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Theological Dualism in the Poetry of George Herbert

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in English

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by  
Carolyn Elizabeth Woodruff  
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Keywords: dualism, theology, death, rebirth, joy, pain, sweetness, bitterness

## ABSTRACT

### Theological Dualism in the Poetry of George Herbert

by

Carolyn Elizabeth Woodruff

Theological dualism is a primary element in George Herbert's poetry. Poems such as "The Flower," "Affliction I," "Affliction V," "The Banquet," and "Love III" illustrate the necessary tension inherent in the polarity of theological dualism. Abstractions such as joy, grief, pleasure, pain, birth, and death form the framework for Herbert's illustration of the Christian pilgrim in search of divine communion. For the searching Christian to understand one abstract principle, its opposite must be equally explored. In this journey to comprehend the duality of the Christian life, one reaches spiritual enlightenment and communion with God. Although several critics have recognized the importance of theological dualism in Herbert's works, none have closely examined its significance in the poems' overall meaning. Not only does Herbert incorporate theological dualism into his poetry, but he also provides a sense of closure for the journeying Christian who seeks to understand the creator's mysterious ways.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Theological dualism pervades George Herbert's poetry. Poems such as "The Flower," "Affliction I," "Affliction V," "The Banquet," and "Love III" evidence theological dualism and the necessary tension inherent in its polarity. While several critics have recognized its presence in elements of Herbert's works, none have truly examined its significance in the overall meaning of the poems. An eclectic combination of New Criticism, theological criticism, and mysticism may be applied in the explication of Herbert's poems. Helen Vendler and other New Critics place an emphasis on Herbert's word choice and how the tension between certain words lends meaning to the poems. Polar opposites such as birth and death, joy and grief, sweetness and bitterness, and serving and being served play crucial roles in creating the poems' meaning.

While touching on the universal aspects of humankind's journey toward truth in light of subjective mortal confines, Herbert places even greater emphasis on the relevance of these principles in regard to Christian theology. Doerksen and Sherwood draw from the precepts of theology to apply Christian principles to Herbert's works. In recognition of theological duality, the Christian pilgrim is caught in a subjective battle between opposing concepts that either nourish one's relationship with the creator or hinder it by luring one further from objective truth. Herbert infuses this mental, spiritual, and physical tension into his poems. Thus, he establishes an effective means by which to understand the dualistic conflicts inherent in humankind's being and how it is a vital constituent in one's journey toward spiritual communion with the Judeo-Christian God. Through the lens of mysticism, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila provide contexts for understanding Herbert's poems such as "The Flower." John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila contrast the duality of the soul's dark night and the light that is born from this harrowing process. However, dualism's philosophical significance was established long before Christian mystics and theologians lauded its importance.

The concept of dualism was first established by Plato in his assertions concerning archetypal forms. The essence of platonic archetypes is embodied in "ideas" and "forms," which represent one's subjective and objective perceptions of intangible and corporeal things. In light of ideas that embody objective perfection, forms are defined according to how close they either

conform to or diverge from that idea. Therefore, their value is contingent solely upon their relationship with ideas (Plato 108). Thomas Aquinas adopted Plato's theory of "ideas" and established it as a parallel structure to the Judeo-Christian God. In relation to objective perfection, the creator forms the idea by which humankind is defined according to their conformity to or disparity from that flawlessness. According to Saint Augustine, this polarity did not exist for humankind before the Fall. Upon the advent of original sin, humankind was separated from the creator and punished with the inner-conflicts of a nature torn between objective good and opposing evil. Evil, which is merely a lack of good, made its presence in the world and created a spectrum ranging from absolute good to greater forms of evil. Therefore, human abstractions such as joy, grief, bitterness, and death arose as byproducts of emergent evil. Humankind is now defined according to the polarity between divine accord and evil. However, the fruits of this polarity lie in the premise that this spiritual dissonance may actually lead one closer to identification with the creator (Augustine 203).

With the advent of the second covenant, Christ formed a bridge between the fallen person and the divine being. When God became man, objective reality was conjoined with subjective relativism to form a means by which humankind may reconstruct the broken covenant. In doing so, Christ adopted the dualistic nature of man with its sufferings and joys to stand as a living prototype of the Christian pilgrim. Thomas Aquinas voices in *Summa Theologica*: "To become like God is the last end of all things" (162). In one's Christian pilgrimage, one pursues unity with God according to one's conformity to this model. In doing so, one also participates in the joy and grief, sweetness and bitterness, and death and rebirth inherent in Christ's model of perfection. Therefore, polar opposites coalesce in a framework by which one may pursue spiritual enlightenment.

George Herbert recognizes the promising implications of the tensions and emphasizes their significance in his poems. In "The Flower," Herbert draws on the ontological polarity between death and rebirth. Herbert parallels the life of the flower to that of Christ and the human being. Just as flowers must submit to the seasonal patterns of death and rebirth, so must the journeying Christian submit to a metaphorical death of self to be reborn in Christ. This premise mirrors Christ's own life, which was sacrificed in order to atone for humankind's sins and to establish unity between God and humankind. In relation to this concept, Herbert acknowledges that the spiritual pattern inherent in death and rebirth is one of the fruits of humankind's fallen

nature. 1 Corinthians 15:21 alludes to the theological fruits of mortal death: “For since by man came death by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” The ethereality of the human being as paralleled by the image of the flower relates to the corporeality of Christ who must suffer and die in order to give divine grace.

If man had not forsaken God and lost eternal life, Christ would not have entered the world to provide divine grace in the form of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 1:10 (NKJV), the apostle Paul lauds the sanctifying grace allotted by Christ in the incarnation: “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” However, one’s comprehension of the “word made flesh” is often misconstrued. This struggle to comprehend God’s ways and His word is painfully felt by the speaker of “The Flower” who finds that God’s “word is all if we could spell” (l. 20). One distinguishing characteristic of Herbert’s poetry is its honest depiction of humankind’s struggles to comprehend the dualistic nature of the human being and its relationship with divine precedence. While truthfully illustrating the iniquities of human frailty, Herbert also touches on the tensions of this frailty (White 154).

In “Affliction I” and “Affliction V,” Herbert provides an honest portrayal of the frail, fledgling Christian pilgrim as he or she journeys to experientially comprehend Christ’s suffering and the joy that results from it. The moral precedence established by the dualism of joy and pain is associated with God’s love for humankind. God’s tempering of the human being is painful and unpleasant in nature; however, it is performed by a loving hand with benevolent intentions. The theological significance of this point is lauded by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:4: “For out of much affliction and anguish of the heart I wrote unto you in many tears: not that you should be grieved but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.” As a Christian pilgrim, one is tempered by the hand of God like iron tempered by the fire.

“Affliction I” and “Affliction V” also possess biographical material in light of Herbert’s own battles with afflictions. From Herbert’s young life as a scholar to his bouts with illness and loss of family members, Herbert experienced a first-hand rendering of pain in an imperfect world. Herbert portrays his own experiences with affliction to breathe realism into the voice of the poem’s persona (Charles 144). Throughout the course of the “Affliction” poems, Herbert follows the evolution of the speaker from an immature youth to a mature, spiritually aware adult.

In relation to joy and pain and birth and death, Herbert also examines the necessary polarity in sweetness and bitterness and serving and being served in "Love III." As a celebrated communion poem, "Love III" embellishes the Christian aspiration for complete communion with God. While "Affliction I," "Affliction V," and "The Flower," dramatize the Christian journey in mundane realms, "Love III" illustrates communion within heaven's domain. The pristine surroundings are a means of intimidation for the seeking communicant who is unaware of the setting's divine implications. Still recognizing the requirement to be blemish free from sinful indulgence, the persona cowers in shamefulness from Love's hospitable invitation. The height of the Christian journey for complete communion with God is actualized in "Love III." After a lifetime of submission and servitude, the role of leader and servant are reversed so that one is the recipient of God's heavenly communion. The host is now no longer merely an earthly representation of Christ in the form of bread. Communion is now present as Christ Himself. The didacticism of "Love III" corresponds to the precept of Christian theology that one must first give of oneself in order to receive. Therefore, giving and receiving are imperative in one's unification with the creator.

