

A. M. Panaghis

GEORGE HERBERT'S RELIGION AS EXPRESSED IN *THE TEMPLE*

Very early in his life George Herbert realized that the emotional peace which he sought was not easy to find in a secular world, and believed that the love of God was the only power that could protect man in his pilgrimage on earth. Yet, it is worth pointing out that Herbert's limited experience is reflected in the narrow scope of the themes he dealt with in his poems.

Herbert's poetry is not a record of spiritual quietness but one of continuous struggle and a submission to the "collar" which is difficult to wear. Herbert "was capable of clear thought in conjunction with vehement feeling. The two kinds of activity abetted each other so that the logical plotting of a lyric suited his genius."¹ The illustrations he chose to throw light on his themes were everyday situations and characters who used current daily language. In the two poems entitled "Jordan I" and "Jordan II," he mentions the stylistic techniques he tries to perfect. He asks his audience not to accuse him of lack of poetic ability if he uses plain diction to praise God.

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

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:
I envie no mans nightingale or spring;
Nor let them punish me with losse of rime,
Who plainly say, My God, My King.²

Herbert points out that he will use neither Petrarch's elaborate style and pastoral affectation, nor Donne's intellectual linguistic fireworks.

When first my lines of Heav'nly joyes made mention,
Such was their lustre, they did so excell,
That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;
My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,
Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.

1. Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 59.

2. George Herbert, "Jordan I," in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 56.

Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,
 Offering their service, if I were not sped;
 I often blotted what I had begunne;
 This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
 Much lesse those joyes which trample on his head.
 As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,
 So did I weave my self into the sense.
 But while I bustled, I might heare a friend
 Whisper, How wide is all this long pretence!
 There is in love a sweetness readie penn'd:
 Copie out onely that, and save expense.³

In the above quoted poem the poet depicts a bustling salesman moving about his daily business and identifies with him to express his experience. The stress is laid on the ingenious "winding stair" of its "rational structure and on the covertness of its meanings."⁴ The poet, Herbert believed, must not invent elaborate metaphors nor create complex levels of meaning because such attempts will only blur his theme.

Man must not try to create reasons for heavenly joys since God has already created them through the manifestation of this love. By looking upon the world the poet has nothing more to do than "copie," hence offering God greater praise than personal invention. True expression, says Herbert, does not come from "the old self, but from the consumption of that self by divine love."⁵ Both poems embody the simplicity he attained through the use of "concrete imagery, familiar diction and a sound pattern close to the rhythm of speech."⁶

Herbert's poems seldom develop to an unexpected conclusion. When such a conclusion is intended, it is withheld until the final lines of the poem. The steps toward the resolution of an emotional problem, in Herbert's poems, are as similar to one another as are the stanza-forms that communicate them. "They advance, retreat, tread firmly, haltingly or whatever it may be in regular sequences."⁷

In "Denial" Herbert invents a meter and a rhyme scheme to express the broken relationship between God and the soul.

3. "Jordan II," pp. 102-103.

4. Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 109.

5. Summers, p. 111.

6. Bennett, p. 60.

7. Bennett, pp. 61-62.

When my devotions could not pierce
 Thy silent eares:
 Then was my heart broken, as was my verse:
 My breast was full of fears
 And disorder.⁸

Each of the first three stanzas comes to an end with a short unrhymed line. In the last line the rhyme is completed, suggesting the return of peace and harmony that results from the renewal and desired relationship between the poet and God.

O cheer and tune my heartlesse breast,
 Deferre no time;
 That so thy favours granting my request,
 They and my minde may chime,
 And mend my ryme.⁹

Through the pattern of the poem the reader senses the state of turbulence the persona is undergoing as a result of being denied by God. In the final stanza the "establishment of the normal pattern of cadence and thyme is the symbol of reconstructed order."¹⁰ The form of the last prayer proves that the demand he longed for has been granted. The character moves from fear to overt rebellion and displeasure. In the end denial is overcome through the renewal of the relationship demonstrated by the ordered structure of the last stanza.

