

THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH:
INSTITUTING THE HOLY
IN GEORGE HERBERT'S POETRY AND PROSE

by

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ABSTRACT

George Herbert's poetic edifice, called *The Temple*, has been read according to various schematic forms, usually under the idea that the collection's central unit, *The Church*, creates an architectural church that in turn models the interior space of the Protestant believer. Turning away from these earlier models of reading, my work puts forward the idea that the "church" of Herbert's poems refers not to a static edifice or interior space but toward the site of communion among the readers of his poetry. Herbert's collection is a "church" in the universalist sense of a church extending backward and forward in time to encompass all communicants of Christ's grace.

In Chapter 2, I argue that Herbert's conception of the Holy Spirit works to constitute the audience of his poetry. The problem of understanding how the Spirit creates the momentum behind many of his poems. Most often, this problem becomes expressed through pondering some miracle, such as communion, or an inscrutable biblical passage. In the end, the speaker's anxious desire overcomes this ratiocination and, paradoxically, creates the speaker's own assurance of grace. In Chapter 3, the argument expands to Herbert's pastoral manual, *The Country Parson*. As a twin to his work in *The Church*, *The Country Parson* again worries over the question of creating a unified spiritual community through the Holy Spirit. While in *The Temple*, his speaker turned inward, the priest of *The Country Parson* must turn outward, using the iconographic and rhetorical traditions of Counter-Reformation theory to answer the Puritan problem of displaying the Spirit's inward effects.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HERBERT'S TWO CHURCHES

George Herbert is an Anglican saint as well as a poet, a fact indicating how, even more than other 17th century poets, he has been adopted into the fabric of the institution to which he dedicated his life. Sir Izaak Walton's *Life* helped create a narrative of a "primitive" Herbert, an Anglican ideal of the Christian believer and the local priest. His status as an "ideal Christian"—however his admirers choose to define this—and as an "institutional" poet of the Church of England together may appear to diminish his capacity to surprise and innovate. Against these charges, Herbert's poetry speaks for itself, and his numerous defenders inside and outside the Anglican Church make sure it does not speak alone. Despite the efforts of his admirers, today Herbert is often taught as a "minor" 17th century English poet, caught between the ages of Shakespeare and Milton. I believe Herbert's importance lies not only in his aesthetic values, which critics as eminent as Helen Vendler and Dame Helen Gardener have substantially examined, but also in the theological, ecclesiastical, and social perspective he offers on the very institution that canonized him. In returning to Herbert's institutional role, I want to revive his importance as a thinker of theological sophistication and continue the examination of his literary ingenuity to show how his example created the "ideal" believer and priest of Walton and Coleridge, as well as the skilled artist of Vendler. In short, I want to discover how Herbert conceptualized, promulgated, and prophesied his "church", both the literary church of his

collected poems and the real church in which he moved and lived, and which saw fit to name him in its rank of holy men.

Herbert's idea of the British Church has certain distinctive qualities. Unlike his Puritan contemporaries, George Herbert admits no idea of a "pilgrim church" to his notion of English universalism. For Herbert, the national church is the irreducible unit of Christian life. Though Herbert saw flaws in his national church, as indicated by the numerous anxious poems on the subject, he never sought to undermine this essential network of English culture¹. As a result, Herbert's idea of "reformation" does not assume the character of a godly Puritan "brethren" who insulate themselves from the larger architecture of authority. Instead, Herbert sees a British Church whose "perfect lineaments" are "Both sweet and bright" ("The British Church" 2-3). Like many Protestants of his era, indeed like his Puritan opponents, Herbert identifies the twofold architecture of the church, the structural hierarchy and the real architecture of church buildings, but what the Puritans despise Herbert's sense of continuing tradition causes him to admire. Though he approved the beauty of the intricate system of authority, toward which he always bowed on doctrinal matters, and the physical "fine aspect in fit array" of traditional church architecture, Herbert noticed a gap in his church that called for reform (7)². This gap, or hollowness, can be imagined by expanding the convenient image of the church itself. If the broad architecture of the church remains sound, articulate, and beautiful, that architecture nevertheless contains an absence. Herbert noticed an unsoundness not in the physical or ecclesiastical architecture of the church but within the people inside, the common people who pass the Spirit of God among them. For Herbert, controversy and schisms obscured the spiritual purpose of

¹ See "The Church Militant" 245-246: "what sinnes next yeare / Shall bothin *France* and *England* domineer: then shall Religion to *America* flee".

² See *The Country Parson* for Herbert's discussion of obedience to Authority.

Christianity, leading to an eventual decay of the Holy Spirit itself. A tabernacle without spirit is a hollow body. To restore the spirit to the members requires an educator who could inspire the common churchgoer with a sense of the presence of holiness in their lives. Both in his role as priest, which he adopted after years of indecision, and his position as a reformed lyric poet, Herbert rose to the challenge of restoring the spirit to the church.

Herbert conceived his role as educating the common people into this spiritual unity. This vocation differs relatively little with the vocation of any Christian minister, from the founding of the church until today, but for Herbert it had a more urgent purpose. He observed the Church's failure to become a united and governable whole, as controversy and schism drove the sense of division deeper and firmer in the late Jacobean era, when Herbert came of age and composed his poetry. Therefore, Herbert sought to educate and reinvigorate the people of England with a broad, traditional, and nonschismatic notion of Christianity. In *Return to the Middle Way*, Christopher Hodgkins argued that this *via media* represents a return to the Elizabethan settlement, but I think Herbert's nostalgia runs deeper³. The element Herbert wanted to institute in his "church" of both educated and uneducated laypeople could simply be called 'spirit', the original foundation of the Christian Church. Also but not only the Holy Spirit, Herbert's idea of "spirit" reacts to the schisms widening the gap between low and high church Anglicanism, which he believed weakened the spiritual health of the laity, as indicated by his critique of Puritanism in the *Musae Responsoriae* and his critique of corrupt authority in *The Country Parson*. "Spirit" describes a liveliness in religion, a sense of inspired purpose that effectively qualifies the English

³ It is worth noting, since my argument depends on a continuity between external and internal church architecture that Herbert actually began *physically* restoring a church in 1625, the Leighton Ecclesia in Huntingdonshire, a practice that probably informed his injunction to keep up church appearances in *The Country Parson*.

people as an elect nation, a second Israel. As I said, “spirit” also includes his notion of the Holy Spirit, without which a temple is only walls and frame. Herbert made it his life work to bring a carnal people into spirituality, to make the inner part of the British Church worthy the bright lineaments that shine from without.

This purpose inheres in his authorial project for his set of poems, *The Church*. After all, the set of poems is a “church”, though in what respect and how remains somewhat obscure⁴. Most often, literary critics define the mysterious “Church”⁵ in terms of the ecclesial controversy raging in pamphlets during the period. Scholars refer to visible and invisible churches, and other points of disputation. Intelligently, Ann M. Myers objected that this tendency has obscured the fact of the church itself as a piece of architecture⁶. I second this objection but would like to add that *The Church* also refers to the large body of Christ’s redeemed—the holy catholic church referred to in scripture and the writings of Reformists and Catholics alike. In the universalist language of Herbert’s Anglicanism, it also means the elect Church of England, the institution Herbert made it his life’s work to inspire.

However, in the context of the poetry, this “Church” is actually his community of readers, who share the lively inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Exploiting his poetic gift for the service of both his nation and his faith, Herbert created a poetic counterpart for his beloved Anglican Church. Herbert’s poetic church features a preacher, parishioners, sacraments, and all the other features of the congregation. Herbert believed the same element required by the physical church necessary to his poetic “Church” as well: the Holy Spirit. To ensure the presence

⁴ Both *George Herbert’s Christian Narrative and Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert* argue that Herbert’s “Church” reflects a “Middle Way” conservatism.

⁵ Whenever I refer to the “Church” of Herbert’s poems I capitalize it and add quotations, as a way of estranging it.

⁶ Myers “Restoring ‘The Church-Porch’: George Herbert’s Architectural Style”

of the Spirit among the readers of the work, Herbert exemplifies the presence of the Spirit through speakers whose complex meditations exemplify the secret operations of the Spirit. This is the main mode of *The Church*, his collected lyrics, but in “The Church Porch” he presents himself as the preacher of his poetic “church”, using didacticism to reach those whom more internal spiritual meditation will not. Yet to speak to his educated or skeptical readers, Herbert, like all good preachers, needed other tools of persuasion than didacticism. To this end, exemplarity becomes his major instrument for teaching reformation in *The Church*. By sincerely modeling both his struggle for faith and the gradual assurance of grace, Herbert’s speakers in *The Church* suggest imitative models that teach the Christian lifestyle by example⁷. At the same time, the very process of meditation, fueled by earnest belief, testifies to and passes the Spirit of God that is for Herbert the basic unit of religious understanding and accord.