Also embedded in the Christian didacticism of "The Banquet" is the polarity of sweetness and bitterness in regard to the Eucharist. Christ's love for humankind is a sweetness that is realized in his sacrificial gift to establish the second covenant. However, within this sweetness lies the bitterness and anguish of his painful death. For the world to experience the sweetness of this covenant, Christ had to suffer the bitterness of a cruel and painful death. This concept also parallels the individual Christian's bout with joy and grief in one's pursuit for spiritual enlightenment. In "Love III," the persona experiences true sweetness when Love gently persuades the communicant to sit down and to eat. At the pinnacle of one's spiritual passage, God's all-encompassing love is revealed in its entirety devoid of the harsh realities of sin and death. "Love III" actualizes the theological principles present in "The Flower," "Affliction I," "Affliction V," and "The Banquet" to express the final destination of the searching persona.

In his poetry, theological dualism pervades, providing a means of explicating Herbert's poems. Herbert effectively conveys the essential polarity of abstractions such as joy, pain, sweetness, bitterness, and serving and being served. As one follows the poem's persona through bouts of happiness and despair, the evolution of Christian maturity is expressed through an array of human emotion and experience. The young speaker of "The Flower" and "Affliction I"



struggles to comprehend the inconsistency of the creator's actions. The sin that divides humankind and God has also created a gap between comprehension and misunderstanding. Complete understanding of God's will is not recognized until complete communion is established in "Love III." Through the succession of the poems, Herbert elucidates the prevalence of theological duality in relation to Christian maturation.

## CHAPTER 2

### DEATH OF SELF AND REBIRTH OF THE SOUL IN “THE FLOWER”

In his poem, “The Flower,” seventeenth-century metaphysical poet, George Herbert, contemplates the metaphorical death one must succumb to in order to experience a rebirth of the soul. Through a death of one’s will, the Christian reaches communion with God. Each time one prays or worships God, one surrenders oneself to God’s will in recognition of one’s sole dependence on God’s sanctifying grace for salvation. Herbert acknowledges that humankind’s spiritual pattern of death and rebirth is one of the graces allotted to man’s fallen nature. However, God’s will for the spiritual pilgrim is one of abstraction. Herbert’s “The Flower” attempts to decipher the child-like Christian’s searching, complex, and at times painful relationship with the creator. In this depiction, Herbert examines the necessity of metaphorical death and rebirth in one’s pilgrimage toward Christian sanctification.

As “The Flower” unfolds, the poem’s speaker is compelled by feelings of jubilation in relation to his spiritual metamorphosis. The spring of spiritual grace is upon the speaker, and the speaker gratefully welcomes the reemergence of God’s mercy and goodness: “How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean/ Are thy returns! ev’n as the flowers in spring;”(ll. 1-2) However, the speaker is a veteran of many springs whose flowers annually undergo the crucible of frost that lies dormant until the beauties of spring and summer fade into winter. Herbert’s use of flower imagery serves as a metaphorical representation of the individual Christian’s spiritual pilgrimage through the secular life. The Christian’s journey toward salvation is laden with recurring obstacles that appear to thwart one’s progression toward sanctification. However, with God’s grace and Christian fortitude, one’s suffering is progressively likened to a gift from God. The burden of suffering is forgotten and humankind is ontologically reunited with the Father: “To which, besides their own demean, / The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring./ Grief melts away/ Like snow in May,/ As if there were no such cold thing” (ll. 3-7).

The poem’s first stanza, which expresses the burden of suffering, is indicative to the mystery of Christian life. As Stanley Stewart asserts, humankind “is born of the spirit as well as the flesh” (103). The lot of suffering befell humankind upon Adam’s defiance of God’s original covenant with humankind. Adam’s sin, one of pride and self-will, cost humankind God’s gift of the natural life of the soul (Malcomson 147). Prior to the fall, man and woman were infused with

“preternatural gifts” that allotted them insusceptibility to suffering and death. When Adam and Eve defied God’s laws, humankind was burdened with both mortal death and recurring spiritual death throughout the cycle of earthly life. In “A Homily on the Misery of All Mankind,”(1562) the loss of man’s grace is examined in accordance with Adam’s folly:

In the booke of Genesis, Almighty GOD giueth vs all a title and name in our great grandfather Adam, which ought to warne vs all to consider what wee bee, whereof wee bee, from whence we came, and whither we shall, saying thus, In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread, till thou be turned againe into the ground, for out of it wast thou taken, in as much as thou art dust, into dust shalt thou be turned again. Heere we may learne to know our selues to be but ground earth, earth and ashes, and that to earth and ashes we shall returne. (*Anglican Library*)

Similar to the flower, the human person is a material entity, vulnerable to time’s degradation. The flower returns to the earth when its bloom fades as humankind returns to dust upon the seasonal succession of one’s mortality:

Who would have thought my shrivel’d heart  
Could have recover’d greenesse? It was gone  
Quite underground; as flowers depart  
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;  
Where they together  
All the hard weather,  
Dead to the world, keep house unknown. (ll. 8-14)

Only through the acquisition of God’s sanctifying grace may the fallen Christian surpass the confines of mortal death to acquire eternal salvation. The providential road of the Christian pilgrimage is paved with the despondence of suffering. The “frosts” of one’s life are blessings to the sin-burdened Christian who may further identify with Christ through the fires of earthly struggle. In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, sixteenth century Christian mystic Saint John of the Cross contemplates the virtue of suffering:

There is another reason why the soul has walked securely in this darkness, and this is because it has been suffering. For the road of suffering is more secure and even more profitable than that of fruition and action: first, in suffering the strength of God is added to that of man, while in action and fruition the soul is practicing its own weaknesses and

imperfections; and secondly, because in suffering the soul continues to practice and acquire the virtues and become purer, wiser and more cautious. (155)

With God's strength and guidance, an object of sin may be transformed into a model of virtue. One may use the power of hatred and self-possession involved in sinning and sublimate that power into acts of good will. In "The Church Porch," George Herbert expands on the virtue of transposing "beasts" of sin such as jealousy or pride into pristine goodness:

Envie not greatnesse: for thou mak'st thereby  
Thy self the worse, and so the distance greater.  
Be not thine own worm: yet such jealousy,  
As hurts not others, but make thee better,  
Is a good spurre. Correct thy passion spite;  
Then may the beasts draw thee to happy light. (115)

Similarly, in his poem, "Easter Wings," Herbert alludes to Christian theology's concept of finding sublime strength through one's sins. The crucible of suffering and sin made manifest by the fallen nature of man may be used to strengthen one's journey toward providence:

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more,  
'Til he became  
Most poore:  
With thee  
O let me rise  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me. (ll. 1-10)

For the searching Christian, God's abstract fruits of suffering are laden with misapprehension. God's ways are not man's ways, and God's purgation of man through one's suffering baffles the subjective confines of the discerning Christian's mind. God's "wonders" of "killing and quickening" lie in rash juxtaposition with the ideology of the secular world. At certain intervals, the road to providence may feel as if it is the road to perdition. God raises one to magnificent heights only to scourge one in the following moment. The Christian pilgrimage, led by the

omniscient presence of God's word, would be considerably easier to ascertain if only one could understand or "spell" (Strier 251). Herbert recognizes the Christian's plight of beckoning for God's word only to be left in uncertainty by one's miscomprehension:

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,  
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell  
And up to heaven in an houre;  
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.

