His current situation is such that he often feels he has one foot in each world, for God's grace has been revealed, but the struggle against sin and self-assertion (to Herbert these are the same) continues. The narrator of "Affliction IV" has already experienced living only in the world of works, and he did

¹⁰The King James Version is quoted here to provide insight into the usage of the word "wonder" in Herbert's day. The Geneva Bible uses the phrase, "I am become as it were a monstre unto manie," with this gloss: "All the worlde wondereth at me because of my miseries."

not find salvation there. He has chosen now to be "tortur'd" in the space between the world of "works" and the world of "grace."

The thoughts that "are all a case of knives" wounding the speaker's heart are what he perceives to be the prodding assertiveness of his sinful self. The source of his pain is that he cannot simply accept God's grace, but he must constantly try to overcome his sinfulness on his own. Yet the narrator confesses: "Nothing their furie can contrroll," acknowledging that sinfulness is something beyond his ability to cap or stem. This is the "scatter'd smart," which comes from the wounds inflicted by the thoughts which prick his soul until it becomes like the little holes in the spout of the watering pot. Also, just as "watring pots give flowers their lives," so being prodded in this way by the sinful nature is an inevitable result of being a sinful human. Such fatalism regarding sin is not uncommon among Calvinists, who believe that sin is imputed in the human race from one generation to the next, based on Paul's words in Romans: "Wherefore, as by one man sinne entred into the worlde, and death by sinne, and so death went over all men, for asmuche as all man have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Calvin elaborates on this text, pointing out that "therefore all of us, who have descended from impure seed, are born infected with the contagion of sin. In fact, before we saw the light of this life we were soiled and spotted in God's sight"

(*Institutes* 2.1.5). Herbert's attitude toward sin reflects this kind of inevitability in various poems. For instance, "Sinne (I)" lists the many obstacles that might prevent one from sinning, but the poem concludes that "all these fences and their whole aray / One cunning bosome-sinne blows quite away" (13-14). Therefore, the inevitability of sin remains a frustrating reality even for those who are being sanctified.

In the third stanza of "Affliction (IV)," the speaker enacts the battle he must constantly wage against this "old" nature. The attendants, or sinful intentions, which remain quiet for short periods, never fail to arise, attempting to conquer the speaker: "all my attendants are at strife, / Quitting their place / Unto my face" (13-15). They fight with the speaker's intentions to "perform the task of life"--to follow God's will. He admits that even when he strives to follow God, self-intents always "trie out their right," seeking to control his actions. Note how he stresses the "And while I live" to emphasize how these processes of struggle are an incessant and inevitable part of being human.

In desperation, the speaker finally turns to God for help. He confesses that he cannot fight the evil reigning within; he cannot do what God requires of him. He pleads, "Oh help, my God! let not their plot / Kill them and me" (19-20). He has reached a point where his assurance in God's

grace has been overtaken by his sinful desire to go it on his own. That does not mean that God has deserted him, only that he has momentarily forgotten God's grace. In this stanza his memory is restored, and he becomes calm. He reminds himself that if sinfulness could kill him, it would also have to kill God, since God's Spirit lives in him. He remembers that sin cannot destroy what God has built up. He may be recalling the text in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 that says "Knowe ye not that you are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If anie man destroy the Temple of God, him shal God destroy: for the Temple of God is holie, which ye are." The speaker begins to understand that his tendencies toward self-intent are an integral part of the human temple. Hence, he does not ask God to take the self-directed energies away, but rather that he "dissolve the knot." Marion White Singleton notes that "the knot of earthly entanglements in which his thoughts enmesh him are of his own making, not God's" (Singleton 135). Just as the sun scatters that which tries to hide its evil intentions in the dark, the speaker's God breaks into his heart and re-directs the energy with which the speaker attempted to live by works and transforms it into a channel for God's grace.

The final stanza fails to relieve the speaker of his suspension between two worlds, at least for now. Rather, "those powers" or his desires to live by his own will "which [now] work for grief" shall be newly directed so that they

"Labour [God's] praise." In addition, God does provide the speaker with rest at last, "relief" in knowing that God will "rebuild" him until he reaches heaven. The Bible often refers to God as a builder or the foundation of the human building--body and soul. As Paul points out in his letter to the Corinthians "ye are . . . God's buylding. According to the grace of God given to me, as a skilful master buylder, I have laid the foundation, and another buyldeth thereon: but let everie man take hede how he buyldeth upon it. For other foundation can no man lay, then that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:9-11). Singleton points out that "the means of ascent out of this world and into the world of grace is now perceived with a certain clarity and as an ordered, ceremonious, but above all continual process," that of God building him until he can finally reach heaven (Singleton 135). Here we are encouraged to imagine God rebuilding man until he is a tower that spans the world of works and that of grace. But notice how the speaker only attains this when he puts aside his own abilities, as in the opening of the poem when the speaker confesses that he is "broken in pieces all asunder." Chana Bloch points out that the "image of building" is implicitly contrasted with "broken in pieces" of the first line (Bloch 276). The speaker has not attained a state of self-assurance where he believes in his own ability to reach God. Rather, he is a broken man, who because of God's grace, has become a tower

that spans the heights of heaven.

V. "REDEMPTION"

Like so many of his poems, Herbert's "Redemption" immediately recalls the words of the Apostle Paul. The poem follows here:

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancell th' old.
In heaven at his manour I him sought:
They told me there, that he was lately gone
About some land, which he had dearely bought
Long since on earth, to take possession.
I straight return'd, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of theeves and murderers: there him I espied,
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, & died.