More will be said about the literary attributes of Herbert’s poetic church, but first I must speak to the spiritual contents Herbert meant to evoke. For George Herbert, the human world is sensual, rational, and limited, but the Spirit connects human beings to the mystical world of God, which reason alone cannot grasp. If we could change our perspective with God’s, we would see the world as it really exists, a series of emotional interrelationships among God and his creatures,

⁷ It may be asked, if Herbert always had this didactic purpose in mind, why ask Nicholas Ferrar to burn his collected poems? A glance at the letter as transcribed by Walton immediately the question. Even if Walton’s enthusiastic account is true, Herbert clearly never intended to burn his poems. He told Ferrar to publish the work “if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor Soul” (quoted from Wilcox xxxvii). Herbert conceived his poetry as having a teaching or reforming purpose, even if it only reaches on the individual level. Poetry finds individuals, as preaching reaches and constitutes groups. “A Verse may find him whom a Sermon flies,” Herbert says, thereby announcing both his intention for his poetry and his reason for publication (“The Church Porch” 5). In light of Herbert’s ideas about the didactic position of poetry, it seems unlikely he seriously considered abandoning his manuscript. Instead, the statement given in Walton identifies his high-minded expectations for the inspirational power of his poetry.

secured by the bonds of love. Love is both the content of God's world and the human being's bridge to it: love experienced through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit provides linkage to God's world via an emotional, affective experience, rather than a rational "knowing". Through the Spirit, human beings feel the goodness of God and their dependence upon Him. By feeling love, they glimpse the created world through God's goodness itself. The believer understands God's world better when he or she turns away from rationality and embraces this emotionalism. Since love connects the parts of God's creation together, to feel divine love through the Spirit is to see the real world, rather than the false world of nervous or arrogant intellectualism.

For Herbert, reason creates the divisions that separate one sect of the church from another. Reason is a tool of the schools, used to widen differences among essentially united perspectives. For Herbert, poetry's strength is not the doctrinal position that it creates but the sensitive, explorative way poetry moves through questions of deep spiritual import. It is a perspective informed and sustained by the love of God reflected through human life. In an attempt to write *The Church's* theological epitaph critics have lost sight of its rich spiritual life and the liveliness with which it considers its positions on Christian experience, within, around, and through doctrine. In my analysis, I aim to rediscover Herbert's experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, the feeling of it in the mind and heart, which, despite being bound in the fleshly body, serve as gateways to the soul⁸. My approach necessitates a concomitant awareness of doctrine, but the difference between lived spirituality and abstract theology in Herbert's poems is a distinction as sharp and inviolable as the separation between the Letter and Spirit of the Word.

⁸ As I lay out in Chapter 2 "Our Souls and Fleshly Hearts" the alignment of mental and emotional faculties in the physical body becomes a major element of Herbert's unique exposition of the doctrine of holy "motions".

The operation of the Holy Spirit is a key component in Herbert's verse, in Herbert's mind if not the mind of his readers. In fact, the Holy Spirit offered the key difference between redeemed and unredeemed Christian poetry. John Calvin, Herbert's theological father, explains the distinction between "the flesh"—things worldly—and "the spirit"—things of God. For Calvin, the distinction is absolute, and all flesh is corrupted and sinful. The fall of Adam left human intellect and will corrupted along with the entire human person (Calvin 2.3). Coming from a corrupted source, all products of human imagination must be corrupted as well: hence the divisiveness and isolating ability of theology. By scriptural injunction, those dead in the flesh must be reborn in the Spirit to enjoy the regenerate life promised to the redeemed. Likewise, to write redeemed poetry requires a presence that could regenerate the human mind and will. If we imagine that words on the page, like flesh, must be corrupted, then a redeemed poetry requires the presence of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit must be felt within the dead stone walls of a steeple-house to make it a church, so must the Spirit be felt in the reading and writing of Herbert's poems to transform them into the church that their name declares them to be. Corporeal poetry must be made sacred by the presence of the Spirit.

To this end, the poems continually worry at the distinction of spirit and matter, soul and body. The speakers often present their earnest desire to consecrate their own body and heart as a temple for God's Spirit. But, Herbert being a complicated thinker, this analysis of spirit and body rarely deals in unequivocal terms. Most often, the desire for spiritual regeneration is as far as the speaker can reach. The realities of dogma snap the speaker back into place like a rubber band. When the speaker worries at the distinction between flesh and spirit, he flirts with the risk of alienating God by his arrogance. It is a sin to believe that one's own corporeal mental faculties suffice to comprehend things that belong only to the Spirit, as the natural scientists and

theologians do in “Agonie” and “Divinitie”. Herbert desperately wants to avoid their sin of trusting one’s own knowledge and experience of the world rather than the knowledge of God alone. In “Eph. 4.30” and “The Holy Communion” the speaker examines the difference between soul and body. The speaker walks a fine line in his attempt to articulate the experience of the Holy Spirit through the medium of his own sinful mind and body. In these poems, Herbert’s speakers’ saving grace is their willingness to experience God’s goodness on God’s terms and not their own. Often, failing to achieve trust in God, the speakers must equivocate, wonder, and question. These moments of indecision are among the profoundest spiritual expressions in Herbert’s poetry, projections into the void, blips of desire for grace, unprotected by reason and often standing opposite traditional Calvinist dogma. Yet by Herbert’s own belief in the power of sincerity, against the power of reason, the equivocal nature of these expressions—their sincere desire to please God exactly, their fear that they do not—consecrates them with the very object of their desire, in the form of the Spirit’s living presence.

I argue Herbert imagined physical bodies as lively receptacles for the power of the Holy Spirit. In Herbert’s conception, the aliveness of physical bodies replaces the static edifice of the physical church. To accomplish this goal, Herbert’s poems worry at the distinction between spirit and matter, trying to find a place for the Holy Spirit of God to enter into the physical matter of the body. As a centerpiece, I use Herbert’s little-discussed poem “The Holy Communion”, since it contains Herbert’s most successful attempt in this enterprise. As Regina Schwartz illustrated at length, communion became a popular topic for the Renaissance English poets, because the sacrament promised to secure the holy within a language-like sign-system. Communion promised a means of understanding human language, and poetry, as a spiritual experience. Herbert often meditates on the sacrament and poetry, two processes that promise to spiritualize

the physical; he uses poetry and sacramentalism together not to elevate the status of poetry but to teach important spiritual lessons. In *The Church* his instruction turns away from the static architecture of the physical church to the internal architecture of his poetic “church”, his community of readers. Through poetry, Herbert tries to inspire his readers’ daily lives, empower their physical and emotional existence with God’s presence. Though I will not examine this poem, the trend concludes with “Love (III)”, a poem dissected enough to be left alone. As the climax of Herbert’s poetic collection, the third “Love” concludes the transition from physical to bodily churches by displaying the interaction between God, or Love, and the human soul, in astonishingly physical terms. Since it acts as both allegory, metaphor, and scene of literal action, the poem shows poetry’s sacramental power at its liveliest. Herbert’s other communion poems imagine the bridging of the physical and divine, but “Love” finally achieves it⁹.

Herbert’s poetic project is only half of his vocation as England’s spiritual reformer. No stranger to public life, when Herbert assumed the rectorship of Bemerton he embarked on an educational vocation that complements his poetic production. In *The Country Parson*, he describes his vision for the spiritual life of the priest. As priest, Herbert speaks not just to individual readers but to a community, the “heavy” common people of Bemerton. He works to inspire their lives with a basic spiritualism he believes will counter the divisiveness of controversial schismatics. Herbert’s role in *The Church* is internal, leading to inward inspiration, but in *The Country Parson*, Herbert’s priest is a visible icon of the Holy Spirit itself, as I will explain momentarily. Herbert’s reasons for doing this are several. First, it must be admitted Herbert has a low estimation of the spiritual capabilities of his audience. As John Foxe proved

⁹ As I will explain in Chapter 2, my decision to not analyze “Love (III)” comes not from doubt of its sophistication or importance, but from the many able and sufficient readings that have anticipated what I would want to say about it.

with his woodcuts in the broadly influential *Actes and Monuments*, the common people of England responded to images as well as words. In *The Country Parson* Herbert's priest performs the role of a visual spiritual icon that plants the Holy Spirit at the visible center of their lives. Following the respect for images common in early modern rhetoric, Herbert also recommends the use of highly imagistic rhetoric in public sermons. Secondly, Herbert's visual imagination in *The Country Parson* responds to the problems created by Puritan writers like William Perkins. For preachers like Perkins, the most important aspect of preaching was "the demonstration (or shewing) of the spirit"—displaying the inward effects of the Holy Spirit to a world that needs the outward sign to believe ("The Arte of Prophesying", x). Herbert felt this need to display the internal effects of his spirituality, leading him to create a visual as well as internal spiritual persona.