We say amiss,

This or that is:

Thy word is all if we could spell. (ll. 14-20)

The "killing and quickening" Herbert refers to is indicative of the various deaths of self-will the Christian pilgrim must submit to in order attain communion with God. The human person possesses the gift of free will, and, with that free will, one may choose to act in accordance with God's plan or in regard to one's own selfish designs. With the suffering that God allows to permeate the world, the Christian chooses how to bear that suffering. The time of despondence or "killing" one faces in the presence of one's own sin may be given up to the Lord in an act of humility. According to Christian theology, one must submit one's burdens to the cross and allow Christ, the Lord, to bear them for humankind. One is not to try to bear one's own load and wallow in one's own sin; it is an act of pride and an abomination to God. Each time the Christian gives these up to God, the spiritual "killing" or purgation is preceded by a time of cleansing and rebirth. Rebirth is not permanent, however. One continues this cyclical pattern of death and rebirth until one is reunited with Christ in Paradise. In "Homily on the Resurrection for Easter Day," (1562) the religious speaker comments on the cyclical pattern of death and rebirth through sin:

Certainly it had beene better (saith hee) neuer to haue known the way of righteousness, then after it is known and receiued, to turne backe againe from the old Commandment of God giuen vnto vs. For so shall the prouerbe haue place in vs, where it is said: The dogge is returned to his vomit again, and the Sowe that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire again (2 Peter 2.20-22). What a shame it were it for vs, being thus so clearly and freely washed from our sinne, to returne to the filthiness thereof againe? What a follie were it, thus endowed with righteousness, to loose it again? (*Anglican Library*)

In stanzas four and five, the speaker of “The Flower” has grown irritated and impatient with these “changing” seasons of God’s mercy: “O that I once past changing were, / Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can whither!” (ll. 21-22). The narrator’s perpetual elevations to heaven and returns to the muck of the earth are growing tiresome and indignant: “Many a spring I shoot up fair, / Offring at heav’n growing and groning thither:”(ll. 23-4). The speaker wishes to rise to heaven through his own assertions, not by God’s guidance when he voices, “Still upwards bent, as if heav’n were mine own” (l. 29). He is “joining together” with his sins of pride as opposed to giving them up to the Lord and disavowing self-possession and glorification. The speaker has not yet developed a keen understanding of God’s motives or reasoning. His perception is clouded by his self-inclination to govern his own existence (Schoendfeldt 147). As a consequence for his attempts at self-ascension, he incurs God’s wrath:

But while I grow in a straight line,  
Still upwards bent, as if heav’n were mine own,  
Thy anger comes, and I decline:  
What frost to that? What pole is not the zone,  
Where all things burn,  
When thou dost turn,  
And the least frown of thine is shown? (ll. 28-34)

The speaker maintains the false assumption that God’s love changes constantly. His misguided directives are the propelling forces that abandon him in a state of mental restlessness. Helen Vendler asserts, “It is not God... who is arbitrary and capricious, but we; God’s actions only follow ours; he is changeless and we are the changeable ones” (52). God, alone, is unchanging, and the numerous transitions that humankind forgoes are necessary rites of passage in the journey toward heaven. The “killing and quickening” indicative of the human experience is part of the God’s didactic plan for the Christian pilgrimage. The role one is to learn as a Christian is that in offering full submission to God, one may possess objective meaning in one’s life, thus, elevating oneself toward heaven. Seventeenth-century Christian mystic Saint Theresa of Avila expands on this point: “Let nothing disturb you; nothing frighten you. All things are passing. God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Nothing is wanting to him who possesses God. God alone suffices”(58).

In stanza six, the narrator experiences the dawning of an epiphany. The poem's first half has served as a depiction of the difficulties of the Christian journey. The second part illustrates the point of enlightenment one may attain through the "many deaths" one experiences while fulfilling God's omniscient plan. The narrator is speaking from the perspective of experience in stanza six. He has survived several deaths and rebirths over time, and he uses the looming suffering as a muse to guide his verse. The suffering and hardship is eventually forgotten, and he transforms his sins into devotional verse:

And now in age I bud again,  
After so many deaths I live and write;  
I once more swell the dew and rain.  
And relish versing: O my onely light,  
It cannot be  
That I am he  
On whom the tempest fell all night. (ll. 35-41)

The speaker appears to have developed an informed understanding that God's ways are not merely arbitrary. There is a purpose behind the sin and anguish God allows to permeate the world. The point is to bring one to a greater conception of humankind's role in the modality of the universe. The speaker expresses his sole dependence on God for his spiritual vitality when he refers to God as "my onely light" (l. 38). He submits his self-will over to God's will, in recognition that complete submission to God is the path toward heaven. Man's mortal time on earth is a mere experience to educate one in God's ways and lead one to communion with the Father.

The speaker attains the same point of self-submission reached by the speaker of "The Crosse" and "The Collar." After a period of mental restlessness, anguish, and impatience, the children of God come to terms with their all-encompassing relationship with God. When the speaker beckons to God as his "onely light" (l. 38), one is reminded of the final exclamations of "The Crosse" and "The Collar": "Thy will be done" and "My Lord."

In the final stanza, the speaker appears to reach communion with the Father:

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,  
To make us see we are but flowers that glide:  
Which when we once can finde and prove,

Thou hast a garden for us, where to bide.  
Who would be more,  
Swelling through store,  
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride. (ll. 41-49)

God's "hard weather" (l. 12) is actually God's "wonders" when reexamined by the enlightened mind. The beauty of human experience is to divulge to one the meaning of one's existence: one's existence is completely relative to God. The point is to guide one to understanding that until one is united with God in Providence, the human person is governed by one's fleeting nature: "We are but flowers that glide" (l. 43). Only through full communion with God, may one reach a point of constancy. One may reconcile the sin of Adam by submitting one's sins to the cross to be bourn by Christ, the savior of mankind. One is led by the Paraclete or Holy Spirit to perform God's will on earth. Those who do not conform to this idea will "forfeit their Paradise by their pride" (49).

George Herbert's poem, "The Flower," realistically depicts the experience of the Christian pilgrimage. The speaker is narrating from the perspective of experience, reviewing the crucible of "killing and quickening," he has forgone in his journey toward Paradise. Over the course of the poem, God's plan for mankind is revealed to the anguished, longing, and impatient speaker. Humankind's lot of perpetual death and rebirth is analogous to the seasonal patterns of the flower. The flower is susceptible to the trials of nature's mercy as the human person is governed by the persistence of God's will in one's life. When one eventually surrenders one's self to God's will through the death of self-pride, one will reach spiritual enlightenment. One's spiritual enlightenment conveys God's plan as something far greater than arbitrary disinterest or wrathful punishment. The speaker grows to discern God's will as one that is directed by all-encompassing love. It is not God who needs humankind, but humankind who needs God.



## CHAPTER 3

### A NEGATION OF OPPOSITES IN “AFFLICTION I” AND “V”

In “Affliction I” and “Affliction V,” metaphysical poet George Herbert mimics the structure of “The Flower” to illustrate God’s dualistic tempering of man. Yet Herbert’s “Affliction I” and “Affliction V” negate the polarity between the principles of joy and grief. Throughout the course of the two poems, Herbert demonstrates the inclusive nature of the two abstractions and substantiates their vital role in the speaker’s spiritual formation. Herbert proposes that joy and grief are inseparable constituents in one’s journey toward spiritual maturation. In regard to Herbert’s life, the “Affliction” poems also form an autobiographical account of Herbert’s own afflictions during his academic posts as an instructor in rhetoric and university orator at Cambridge. In the poems, Herbert communicates his own sufferings through the voice of the persona. Though Herbert recognizes God’s love as immutable, he dignifies the creator’s painful disciplinary measures through his unwavering afflictions. Herbert illustrates the spiritual transformation of the poem’s speaker through God’s tempering hand. The speaker matures from the arrogant and inexperienced youth of “Affliction I” into the emerging spiritual adult of “Affliction V.” Similar to “The Flower,” the “Affliction” poems traverse the persona’s movement from miscomprehension to enlightenment.

The speaker’s journey is marked by the hallmark principles of grief: depravity, self-denial, and self-pity. Scripture is imperative in “Affliction I” and “Affliction V” and other poems in Herbert’s *Temple*. Herbert heralds scripture as the following:

It is not onely armour, but also a whole armorie of weapons, both offensive, and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and put the enemie to flight. It is not an herbe, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every moneth, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicen. (2)

Herbert heavily relies on biblical scripture and characters such as Jeremiah, Job, and the speaker of Lamentations 3 to illustrate the persona’s grueling afflictions. Herbert believed that illustrating the stories of others was “didactically effective” because the stories are recalled easily from memory. Herbert remarked that “for them also men heed, and remember better than exhortations; which though earnest yet often dry with the sermon. . . but stories and sayings thee



The persona is clearly a product of youth's vanity. He longs to improve himself through the allurements of wealth and prosperity. Ecclesiastes 2:1 recognizes such desires as the offspring of vanity: "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; an behold, this vanity" (KJV).