Herbert made use of John Donne's various stylistic features but adapted them to his own temperament. He simplified the inner logical line of argument, changed the metrical patterns into more flexible ones, tried to associate sound to meaning and limited the range of diction and imagery.

"Love III" is built on a discussion between two characters. The relation of the soul to God is symbolized by a commonplace situation, a tired traveler who receives hospitality. The poet attempts to control the reader's feelings through style. He starts at a low pitch and builds to a climax about the middle of the poem.

I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.¹¹

The tension decreases as the poem progresses. By the end of the poem the emotion is already poignant and the simple words, "So I did sit and eat"

8. "Deniall," pp. 79-80.

9. Ibid.

10. Summers, p. 136.

11. "Love III," pp. 188-189.

convey more than ardent rhetoric. The feelings the poet had, and which grew through the poem rest on this last simple line.

The sonnet gives an imaginary description of the soul's first entrance into the heavenly communion of which the earthly Eucharist is but an anticipatory experience. The overwhelming meeting with Christ, the Incarnate Love, is given in a simple dialogue that might occur between a traveler and his host. The traveler being aware of his unworthiness hesitates to become a guest, but once his restraints are overcome by the kindness of his host, he sits down and partakes of the meal offered to him.

Love is the central axis around which Herbert's religion revolves. The two poems "Love I" and "Love II" are closely connected and form an extended contrast to the attributes of Divine Love, and the lesser delights afforded by Cupid. After all, Cupid cannot declare any right in the creation of the world.

Herbert attacks the Renaissance poets for choosing secular subjects, such as the transient love of women, and presenting them in an artificial style.

How hath man parcel'd out thy glorious name,
And thrown it on that dust which thou hast made,
While mortall love doth all the title gain!
Which siding with invention, they together
Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
(Thy workmanship) and give thee share in neither.
Wit fancies beautie, beautie raiseth wit:
The world is theirs; they two play out the game,
Thou standing by: and through thy glorious name
Wrought our deliverance from the infernall pit,
Who sings thy praise? onely a skarfe or glove
Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love.¹²

So that what "God gives to man he gives away ungratefully to Cupid."¹³

In "The Church-floore" the visual images form the basis of the poem. The image helps the reader to analyze the details and follow the argument of the poem. The floor in "The Church-floore" is a hieroglyph of the foundations of the church based on various virtues such as patience, humility, confidence, and charity, which sin and death are trying to efface, evidently the virtues are resisting Hell, Sin, and Death. At the close of the poem the poet says:

Blest be the Architect, whose art
Could build so strong in a weak heart.¹⁴

12. "Love," p. 54.

13. Mary E. Rickey, *Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 20.

14. "The Church-floore," pp. 66-67.

It is clear that the hieroglyph is not the church, but the human heart, and patience, humility, confidence, and charity are the materials with which God builds the structure of salvation within man's heart.¹⁵ "Herbert used the hieroglyph convention in order to emphasize, explain, or resolve the central conflict in the poem."¹⁶

Poems like "The Church-floore," "Easter-Wings," and "The Altar" reflect

...an habitual cast of mind, a constant readiness to see a relation between simple, concrete, visible, things and moral ideas, and to establish that relation in as complete a way as possible without identifying the two or blurring the outlines of either.¹⁷

Moreover, it is difficult to separate the image from the moral because they are so closely connected. As for the nature of imagery

...their visual quality and precise outlines, the clarity and simplicity with which they express the ideas they embody is deceptive; it suggests that the moral is equally simple.¹⁸

A medieval quality about Herbert's faith is reflected in his poetry. His total acceptance of the Church's teaching about God's providence, Man's sin and Christ's redemption, offers him firm grounds from which he can contemplate the world around him and his own inner strife. It also characterizes his method of contemplation as interpretative rather than visionary or prophetic.