In "Redemption," as in Paul, salvation is viewed as a property purchase by God. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23, Paul speaks of redemption in terms of money in exchange for property: "ye are not your owne"; "you were bought at a price" and "Ye are bought with a price: be not the servants of men." Peter speaks about redemption in these same terms: "Knowing that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, silver and golde, from your vaine conversation, received by the tradicions of the fathers, But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lambe undefiled,

& without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Herbert's "Redemption" parable is also about property bought with the price of blood. The emphasis in Herbert's story of redemption, however, is not so much on Christ's sacrifice but rather on what that deed means for the deeds of sinful humankind. Here we experience not only the wonder of redemption but also the pain that the notion of redemption causes for the person receiving its benefits.

In this poem, a tenant seeks out his Lord to ask for a new lease and to cancel the old. An insightful comparison can be made between Herbert's redemption parable and an illustration which John Calvin employs to demonstrate the importance of attributing works to grace. Calvin explains: "Here I appeal to every man's common sense. If anyone who holds the usufruct of a field by another's liberality also claims the title to the property for himself, does he not by such ungratefulness deserve to lose the very possession that he has held?" (*Institutes* 3.15.3). Calvin insists that "the only lawful way of enjoying a benefit is neither to claim for ourselves more than was given nor to defraud of his praise the author of good, but so to behave that what he has transferred to us may still seem in a way to reside with him" (3.15.3). One may speculate that Herbert, in his years of theological research and study for weekly homilies, came across these words by Calvin and thought on them long enough to form them into the exquisite poem we know as

"Redemption." Whatever the case, Calvin's words shed significant insight on Herbert's poem. Herbert's tenant, unlike Calvin's, does not wish to claim the title to the land, but he does "resolve to be bold" and ask for more than he was given because he is "not thriving." Moreover, Herbert's story of a man who dares to demand more from his generous landlord echoes the intent of Calvin, demonstrating how humans constantly struggle to claim more for themselves than they should.

Chana Bloch points out that "the narrator of 'Redemption' stands literally at the juncture of Old [world of works] and New [world of grace]. Though he wears an air of bravado ('I resolved to be bold,' 'I straight return'd'), he is a poor lost soul, searching for his Lord in all the wrong places" (Bloch 150). The places the speaker looks, however, at least from the reader's perspective, appear right. The tenant looks for the Lord in all the places that a servant might: in the manour where he expects to plead his case, but he does not find his Lord there. In fact, he is told there that his Lord "was lately gone / About some land, which he had dearely bought / Long since on earth, to take possession" (6-8). As Chauncey Wood explains in "George and Henry Herbert on Redemption," the chronology of these actions is askew. The chronology can be pieced together, however, if we understand the "long since bought" as referring to the old covenant God made with Israel when he

delivered them from their Egyptian bondage, as in Exodus 6:6, when the Lord tells Moses "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and will deliver you out of their bondage, and will redeem you in a stretched out arm." Wood clarifies that "This Sinaiatic covenant with its idea of a treasure, or valuable possession, along with the sense of the Lord's acquisition of the people of Israel, has widely been understood as 'redemption' not only in the sense of deliverance or liberation, but also in the sense of purchase--the idea that is particularly important for drawing parallels between old and new testaments" (Wood 299). So the land which was bought "long since on earth" refers to the people of Israel in a covenant of works from which God had promised would come the Messiah. This Messiah would usher in the new covenant, also "dearly bought," who would bring redemption for all people. Joseph Summers points out that George Ryley also understands this poem in light of the old and new covenants presented in the Bible. Ryley explains:

'The first lease this great landlord gave to man, his tenant, was the covenant of workes. . . . Man breaking the articles of this once, rendered himself forever incapable of retrieving that loss. . . . so by these articles could he never thrive, that is be justified. But what the law could not do, God sending his own Son, etc. hath wrought for us, that is our Redemption: making us free from the law of sin and death, and granting us a new *small-rented* lease. This was purchased for us by, and granted to us att, the death of Christ.' (Summers 60-61)

The tenant has yet to realize, however, what price will be

paid for his redemption, a different kind of redemption than he seeks.

The identity of the tenant in this poem, therefore, is essential for understanding the meaning of redemption in the poem. In "George Herbert's 'Redemption,'" Virginia R. Mollenkott asserts that "the tenant who was 'not thriving' under his old lease and who sought in Heaven for a 'new small-rented lease' . . . cannot be the typical Christian, nor can he be Herbert himself, for the speaker had been tenant long before the incarnation and death of Christ the rich landlord." (262). Mollenkott elaborates that "the adjectives *new* and *old* in line 4 supply the answer: the tenant is the spiritual nature of Everyman, not thriving under the Old Testament covenant and finally seeking a New Testament one, with the smaller rent of grace taking the place of the old lease of the law" (262). Herbert clearly means each reader to see herself as a tenant with a rich Lord, concerned with her inability to live by God's standards, searching for some better way of settling her accounts with God.

The tenant does not understand the significance of the Lord returning to earth for the land "dearly bought," nor does he consider that the purchase may apply to him. He merely continues his search on earth. The tenant assumes that with his Lord's wealth and noble name, he would certainly be lodging in the great resorts of the rich and

famous. He looks in all the places where wealthy and sophisticated people spend their time, but he is unable to find his Lord. Gene Veith explains in *Reformation Spirituality* that "The search for God, though, whether in heaven or on earth, is futile in so far as the seeker depends upon his own efforts. . . . The search of God is inherently thwarted by the seeker's misdirected will" (70). In fact, the tenant's search epitomizes man's failure to see God as he was incarnated in Jesus. As the Jews had rejected the Messiah because he came as a baby born in a manger, a carpenter's son, and not a king by royal birth, or a powerful ruler by anyone's standards, so the tenant searches for his Lord among the wealthy and famous, but he finds him not.