Herbert's theological thinking is not especially original, but his version of Christianity remains distinctive and poetic. In keeping with early Jacobean Anglicanism, Herbert's Christianity is doctrinally Calvinist and ecclesiastically Lutheran. He interprets "Doctrine" and "Life", the twin aspects of Christianity through the types of religious knowledge conceptualized respectively in *The Church* and *The Country Parson*—one a code for individual belief, the other for communal mutuality and obedience. In general, Herbert feels a need to think about Christianity as something both bodily and spiritual. As empty bodies, human beings require the presence of God to be sanctified and cleaned to perform righteous deeds—fulfilling the Christian "Life". At the same time, knowledge about one's belief, what Herbert calls "Doctrine", is not a matter of abstract knowledge but the direct experience of the body. Therefore, the "taste" of the Holy Spirit confirms human beings' faith, sealing as in the sacrament of communion. As only one half of the Christian lifestyle, "Doctrine" always sends the believer back into the world to

live out the Christian “life”, as a believer among believers. Once again, the Holy Spirit plays a central role, joining person to person in the spiritual and physical unity of the church. On the micro and macro scale, George Herbert conceives the religious person as a body awaiting the infiltration and institution of the Holy Spirit. Doctrinally speaking, this is not a fundamental revision of Christian principle, but it arrives from his poetic imagination. Herbert’s consistency in this enterprise shows his power as both an educator and a poet.

CHAPTER 2

“OUR SOULS AND FLESHLY HEARTS”: COMMUNION OF THE BODY AND SOUL IN *THE CHURCH*

Introduction

Thinking about the church as a congregation confirmed by the Spirit provides a useful method for reading all the poems in *The Temple*. If we understand physical matter as dead and corrupted flesh, then we can understand the pages of *The Church* similarly as an unliving object awaiting inspiration. This inspiration comes when the poems live on the breath of their readers. Together, the author and audience of *The Church* form a “church” as such, defined by the communicant relationship between its parts. As a confirmed believer in the power of sanctified verse, George Herbert probably expected readers to feel or to be inspired while they read, as Elizabeth Clarke suggests he felt while writing. By the power of the Spirit, the dead matter of the page, like the dead stone of the tabernacle, comes alive with the stuff of salvation. My interpretation requires that Herbert’s conception of *The Church* precludes the experience of his “secular readers”, who are manifold, especially after the onset of the twentieth century. In Herbert’s view, the aesthetic and religious belong together. Many great studies have followed the New Critics and examined Herbert’s poems as abstract articles of literary greatness, divorced from their religious contexts. Other, historical analyses still resemble these insofar as they have studied how Herbert’s poems engage with and transformed their contemporary religious environment. I would like to return focus to what these poems *do*, in the experience of the author

and the reader—how they accomplish the spiritual goals proper within the confines of a church, and a temple.

As the "church" of Herbert's poems is his community of readers, created and sustained by the Spirit's presence, Herbert's own poetry also requires the Spirit to give life to the unliving words on his page. The poetry gives Herbert a chance to dramatize (and occasionally analogize) this very process, through the emotional experience of both his readers and himself. According to my argument, the desire to feel the Spirit always comes wedded to his desire for a physical life, for reasons I will explore below. Concomitant with Herbert's concern about bringing the Spirit to his poetry is his desire to feel the Spirit in the physical world in general, and in the Eucharist in particular. Because no believer knows for sure that God approves his private desires, Herbert's speakers continually worry and struggle with the terms of their yearning to bridge the divide between spiritual and physical. In the process of their anxiety, the speakers achieve the strange assurance that God speaks to them and to the readers of the poetry. Paradoxically, by means of their sincere anxiety—worrying that they transgress—these speakers actually please God by infusing their words with emotionalism that becomes both testament to and the result of his inspiration.

In this chapter, I will explore the variety of ways this conflict between emotion, spirit, and physical body energizes the poems of *The Church*. Despite the collection's title, its first poem, "The Altar", alerts us that the poetry's concern is personal rather than institutional or architectural. Herbert calls the language of his poetry "A broken ALTAR...made of a heart, and cemented with tears" (1-2). From the title *The Church*, we may expect a work concerned with spirituality and, from the visual design of "The Altar", built upon an architectural scheme. However, even in his architectural pattern poem, Herbert reminds us that churches are not built

from walls, or even from altars, but from human hearts joined together by mutual feeling. As I said previously, Herbert sensed a discrepancy between the “lineaments divine” of the physical church and the vacuous spiritual space of the human, emotional church. The tension between the architecture of the physical church and the interior one animates the poems of Herbert’s collection. As “The British Church” suggests, Herbert often found the outward church more inspiring than the inward one, believing that people’s individual consciences lacked the spirituality he believed necessary for salvation. This focus on interiority has a heightened importance in the context of Herbert’s Reformed spirituality. In Reformed theology, the interior experience of individuals suggests spiritually important qualities, including the presence of prevenient grace itself. The right emotional attitude could indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit or, terrifyingly, its absence, and the corresponding absence of God’s grace. As Deborah Shuger suggests, in Reformed spirituality, “emotional states in turn are contingent upon the presence or the absence of the divine within the heart.” (100) Divinity registers not through outward but through inward revelation, the testimony of the Spirit. This revelation consists in the sincere love for God, which indicates a reciprocal love God has for the believer.

A problem arises from the multiplicity of emotional experience, and the ambiguity of those experiences. Human love might indicate either a merely personal affection or the authorizing presence of the Holy Spirit, and the believer must decide which is which. Confused between identifying his love as carnal or spiritual, the poet of *The Church* consistently seems caught up in conflicts about the moral power of emotion. On the one hand, he hopes to share his sincere emotional experience with God, thereby experiencing the mutual love that assures him of his own salvation. At the same time, he feels the corruption inherent in the entire human person,

body and soul¹⁰. How can he tell the difference between the fallen emotions created by his human mind and the ennobling interior experience of the Holy Spirit? This ambiguity generates the conflict of his poems, in which troubled speakers wonder whether their emotion remains only human, or ascends to the divine. This spiritual consideration has important emotional valences, as Renaissance sacred texts generally align spirituality and emotion. The poems repeatedly dramatize a conflict that is importantly not only spiritual, but emotional as well.

On the other hand, because of the controversy surrounding the location of the soul in human bodies, we can also call this content “physical”¹¹. The cardiocentric theory of early modern anatomy, in transition but still strong in Herbert’s time, upholds the heart as the seat of intelligence, emotions, and the only place in the physical body where the soul appears¹². Descartes famously located the human soul in the pineal gland, but for centuries, following Aristotle, physiologists claimed it lay in the heart (Aristotle 237, Descartes 106). The language of scripture makes space for this classical belief: “Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in *fleshy tables of the heart*” (2. Corin. 3:3, my emphasis)¹³. In accordance with both scripture and early modern physiology, I refer to human emotions as particularly “fleshy”

¹⁰ Cf. Calvin 2.3. He explains the distinction between “the flesh”—things worldly—and “the spirit”—things of God. For Calvin, flesh included under its purview certain aspects of the intellect and will, parts he ascribes to the soul. Herbert’s concern for the physical body shows a desire for the two parts of the human person to function together in righteousness. For Calvin, spiritual regeneration does remake the parts of body and soul which are reborn; however, they remain entirely distinct parts of the human person.

¹¹ This background comes from a published dissertation by Cori Perdue, *If the heart be moved’: The Triumph of the Heart in Milton, Herbert, and Donne*.

¹² Cf. Marvell, “A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body”, lines 9-10: “Tortur’d, besides each other part, / In a vain Head, and double Heart.” Marvell, living many years after Harvey’s discovery of the function of the heart, hedges his bet about the location of the soul, making either its potential seat.