The idea of a supernatural order that reconciles all discords in this world, together with his moral belief and innate bent for "sobriety, grace and elegance," is expressed in his poems. The doctrine of the great chain of being is given in "Employment I."

All things are busie; onely I
Neither bring hony with the bees,
Nor flowers to make that, nor the husbandrie
To water these.

I am no link of thy great chain,
But all my companie is a weed.
Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain
To my poore reed.¹⁹

In these lines the idea of the universe as a "divinely organized harmony" is evident. The belief in "the essential beauty and goodness of order"

15. Summers, p. 125.

16. Summers, p. 128.

17. Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 155.

18. Freeman, p. 156.

19. "Employment I," p. 57.

characterizes the bulk of his work. The view not only finds expression in his poem "Providence," but is also clear in his precise, balanced, and coherent style. Every individual and creature is part of the divine hierarchy; consequently, "every phenomenon is a manifestation of God's power and a symbol of His truth."²⁰

The medieval idea of man being a microcosm is expressed in his poem "Man."

Man is all symmetrie,
Full of proportions, one limbe to another,
And all to all the world besides:
Each part may call the furthest, brother:
For head with fool hath private amitie,
And both with moons and tides.

Nothing hath got so farre,
But Man hath caught and kept it, as his prey.
His eyes dismount the highest starre:
He is in little all the sphere.²¹

Bottrall points out that "man's true dignity consists in his being the peculiar focus of God's forgiving love."²² Man rebelled like the angels, upset the natural order, and brought discord in the existing harmony. God in the person of his Son intervened, solved the disorder, and restored the original pattern, "by taking upon himself not only the consequences of Man's sin but the very nature of humanity."²³ Since the Son of God became the Son of Man, humanity's place in the cosmological pattern is of major importance. Man is able to enter into a personal relationship with God, a relationship of love.

H. G. C. Grierson says that *The Temple* is

...a series of metaphysical love poems. It is a record of God's wooing of the soul of Herbert recorded in the Christian story and the seasons and symbols of the Church, and Herbert's wooing of God a record of conflict and fluctuating moods and expostulations with God and himself.²⁴

Divine Love operated on the spiritual relationship between God and the individual soul and surpassed all personal experiences, by forming the

20. Margaret Bottrall, *George Herbert* (London: John Murry, 1954), p. 85.

21. "Man," pp. 90-92.

22. Bottrall, p. 86.

23. Bottrall, p. 86.

24. H. J. C. Grierson, *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 216.

power which held the world in unity. The idea that God's love is permanent dominates his poetry. Herbert's favorite theme is Christ's redemptive love. The redemptive drama is continuously re-enacted. In "Affliction III" he deals with "man's self-will and God's long suffering."

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 the members suffer ill.
 They who lament one crosse,
 Thou dying daily, praise thee to thy losse.²⁵

His humility is expressed through images drawn out of childhood and nestling birds. His dependence on God and his common self-distrust is clear in "H. Baptisme" when he says:

O let me still
 Write thee great God, and me a child:
 Let me be soft and supple to thy will,
 Small to my self...²⁶

The habitual pain of his suffering contrasts with the rare moments of serenity, producing a great impact on the reader. Serenity comes as a result of courageous acceptance of God's will, a type of acceptance which surmounts mere resignation.

Herbert's poems are primarily an expression of a man who has suffered the stress of man who has suffered the stress of many conflicts. Sometimes he used conventional patterns and ideas, but without losing his originality.

Several poems in *The Temple* illustrate a "readiness to see a relation between simple, concrete, visible things and moral ideas, and to establish that relation in as complete a way as possible without identifying the two or blurring the outline of either."²⁷ Some emphasize the divine order which he discerned in daily experience and the relation between the visible and the spiritual.

Herbert is a metaphysical poet because he deals with the relation between "the finite and infinite, between the human and the divine." He wrote as a devout Christian who sought to come closer to God and to learn more about Him whom he served. In *The Temple* he stressed that through simplicity God conveys grace to the individual soul. He says:

Not in rich furniture, or fine array,
 Nor in a wedge of gold,

25. "Affliction III," p. 73.