At last, the tenant hears some "ragged noise and mirth / Of thieves and murderers" which catches his attention. He finds his Lord among the most despicable on earth, and before he is even able to present his petition, the Lord sees him and says "Your suit is granted." Then the Lord dies. Veith points out that "The ironies [of the poem] are those of God's foreknowledge and predestination, as the rather complacent tenant's casual random search ends with Christ finding him and granting his request by dying" (70). Bloch confirms that

God's prevenient grace has rendered all his effort absurd. Significantly, Christ has the last action too: Herbert did not write (the banal rhyme aside), 'there I him did see, / Who straight, Your suit is

granted, said to me.' Some of the power of the ending lies in the abrupt '& died.' The point is not simply that Christ died before the suitor could say 'Please' or 'Thank you,' but that he *died*, with the act effecting man's redemption. (150-151)

Strier agrees that main point of the poem is the "strangeness of Christianity, its affronting of natural reason and common sense . . . The Lord's words . . . come to [the speaker] independently of all his efforts and give him freely what he has been misguidedly struggling to attain. 'Redemption' dramatizes not only the strangeness of the means of grace but also the strange *givenness* of grace" (57-58). Mollenkott agrees: "As in many first-person fictions, the reader gradually comes to identify with the narrator, so that when the speaker finally recognizes Christ among the thieves and murderers of Golgotha, both *his* quest and *ours* comes to a startling, abrupt conclusion." She explains that "any expression of the narrator's feeling would interfere with the workings of the reader's emotions: we are left staring at the crucified Christ, grappling with the realization that he has answered our need even before we have had the opportunity to tell him about it" (Mollenkott 266).

The most interesting thing about the discourse which appears in this poem, however, is that the most important facts are missing. What happens to the tenant after the poem ends? Does he really get what he was searching for? The poem leaves us feeling uncertain. When the tenant seeks out his

Lord, he does so with immense fortitude. He is "resolved to be bold," and bold it certainly is for a mere tenant to seek out the Lord at the manour. Moreover, the tenant also demonstrates brazenness in demanding a new lease. His display of undying determination does not stop when he fails to find the Lord at the manour; he continues to pursue his Lord all over the world. What boldness he shows when he appears in his ragged clothes in the hotels of the wealthiest and well-known. The tenant's search, represents, in itself, an attempt to impose his wilfulness on his master, to demonstrate that he has his own abilities and aspirations, to state his claim on his aptitude to buy his own "redemption."

Read as such, we cannot help but hear the disappointment in the phrase "there him I espied / Who straight, Your suit is granted, said & died." The disappointment in this phrase, however, does not result from the fact of the Lord's death. The tenant gets what he was looking for--his new lease. The story is not sad in that regard. No, the ending is disappointing for the speaker because when the tenant at last has the opportunity to approach his Lord, his only opportunity is taken away. His sadness comes not from the Lord's death but rather from the timing of the death. If only the tenant had been able to plead his case and had been granted his suit afterward, then his self-reliance would have been assured. He would have

been able to impose his will, to determine his fate. But instead, he only presents himself speechless and empty before his Lord and receives exactly what he wanted all along. He is not given the privilege of doing anything to receive it.

What does the tenant do after he hears the words of his Lord? Herbert's poem does not tell us. But we sense from the poem's ending--disappointing to the speaker but not to the reader--that the tenant must now search his soul. Like the Christian, the tenant seeks to earn his salvation, to approach the Lord with his own merit, and to make a barter with his God. Like the Christian, the tenant is forced to at last appear before his Lord with nothing to offer: no words of self-defence, no justifying arguments, just an empty, sinful self. Like every Christian, the tenant must come to a realization of his incapacity even to do the asking, for that is the moment when the Lord grants him what he wanted all along. This is the affliction of the Christian life for Herbert's speakers. They are constantly seeking the Lord and trying to live in a way that is acceptable to him which they are called to do, yet at the same time realizing that the more they try to do, the more they depend upon their own wills, and the harder it becomes to rely upon God. As in "Redemption," God at last brings the speakers to the point where he gives to them before they can ask. This affliction is all about the ease of grace. The tenant in "Redemption"

would rather earn his own redemption than to receive something he does not deserve. He wants to be self-sufficient, but all the boldness he can possess in the world cannot gain for him what Christ gives freely. The tenant sadly accepts redemption as something he only receives when he realizes that he is not worthy or able to receive it himself.

VI. "CHRISTMAS"

"Christmas" is similar to "Redemption" in that the narrator once more tells a story of a person seeking something and finding it at last where he least expects it:

All after pleasures as I rid one day,
My horse and I, both tir'd, bodie and minde,
With full crie of affections, quite astray,
I tooke up at the next inne I could finde.
There when I came, whom found I but my deare,
My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief
Of pleasures brought me to him, readie there
To be all passengers most sweet relief?
O thou, whose glorious, yet contracted light,
Wrapt in night's mantle, stole into a manger;
Since my dark soul and brutish is thy right,
To Man of all beasts be not thou a stranger:
Furnish & deck my soul, that thou mayst have
A better lodging than a rack or grave. (1-14)