In the second stanza, the protagonist views God's house as the one spoken of in Psalms 36:8: "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures." As he gazes upon God's "furniture so fine," which "entwine" and "tice" him and counts his "starres" of "heaven and earth," he irreverently obligates God for "wages pay'd in a world of mirth." He feels betrayed because he has displaced God's heavenly house to a faction of idolatry that represents man's greed for material value. Herbert draws on the moral principle in Ecclesiastes 7:2, 4: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." The speaker has found God's house to be one of mourning rather than that of feasting, yet he does not realize that in God's eyes, "fools" are in the "house of mirth."

Within the true context of Christian moral principle, God's house is more appropriately likened to the one spoken of by Christ in John 14:2: "In my father's house there are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." This verse plays a pivotal role in expressing the fallacy inherent in the miscomprehension of divine will (Summers 109). God's house of riches and of mirth is not to be found in earthly realms. If it were to be designated as an earthly premises, Christ's incarnation would have been superfluous. Christ proclaims that he has gone to "prepare a place" for humankind in heaven because it is not to be found in secular confines and not to be attained until sin and suffering are obliterated in the world through Christ's second coming. Here, the speaker is misled in accordance with the Old Testament belief that "urges man to enjoy within the bounds of pleasures of his life" (193). Caught in the axis of Old Testament hedonism and New Testament self-abasement, the persona is unable to grasp the true nature of God's kingdom.

Plagued with the misapprehension that God's true house is a secular temple likened to those of David and Solomon in the Old Testament, the speaker desires the ornamental wealth of "true gold" (2 Chr. 3:4), "precious stones" (2 Chr. 3:6), and "fine linen" (2 Chr. 3:14). He desires the secular wealth of Solomon and David, yet his lot is more akin to the spiritual

suffering of Job and Jeremiah. Roberts French concurs, “both he and Jeremiah had occasion to regard themselves as abused servants of an apparently ungrateful God” (201).

The persona further resembles Jeremiah when he accuses God of deceitfully leading him into his service through promises of unceasing joy and pleasure:

At first thou gav’st me milk and sweetnesses;  
I had my wish and way.  
My dayes were staw’n with flow’rs and happiness;  
There was no moneth but May. (ll. 19-22)

In Jeremiah 15-16, the prophet speaks of the similar enticements into God’s service: “Thy words were found and I did eat them; and they word unto me the joy and rejoicing of the heart.”

Though both the persona’s, Herbert’s, and Jeremiah’s initial experiences are blessed with joy, they find that over the “yeares sorrow did twist and grow” (l. 23). With the cries of a “soul in pain,” (25) he bereaves the afflictions God has cursed him with:

Sicknesses cleave my bones;  
Consuming agues dwell in ev’ry vein,  
...Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce beleaved,  
Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived. (ll. 26-30)

Jeremiah also bewails his treatment by God: “I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me.” The poem not only reverberates Jeremiah’s haunting protestations but mimics the ailing victim of Lamentations 3:

I am a man of that hath seen afflictions by the rod of his wrath. He had led me,  
And brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me his face is  
turned. He turneth his had against me all the day. My flesh and my skin he has  
made old. He hath broken my bones. He hath builded against me, and compassed  
me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places as they that be dead of old.  
He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain  
heavy...he hath enclosed by ways with hewn stone; he hath made my paths  
crooked.

The anguish expressed in stanza 6 is similar to those experienced by the biblical figure of Job: In Job 2:5, Job is “smote...with sickening eruptions from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.” Though the speaker and Job both suffer spiritual affliction, Job personifies spiritual

maturity in the wake of his spiritual suffering. When Job's wife orders him to "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9), Job voices the necessary acceptance of joy and grief in one's spiritual journey: "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10) Job embodies the Judeo-Christian ideal of being cleansed through one's suffering and does not fall to despair but embraces his suffering as a means to draw closer to God. Job 5:17 praises those who find virtue in God's chastening process: "Happy is the man who God correcteth; therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." Herbert and the speaker, however, cannot willingly accept their suffering as a dualistic part of God's service. Similar to Jeremiah, he turns to self-pity to mollify his abuses:

When thou got health, thou took'st away my life,  
And more; for my friends die:  
My mirth and edge was lost; a blunted knife  
Was of more use than I  
Thus thinne and lean without a fence or friend,  
I was blown through ev'ry storm and winde. (ll. 31-6)

In stanza seven the persona distinguishes his forlorn life in the desert from his previous existence when he took "the way that took the town" (l. 38). Vendler describes the persona's motivation in his former life: "Moved by inspiration, conscience and ideal, he chose academic life over the worldly inclinations of birth and spirit, as he tells us, thinking thereby to approve more of himself" (l. 48). Engrossed in a life of academia, with its "lingring" (l. 39) books and starch gowns, the persona receives "Academick praise" (l. 45) that he hopes "will melt and dissolve" his rage" (l. 46). However, he soon finds himself "entangled in a world of strife" (l. 41). The persona views God's gifts as "baits of false optimism" (Hodgkins 203). Christopher Hodgkins argues, "God has enticed Herbert's heart, raising his expectations of smooth spiritual and political advancement... Then God cruelly 'didst betray' him to disease and banishment in academe" (203).

The academic "gown" in line 40 may also correspond to the gown of righteousness found in Isaiah 61:10: "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels." The use of "gown" also correlates with Christ's parable of the wedding party where the garmentless man is cast in outer darkness. Christ closes the parable with the

adage: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22). This allusion perhaps corresponds with Herbert’s own call to service. He realizes that he has been called yet he is reluctant to feel that he has been chosen because of his impoverished state. He perhaps feels a kinship with the man of Matthew 22:13 who is “cast...into outer darkness” where “there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Both gowns are recognized as a source of confinement for Herbert and the poem’s speaker. A life in academia and a life called to service for God propel the speaker into a state of rage. The “rage” Vendler explains, is an “advanced psychological truth over his earlier sorrows” and “plunges him into more sickness” (48). The persona cites God’s further indifference for his plight by casting him further into depths of suffering:

Yet lest perchance I should too happie be  
In my unhappinesse,  
Turning my purge to food, thou throwest me  
Into more sicknesses.

Thus doth thy power cross-bias me.... (ll. 49-54)

Desiring to escape his moral confines, the persona, in stanza eight, longs to become a tree. As a tree weathers nature’s elements, the speaker also views himself as one who has endured being “blown through every storm and wind.” In the context of stanza nine, the desire to become a tree is the result of the desire for security and immutability:

I reade, and sigh, and wish I were a tree;  
For sure then I should grow  
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust  
Her household to me, and I should be just. (ll. 57-60)

The irony of the speaker’s desire lies in the dualistic metaphor of the tree. In reference to Psalm 1:3 where one’s spiritual formation and commitment to God is embodied by the image of a tree: “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” As Daniel Rubey surmises, the speaker is unaware of “what the true implications of the metaphor are, the lines are revealed as self-justifying evasion of the responsibilities of Christian service” (110). The speaker longs to relinquish his commitment by taking the form of an inanimate object, yet he is ironically called further into the painful obligations of his spiritual commitment. In regards to biblical imagery surrounding the tree, it is similar to the Christian pilgrim’s vocation that is marked by

weathering, anguish, beauty, and fruit. The tree of Psalm 1:3 is the same tree that must “weather the storm of righteousness.” The speaker too must withstand the storms of his journey so that he may be able to be “planted by the rivers...and bringeth forth his fruit in season.”

Because of the persona’s miscomprehension of his relationship with the creator, he is fearful and antagonistic about his vocation. The speaker’s pride as well as his lack of understanding creates a divide between God and him, which inevitably leads to more spiritual degeneration. There is a consistent emphasis on the word “I” throughout the poem, which connotes the speaker’s unerring concentration on the self (Stein 184). Consistent with the premise that joy and grief are not exclusive, the speaker has not yet adopted the Christian ideology present in “The Flower”: In order to draw true understanding through God, one must first forego a death of self. At this time, the persona does not comprehend this relationship or his complete dependence upon God. Until he abandons his self-importance, he will remain unable to unite with God and grasp the dualistic nature of the Christian journey: Joy and sorrow harmonize in one’s earthly experience to prepare the human person for heavenly glory.