26. "H. Baptisme II," p. 44.

27. Bottrall, p. 111.

Thou, who for me wast sold,
 To me dost now thy self convey;
 For so thou should'st without me still have been,
 Leaving within me sinne:
 But by the way of nourishment and strength
 Thou creep'st into my breast.²⁸

He was not interested in theological subtleties but in the good state of the soul. He speculated over the various ways by which God dealt with his creatures. So that

...his consciousness of the inter-relations of time and eternity, visible and invisible, mortal and immortal, differs from that of the genuine metaphysical poets in being founded on an extraordinarily assured and unquestioning faith.²⁹

The belief in the Incarnation and its consequences make his view of the world sacramental. The paradoxes of Christianity never left his mind. A number of his poems are the outcome of thinking about opposites such as human and divine, physical, and spiritual. All contraries were appointed elements in a divinely organized scheme, and Christianity was an absolute and "a revealed religion" which was given, and not a philosophy to be questioned.

In "The Sacrifice" Herbert deals with the love of God rather than man's actions. He argues that sins are not simply self-destructive, but more than anything else they are affronts to God's love, and Christ's suffering. Ultimately, sins are considered as barriers to the understanding and enjoyment of the manifestations of that love.³⁰

H. C. White points out that "the wrath of God, the justice of God, the will of God, the order of God and the power of God," are seventeenth-century religious concepts found in Herbert's poetry.³¹ But also

...playing an active part in the inspiration of thought awakening imagination and kindling feeling, are to be found the wonder of God, all those gentler manifestations of divinity that implement the love of God.³²

The duty of every Christian is to create something harmonious, beautiful,

28. "The Holy Communion," p. 52.

29. Bottrall, p. 126.

30. Joseph H. Summers, *The Heirs of Donne and Jonson* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 96.

31. Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936), p. 179.

32. White, p. 180.

and coherent, and Herbert created poems. The poems in *The Temple* were meant to express the love he had for God, as well as for his neighbors.

There is nothing more pleasant than meditating on God's order, whether in the world, the church, or personal life. The reader's faith will be strengthened by reading the poems, and his wish to order his own life after "the divine pattern" will increase. *The Temple* is a hieroglyph of the human soul seen in the service of God. God is the Architect, Builder, and Artist. The valuable results of an individual experience are estimated, and not the experience *per se* or its universal applicability.

The reader is supposed to identify his thoughts and emotions with those of the poet. The prayer or religious poem had to be more rational and vivid than sermon. The poet used "utmost art" to create a balanced effective poem. The poet's primary duty was to praise God for he stood in relation to his audience as the priest to his congregation.

O Sacred Providence, who from end to end
Strongly and sweetly movest, shall I write,
And not of thee, through whom my fingers bend
To hold my quill? shall they not do thee right?

.....
Man is the worlds high Priest: he doth present
The sacrifices for all; while they below
Unto the service mutter an ascent,
Such as springs use that fall, and windes that blow.³³

The religious poet expressed the praise of God for all those who could not write or sing. If the Christian felt miserable it was because he was unable to praise God properly. His inability led him to corruption and sin. Yet he had to try to praise God, since God accepted even the sinner's praise.

My God, Man cannot praise thy name:
Thou art all brightnesse, perfect puritie;
The sunne holds down his head for shame,
Dead with eclipses, when we speak of thee:
How shall infection
Presume on thy perfection?
As dirtie hands foul all they touch,
And those things most, which are most pure and fine:
So our clay hearts, ev'n when we crouch
To sing thy praises, make them lesse divine.
Yet either this,
Or none, thy portion is.³⁴

33. "Providence," p. 116-121.

34. "Miserie," pp. 100-102.

The fact that the world was created and kept, that life went on, and that Christ died for mankind's sins were proofs of God's love.