In "Christmas," the traveller makes a journey seeking pleasures but to no avail: "All after pleasures as I rid one day, / My horse and I, both tir'd, bodie and minde, / With full crie of affections, quite astray" (1-3). Weary after a day of fruitless wandering, the traveller retires to a little inn. It is important to note that this inn is not an inn he chooses; rather, he shows his selection to be random when he says, "I tooke up in the next inne I could finde" (4). Herbert's traveller finds in this odd little inn both that which he was and was not searching for. The inn seems peculiar because the traveller finds within its walls the

incarnation of God. Would not so grand a place have been better known? What is even more baffling is that God is at this "random" inn waiting especially for this particular traveller. The traveller admits: "whom found I but my deare, / My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief / Of pleasures brought me to him, readie there / To be all passengers most sweet relief" (5-8). Note how the traveller seems to have a pre-acquaintance with the Lord. In fact, he shows that he has had an intimate relationship with him when he calls him "my deare, / My dearest Lord" (5-6). Hence, we can assume that the traveller's surprise at finding the Lord in this place results from his having left the Lord to find "pleasure." Obviously, the traveller did not expect the Lord to provide the pleasure, or he would not have left him in the first place. We can imagine the traveller leaving his Lord to be self-sufficient, to find in the world of works, of his own ability, the pleasures he seeks. So, he leaves behind his Lord and searches God-forsaken country. Then where he least of all expects to meet God, in an inn randomly selected, the Lord shows him that the pleasures he seeks are within his reach if only he will realize his own inability to gain them for himself.

The inn itself reminds us of the inn in Luke, where Joseph and Mary try to lodge during the census and where God becomes man, although in the biblical story, there was no room in the inn, and they lodge in the stable instead. But

what the traveller in "Christmas" must discover is this stable-Jesus, incarnated God, born in the manger as a man-child. God's "glorious, yet contracted light, / Wrapt in nights mantle, stole into a manger" (9-10). Once the traveller has come to understand the incarnation and what it means for him, he makes this confession: "Since my dark soul and brutish is thy right, / To Man of all beasts be not thou a stranger" (11-12). The traveller's confession is really an invitation, inviting this Jesus who was incarnated for sinners to come and live within himself. The traveller's plea for Christ to live in him is a plea for the imputing of God's grace, a grace which can displace the "dark and brutish" sinful self. He explains the process of grace more thoroughly in the next two lines: "Furnish and deck my soul, that thou mayst have / A better lodging then a rack or grave" (13-14). Here the traveller thinks doubly of how Jesus was laid in an unsuitable manger and how Jesus hung on the cross (the rack) and suffered death (the grave) and yet rose again to save sinful humankind. The traveller realizes that he is not worthy to lodge the Son of God, so he pleads with God to send his grace, providing a new, re-furnished, place for God to dwell within himself. The traveller's search for pleasure, therefore, turns out to be pleasure's search for the traveller. When the traveller stops searching, he finally receives that which he had been trying so hard to find.

VII. "ARTILLERIE"

Grace in "Christmas" was finding pleasure by ending the search. In "Artillerie," the speaker wants to find pleasure by attaining equality between God and man:

As I one ev'ning sat before my cell,
Me thoughts a starre did shoot into my lap.
I rose, and shook my clothes, as knowing well,
That from small fires comes oft no small mishap.
 When suddenly I heard one say,
 Do as thou usest, disobey,
 Expell good motions from thy breast,
Which have the face of fire, but end in rest.

I, who had heard of musick in the spheres,
But not of speech in starres, began to muse:
But turning to my God, whose ministers
The starres and all things are; If I refuse,
 Dread Lord, said I, so oft my good;
 Then I refuse not ev'n with bloud
 To wash away my stubborn thought:
For I will do or suffer what I ought.

But I have also starres and shooters too,
Born where thy servants both artilleries use.
My tears and prayers night and day do woove,
And work up to thee; yet thou dost refuse.
 Not but I am (I must say still)
 Much more oblig'd to do thy will,
 Then thou to grant mine: but because
Thy promise now hath ev'n set thee thy laws.

Then we are shooters both, and thou dost deigne
To enter combate with us, and contest
With thine own clay. But I would parley fain:
Shunne not my arrows, and behold my breast.
 Yet if thou shunnest, I am thine:
 I must be so, if I am mine.
 There is no articling with thee:
I am but finite, yet thine infinitely.

The speaker in "Artillerie" struggles with the notion that grace is something freely given, entirely dependent upon God, not man. The story has a surrealistic aura about it, and readers cannot help but think in terms of allegory, where each event has a prophetic meaning above and beyond its immediate referents.

The overriding metaphor for the poem is a militaristic one, portraying a person pursuing combat with God. A man is sitting outside his chamber when a star falls on his lap. He casually shakes the star off as if it were a spark from the fire. He informs the reader of the prudence of his action with this piece of conventional wisdom: "From small fires comes oft no small mishap" (Artillerie 4). With that one line, the speaker reveals something extremely telling about his personality--he relies heavily on the wisdom of the world to make and affirm life's actions. Strier points out that "Within the imagined situation, the speaker, like his distant cousin the protagonist of 'Redemption,' is acting perfectly naturally and perfectly reasonably. There can be no doubt of this speaker's worldly wisdom; his expression of it takes on virtually proverbial form--'from small fires comes oft no small mishap'" (98). But the acumen of the narrator's little aphorism is quickly overthrown as also is his reasonable outlook on life. While he is shaking his clothes a voice says to him: "Do as thou usest, disobey, / Expell good motions from thy breast, /

Which have the face of fire but end in rest." The Voice tells us something about the speaker which we otherwise would not know. "Do as thou usest" has the meaning here of "Do as you usually do." Now we learn that our speaker has a habit of disobeying, of expelling "good motions" from his heart. Moreover, we learn from God's voice that the narrator's "conventional" wisdom has failed him; sparks that have the face of fire do end in rest; he should not have shaken the fire from his lap. The action of which the speaker was so proud a moment ago is shown to have been an act of unabashed disobedience, for what the speaker believed to be a danger is really the means of finding rest. It is significant to understand the meaning of rest in this poem, for it means more here than just a break from one's activity or business. Rather, Herbert often uses "rest" in the sense that Augustine used it in his *Confessions* with these memorable words: "our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Here Augustine speaks of rest with the meaning of eternal contentment and hope for the future. Though they end in rest, good motions have the face of fire and that means they may be painful at times. However, in terms of eternity, these fires awake us to eternal life in God.