In stanza nine the protagonist expresses further frustration in response to his quandary. He postulates that if he were to adopt the proper Christian fortitude enabling him to find elation in his suffering, God would merely strike him with further anguish:

Yet lest perchance I should too happie be  
                                  In my unhappinesse,  
Turning my purge to food, thou throwest me  
                                  Into more sicknesses.

Thus doth thy power cross-bias me, not making  
Thine own gift good, yet from my wayes taking. (ll. 49-54)

Irony pervades in the persona’s notion to turn his “purge to food.” The protagonist surmises that if he were to attempt to mitigate his suffering by embellishing it, the creator would merely subjugate his suffering with further strife. However, Judeo-Christian ideology once again evades the speaker’s fledgling conceptions of God’s will. Christian theology exalts individual suffering as an inalienable means to identify with Christ, thus, drawing the individual closer to God. In this line, the term “food” and its relationship with eating connote fundamental principles of Christian theology. In John 6:48, Christ refers to himself as the “bread of life.” When one suffers, one metaphorically ingests Christ’s presence by taking on his qualities through the identification

allotted by suffering. The process also alludes to the Anglican service where bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ at the Last Supper. Therefore, irony abounds in one's desire to consume one's suffering.

Within this line, one is also reminded of the words verbalized in Job 6:6-7: "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of the egg?" The things that the soul refused to touch are as my own sorrowful meat." As with Herbert's experience, the "unsavory" aspect of the persona's life do at times grow into one's "sorrowful meat" that must be consumed along with the savory items. Then, one may be forced to consume even more bile in the midst of one's suffering. The principle alludes to Matthew 27:48 where the crucified Christ, near death and in need of refreshment, is once again rebuked by the Roman soldiers: "And straightway one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink." In a sense, the persona is correct in assuming that he may be struck with further suffering through the "bearing of his cross." However, he is unaware that this degradation will eventually lead to future recompense for his soul. The persona "should taste of that cup of which his son drank so deep," so that he "might feel a little what sin is, what his Son's love was" (Doerksen 129).

The final stanza serves as a crossroad for the persona's initial understanding of his relationship with God. Resembling the crucified Christ who calls for his father, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," the persona feels abandoned by God at the peak of his suffering. Similar to the biblical Jeremiah, the persona threatens to leave God in search of another master: "Well, I will change my service, and go seek/ Some other master out" (ll. 63-4). These words resonate Jeremiah's assertions that he "will not make mention of him, not speak any more his name" (4:36). To further illustrate Herbert's recognition of didactic spiritual principles, the persona embraces God in joy at the height of his grief. Through his grief, the persona is drawn closer to the true joy of his previous misconceived relationship with God. Jeremiah is also brought back into communion with God in Jeremiah 20:9: "But his word was in mine heart as a fire shut up in my bones."

The final couplet haunts the reader with its recognition of the persona's spiritual epiphany: "Ah, my dear God! Though I am clean forgot, / Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" (ll. 65-6). Though the persona does not completely comprehend his relationship with the creator, he has matured to the extent that he is aware of its implications. The concept is



reminiscent of “The Flower” where the ailing persona concludes: “Thy word is all if we could spell” (l. 20). He has ardently attempted to decipher his fledgling love for the creator; however, because he has been extensively self-involved, the true nature of that relationship has been elusive to him. He beckons for God to empower him with the ability to love in the fashion appropriate for one seeking God’s “recreative, sovereign grace” (Hodgkins 203). As Christopher Hodgkins surmises, the persona is imbued with a genuine yearning for love: “The fact that this plea is within the negative—that Herbert is willing to be excluded utterly from human and divine benefits rather than be a hypocrite—underlines his longing for a pure and simple love, free from mercenary motives” (203). The persona is aware that existence without God is a self-defeating principle. To forsake God is to forsake oneself, where deterioration is inevitable. The poem ends without true closure. Without a clear grasp of truth, one is left in the wake of a great divide of grief and joy that will be explored in “Affliction V.”

Herbert culminates the protagonist’s experiences in “Affliction I” to render a sense of closure and enlightenment in “Affliction V.” Herbert moves from an illustration of the essential polarity of joy and grief in regard to Herbert’s life to a universal rendering of the same concept through the voice of the persona. In the first stanza, Herbert carries the reader from the creation and fall of man to Noah and the great flood. The universality of the events parallels the persona’s own transition from being a fallen creature to one who receives a redefining covenant with God. Herbert writes:

My God, I read this day,  
That planted Paradise was not so firm,  
As was and is thy floating Ark: whose stay  
And anchor thou art onely, to confirm  
And strengthen it in ev’ry age,  
When waves do rise, and tempests rage. (ll. 1-6)

Along with paralleling Herbert’s experience, the poem is a metaphorical representation of Christ and the Church. Because “Paradise was not so firm” (l. 2) for the world’s first man and woman, humankind still lies vulnerable to the certain evils of storms. Therefore, humankind must rely on the Church as its “Ark” (l. 3) to keep afloat “when waves to rise and tempests rage” (l. 6). Christ is the immutable stronghold that anchors the Church and preserves its strengths during secular trials.

Herbert's use of raging waters and rising tempests is reminiscent of the storm imagery in "Affliction I." The persona, as well as Herbert, has had his own series of storms in the form of sinfulness, perceived abandonment, and sickness (Fowler 134). "Affliction V" presents the persona's evolution of spiritual maturity in his objective recognition of his relationship with God. Through spiritual enlightenment, the persona is aware that God carries him to the heights of joy and then to the pits of despair to strengthen his faith and draw him closer to the one who created him in his own image. The incident forces one to recall Mark 4:37 where the disciples are out to sea and endangered by an arising storm:

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, canst thou not see that we perish? And he arose and rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, 'Peace be still.' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, 'Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?'

The disciples' loss of faith parallels the loss of faith in "Affliction I." During his storms of crisis, he loses faith in God's ability to calm the waters of his ailing spirit. He does not trust that the Lord will bring him out of the dredges of misery and back into the pleasures of joy. Despair has been imperative for the persona until he realizes the reasons behind God's dualistic tempering of man. Through the Ark of the Church and with Christ as its anchor, one will be able to rise above the perils of hopelessness into communion with God.

For earthly man, the covenant that was lost during Adam's and Eve's fall from Paradise may be reestablished through a devotion to Christ and the Church. If used as an opportunity to mature spiritually, the storms that rage in one's heart may actually carry one back to one's creator. Herbert illustrates this concept in the second stanza when he writes of God's wrath as being a mechanism to draw his creatures back to him:

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 first did board with thee,  
Now thou wouldst taste our miserie. (ll. 7-12)

God allows one to suffer because it allows mortals to identify with the suffering that Christ endured on the cross. By identifying with His suffering, one is brought into closer communion with God. In this state of unity, one is the closest one can be with God while still in a state of original sin. This state is similar to Adam's and Eve's relationship with God before the Fall when "we first did board with" (l. 11) God. Now that humankind is in a fallen state, God has taken the form of man through the incarnation so that He may not only "taste our miserie," (l. 12) but also to bring us back into the adoptive graces of God.

Herbert reiterates that joy and grief are not exclusive abstractions in stanza three as he refers to the two concepts as "baits" to lure one to the creator:

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. (ll. 13-18)

Here, Herbert likens joy and grief to the food that furnishes the Lord's table. There is undoubtedly a connection to the Eucharist, which is indicative of the Last Supper, where Christ beckons one to "Take this and eat of it. This is my body which will be given up for you." In one's joy and grief, one not only identifies with Christ, but also unites with God by partaking of heavenly grace. God's hand, which delivers wrath as well as pleasure, may be likened to spiritual food that nourishes one's being and strengthens one's soul. Joy and grief are not exclusive. Both are necessary in one's spiritual formation and ever developing relationship with God.