¹³ All references from the King James Version.

phenomena belonging to the body. Though early modern anatomy allows the heart to be the seat of the soul as well as intelligence and emotion, this fact alone does not explain Herbert's persistent exploration of the collapsing of the spiritual-physical distinction. As said earlier, Herbert's poetry requires recourse not only to the idea of a physical "church" inspired by God's presence but also, perhaps, a physical poetry likewise inspired.

In Herbert's verse, the physical, emotional, and spiritual not just meet but become practically indistinguishable. The confusing of spirit, body, and emotion indicates simultaneously a problem and its solution: a problem, because the speaker's identification with the physical world shows him as a human being addicted to living a corporeal life, but also its solution, since through this confused, physical-emotional world, the Holy Spirit speaks, not in spite of but through human bodies, and in so doing expresses and exercises the redemptive potential in human speech and action. The bulk of Herbert's poetry is not so much a meditation on the process of spiritual regeneration but an acting out of that process. As Stanley Fish correctly identifies in his analysis of "The Temper", many of the poems are structured as problems to be solved. As in Sidney's first poem in *Astrophil and Stella*, the poem itself is proof of the problem's solution. Yet because of Herbert's complication of pure reason, the solution is not the ratiocinative result but the fact of the poem itself as an act of communication¹⁴. In Fish's words, "the sense of heaven's desertion leads to the mental exertions which produce the poem" (162). However, the poetic solution is not merely an expression of individuality but a spiritual recognition. Rather than a merely mental exercise, Herbert's poetic exertions express the sincere emotions of the speaker, and these sincere emotional experiences, as Elizabeth Clarke terms

¹⁴ See Schwartz's analysis of "Love (III)" at 133 for an exposition of the importance of communication in Herbert's poetry.

them “groans”, connect the speaker’s experience to the Holy Spirit. As Clark says, the feeling of desertion becomes a sign of one’s true and sincere preexisting faith, which in Calvinist terms demonstrates one’s election. Paradoxically, faith can admit total uncertainty; in certainty’s place, the desire to please God consecrates the believer’s experience. To want God’s grace is to have it, since the sincere expression of desire indicates the presence of prevenient grace. As such, these sincere expressions of the problems often work as their own solutions.

Though the poems’ concerns are usually personal, Herbert plays on the architectural metaphor to suggest by comparison how his community of readers resembles a “church” of its own. Herbert’s temple moves not from outer doors to inner sanctuary but from architectural to human forms of the church. I read the architectural pattern-poem of “The Altar” as a starting point from which later poems diverge. Herbert’s “The Holy Communion”, though little discussed by critics, holds a special place among these poems by working to transition the place of communion from the architecture of the real church to the hearts of human participants in that church. “The Holy Communion” shows Herbert’s speaker worrying over the distinction between spirit and matter—a distinction given particular force by both scientific theory and the theology of sacramentalism. As a midway point in the collection, “The Holy Communion” opens up the range of semantic possibility by teaching us to view physical spaces and physical bodies as spiritual in turn. By the poem’s end, he relinquishes the agency of his own body and soul to the Holy Spirit. C.A. Patrides called the Lord’s Supper “the marrow of Herbert’s sensibility”, and critics prove this both by exploring his Eucharistic poems and demonstrating the place it holds even in poems not directly touching Holy Communion (18). The collection concludes with one such poem, “Love (III)”, a work of quiet simplicity that simultaneously figures communion, the acceptance of grace, the entrance to heaven—in short, the entire narrative of Christian

redemption. “Love (III)” describes the invitation of God, “Love”, to the soul in completely physical terms. Love and the soul sit down together and share a meal. Among the other accomplishments of Herbert’s verse, he created a sequence of poems concluding in a moment where soul and body, God and believer, meet on terms of astonishing physical equality¹⁵. In my final analysis, I read “Ephesians 4.30” as another expression of this important bodily-spiritual encounter. In this poem, Herbert dramatizes the process by which the human soul becomes a vehicle for the Holy Spirit. By exercising his sincere emotions, Herbert’s speaker gradually moves from doubt to acceptance of grace—a grace that finds expression in terms as physical as some of the most sensual poetry of the Early Modern period.

Sacrament in Verse

My argument about “The Holy Communion” depends on Herbert’s reaction to Calvin’s doctrine of communion, making it worth explaining here. According to Calvin’s view, God does not transubstantiate into bread and wine; instead, the Holy Spirit recognizes and accepts the believer’s preexisting faith, with the physical tokens remaining as mere symbols of faith, while the real communion occurs between the soul and Christ’s Real Presence through the Holy Spirit¹⁶. Yet remnants of the original Catholic view, in which God mystically appears in wine and in bread, linger about the language of some early modern Reformed writings on

¹⁵ I will not be illustrating the body-spirit content of “Love (III)”, though I think it brings this narrative to a conclusion. I made this decision because someone else preceded me. In “Repurposing the Body”, Daniel Wade McClain argues that “Love (III)” features the prominent triumph of the body through a spiritual reconciliation. The conversation between Love, or God, and the soul takes place in terms so close and corporeal that the distinctions between physical and spiritual almost entirely drop away. McClain’s purpose involves lifting up the disciple’s body as an imitation of Christ, mine suggesting a concern arising out of contemporary scientific discourse that displaced Aristotelean cardiocentrism.

¹⁶ See Calvin, 4.17.

communion¹⁷. Like many of his Protestant contemporaries, George Herbert wondered at the possibility of a miraculous transformation of flesh into spirit, of lifeless matter into living soul, devoting several poems of *The Temple* to the miracle of communion¹⁸. Herbert's concern about the Eucharist reflects a desire to see the physical and spiritual sides of the human being joined in one undivided unity, as his use of physical and spiritual terminology in “The Holy Communion” shows. The poem also demonstrates how the imaginative working out of the problems entailed by doctrine—though this working out cannot exceed doctrine—actually demonstrates the attitude by which Herbert understands himself to have assurance of grace.

In “The Holy Communion”, Herbert’s speaker struggles with the soul’s captivity in the merely physical human body. Bound in the heart, the soul suffers, yet more because the proximity of the two reinforces their distinction than the body actively limiting the spirit. Lines 14-15 consider the heart-soul distinction explicitly. Discussing the role of the Holy Spirit in sealing the sacrament of communion, Herbert envisions the Holy Spirit passing between the soul and the body itself. Herbert’s speaker reacts against the Calvinist doctrine of communion already described and imagines the physical elements of communion transcending the merely corporeal to become spirit:

Leaping the wall that parts
Our souls and fleshly hearts.

As Herbert well knows, only the Holy Spirit might leap “the wall that parts / Our souls” from the fallen aspects of human nature, and that wall is nothing less or more than the body

¹⁷ See Schwartz 16-17: “Their preoccupation with the substance of the Eucharist does suggest that many reformed poets hungered, even, as their Catholic detractors would have it, were condemned ‘to apprehend and desire’ a dinner that they could only imagine—however compelling their imaginings.”

¹⁸ Many poems of *The Church* invoke or evoke communion, but those treating it specifically include “The Agonie”, “Divinitie”, “The Banquet”, and “Love (III)”.

itself, fallen, corrupted, dead. If the Holy Spirit can leap that wall, make its presence known through the body rather than in spite of it, then human affection itself has restored human beings from the fallen state. For Christ to enter the bread, and through the bread the material of the speaker's body, would provide a communion uniting body, not only soul, with Christ's Real Presence. The Holy Spirit would have the power to transform not only faith into an assurance of grace, but also carnal love into divine love. This effect, the redemption of the body, exceeds the Spirit's role in Herbert's Calvinist doctrine. Only in the Last Judgment will the body and soul be reconciled to God and to each other. Immediately after, the second part of Herbert's poem corrects this possibility, reminding us that human bodies remain corrupted even as human souls prepare to receive grace. In this respect, the poem remains within Calvinist confines. "Onely thy grace," Herbert's speaker acknowledges, "Knoweth the ready way, / And hath the privie key" to bring the speaker's heart into union with God (19-21). The corrupted human body does not need to experience Christ's presence for grace to operate at the spiritual level. Despite this, the possibility expressed in these two lines in "The Holy Communion" permeates both halves of the text, even as the poem's main thrust reminds us that it cannot be. These lines depict the high hope of the speaker's religious life: to join the spiritual and physical parts of his corrupted being into a completed and redeemed unity.