Moreover, in the next verse we realize that stars are "ministered by God," and we begin to see that the star which falls in the speaker's lap does not just randomly

appear but is sent to him from God. We start to see more significance in the way that the speaker brushes it away with his confident reference to a simple-minded aphorism. Despite the knowledge he has just gained, i.e. that his conventional wisdom has failed him and he has been disobedient to his "Dread Lord," the speaker still seems confident enough, even flamboyant. The speaker means what he says, so he turns to his God "whose ministers the stars and all things are" (11-12). The speaker's description of God implies the vastness of the universe and the immensity of God's power. Moreover, as Arthur L. Clements points out in *The Poetry of Contemplation*, this statement also implies "the orderliness of the universe . . . all things properly ordered and functioning, including stars, are God's ministers, that is not only his agents or representatives, but also his attendants and servants; all things are subordinate to God 'who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire'" (Clements 86). The speaker's address to his "dread Lord" sounds just slightly sarcastic after all of that empty praise, empty because even though he realizes his insignificance in comparison to God, he refuses to reconsider his quest for combat. "If I refuse, / Dread Lord, said I, so oft my good; / Then I refuse not ev'n with bloud / To wash away my stubborn thought: / For I will do or suffer what I ought" (12-15). He is close to blasphemy when he refuses even by blood, Jesus' blood, to wash away his

stubborn disobedience. It does not really matter to the speaker what he will do, only that he will do it. The doing itself represents an act of self-assertion and he stubbornly clings to that verb. Hence, the speaker refuses to drop the topic, hopeless though his situation may seem.

He continues to argue his point with the Lord. He says, "But I have starres and shooters too, / Born where thy servants both artilleries use" (17-18). He wants to convince the Lord that he has abilities to "do" God's will. Moreover, he explains to God how his prayers and tears are like shooting stars that can serve as his "artillerie." He is assured of his skill to do combat, to be equal, to get what he deserves. Hence, the speaker tries desperately to prove to God that he can do something. He perceives that the inequality results from God's refusal to accept his actions: "and yet thou dost refuse." The speaker does not question his own abilities but rather God's concern for him. He explains that God refuses him not because he is "much more oblig'd to do [God's] will / Then [God is] to grant [his];" rather, God's refuses him because "[God's] promise now hath ev'n set thee thy laws." He reprimands God. Has God not promised through the death of Jesus to hear the sinner's plea? Is he not bound by his own law, by his own blood, to listen?

Finally, the narrator concludes that both God and man are "shooters both," each trying to capture the other's

attention. He is still grasping for some way to find equality with God, when he says as if confessing: "thou dost deigne / To enter combate with us, and contest / With thine own clay" (25-26). At that moment the speaker begins to lose a little of his haughtiness. For all along the speaker has been trying to work himself up to God's level, and suddenly he realizes that God has come down to him. God comes down and enters combat with him and tries to win the heart of his child, just as he sent the star to the speaker's heart. God does this not because of something man has earned but because he has "deigned" to do it. Realizing this, the speaker then pleads with the Lord, "shunne not my arrows," or listen to my pleas. The least he can do is ask, but even that action is denied him. So finally, the speaker relents and says, "And behold my breast," which represents his invitation to receive God's grace in his heart. Yet, ironically, we know, as does the speaker, that God has sent that grace to him already. Before he could ask himself, God has already asked for him. Finally the narrator realizes what God was saying to him all along: that it is only when he realizes that his works are unacceptable to God (Yet if thou shunnest) that he is accepted by the Lord (I am thine). "I must be so, if I am mine" demonstrates that he has realized the necessity of God's grace acting in him for his own self is incapable of doing any good. For "there is no artiching with thee" reinforces that he can perform no

apprenticeship to become God's professional equal in combat or anything else. He must accept his incapacity to meet God's standards, for he is "but finite." Nevertheless, he still has the assurance of belonging to God "infinitely."

Singleton points out in *God's Courtier* that once the speaker has gained this understanding, he is able to promise God that "'I will do or suffer what I ought.' He does continue to suffer, for he is not done with either complaining or aspiring upward to heaven. But the emphasis is now on giving himself to God rather than imposing his will upon him" (Singleton 148). Similarly, William V. Nestrick in "Mine and Thine in *The Temple*," explains that "The conclusion has come with the acceptance of standing face-to-face with God. It involves the very self-destruction avoided at the beginning of the narration. But there is power in giving oneself that is not present in losing oneself, and the twin ideas of wooing and combating come together in the idea of winning and being won" (Summers and Peabworth 125). The good motion which had the face of fire was one which would bring self-destruction. By the end of the poem we realize that it is only by the destruction of the self that one can find one's self in God.