The Temple deals with man's first disobedience and its consequences, the Christian Sacrifice and the main trial of the human soul. The short poems in the general scheme of the whole collection deal with a variety of themes. Many of the poems have abstract titles such as "Affliction," "Misery," "Love," "Justice," "Praise," and "Vertue." All the poems are written in a vein of spiritual egotism, and give expression to personal experience. The use of the first person pronoun "I," and the second person pronoun "thou" dominate the poems. The reader is given a conversation held between man and God. While in "The Sacrifice" Christ speaks to man from the Cross. In yet another poem the "Dialogue" man and Christ talk to each other alternatively.

In "The Sacrifice" the poet uses a simple style a feature of the miracle plays, but imbues it with deep feeling.

Oh all ye, who passe by, whose eyes and minde
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blinde:
To me, who took eyes that I might you finde.³⁵

The poem is liturgical in form. It is written in the first person, and the refrain which occurs at the end of every stanza is put in personal terms: "Was ever grief like mine?" The repetition of the refrain, though, does not give a personal appeal to Christ's figure, but embodies the "doctrinal truth." The words uttered by Christ represent a set of ideas, involving the Fall, the Atonement, and the Incarnation. In a single monody the events of the passion are revealed through simple words.

The musical tone is obvious in almost all Herbert's poems, particularly the ones where harmony and order predominate. The effect of his poetry, says Courthope, lies

...in vivid and often sublime, renderings of the spiritual aspects of human nature; and to us this strength may seem oftenest shown in his poems on what might be called the larger philosophical abstractions.³⁶

In his didactic poems, Herbert conveys the argument intelligibly. Texture and thought in his poems are well-knit, especially in the sonnets, "the movement is lively, the word order natural and the conceits apt."³⁷ He uses the narrative method in the sonnet. In *Redemption*, for example, the argument is dense and solid. In the two sonnets on love, Herbert puts the

35. "The Sacrifice," pp. 26-34.

36. A. G. Hyde, *George Herbert and His Times* (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1906), p. 282.

37. Bottrall, p. 102.

maximum of meaning into a compact form. He leaves no loose ends in his stanzas, and concludes every poem with impressive lines.

Herbert's verse is dramatic in its effect because it is enlivened with inquiries, exclamations, and advice. He used the one-sided conversation whether he addressed his own conscience or his wounded heart, and by varying his tone from accusation to instruction he produced effective poetry. He personified the abstract foes he referred to into lively human beings. In "Assurance" the poet says:

Now foolish thought go on,
Spin out thy thread, and make thereof a coat
To hide thy shame: for thou hast cast a bone
Which bounds on thee, and will not down thy throat.³⁸

Margaret Bottrall argues that the vigor of Herbert's conceits results more from the "play of his lively, sensitive mind upon familiar and consecrated material than from brilliance of invention or daringness in juxtaposition."³⁹ Furthermore, Rosemary Freeman points out that under the surface of simplicity, there is

...a richness and a variety that is compound of many elements. The preciseness of his imagery and the austerity of his language, do not preclude intensity of feeling. The intensity is rarely explicit and rarely to be found directly in the vocabulary.⁴⁰

In "Vertue" Herbert uses the *carpe diem* theme yet the argument is in favor of spiritual love rather than physical pleasure. The sonnet consists of three stanzas that run in the same direction while the fourth runs in a counter direction and functions as a concluding couplet.

Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
Like seson'd timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.⁴¹

The statements of the poem are familiar. The poem expresses the idea that a lady, like a rose, will soon fade away. The twelve lines of the poem run in the traditional erotic trend. The poet's insistence on the main theme of the poem in the last two lines intensifies the effect on the reader. Obviously, the presence of the soul upsets the effect of the previous lines. Physical beauty is belittled although not totally rejected. The poem is impressive because of

38. "Assurance," pp. 155-156.