The heart-brain controversy bears on this directly¹⁹. The new science of the heart promulgated by thinkers like William Harvey separates the physical heart from the spiritual soul, driving the gulf between body and soul even wider. For Herbert, poetry and sacramentalism

¹⁹ See Perdue 17: "Herbert's leap to material yet out-of-grasp objects illuminates his desire to understand the heart in both material and non-material ways. He yearns to join the physical and metaphysical worlds, but he does not know how to bridge the gap between science and theology."

work together to bridge this disjunction and save the bodily experience of the soul. As Regina Schwartz illustrates in *Sacramental Poetics*, the sacraments and language share a single status as signs. Whether verbal or sacramental, signs are physical objects that can nevertheless point to the metaphysical. On the one hand, the sign relationship keeps the two realities separated; on the other, it creates a semantic “space”, an ambiguity in which the sign can seem both literal and symbolic. In the case of sacraments, the space allows the sign to be both spiritual and physical, belonging to the corporeal as well as the divine; in language, single words may straddle lexical categories and meanings, creating multiple and apparently paradoxical significations. For Schwartz, this dual sign structure appeals to early modern reformed poets as a means of recovering spirituality from the loss of the doctrine of transubstantiation and, through it, Christ’s Real Presence. While I agree with Schwartz in the corresponding function of the sign in sacrament and poetry, I do not find the root cause in a reaction to the withdrawal of the Real Presence. Through Calvinist ascension, Herbert believed he could enjoy the Real Presence via Holy Communion. However, in “The Holy Communion”, Herbert will turn the sacrament, as he turns language itself, into a semantic tool for bringing spirit and flesh, body and soul, into temporary mutual equivalence. I do not go as far as suggesting Herbert carried this perspective back into his ordinary theology, but in the space of the poem, as during the space of the sacrament, he enjoyed the ambiguity that made this simultaneously physical and metaphysical existence possible.

“The Holy Communion” has received minimal critical attention, with most commentators using the poem to establish Herbert’s view on its titular sacrament. Of those interested in the poem’s structure, Frank L. Huntley suggests that the two halves should be considered separate

poems, mislabeled by Herbert's collector Nicholas Ferrar²⁰. F. E. Hutchinson effectively makes the case for the continuity of "The Holy Communion" by observing how the final stanza answers the poem's metrically distinct first half, but if the two halves belong together, they should together support a consistent structure throughout. To this end, James Boyd White describes the poem as antiphonal, with the second part answering the first. According to White, the first four stanzas worry over how the Spirit of Christ enters bread and soul through a spiritual process with a physical analogue, but the second part abandons the physical language and accepts the gift of grace. Speaking theologically, this movement aligns Herbert's speaker with the Calvinist tradition that Christ's Real Presence in communion acts only upon the soul of the believer in the medium of the Holy Spirit, not through the actuality of Christ's presence in the host²¹. When White's Herbert abandons the physical metaphors, he discharges his fleshly baggage and becomes ready to receive grace.

Though he makes an effective case for the poem having a cohesive structure, White misses how the language of physicality continues in lines 25-40, worried at until physical language's boundary with the spiritual at least partly drops away. The physical metaphors in lines 1-24 serve as guideposts to the speaker's desires about the sacrament of communion and offer the poem's strongest figurative statements about the certain feeling of the Holy Spirit's presence. These are the metaphors of metabolism and "animal spirits", and if their attempt to blur the physical and the spiritual produces mixed results, the second four stanzas imply that this blurring inevitably results from a feeling of God's grace. The speaker's attempt to understand communion through physical language fails doctrinally but contains the seed of greater truth,

²⁰ Cf. Huntley 74.

²¹ See McIntyre 123 for a thorough explanation of this difference.

since Christ will blend the physical and spiritual in the Last Judgment, as the speaker hopes the Spirit will in communion. Previous critics have not looked to the Last Judgment as an important image of this poem and, as a result, have missed how the last stanzas realize the promise of the physical language in the first few. Further, the description of Adam's state in Paradise locks in the physical metaphor, by envisioning a world in which matter touched spirit, and soul touched God. Structured by these two visions, of the Judgment in lines 27-28 and Paradise in lines 29-32, the second four stanzas reveal how the first four appropriately figure the past and future hope for human's spiritual aspiration: the uniting of body and soul.

Though the poem's main plot works through a series of meditations on the theologically prescribed power of communion, a subplot undergirds this narrative and offers a contrasting perspective on the ideas the main narrative describes. This hidden imagistic structure consists in four parts, each one subtly described and placed in implicit contrast to each other. Each of these images is in some sense "physical", bodily even, and in another important sense "spiritual". Often, the spiritual side of these images emerges only by association, whether from lexical ambiguity or exegesis of a scriptural idea. The images are "the way of nourishment and strength", the "attendant" bodily spirits, the Last Judgment, and Paradise. Each of these images works against the dominant stream of thought in the poem, which seeks to carefully limit the physical-spiritual transformation within the bounds prescribed carefully by Calvin's doctrine of communion. These four images suggest, implicate, and imagine more than the confines of Calvinist communion will allow. They suggest the dissolution of the very boundary of physical and spiritual that the poem's main plot attempts to secure.

This tension of being trapped within the semantic bounds of doctrine appears in the formal elements of the poem. Episcopalian Church writer Hilary M. Bogert suggests that the

problematic metrical change at lines 25-40 reflects a liturgical shift: “The Eucharistic prayer over, the congregation has more time to contemplate these ‘holy mysteries’” (13). However reasonable this suggestion, Bogert does not explain precisely how the long, uneven stanzas of the first part reflect a prayer structure or how the shorter singsong tetrameter and trimeter lines in the second reflect this shift. My answer lies in the appearance of the stanzas on the page. In the first four stanzas, the elegant, long, five-beat lines of each stanza are followed by squat, awkward-looking lines of iambic trimeter until the penultimate lines, which return to the long iambic form. The longer elegant lines enclose the shorter lines, suggesting the original definition of stanzas as “rooms”. The stanzas as rooms reflects their being physical spaces, but also enclosed ones. If the meaning of the first twenty-four lines worries at the spiritual-physical divide, the metrical structure demonstrates that the divide will remain firmly in place. Indeed, this explains why the denouement of the section, invoking the power of grace, coming through the Spirit rather than the body, remains both semantically and visually closed: “Onley thy grace,” the speaker says, “knoweth the ready way”, not the body. Thus, the first stanzas’ structure reinforces the distinction that the stanzas’ meaning tries to open up, that is, until line 25. There the poem shifts from speculation into imperative address toward the Almighty; so too changes the metrical structure. The lines now pair in tetrameters and trimeters. The visual effect is successive lines joined in intimate connection. The simplicity of the metrical scheme, often used in popular song, also reflects the idea that the joy of communion lies not in its more complicated mystery, but in its easy, gracious availability. As the speaker envisions the power of communion transformed into images of the Last Judgment and finally Paradisal existence, the poem transcends the image of stanzas as “rooms” and visually suggests a dissolution of the physical-spiritual barrier.

The second two stanzas contain the first imagistic consideration of the Holy Spirit acting within the physical medium of the heart and body:

But by the way of nourishment and strength
Thou creep'st into my breast;
Making thy way my rest,
And thy small quantities my length;
Which spread their forces into every part,
Meeting sinnes force and art.

Yet can these not get over to my soul,
Leaping the wall that parts
Our souls and fleshly hearts;
But as th'outworks they may control
My rebel-flesh, and carrying thy name,
Affright both sinne and shame. (7-9)

“By the way of nourishment and strength” carries two meanings, which together suggest a collapsing of the body-soul divide. “Way” carries its physiological meaning: “A duct or channel of any kind in the body of man or other animal” (“Way”). Christ enters through the “way of nourishment and strength”: through the same metabolic pathways that earthly food travels to nourish the body. Now, this way immediately contrasts with Christ’s “way” in the next line: “making *thy way* my rest” (my emphasis). “Way” loses its secular, bodily meaning and becomes the religious lifestyle, the Way of Christ. “Rest”, however, returns us to the physical. Rest, strength, and nourishment refresh the vital energies the human body needs to function healthily, so although the new “way” is no longer secular but spiritual, the language retains a physical character. The physical, metabolic way of the body links to the religious and spiritual meaning.

If we expected the Holy Spirit to redeem the human body, the poem corrects our temporary misreading: “Yet can these not get over to my soul”. “These” means the elements of communion, the bread, wine, and cup through which Christ enters the soul. Though undoubtedly a corrective, this statement also describes a real spiritual aspiration, which I have already emphasized, “Leaping the wall that parts / Our souls and fleshly hearts”. The phrasing is

awkward: “yet *can these not* get over to my soul”. It is probably too much to assume a missing question mark, but the phrasing itself allows for the possibility of a bridging of corporeal and spiritual matter and creates space for the powerful next two lines: “Leaping the wall that parts / Our souls and fleshly hearts”. In lines 15-16, the rhyme of “parts” and “hearts” creates a visual and aural parallel that implies a bridging of two elements similar to what the line’s meaning implies.