VIII. "THE COLLAR"

Unlike the other poems chosen for this reading, "The Collar" has been read often and in minute detail. Despite the profusion of interpretations already available, an examination of this poem in light of the struggle between grace and works provides additional insight into the tension of the poem. "The Collar" is the angry confession of a man tired of living a seemingly fruitless life. He is tired of living a religion that demands so much of him and yet so little all at once. His words seethe with frustration:

I struck the board, and cry'd, No more.
I will abroad.
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the rode,
Loose as the winde, 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?
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 petty 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.
 Call in thy deaths head there: tie up thy fears.
 He that forbears
 To suit and serve his need,
 Deserves his load.
 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.*

"What shall I ever sigh and pine?" the speaker asks in desperation. He is tired of feeling guilty for sinning knowing that he cannot avoid sinning. He is tired of living a religion that demands so much and yet so little of him all at once. He is tired of doing works and yet seeing no fruit from his works. So he proclaims himself "free" and "loose as the wind": free from God's obligations, his demands, and his wrath.

Then with the question, "Shall I still be in suit?," the poem moves from angry rebellion to regretful sadness. Hutchinson points out in his edition that this line means "Am I always to be doing suit and service to another, instead of taking my own line?" The speaker's rebellion is full-blown; he is tired of playing the role of a submissive servant to God. Moreover, when the speaker looks back over the year and sees that he has little to show for all his "service," he becomes even more frustrated. He has tried so hard to achieve some good works as a sign of his new life in Christ, and yet when he examines his life he sees no fruit.

The speaker quite rightly takes the absence of fruit

seriously, for the Scriptures strongly stress the importance of showing the fruit of life in Christ. Herbert was certainly thinking of the abundance of biblical texts which discuss the "fruit" of God's spirit as in Romans 7:4: "So ye, my brethren, are dead also to the Law by the bodie of Christ, that ye shulde be unto another, even unto him that is raised up from the dead, that we shulde bring forth frute unto God"; or Colossians 1:10: "That we might walke worthie of the Lord, and please him in all things, being fruteful in all good workes, and increasing in the knowledge of God." It is interesting to note that John Calvin also pays special attention to this text in Romans, and he discusses it in detail in both his *New Testament Commentaries* and in the *Institutes*. In its larger context, the text is part of a discussion by Paul that Calvin summarizes thus: "After [discussing] freely given righteousness, then, since some impious persons were inferring from it that we should live as we pleased because we were not accepted by God though the merit of works, [Paul] adds that all those who don Christ's righteousness are at the same time regenerated by the spirit. . . ." (Institutes 4.15.12). Calvin explains further that "[Paul] therefore says that he has a perpetual conflict with the vestiges of the flesh, and that he is held bound in miserable bondage, so that he cannot concentrate himself wholly to obedience to the divine law" (4.15.12). Paul expresses the difficulty of engaging in this "perpetual

conflict" when he exclaims: "O wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this bodie of death?" (Romans 7:24). The speaker in "The Collar" also asks pitifully, "Is the year onely lost to me? / Have I no bayes to crown it? / No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted? / All wasted?" The speaker becomes exceedingly sad when he thinks back on all that he has done, for he cannot remember one thing that gives his life meaning.

But there is meaning. The "Not so, my heart" changes the tenor of the poem once more to a tone of hope and happiness. He realizes that "There is fruit, / And thou hast hands." There is fruit to be had; he knows that, and he has hands. He must be able to find a way to get at the fruit. How to find the meaning amidst the emptiness? The speaker thinks that one may find meaning by "forsak[ing] thy cage, / Thy rope of sands, / Which petty thoughts have made." The speaker realizes that his cage is one made only of sand, created by his own petty thoughts; he has been psychologically trapped by his own feelings of guilt and unworthiness. He must turn this "rope of sands" or his imaginary cage into a strong cable which will lead him with confidence to the fruit he seeks.

So the speaker tells himself that he will use that stronger cable to "tie up [his] fears." As in the text in Romans mentioned above where Paul talks about fear as his bondage to the law, Herbert also refers to fear as bondage.

Calvin, too, discusses this notion of bondage: "Note that Paul connects fear with bondage, since the law can do nothing but harass and torment our souls with wretched discontent as long as it exercises dominion. There is therefore, no other remedy for pacifying our souls than when God forgives us our sins, and deals kindly with us as a father with his children" (*New Testament Commentaries* 8:169). The speaker in "The Collar" confidently asserts that "He that forbears / To suit and serve his need, / Deserves his load." He concludes that all this frustration is his punishment for not living properly, for not being good enough, for not trying hard enough. But this brings him back to the predicament of the poem's beginning. He cannot be good enough, and that self-doubt continues to cause him frustration. His decision to forget his fears and strongly bear up under his burdens is not the cure he needs, for he knows that his optimism is unfounded.

Tying up his fears has not worked. Yet Herbert has another kind of tying up in mind, which his speaker finally realizes. The only way to tie up the fear or to rid himself of the bondage of the law is to realize that he has forgiveness in Jesus Christ and not in his own abilities to live according to the law. Where Herbert writes: "But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde / At every word," his text reads like a gloss on Calvin's commentary, for the speaker in the poem becomes pacified when he sees that God

deals "kindly with us as a father with his children" (*New Testament Commentaries* 8:169). And then as he continues muttering to himself trying to find a way out of his dilemma, a voice breaks through his anger calling, Child! The exclamation point after child is very important to the meaning of grace in this poem. The voice of the Lord is both a reprimand and a soothing affirmation. We can not help thinking of Paul's plea of Romans 7:24: "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" which was answered in the following chapter in Romans 8:15-16 with: "For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage to feare again: but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we crye Abba, Father. The same Spirit beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God" (emphasis mine). The Bible's use of Abba for Father implies an especially intimate relationship with God, similar to Herbert's affirmation of that relationship in "The Collar" when the father calls him child. The Lord merely reminds the speaker who is in control. The speaker's reply demonstrates that he has been through this before, and his quiet acceptance of the Lord's reprimand tells the story behind this story. The story Herbert tells here is already well-known to us. Here is a man always trying to bear his own burdens rather than placing them at the feet of a forgiving Lord. Here is a man always trying to live alone in the world of works, expecting that doing so will bring him the fruit of reward. Here is a

man always called back by a loving, powerful God who says
you may have fruit, but only through me.