39. Bottrall, p. 110.

40. Freeman, p. 157.

41. "Vertue," pp. 87-88.

the "affinity of the opening lines with conventional celebrations of physical beauty and love."⁴²

In "Vanitie" he uses a complex metaphorical structure to depict basic similarity "of the vain pursuits, even though each may appear singular and fruitful to its unwise devotee."⁴³ The pleasures of the world are gifts given by God to be enjoyed. At the same time they are vanities, and not blessings, because they are capable of diverting man's attention from meditating on the Creator's power and glory. The astronomer, diver, and chymick are in certain ways different. Each one of them is interested

...in a different kind of the unknown, each explores a different physical element: the goal of the astronomer is intellectual, that of the diver material and that of the alchemist a mixture of the two.⁴⁴

Yet the three men have the same purpose, because the three are considered ravagers by the poet. The astronomer "pierces the bodies with his mind thereby reducing their magic and mystery. The diver destroys the shellfish which holds the pearl, and the chemist who pretends he is after truth is intensified into a bird of prey, who can divest and strip the creature naked to discover its components."⁴⁵ The three have death as a common goal, and their view of God's creation is materialistic.

"The Collar" is considered one of Herbert's best poems. It is a deliberate attempt in the hieroglyph form. It reflects the disorganized life of the human will which rebels against God's will. The poem is divided into four sections: the heart's complaint; the will's affirmation that there is fruit if the Heart will look for it; the Heart's repeated complaint, and the resolution of the problem.

The Heart rebels because there is no fruit, in other words, there is no reward. The flowers and garlands lose their elegance as the emotion becomes "fierce and wilde." Through the pattern and rhyme the poet expresses the persona's rebellion, and the state of chaos he is in. The last four lines of the poem dramatize skillfully the revolt of the heart, and the colloquial language convinces the reader that the cause is justified. At the end of the poem the reader realizes that it is a narrative, about an incident that took place in the past, and that the message for the present lies in the necessity for order. Form is the major force by which spiritual power creates order out of disorder.

The poet as a craftsman shaped the imperfect materials of his own experience, suffering, and joy into a pattern symbolic of the divine order. The chaotic feelings are put under control, and order prevails in the lines

42. Rickey, p. 22.

43. Rickey, 62.

44. Rickey, 63.

45. "The Collar," pp. 153-154.

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.⁴⁶

The poem expresses the conflict between pleasure and the demand for discipline, between the duties of a clergyman and worldly satisfaction. The conflict is primarily between God's will and the speaker's rebellious heart. Herbert's poem is

...the Christian moral drama — the Fall, the Atonement, and the Redemption. It is certainly true that the speaker, under the influence of the Heart, rebels against discipline. But in reaching for the 'fruit' as did Adam, he simultaneously reaches for the supernatural fruit, the fruit of the Cross. Paradoxically, the 'natural' imagery of the poem, the fruit and wine, and corn, in pursuit of which the speaker rebels, is also the imagery traditionally associated with the Eucharist.⁴⁷

The moral confusion of the speaker is overcome by the sacrament of the Eucharist, as was Adam and Eve's rebellion by Christ's sacrifice.

The effectiveness of the poem lies in the fact that the same vocabulary expresses rebellion and contrition simultaneously. Man's heart and will are God's instruments through which His will is manifested.

When the speaker rebels he sees discipline as painful, because it prevents him from enjoying the worldly pleasures, makes him bleed, and moan, and offers no reward. The "thorn" suggests the imperfections which appeared in the world after the Fall. The suffering of the speaker, his bleeding and pain foreshadowed his redemption. The persona is identified with Adam, and like him he yearns for the fruit. His revolt leads to thorns, pain, contrition, and salvation. The poem expresses the idea of obedience, the duty of every Christian, and the speaker is identified as Everyman. The poet refers to several motifs: "the yoke of God which all must bear, the particular yoke of the clergyman, the choler demonstrated by the human speaker and divine Speaker of the conclusion."⁴⁸ At the end of the poem, the poet "asserts divine permanence by means of poetic form rather than literal statement."⁴⁹

Herbert aimed at including the whole world in his poetry and tried to shape the material of his poems in the same way God regulated the cosmos. Finally, in "The Dedication" Herbert declares that he will make use of all of God's gifts to praise Him.