Unfortunately, the corrupted flesh makes unmediated communion impossible. Instead, the elements of communion function as the “outworks” that may control, direct, and symbolize the actions of the “rebel-flesh” without dissolving the distinction between body and soul. “Onely thy grace”, the speaker exclaims to God, “Knoweth the ready way, / And hath the privie key” that can unlock the places of the soul. Doctrinally speaking, this fits with Herbert’s Calvinism as already described. Herbert says that wine and bread turn “to spirits refin’d” that “at doore attend / Dispatches from their friend.” (23-24). He suggests that the physical elements of communion do transform into “spirits”, but instead of heavenly spirit or soul, the body digests these elements and turns them into “spirits refin’d”. Here Herbert plays with the multiple meanings of "spirit", just as he plays with the secular and religious meanings of "way". In this case, the punning is subtler, but also more central and complicated. Line 23 has Herbert’s only use of "spirit" in the poem, to refer to the animal "spirits" of the human body. This meaning, “One or other of certain subtle highly-refined substances or fluids (distinguished as natural, animal, and vital) formerly supposed to permeate the blood and chief organs of the body”, carefully limits the semantic range of “spirit” in a way that is ironically evocative (“Spirit”). In a poem about the power of Christ manifested through the Holy Spirit, the limited use of the word must be deliberate. Being part of the circulatory system, these “Spirits” connect to the “way of nourishment and strength”

mentioned earlier, establishing a continuity of physical, bodily images in the poem. Moreover, the Holy Spirit's name functions as a conspicuous absence. By using the word "spirits", Herbert connects the physical animal spirits of the body and the Holy Spirit, whose name we would more readily expect in a poem about one of its miracles. These physical "spirits" attend on the door of the soul, though apparently unable to enter: they "at doore attend / Dispatches from their friend." (23-24) Though his language worries at their distinction, the body and soul remain separated by this exposition of doctrine. Even the appellation "friend", applied to the soul, does little to dispel the feeling that the important spiritual feelings and experiences of the body have been subjugated to the soul.

The image of the attendant "spirits"—a clever, multivalent pun referring to a genius loci as well as to human servants—satisfies no more than the "outworks" of the rebel-flesh described earlier, so the poem explores ways by which the soul and body will achieve a closer joining. These take the form of two important visions, occurring after the metrical change already described, in which the speaker imagines possible horizons within the Christian narrative where the problem of body-soul distinction does not appertain. In his first vision of a simultaneously spiritual and physical state, the speaker invokes the Judgment:

Give me my captive soul, or take
My bodie also thither.
Another lift like this will make
Them both to be together. (25-28)

Here, the first "lift" is the ascension of the soul to the Real Presence of Christ. Unlike transubstantiation, Calvin's view on communion describes the soul flying up to heaven, rather than Christ descending down into bread. When Herbert says, "Give me my captive soul, or take / My bodie also thither", he once again reacts against the unsatisfying doctrine that denies his Lord's presence on the earth. Herbert will commend the ascension to the Real Presence at the

end of the poem when he says that he will “leave th’earth to their food”, but in this stanza he imagines a spiritual alternative (40). Disappointed, he turns to “Another lift like this”, but one which brings both body and soul together in a way that Calvin’s sacramentalism does not. He imagines the Last Judgment, in which body and soul join in a union that will never end²². This final movement of Christian teleology will make moot all sacraments, as well as the distinction between soul and body. With this image in place, Herbert’s speaker can suffice with the heavenly food he enjoys, though it works no transformative change in his corrupted body, because he knows only the final lift will restore the integrity of his entire person.

The poem’s final vision occurs after the speaker acknowledges that grace alone will suffice to reach his soul, with no recourse to his fallen body. Yet this vision itself is one of bodily, rather than purely spiritual, transcendence:

Before that sinne turn’d flesh to stone,
And all our lump to leaven;
A fervent sigh might well have blown
Our innocent earth to heaven. (29-32)

The poem picks up instead the metabolic metaphor of “nourishment and strength” and presents the “lump” of man’s original dough as a “leaven” corrupted by sin. The presence of leavened bread is multiply significant. Obviously, the unleavened bread marks the symbol of the Israelites’ faithfulness during the watch of the last plague in Egypt; conversely, a leavened bread suggests an act of culinary disobedience. Moreover, “leavening” entails adding yeast that makes bread rise, suggesting the Fall was, in fact, a false attempt to rise. The more expanded meanings

²² Other critics suggests the “other lift” is merely a second encounter with the Holy Spirit through the sacrament (White 143, Vendler 234). I find this reading oddly repetitive and lacking force to merit the line’s inclusion. My own reading would not, I believe, benefit from marshalling evidence describing the Judgment as a “lift”, since the meaning is straightforward. Absent strong evidence, my reading depends on the explanatory power of using the Judgment as a primary vision.

“To permeate with a transforming influence as leaven does” and “to imbue or mingle with some tempering or modifying element” were both available to Herbert, and both have implications in a poem about communion (“Leaven”). Communion also involves bread touched by a transforming influence, tempered and modified by some external element. In the context of Adam’s sin, the imagery seems like a subtle joke at the doctrine of transubstantiation.

More importantly, this image emphasizes our fleshy state, our body as a lump or “leaven”. However, bread is only one of two physical images presented in the stanza, the second being breath, specifically, a “fervent sigh”. “Sigh” includes its physical, bodily meaning. Though we are a lump of flesh, we are simultaneously a spirit. We have within us not only cloddish physical flesh, but “spiritus”, etymologically breath and spirit in the same moment. With this image in mind, we arrive at the second crucial image which shows the linking of divine and spiritual: the experience of unfallen Adam. Adam’s flesh may have been light and airy enough to carry upward on a breath, but even more importantly, the breath is Adam’s own. The “fervent sigh” resembles the Reformed idea of a “groan”, which along with tears were one of the human being’s few weapons in the war for God’s grace²³. Here we see Adam, unfallen yet still physical, still existing in a body. In his righteousness, his own breath can carry him to heaven, because his body contains the potential of its own ascension²⁴. By witnessing Adam’s pre-fall physicality, inextricably linked with his spirituality, the speaker observes that flesh is not evil; only sin is. Flesh, like all things, may be corrupted, leavened with pride and self-deceit. Yet even in its

²³ See Herbert “Artillery”: “Then we are shooters both, and thou dost deign / To enter combat with us, and contest / With thine own clay.” (24-26)

²⁴ See Clarke 161: “Once God’s grace has accomplished the intricate process of penetrating the fortress of the heart, a sigh from the heart, inspired by grace, is able to waft the Christian from earth to heaven.” Clarke does not give proper weight to the fact that this process can only be *imagined* after the fall. Within the poem’s confines a “sigh” cannot be a direct link to God except in Paradise, although what Paradisaal beings would have to sigh about is unclear.

original “lump”, in the dust and clay God’s hands molded into man, the first man had “breath”—spiritus—within him. He had the power to ascend heavenward without the awkward division between soul and body. He did not need Holy Communion, because his very breath communed with God. The breath of life breathed through his nostrils, both a spirit and his very vital force. Adam’s spirituality does not require grace, but his relationship with God sounds like fallen human beings’ relationship with Him mediated by the Holy Spirit. Characteristically, the speaker uses physical terms: “He might to heav’n from Paradise go, / As from one room t’another.” (35-6) By imagining the pre-fallen state, the speaker finally collapses the distinction between the physical and spiritual. Only in the Paradisal unfallen state did human beings enjoy an uncorrupted flesh. To taste the Spirit is to remember, for a moment, that Paradisal existence, where breath was a wind—a spirit not separated from body. At the poem’s close, the speaker reminds us how human beings can achieve this brief taste of unification, by ascending to the Real Presence through the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of communion:

Thou has restor’d us to this ease
 By this thy heav’nly bloud;
 Which I can go to, when I please,
 And leave th’earth to their food. (37-41)

Adam’s “ease” is not postlapsarian ease, but believers can briefly taste it through the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Only the Judgment can unite the Christian body and soul, a possibility enjoyed by human beings in Paradise, but tasted here in union Christ’s Real Presence through the medium of the Holy Spirit. Now, we see that the descriptors of grace have not replaced the physical-spiritual metaphors of the first few stanzas. Instead, those metaphors actually anticipate the language of the latter half’s consolation. They described the real heights of human spiritual aspiration, both before and after the Fall. Despite the fact that the poetic narrative asserts the triumph of grace over the body, these four images of physicality assert the

simultaneously physical and spiritual nature of Herbert's experience of communion. If Herbert's theology of the sacrament of communion resembles Calvin, his physical and emotional expression of it remains unique to his poetry. For Calvin, the pneumatic experience of communion by definition does not occur in the body, but for Herbert, it leaves an indelible mark on the emotions, which in turn belong to the body. Herbert often returns to communion, because the sacrament promises that the relationship between God and the believer can be bridged almost to the point of physicality, where spirit, heart, and body mix and are nearly dissolved. The speaker's efforts to collapse these distinctions in "The Holy Communion" seem limited by the fact that Herbert does not believe in transubstantiation, but these four images suggest otherwise, securing body and soul together with language that brings them into immediate presence and mutual equivalence. In this respect, "The Holy Communion", both poem and sacrament, figure the best of the Christian poet's spiritual life, in which God and human beings join both in body and in soul.