100

The story told in "Love Unknown" presents the clearest picture yet of the struggle between the world of works and the world of grace. The poem focuses intently on God's grace as freely given, and readers strongly sense that the speaker in the poem resents a God who turns away his offerings and gifts. He begins his story thus: "Deare Friend, sit down, the tale is long and sad: / And in my faintings I presume your love / Will more complie than help" (1-3). What the narrator really wants from his friend (and readers) is pity, sympathy, and agreement on the perceived unreasonableness of his Lord. The story that follows is strange and even gruesome, its images of wrung and bloody hearts seem crude and inappropriate. However, Herbert employed these images to draw attention to the poem's sheer allegory and, therefore, he did not feel obliged to make them seem particularly realistic. The story follows:

. . . A Lord I had,
And have, of whom some grounds, which may improve,
I hold for two lives, and both lives in me.
To him I brought a dish of fruit one day,
And in the middle plac'd my heart. But he
(I sigh to say)
Lookt on a servant, who did know his eye
Better then you know me, or (which is one)
Then I my self. The servant instantly
Quitting the fruit, seiz'd on my heart alone,

And threw it in a font, wherein did fall
 A stream of bloud, which issu'd from the side
 Of a great rock: I well remember all,
 And have good cause: there it was dipt and dy'd,
 And washt, and wrung: the very wringing yet
 Enforceth tears. Your heart was foul, I fear.
 Indeed 'tis true. I did and do commit
 Many a fault more then my lease would bear;
 Yet still askt pardon, and was not deni'd.
 But you shall heare. After my heart was well,
 And clean and fair, as I one even-tide

(I sigh to tell)

Walkt by my self abroad, I saw a large
 And spacious fornace flaming, and thereon
 A boyling caldron, round about whose verge
 Was in great letters set *AFFLICTION*.
 The greatnesse shew'd the owner. So I went
 To fetch a sacrifice out of my fold,
 Thinking with that, which I did thus present,
 To warm his love, which I did fear grew cold.
 But as my heart did tender it, the man,
 Who was to take it from me, slipt his hand,
 And threw my heart into the scalding pan;
 My heart, that brought it (do you understand?)
 The offerers heart. I found a callous matter
 Began to spread and to expatiate there:
 But with a richer drug than scalding water
 I bath'd it often, ev'n with holy bloud,
 Which at a board, while many drunk bare wine,
 A friend did steal into my cup for good,
 Ev'n taken inwardly, and most divine
 To supple hardnesse. But at the length
 Out of the caldron getting, soon I fled
 Unto my house, where to repair the strength
 Which I had lost, I hasted to my bed.
 But when I thought to sleep out all these faults

(I sigh to speak)

I found that some had stuff'd the bed with thoughts,
 I would say *thorns*. Deare, could my heart not break,
 When with my pleasures ev'n my rest was gone?
 Full well I understood, who had been there:
 For I had given the key to none, but one:
 It must be he. Your heart was dull, I fear.
 Indeed a slack and sleepe state of mind
 Did oft possesse me, so that when I pray'd,
 Though my lips went, my heart did stay behinde.
 But all my scores were by another paid,
 Who took the debt upon him. Truly, Friend,
 For ought I heare, your Master shows to you
 More favour then you wot of. Mark the end.
 The Font did onely, what was old, renew:
 The Caldron suppld, what was grown too hard:

*The Thorns did quicken, what was grown too dull:
 All did but strive to mend, what you had marr'd.
 Wherefore be cheer'd, and praise him to the full
 Each day, each houre, each moment of the week,
 Who fain would have you be new, tender, quick.*

The story's beginning is reminiscent of "Redemption," with a tenant who wants to make a claim to his Lord--the right to achieve merit for himself based on righteous actions. He leases some grounds from his Lord which he holds "for two lives" both of which live in him (3-5). These puzzling "two lives" may represent the old sinful nature and the new nature received in Christ, for the old nature still persists even after one has been sanctified through the grace of Christ. As Paul writes in Romans 7:23: "But I see another law in my members, rebelling against the law of my minde, & leading me captive unto the law of sinne, which is in my members." The Geneva Bible's gloss on this text explains further that this verse refers to "even the corruption that yet remaineth" to emphasize the ongoing persistence of the sinful self even in the life of the sanctified Christian.

The tenant offers his Lord a dish of fruit one day and places his heart in it. If the reader pictures this image, its absurdity can be overwhelming, yet if we think of the heart in its referential terms (ie. the place of a person's emotions and loyalties) then we see this gift not as absurd but as a most self-sacrificial and generous gift. The Lord, however, merely glances at his servant, and his servant seizes the heart and proceeds to throw the heart

into a font where it is "dipt and dy'd, / And washt, and wrung." The reason: "Your heart was foul, I fear" (16-17). This wringing of his heart causes the tenant great pain, and the memory of it still brings tears today. But upon hearing the servant's words, the tenant realizes that he has known about the feeble condition of his heart all along. He had committed many faults, more than his lease could bear. Still, he dares to ask for pardon and receives it from the Lord. However, the story is not finished yet.