46. Jeffrey Hart, "Herbert's 'The Collar' Re-read," in *Seventeenth Century Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. W. R. Keast, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 249.

47. Rickey, p. 101.

48. Freeman, p. 200.

49. Rickey, p. 90.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Α. Μ. Παναγή, *Η Θρησκεία του George Herbert όπως εκφράζεται στο έργο του Ο Ναός*

Η ποίηση του George Herbert διακρίνεται για τη συνεχή πάλη του ποιητή να υποτάξει την καρδιά του στον προορισμό του κληρικού. Πίστευε πως η αγάπη του Θεού είναι η μόνη δύναμη που μπορεί να προστατέψει τον άνθρωπο στην επίγεια ζωή. Η περιορισμένη εμπειρία του είναι φανερή στο στενό φάσμα των θεμάτων στα ποιήματά του, για τα οποία είναι ιδεώδης η λογική πλοκή που εκφράζεται με την φόρμα λυρικού ποιήματος. Η γλώσσα στην ποίησή του είναι απλή καθομιλουμένη, τα ποιητικά του σχήματα όχι εξεζητημένα. Ο άνθρωπος δεν πρέπει να επιδιώκει εξεζητημένες χαρές στην τέχνη, αφού όλες οι χαρές βρίσκονται στην αγάπη του Θεού. Ο ποιητής γράφει μονάχα για να αντιγράψει το σύμπαν κι έτσι να υμνήσει τον Θεό.

Ο τρόπος που ο ποιητής αντιμετωπίζει συγκινησιακά προβλήματα είναι πάντα ο ίδιος, όπως και η μορφή των στροφών του. Η αγάπη είναι ο κεντρικός άξονας και γύρω του γυρνά η θρησκεία του Herbert. Κατηγορεί τους ποιητές της Αναγέννησης, γιατί διάλεγαν θέματα όχι σχετικά με τη θρησκεία. Η αξία που αναγνωρίζει είναι η Εκκλησία του Θεού, και αρετές μονάχα η υπομονή, ταπεινοφροσύνη, εμπιστοσύνη, ευσπλαχνία, γιατί μ' αυτές ο Θεός κτίζει τη σωτηρία μέσα στην ανθρωπίνη ψυχή. Γενικά η ποιότητα της πίστης του Herbert, όπως κατοπτρίζεται στην ποίησή του είναι μεσαιωνική. Δέχεται αδιαφιλονίκητα τη διδασκαλία της Εκκλησίας για τη θεία Πρόνοια, το Προπατορικό αμάρτημα και τη λύτρωση του Χριστού, κι από το πρίσμα τούτο βλέπει τον κόσμο γύρω και την πάλη μέσα του. Για τον Herbert ισχύει η παλιά αντίληψη του σύμπαντος.

Ο Herbert, όμως, ανήκει στους Μεταφυσικούς, γιατί ενδιαφέρεται για την σχέση «του πεπερασμένου με το άπειρο, του ανθρώπου με το Θείο». Το καθήκον κάθε Χριστιανού είναι να δημιουργήσει κάτι αρμονικό, ωραίο, που να έχει συνοχή, όπως το σύμπαν, και ο Herbert έγραψε ποιήματα. Ο ποιητής/κληρικός υμνεί τον Θεό για λογαριασμό όλων των ανθρώπων που δεν μπορούν να γράψουν ή να ψάλουν. Η καρδιά επαναστατεί, γιατί δεν υπάρχει ανταμοιβή για τις πίκρες. Ο ποιητής Herbert έδωσε μορφή στο φτωχό υλικό της εμπειρίας του, τον πόνο και τη χαρά, σε ένα σχήμα που συμβολίζει τη Θεία δύναμη.