For readers unconvinced that the collapsing of the physical-spiritual dichotomy survives the poem's repudiation of transubstantiation, the Williams manuscript version offers a counterexample. In the original design for "The Holy Communion", Herbert rejects transubstantiation much more forcefully and in language that literally mocks the idea. Transubstantiation would appear logical only if God had entered the world for the salvation of bread, rather than of men; if true, Christ came to "Abolish Sinn, not Wheat", the poet laughs (21). Moreover, the Williams manuscript explicitly denies the possibility of bridging the physical and spiritual: "Into my soul [the bread] cannot pass / fflesh (though exalted) keeps his grass / And cannot turn to soul" (37-39). Invoking 1 Peter 1.24, the speaker in Herbert's first version touts the line of Calvinist doctrine and makes a mockery of transubstantiation. Compared to this

scorn, Herbert's language in *The Temple* seems far less dismissive of both transubstantiation and the possibility of bridging soul and body: "Yet can these not get over to my soul" in the Bodleian manuscript reads semantically as "These cannot get over to my soul", but spoken aloud the statement sounds like a question. "Yet can these not get over to my soul / leaping the wall that parts / our souls and fleshly hearts" remains a powerful expression of spiritual possibility, if not doctrinal reality. Moreover, the question opens the door of Herbert's uncertainty about transubstantiation, arising from his very desire for it. Overall, Herbert's revision strengthens the early statements about soul and body, using physical and equivocal language to analogize the Spirit in communion.

Spirit in Verse

The physical and spiritual belong together in Herbert's verse, commenting on each other through their mutual intelligibility. Human experience occasionally flashes with the mystical unknowability of God's grace. The most obvious example of this intersection occurs during Holy Communion, in which human beings have a personal experience—almost a physical experience—of something truly divine. But as religious studies scholar Daniel Wade McClain explains "sacramental power for Herbert reaches beyond the Eucharist to encompass all of the listener's life" (354). Thus, the sacramental feeling occurs even in poems with no explicit connection to communion, such as "Ephesians 4.30". In this poem, the human perspective does not just yield to the divine one, but the divine itself intersects with the believer's experience of his own body. In Herbert's verse, grace becomes tactile, nearly edible, something human beings can hold within their bodies, if only for an effervescent moment. The vehicle of this experience is the Holy Spirit itself, which turns human emotion into an expression of its own divine will.

Unlike many poems in *The Church*, “Ephesians 4.30” announces the Holy Spirit as its very topic²⁵. Like “The Holy Communion”, “Ephes. 4.30: *Grieve not the Holy Spirit, etc.*” considers the spiritual aliveness of the human body and its “fleshly heart.” The speaker wonders how the Holy Spirit effects “Leaping the wall that parts / Our souls and fleshly hearts.” Yet here the speaker additionally wonders how God’s Spirit feels grief, a sensual emotion, as the Ephesians verse that forms the title implies. The verse reads:

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. (Ephes. 4.30)

Herbert’s poem picks up where Paul’s verse leaves off, with the same conjunctive, “And art thou grieved, sweet and sacred dove...” (1) The conjunction gives a sense of immediacy that places us with Herbert’s speaker in the very act of reading the Bible.²⁶ The poem is importantly *about* reading the Bible, a series of negotiations between competing means of reading this passage. Before outlining the two competing ways of reading Herbert’s speaker works through, I want to consider how the verse, and Herbert’s poetic reaction to it, extends the investigation of matter and spirit begun in “The Holy Communion.” We have already noticed that early modern physiologists considered the emotions to be particularly “fleshly”, or bodily, phenomena, and Paul’s verse implies that the Holy Spirit can suffer from a human, even corporeal disease²⁷.

²⁵ A reading of this poem *as* an act of the Holy Spirit has been performed admirably by Professor Jeremy S. Begbie of the Duke Divinity School. Beagle’s article depends upon a premise that some readers of Herbert might not share: that the Spirit perform its operation inside the reading experience of poetry, in 2014 as in the 1630s. This premise serves the remarkable goal of shoring up the vague language that surrounds the “spirit” sometimes invoked in the arts by spiritually-minded critics and artists.

²⁶ See Bloch 33.

²⁷ Humoral theory gives us another lens through which to observe this early modern preoccupation. The early modern explanation of the body’s processes often linked unfettered

Paradoxically, in his catalogue of sensual emotions, Paul suggests that human emotion and human desertion actually “grieves” the Holy Spirit itself. In his poem, Herbert dramatizes the process of coming to understand this verse, and its paradoxical assignment of “grief” to the Holy Spirit. Why, and more importantly how, would God deign to suffer human emotions, “[putting] on sense”, as the poet remarks in line 16? Grief, in this context, might imply merely emotional hurt, or it may possess its more directly corporeal meaning: “To do bodily harm” (Grieve). More importantly, the two concepts are linked.²⁸ From the poem’s title alone, we have a promise of what will come. If God himself can put on a body, as he did not just in this case but in the Incarnation, than surely spirit and body can meet in a mutual medium, the flashpoint of the human heart.

The word “sowre” indicates the same kind of semantic elasticity we observed in “The Holy Communion.” On the one hand, “sowre” obviously means “sour”, as in bitter or disagreeable. The definition fits with the speaker’s diagnosis of his own recalcitrance. On the other hand, “sowre” is also an available spelling for “soar”, suggesting a trip upward, a literal rapture. In Herbert’s Calvinist version of Holy Communion, the soul travels upward to visit the Spirit of God in heaven. As in “The Holy Communion”, the multiple meanings of “sowre” evoke the spiritual and physical simultaneously. Moreover, by pairing a disagreeable, recalcitrant, and human word like “sour” with a rapturous word like “soar”, Herbert implies that the very human experience of his own emotionality might just have the power to enable his spiritual ascension. As we will see, this poem actually solves the problem it describes, since when Herbert’s speaker

emotionality to biological imbalances. Since emotions had special resonance in the Reformed theology of John Calvin, the health of one’s body bore significantly in one’s spiritual health as well.

²⁸ As in so many cases, we can see how the multiply physical and emotional nature of language is something inherent, which a poet like Herbert can skillfully draw out.

can admit his own sinfulness and “sourness”, he acknowledges the power God has over his own will—an act of surrender that portends his own spiritual victory.

Importantly, Herbert’s speaker receives the notion of God grieving from a reading of Scripture. Herbert places us in the reading of scripture in order to make reading a central locus for spiritual transmission. By understanding the relationship between Herbert’s speaker and his author, Paul, we see a model for our own relationship to him. In both cases, a spiritual idea—the idea of the Spirit feeling in a human way—passes through the inspired words of a speaker. The role of reading highlights the audience-author connection between Herbert and us, a mirror of the connection between the Ephesians and Paul. Like Paul, Herbert writes to encourage brotherhood and to diminish difference, all directed at cultivating a people into a religious entity, or a church. I want to describe two possible readings for Paul’s verse, two ways of thinking about the relation between the Spirit and human emotions. These two readings appear in Herbert’s poem as responses to the verse and the negotiation between them provides the engine of the poem. The first I call the “psychological” reading. It assumes that God the Spirit experiences human emotions in a way similar to the speaker’s own experience of emotion. Consequently, he believes that God’s experience of emotion makes him less God and more human. This mistake leads the speaker to faulty conclusions about the relationship between the Spirit and himself. We will see the emotional consequences of this psychological reading shortly. The other view I call the “supernatural” reading. Rather than understanding God’s own emotion as human, this attitude sees human emotion as a work of God’s will. Instead of psychologizing God, this reading would understand divine emotion as an experience that occurs within the human being himself. These emotions, or “motions”, have their source in God’s own will. The human body and heart become mediums for the expression of this essentially divine message. The final images of the poem,

particularly the lyre of the last stanza, demonstrate how Herbert can understand his own emotion as an object of divine will.