In Herbert's final stanza, the poet alludes to imagery surrounding God's immutable covenant with man following the flood:

Affliction this 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. (ll. 19-24)

The Lord flooded and destroyed the earth with his raging waters just as one feels spiritually destroyed through the pain of affliction. However, one recalls (as does the persona) that God has promised never to destroy the earth again. The hopefulness of this covenant imbues one with the optimism to survive one's struggles and to await the return of God's loving hand (Fish 183). The tree imagery is reminiscent of the speaker's desire to be a tree in "Affliction I." The speaker is aware that if one is rooted deeply in faith and anchored in Christ, one's limbs may only be shaken and strengthened but not destroyed. God's punishing beam that endows his menacing bow is the same beam that forms the rainbow of his covenant. Man is not forsaken; God always restores that which is lost whether through the promise of the rainbow or the eternal promise of his son. Christ has replaced God's first covenant after the flood to form the second covenant of everlasting life for those who receive him.

## CHAPTER 4

### RECEIVING CHRIST'S BITTER-SWEET BODY

In “The Banquet” and “Love III,” George Herbert examines the intrinsic duality between sweetness and bitterness in earthly communion. In “The Banquet,” Herbert illustrates the persona’s spiritual and physical ingestion of the holy sacrament and its metaphorical implications in relation to Christ’s bitter suffering. By communing with Christ through consumption of the Holy Eucharist, one not only adopts Christ’s sweetness but also further identifies with his sufferings on the cross. Herbert’s “Love III” builds upon the themes in “The Banquet” to conceptualize one’s necessary submission to dine at God’s heavenly table. “Love III” represents the inward struggle between humankind’s desire to govern and to submit and its relationship to the Christian pilgrimage. In his depiction of earthly and heavenly communion, Herbert recognizes the necessity for one to allow God to serve the persona in spite of his sinfulness. According to Herbert, to truly serve, one must first be served. The sweet nourishment provided by the Holy Eucharist allows one to truly serve in a Christ-like spirit. By ingesting Christ, one becomes like Christ. Sweetness and bitterness are not exclusive, just as serving and being served are inseparable in one’s journey toward spiritual maturation.

“The Banquet” and “Love III” delineate the spiritual significance of Christ’s final speech at the Last Supper. The Passover, within the secular or heavenly context, is presented as an invitation to the prospective communicant. As one who enters a house or a dining hall, the celebrant metaphorically enters into God’s spiritual realm. In Luke 22:12, Christ declares that the disciples will be shown “a large upper room furnished.” Here they are to “make ready” for the reception of the Lord in Holy Communion. Therefore, the entering of one into God’s banquet hall is analogous to Christ entering one’s body in the form of the Eucharist. The communicant must enter God’s temple, so that Christ, in the form of the Eucharist, may enter into the temple of his or her body. By characterizing these concepts, Herbert expands upon the idea that service is not a one-dimensional concept. The polarity of serving and being served are not discrete in nature and are contingent upon one another in one’s passage to spiritual enlightenment.

The opening stanzas of “The Banquet” and “Love III” justify this argument through their depiction of the two forms of the invitation. In “The Banquet,” the persona is inviting the heavenly host and blood into his body with the words, “Welcome sweet and sacred cheer, /

Welcome dear” (ll. 1-2). In line three Herbert alludes to the doxology of the Anglican service with the words “With me, in me, live and dwell.” In the context of the doxology, the priest or celebrant cites the words, “Through him, with Him, in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is your Almighty Father, forever and ever” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 119). The prayer is taken from the scriptural passage of Romans 11:36, which reads: “For from Him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever.” To illustrate the persona’s reception of the Holy Communion, Herbert replaces the words “Through Him, with Him, in Him,” with “with me, in me.” The mystery of the Eucharist is fulfilled through one’s reception of Christ’s body through the sacrament of the Eucharist. “Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,” the communicant may unify with Christ in secular realms by consuming the heavenly host or body of Christ, thus inviting Christ’s presence “with him” and “in him.” Christ gives of himself in the Eucharist and the communicant gives of himself in reception of the holy sacrament. In receiving glory, the communicant gives glory to He who has blessed him with glory. Through these lines, Herbert suggests the indiscretion of giving and receiving in the context of Christian maturation.

Herbert expands upon this theological principle by closing the first stanza with the lines, “For thy neatness passeth sight, / Thy delight/ Passeth tongue to taste or tell” (ll. 3-5). The Anglican service, with the Eucharist as its central component serves as mankind’s path to God on earth. Herbert celebrated the Eucharist in light of its figurative representation of Christ’s sacrifice of self for humankind rather than the literal representation of transubstantiation espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. Though Herbert’s contention is figurative in regards to the body and blood of Christ, he celebrates its metaphysical properties, which surpass “sight” and “tongue.” The body and blood as represented by the bread and wine are far more than earthly representations of Christ’s eternal sacrifice for mankind. The Eucharist, for Herbert, signifies the dualistic nature of sweetness and the bitterness that is inherent in its emulation of drawing man closer to God.

The sweetness and bitterness of the Eucharist coincide with the sweetness and bitterness of God’s relationship with humankind. The two principles are defined in relation to one another. The sweetness of God is embodied by His love made in flesh by Jesus Christ, and humankind’s sweetness is defined according to his being in likeness to God. Man may assume Christ’s sweet virtue by ingesting his sacrament, thus being more Christ-like. 2 Corinthians 2:15 clarifies that

“we are a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” Bitterness is the product of humankind’s fallen state into sinfulness, which forms the bitterness surrounding the suffering of Christ for humankind’s sins. As 2 Corinthians 2:16 posits, “To the one we are the savor of death and to the other the savor of life unto life.” The final line of the verse presents the question that will be proposed by the persona in “Love III”: “And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16) Although redemption is the fruit of the penitent heart that consumes Christ’s body and lives a life of Christ-like contrition, God’s Eucharistic banquet still possesses the taste of bitterness. Terry Sherwood concurs, “even the virtuous believer tastes a mixture of sweetness and bitterness because of sin inherited through Adam’s fall” (64). This concept relates to the adage present in James 3:11: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place both sweet water and bitter?” Only when one reaches the heights of God’s heavenly banquet, as depicted in “Love III,” will one discern the true implications of the Eucharist and God’s sweetness in its purest sense.

In the realms of earthly communion, the mysteries of the Eucharist confound the persona in the first stanza when he mistakenly assumes that a “starre” was “melted” in the wine to create its sweet taste. The persona, unaware of the Eucharist’s true nature, equates its sweetness with the “flowers,” “gummes,” and “powders” (l. 15) that are used as culinary additives to give earthly food its sweet flavor. This earthly descriptive language suggests the persona’s attempt to explain profound spiritual realities with commonplace, secular items (Clarke 104). In his identification of earthly simplicities with divine concepts, the persona is not completely misconstrued. Herbert often distinguishes that the simple acts of ingesting food and sensing are essential for the tactile use of the human person in completing one’s obligation to love and cherish God. To the spiritual fledgling, common sacramentals in the form of food may lead to the spiritual truth that Eucharistic sweetness is related solely to communion with Christ. Terry Sherwood expands upon Herbert’s recognition of profound truths being sought through simple realities:

He looks the body as man’s most immediate physical reality, and to eating and drinking as its most immediate need. For him the power of the Eucharist is that it offers this simple human need as a figure for the soul’s highest communion with God. (75)





to which the rectified human soul conforms, carries the sweetness of divine substance” (63). Christ, as the Word made flesh, fulfills His role also by illuminating sinful minds with the truths of the scriptures. The book of Luke states, “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (4:4). Therefore, the scriptures, as well as the Eucharist serve as humankind’s spiritual bread on earth.

However, flowers and stars may also connote the fleeting nature of one’s body in regard to sinfulness. “The Flower” confirms, “we are but flowers that glide” (l. 44). Job 14:2 also describes the person as coming “forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not.” One’s sinfulness is also embodied in the star, which references Satan’s fall from heaven as well as serves as a symbol of pride and sinfulness in relation to humankind’s fall, which also suggest the duality of the metaphor. Herbert draws on the theological principle that evil does not exist in and of itself. Evil is merely a lack of goodness. God, who is the perfect form of goodness, stands as the model by which lesser forms of goodness may be defined. As Thomas Aquinas surmises in *Summa Theologica*, “Only God by nature is good. The goodness of any created thing is not its nature, but something additional: either its existence or some perfection added to it, or some relatedness to a goal” (138). In light of perfection, one may attain it through the goal of becoming more Christ-like. In earthly realms one may aspire toward an essence of God’s goodness and perfection through the consumption of Holy Communion. Therefore, perfection may be “added” in relation to the goal of paralleling one’s life with Christ’s teachings and through the formation of a contrite heart. Only then will one rise above the fate of Satan and assume the perfection embodied by everlasting life. The principles share the same ontological basis, yet Christ forms the archetypal form of the object, whereas humankind forms the divergent derivation of that form. However, Herbert’s unifying principle is rooted in the idea that humankind lessens in divergence as one grows closer to Christ through the Eucharist.