After that experience, the tenant's heart is "clean and fair" (23), and so one evening he goes walking. The memory of the walk is like some strange nightmare, for he sees a "spacious fornace flaming" upon which sits a "boyling caldron" on which is written in large letters, "AFFLICTION" (27-28). The narrator adds that "The greatnesse shew'd the owner," meaning that the greatness of the "affliction" showed that it was the tenant's own. Upon seeing his great affliction, he feels compelled to "fetch a sacrifice out of [his] fold" to warm [the Lord's] love, which [he] did fear grew cold" (30-33). But as his heart gives over its sacrifice, the recipient throws the tenant's heart (not the sacrifice) into the pan. The tenant is troubled, for it is his heart that brought the gift. Why did the man take the heart and not the gift? The man answers, "Your heart was hard I fear" (37). Once more, the tenant quickly realizes his mistake and admits that this is true: he finds that

"callous matter / Began to spread and to expatiate there" (38-39). So to soften his hard heart, the tenant "bath'd it often, ev'n with holy bloud, / Which at a board, while many drunk bare wine, / A friend did steal into my cup for good, / Ev'n taken inwardly, and most divine, To supple hardnesses" (40-45). The holy blood and "board" referred to here hint at the sacrament of communion which represent not mere wine for the believer but "holy bloud." And yet, when the tenant finally returns home, he hastens to his bed, and cannot sleep for thoughts that, like thorns, keep prodding him.

The next segment of the poem is a direct address by the tenant to his Lord. "Deare," asks the tenant, "could not my heart break / When with my pleasures ev'n my rest was gone?" (52-53). The tenant feels that he has lost everything--he cannot give anything to his Lord for he is full of unrighteousness; he cannot even make an acceptable sacrifice for his sins. Now he cannot even sleep for being so afflicted by his own unworthiness. The anguish of these lines is troubling, but when we come upon the next lines, we discover with the tenant what the problem or "AFFLICTION" has been all along. The tenant remembers "Full well I understood, who had been there: For I had giv'n the key to none, but one: It must be he" (54-55). "Here" may be the tenant's home or it may be the tenant's heart, but whatever the case, it is clear that the Lord has been there all

along. The Lord's words come to him as distinctly as they had come in his dream: "Your heart was dull, I fear" (56). Then the tenant remembers that often he had prayed mindlessly and with no sincere devotion: "Though my lips went, my heart did stay behind" (59).

The poem turns again with the "But" of line 60: "But all my scores were by another paid, / Who took the debt upon him" (60-61). When the tenant realizes that he is incapable of winning his Lord's love through gifts, sacrifice, or prayers, he does not despair but realizes that the Lord already paid for the sins he has not even yet committed. The tenant realizes he is debt-free now and forever.

The narrator breaks in once more at the end of the poem with an explanation for his friend (and readers) who might not have understood the moral of the story. The speaker's friend comprehends the moral and concludes, "Your Master shows to you / More favour then you wot of" (63). The friend explains the riddles: the font only made the tenant's old heart new, the Caldron made his hard heart soft, the thorns prodded him to seek the Lord. All the incidents that caused the tenant so much despair "did but strive to mend, what you had marr'd" (67). Because of this, the friend says, "be cheer'd, and praise him to the full / Each day, each houre, each moment of the week / Who fain would have you be new, tender, quick" (68-70). God's desire to give the gift of grace to the speaker is contrasted in this poem with

acute emphasis on the pain of having one's own gifts spurned, but there is more than suffering in these lines. Upon rejection, the tenant realizes that there is no action for him to take except to let the Spirit of grace transform him into what God would have him be: "new, tender, quick." Not only does the poem insist on God giving grace freely to the speaker once at the moment of his "rebirth," but it stresses the ongoing need for regeneration. The story demonstrates that the only good the tenant can do is that which God does through the rejuvenation of grace in his heart which remains a continuous process as long as he continues to live between the two worlds of works and grace. Strier agrees that "'Love Unknown' demonstrates the relation between Herbert's rejection of works and the focus on the inner life" (164). While this is true, the non-stressing of works and the emphasis on grace brings Herbert's affliction to the forefront once more; his thoughts (like thorns) are always prodding him to take responsibility for his relationship with God, to gain his salvation by doing the right things or looking in the right places. As in every other poem we have examined, the speaker discovers that to find God he must let God find him.

CONCLUSION

Having examined a number of poems from *The Temple* as the embodiment of the struggle between the world of works and that of grace, one begins to perceive more completely the source of the tension, contradiction, and pain present in so much of *The Temple*. Calvin's emphasis on the ease of grace combined with the necessity of works creates a system of belief whose inherent contradiction results in a self torn between two opposite realities. Helen Vendler says in "The Reinvented Poem" that this is because "Herbert's God asks that he be more than what he conceives himself to be." She explains further that "Herbert may have invented this sort of God to embody the demands that his own conscience put upon him, a conscience formed by that 'severa parens,' his mother" (Vendler 55). Perhaps what Vendler failed to consider is what these readings have shown: Herbert's affliction was rather that his God asked him to be less than what he wanted to be. Moreover, it is presumptuous to give Herbert credit for a God that so many from Paul to Calvin to Herbert have struggled with in a similar manner. Herbert's poems, as his life, are not so much reinvented as redeemed. *The Temple* revisits the struggles of a Christian caught up

in the ongoing process of sanctification, putting off the old man who wants to live alone in the world of works, putting on the new man who can easily accept God's grace, given as a gift freely and wholly undeserved. In the meantime, betwixt these two worlds hangs the tortured self.

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