Stanzas five, six, and seven indicate the persona’s recognition of the significance of Christ’s broken body as a means to heal his own broken body. Christ, as well as the human person, is likened to “Pomanders and wood” (l. 24) that are still “good” (l. 25) despite “being bruised”(l. 26). The form that is broken and bruised is actually better “sented” because it expresses the extent of God’s love for mankind. In the form of the Eucharist, Christ’s broken body “is presented” to the human person as an opportunity to improve on one’s love for God. It



and virtue. Wine as a material substance has inherent qualities of sweetness and bitterness in relation to its age, dryness, and fermentation that coincide with the dualism surrounding its metaphorical qualities of vice and virtue.

Two metaphorical transformations are occurring in Herbert's poem. In one regard the wine is figuratively transforming into the blood of Christ. In another context the participant is experiencing a metaphorical transformation of the self through Jesus Christ. James Boyd White expands on the two-fold transformation of the Eucharist:

He represents the sacrament as a source of transformation, but not just of wine into blood, blood into wine, but of the self that participates in it: the wine or taste or love you pursue is converted into something else, infinitely better, and with that you are converted too. (255)

Both material substances of wine and person are transformed into something greater in a spiritual regard.

In John 4:32, 34, Christ voices that He has "a meat that ye know not of... My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Christ's meat, which is the will of God, is also humankind's meat that becomes known to one upon Christ's death on the cross. In consumption of that meat, one also adopts the task of doing God's work. In identification with Christ's suffering through the Eucharist, Herbert chooses to perform God's work in the form of his writing. His "lines" (l. 50), he feels, may also act as a form of nourishment for those seeking spiritual knowledge. In *The Country Parson*, Herbert dignifies his writing as a means to fulfill God's purpose for his life:

Being desirous (thorow the Mercy of God) to please Him, for whom I am, and live, and who giveth mee my Desires and Performances; and considering with my self, That the way to please Him, is to feed my flock diligently and faithfully, since our Saviour hath made that the argument of a Pastour's love, I have resolved to set down the Form and Character of a true Pastour, that I may have a Mark to aim at: which also I will set as high as I can, since hee shoots higher that threatens the Moon, then hee that aims at a Tree. (224)

In recognition of this point, Herbert substantiates the importance of creating one's own bread in the poem's final stanza. The "pitie" one feels for Christ's suffering may be sublimated into a desire to help others mature in their walk with Christ:

Let the wonder of this pitie  
Be my dittie,  
And take up my lines and life:  
Hearken under pain of death,  
Hands and breath;  
Strive in this, and love the strife. (ll. 48-53)

The “word made flesh” provides the muse and spiritual nourishment to prompt Herbert’s own “lines” that will form the “word” he may share with others as part of his vocation. Accompanying this premise, the final lines correspond to the revelation acknowledged in “Affliction V” that pain and grief may actually be implemented to bolster one’s spiritual fortitude. When one is tried by God’s tempering hand, one establishes a beneficial threshold that encourages growth of spirit. This concept also suggests the metaphysical poet’s “struggle to incorporate the truth of the Eucharist and its delight into earthly life and poetic vocation” (116). However, Herbert recognizes the adoption of this ideology as essential in one’s vocation of Christian servitude. Adopting an attitude of service, despite and through the struggle, he will “strive in this, and love the strife” (l. 53) in his vocation.

Unlike the opening lines of “The Banquet,” where the speaker invites Christ into the temple of his body, “Love III” begins with Christ initiating the invitation. “Love III” is an allusion to the truths spoken by Christ in the book of Luke, whereby Christ praises the anticipation of heavenly communion:

He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father have appointed unto me. That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:26-30)

Unsure of his worthiness, the persona’s heart is weary in response to Love’s offer. “Love bade me welcome,” the persona relates, yet his heart is apprehensive to oblige because of his uncertain worthiness. My “soul drew back,” the persona regards as he contemplates the tainted nature of his sinful soul that is “guiltie of dust and sinne” (l. 2).

Herbert's use of the terms "dust and sinne" alludes to the fallen state of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. Upon eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge, Adam and Eve are found naked in the garden with their physical and sinful states exposed to the Almighty. God rebukes them for their sin of pride and banishes them from earthly paradise until the atonement established by Christ: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 4:19). The speaker also finds himself in a state of nakedness with his sins lying open for God's judgment. Christ is the fruit of the second covenant to atone for the infractions incurred by Adam and Eve who defied God to taste the forbidden fruit (Walby 67). Christ, who signifies perfect humility, stands in juxtaposition with the forbidden fruit, which signifies pride. In Luke 1:42, Elizabeth calls out the young Virgin Mary: "Blessed art thou among women and blessed be the fruit of thy womb Jesus." The High Church also refers to the Eucharist as the "fruit of cross" (*Book of Common Prayer*, 101). Therefore, the fruit of unrighteousness that has led to the loss of unity with God is redeemed by the heavenly fruit of Christ that will restore humankind's covenant with God.

In contrast with "The Banquet," which is an earthly equivalent to the heavenly dialogue in "Love III," the persona finds himself in a state of intimidation. Now presented with the prospects of heavenly communion, he relinquishes the confident manner he upheld in "The Banquet." Now that he has reached a place of spiritual maturation that allows him to recognize the true nature of the Eucharist, he is actually reproached by his own sense of unworthiness in its precious regard. The persona's sense of unworthiness may be attributed to the fact that he, now in a state of higher enlightenment, is aware of the needs of his soul and the incomplete nature of his being. Arnold Stein posits that Love's "sweet questioning" actually "states and assures but points toward and ultimate awareness...that all creatures are by definition incomplete and what they "lack is the source of their being" (192).

In recognition of the penitential rite in the Anglican service, Herbert recognizes the reverence expected of those who take Holy Communion. Prior to the penitential rite, whereby one renounces his or her sins, the priest warns the communicants of the dangers of receiving communion while in a state of sinfulness:

...Examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments; and whereinsoever ye shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or

deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and confess yourselves to Almighty God.... then ye shall reconcile yourselves to them; being ready to make restitution and satisfaction...for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other...for otherwise the receiving of the holy Communion cloth nothing else but increase your damnation. Therefore if you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of his Word, an adulterer, or be in malice...repent ye of your sins, or else come not to the Holy table; lest, after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both body and soul.  
(*Book of Common Prayer*, 185)

Though the persona is now communing at the heavenly table, he is still frightened that the “life saving cup” may become the chalice of death for his sinful soul.

Though the Anglican service preaches the dangers of receiving the Lord in a sinful state, it also reproaches those who refuse or are afraid to partake of communion. Known as the “Exhortation,” this section of the Anglican services admonishes those refusing communion with threats of losing God’s grace:

...ye shall not refuse to come thereto, being so lovingly called and bidden by God himself. Ye know how grievous and unkind a thing it is, when a man hath prepared a rich feast, decked his table with all kind of provision, so that there lacketh nothing but the guests to sit down: and yet they who are called (without any cause) most unthankfully refuse to come....If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come; wherefore then do ye not repent and amend? When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say ye will not come? When ye should return to God, will ye excuse yourselves, and say ye are not ready? Consider earnestly with yourselves how little such feigned excuses will avail before God. (*Book of Common Prayer*, 187)

The speaker finds himself in a precarious situation. He feels his sinfulness warrants him unworthy to accept the Lord’s feast, yet he is also aware of the ramifications of refusing the Lord’s offering. However, Love helps to mollify the speaker’s ambivalence with His nurturing hospitality. Herbert’s depiction of God in “Love III” is not the creator who leaves one in spiritual and physical abandonment as represented in “The Flower,” “Affliction I,” and “Affliction V.” In response to the persona’s “slack[ness],” the “quick-ey’d love” (l. 4) draws nearer to the speaker, shrouding him with the comforts of sweet “questioning” (l. 5). The significance of Love’s

behavior corresponds with the nature of the communal setting. Herbert acknowledges the Protestant belief that Christ may not be present in two places at once. In light of this principle, the true presence of Christ is not in earthly communion but only in the realms of heaven. *The Book of Common Prayer* is explicit on this point:

For the Sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored; and the natural Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ are in Heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one (11).

Because the speaker is already in communion with God by being in his presence in heaven, his self-loathing disposition is superfluous. His feelings of disparagement were necessary in relation to earthly communion, but are now obsolete with the attained graces of heavenly communion. In regard to this truth, Love offers reassurance:

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:  
Love said, You shall be he.  
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,  
I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I? (ll. 7-12)

Love sustains his encouragement while reminding the speaker of his sole dependence on God. Because God has created the persona's nature and sustains it, it is imperative that he regard spiritual truths in the same light. Herbert's focus on sight corresponds to the theological theory that sight is the highest form of sensory perception: "Since sight is without natural change in organ or object, it is the most immaterial, the most perfect, and the most universal of all the senses" (Aquinas 184). In this sense sight holds precedence over tasting and smelling in regards to acknowledging one's place in God's kingdom. Taste and smell are more conducive to the sensory perceptions of earthly communion, whereas heavenly communion involves truly seeing Christ and possessing knowledge of his truth.

The poem's last stanza emphasizes the didactic role of giving and receiving. In shamefulness for his iniquities, the persona once again rebukes Love's offering. In response, Love reminds that it is his sacrifice that has assumed the "blame" for humankind's sinful transgressions: "And know you not sayes Love, who bore the blame?"(l. 15). The speaker replies,

“My deare then I will serve,” (l. 16) suggesting the true nature of his humility. This offering of self relates to the theological necessity to give of oneself before one may receive of the Lord. In the Anglican service, the communicant offers himself to the Lord as a sacrifice to complement Christ’s sacrifice:

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies...and lively sacrifice unto thee...we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, though our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounded duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences....

*(Book of Common Prayer, 192)*

In regard to this theological principle, Herbert recognizes that serving and being served are not exclusive concepts. Just as grief and joy, birth and death, sweetness and bitterness are contingent upon one another, giving and receiving are also imperative in one’s spiritual transcendence. Herbert acknowledges this principle when Love substantiates the creator’s call to serve in the poem’s ending lines: “You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat: / So I did sit and eat” (ll. 17-18).

In George Herbert’s “The Banquet” and “Love III,” the poet delineates the beauty of theological dualism in regard to the Eucharist. Sweetness and bitterness along with serving and being served compose the necessary elements of one’s journey toward spiritual communion with God. The goal of earthly communion has been fulfilled through the graces of heavenly communion in “Love III.” The anticipation of what was promised in “The Banquet” has been fulfilled in “Love III.” Eucharistic truth is realized in the sweetness of Christ’s love for humankind along with the bitterness of his painful death for man’s sinfulness. However, in “Love III,” the sweetness of the Eucharist takes precedence over the previously tasted bitterness of Christ’s sacrifices. God comes to humankind with the full sweetness of his perfection. The speaker’s humility and willingness to serve are also prerequisites for God’s saving graces. When one offers of oneself, one is spiritually capable of receiving Christ’s sanctifying gifts. In expressing these theological truths, “Love III” and “The Banquet” unite the principles present in Herbert’s previous poems to signify God’s truth as embodied in the Eucharist.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Theological dualism provides an important means of explicating Herbert's poems. Through his poems, Herbert effectively illustrates poles of joy and pain, sweetness and bitterness, and serving and being served. The development of Christian maturity is expressed through an array of human emotion and experience as the reader follows the poem's speaker through experiences of happiness and despair. In "The Flower" and "Affliction I," the youthful and inexperienced persona attempts to comprehend the mysteries behind the creator's inconsistent actions. However, the sin that separates humankind from God has created a division between reason and misunderstanding.

In "The Flower," Herbert examines the metaphorical death one must submit to in order to be reborn in Christ. Through a death of self-will, the Christian may attain communion with the creator. Prayer, humility, and worship allow one to surrender oneself to God's will with the realization that one is solely dependent on God's sanctifying grace for everlasting life. Herbert illustrates that humankind's cyclic pattern of metaphorical death and rebirth is a gift resulting from the human person's fallen state. However, God's will for the spiritual pilgrim is abstract and easily misunderstood. Herbert's "The Flower" depicts the Christian's complex and at times painful relationship with the creator. In this depiction, Herbert examines the necessity of metaphorical death and rebirth in one's pilgrimage toward Christian sanctification.

Partial comprehension of human affliction is realized in "Affliction V" when the now matured speaker recognizes that God's tempering of humankind is done with a loving hand. Throughout the course of the poems, the persona realizes that complete understanding of God's will is not recognized until complete communion is established in "Love III." Herbert elucidates the significance of theological duality in relation to Christian maturation. In "Affliction I" and "Affliction V," Herbert delineates God's dualistic tempering of the human person. Herbert's "Affliction I" and "Affliction V" examine the polarity between the human emotions of joy and grief and then negates their polarity in relation to Christian theology. Throughout the course of the two poems, Herbert demonstrates the nature of the two emotions and advocates their place in the speaker's spiritual journey. Herbert suggests that joy and grief are inseparable and necessary elements in one's pilgrimage toward spiritual maturation. The "Affliction" poems also allude to

the poet's own afflictions during his academic posts as an instructor in rhetoric and university orator at Cambridge. Through the voice of the persona, Herbert illustrates his own bouts with affliction. Though Herbert acknowledges that God's love is unchanging, he defends the necessity of the creator's actions through his own afflictions. In doing so, Herbert also depicts the spiritual transcendence of the poem's speaker, which is made capable by God's tempering hand. Throughout the "Affliction" poems, the speaker grows from the self-aggrandized youth of "Affliction I" into the spiritually mature adult of "Affliction V." "The Flower," as well as the "Affliction" poems illustrates one's movement from misunderstanding to enlightenment.

In his Eucharistic poems, George Herbert examines the duality of sweetness and bitterness in earthly communion in "The Banquet" and "Love III." In "The Banquet," Herbert depicts the consumption of the holy sacrament and the spiritual and physical implications of this act in regard to Christ's broken body. Through ingestion of the Holy Eucharist, one not only accepts Christ's sweetness, but must also recognize his bitter sufferings at Calvary. Herbert's "Love III" builds upon the themes in "The Banquet" to suggest one's necessary submission to dine at God's heavenly table. This invitation to dine awakens humankind's inward struggle to govern or to submit and how this struggle relates to the Christian journey. Herbert recognizes the necessity for one to allow God to serve one in spite of one's sinfulness in his depiction of earthly and heavenly communion. Herbert suggests that for one to truly serve, one must first submit to a death of self-will and allow oneself to be served by God. By receiving the Eucharist's sweet nourishment, one may authentically serve God and others in a Christ-like spirit. One becomes like Christ through reception of the Eucharist. Just as serving and being served are necessary components of one's voyage toward spiritual enlightenment, sweetness and bitterness are inseparable in their roles on one's journey as well.

Throughout his poems, Herbert realistically illustrates one's journey toward spiritual maturation. From the voice of inexperience and then of maturity, Herbert provides several perspectives to depict the Christian experience. Through the lens of theological dualism, God's didactic plan for humankind is revealed to the searching pilgrim. Death and rebirth as well as joy and grief and sweetness and bitterness form the necessary components of one's voyage toward spiritual unity with God. "The Flower" exemplifies the beauty of death so that one may be reborn in Christ, while the "Affliction" poems equate the pain of affliction with the joy of the spirit. Herbert recognizes the inseparable nature of sweetness and bitterness in Christ's sacrifice

for mankind in “The Banquet” and heightens this concept to heavenly realms when one submits oneself to receive of God in “Love III.” All five poems celebrate the necessity of theological dualism in relation to Christian maturation.

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