Herbert is striving toward the understanding of how body and soul—and by extension, human and divine experience—can momentarily flash into each other and become mutually apparent. The experience of divinity, on divinity’s terms, can appear within human life. However, Herbert’s speaker makes a misstep, arriving at the first means of reading Paul’s verse. Instead of understanding how his own life is contained within a larger divine superstructure, he grasps at his own experience and tries to contain the divine within it. Rather than believing that his own emotions can serve and demonstrate divine will, he makes faulty assumptions about the reverse. He actually mistakes God’s “grief” for a human pathology. This psychological reading swamps Herbert’s speaker in quixotic attempts at self-redemption. He compares God’s relationship to himself to his own relationship to lesser creatures, failing to realize that the difference of kind overwhelms all secondary question of degree. This misreading throws Herbert’s speaker into a spiritual crisis. He cannot understand why the Spirit would deign to grieve for him, since he is “a worm” and not worth the Spirit’s attention (5). When the speaker “tread[s]” a worm, he “pass[es] away and leave[s] it dead” (5-6). Following his own analogy, the speaker expects that when the Spirit “treads” on him, it only passes through, without altering the substance of his flesh. Since his flesh was already “dead” in sin, he expects it will be dead after the Spirit has entered, and exited, it. As in “The Holy Communion”, one of Herbert’s speakers wonders how to signal the proper spiritual state through the body’s merely physical particulars²⁹.

²⁹ I cannot see why this problematic has not been examined more closely, as it seems to me one of the defining, if not the defining theological concerns of Herbert’s verse. Perhaps it is its very obviousness and relevance. More time has been languished on issues which primarily pressed religious thinkers of Herbert’s day. However, those religious issues that are still lively with us today deserve equal attention.

This problem leads the speaker to adopt the only physical response he believes might have hope to redeem the flesh: weeping.

Following his mistaken idea, the speaker will “weep mine eyes” in the hope of enlivening his dead corporeality. (6) In the quixotic attempt to regenerate his flesh through his flesh, the speaker embraces constant weeping, “Ev’n endless tears / Without relief”. (26-7) He explains his rationale by means of a physical analogy. Since “death is drie as dust” perhaps the human body, watered by tears, might be quickened into life: “Weep foolish heart, / And weeping live.” (7-8) The scheme’s flaw immediately emerges. As bodily objects, tears are finite and just as corporeal as the rest of the body. As the speaker despairs at line 30, “I am no Crystall, what shall I?”³⁰ The whole unregenerate body cannot excite life into Spirit. Even death only rearranges corporeal elements, as unsacramental as all parts of human’s unregenerate life:

Yet if ye part,
End as the night, whose sable hue
Your sinnes expresse; melt into dew. (10-12)

In this moment of almost suicidal desperation, Herbert’s speaker aligns life itself with the inevitable experience of death. At least, if human beings die, their end will be like “the night”, whose color accurately reflects the sinfulness of the human soul. Further, once we die, our corporeal bodies “melt into dew”, a less condensed but ultimately still only physical body of elements. Death, considered solely through this physical examination of color and density, cannot transcend the body’s own physicality, or the soul’s own sinfulness. The consideration of death inspires an attempt to generate aliveness another way, through the exuberance of “sawcie mirth”. This attempt fails as well, because the emotions of “mirth” remain firmly products of

³⁰In her edition of the collected poems, Wilcox suggests the “capitalization hints at a pun on Christ” (476). For my purpose, it suffice to say that the speaker emphasizes his own imperfect fleshiness.

human corporeality. “Sawcie” may even be a pun, referring not only to human recalcitrance but to an actual “sauce” or culinary concoction born of the nasty mixture of human tears and human “dust”³¹.

Thwarted at every turn, Herbert’s speaker returns to find a new reading of the Scriptural verse that inspired his original anxiety. “Almighty God doth grieve,” he says wonderingly: “he puts on sense” (16). Following the psychological reading, the speaker has concluded that by “grieving”, the Holy Spirit has assumed the character and quality of the flesh: “sense”. But no sooner than he voices this possibility, Herbert’s speaker imagines another reading. This conclusion, the supernatural reading, suggests not that God fits himself into a human mold, but that human life and emotions can access divinity. As the speaker says, when he sins, he does so “not to my grief alone / but to my God’s too; he doth *grone*.” (18-19, my emphasis) Human and divine emotion actually flash into each other, and God actually models the “groan” the speaker himself needs to become assured of salvation. God’s expression of grief, through a groan, creates a moment of mutuality between the speaker and God. However odd and unexpected, this mutuality does spiritual work for the speaker, helping him to regenerate through a retrieval of hope. God’s own experience confirms for the speaker that a transformation of flesh and spirit is actually possible, through the medium of emotion. Since God’s Spirit can “[put] on sense” to grieve for him, perhaps the speaker can do the same and turn his body into a sensual vessel for the Spirit. In this way, the supernatural reading is simply an inversion of the psychological reading already described.

Armed with this new way of reading, the speaker sees how God “puts on sense” in a different way. The “sense” God acquires might not be a psychology that, however human,

³¹ I thank Russ McConnell for inventing this original and extremely clever reading.

belongs uniquely to God. It may in fact be the speaker's own "sense" that God "puts on". God may himself enter into the speaker's body and emotions, directing and authorizing them from within. This realization is nothing more than a logical consequence of the psychological view: if God's Spirit can assume a body, perhaps his own body can accommodate the presence of God's Spirit within itself. When allowing the Spirit in, the speaker has to surrender his own agency, and the very resolution to do so comes not from himself, but from the Holy Spirit's own will. This distinction makes all the difference. The speaker's body can be redeemed in spirit, but not by his own agency. By appealing to God's instead of his own agency, he sidesteps the question of how his fallen will and emotion, his "fleshly heart", can accept the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, God "puts on sense" in another way, too; he puts on the speaker's own sense through the "motions", or emotional impulses, which the Spirit inspires.

By turning over his bodily control to the Spirit, he can actually share a supernatural experience with him in the form of emotion. At this point, Herbert's familiar musical metaphor images the proper way of reading the verse and positioning oneself toward the notion of God it describes. Instead of trying to contain God inside a human idea, the speaker surrenders himself and his will to God. In the hands of God, the human heart can be turned into God's lute. As the vessel of the Spirit, the human body might "All day complain" with the Spirit of God itself (21). As the instrument of that Spirit, the speaker will be joined in a musical relationship closer than that between the two participants in a duet: he will be responsive enough to the Spirit's will to be "tuned" and played by God's instinctive motions. The union of God's life with the speaker's will also bring together the body and soul in the medium of the "fleshly heart." Unlike the carnal tears, these new tears originate in the Spirit itself. Since the Spirit complains, Herbert's speaker joins his voice with God as in a choir; together, they are tuned to the same "strain" and joined in

literal harmony of which “There can no discord but in ceasing be” (22). This is one of the poem’s climaxes, if not the primary one. The speaker has realized the terms of his relationship with the Spirit and reconciled his emotion to a spiritual purpose, even an experience of spirituality itself. Though the poem suffers other crises as the speaker considers his own inadequacy, this relationship suffices because the speaker surrenders his own agency to the Spirit. The speaker understands Paul’s verse as a description of supernatural experience rather than an emotional psychology of the deity. Moreover, by making his emotions subservient to God’s will, the speaker shares mystically with Him in common grief.

To conclude, the relationship of poetic production to religious belief is a vexed question among Herbert’s readers³². Like many critics, I do not think it wise to study a poet like George Herbert to determine the exact nature of his belief but instead to ascertain his relationship to belief. In the afterlife of Herbert’s poetry, he has been enjoyed by readers who do not share his theological opinions, or have no theological opinions at all. Yet the meaning of the poems depends upon belief, and I do not believe Herbert’s readers approve of Herbert’s language only. Something of the religious experience sticks to them, still warm with his breath. As James Boyd White says, “Reading this poetry works on the reader—on this reader at least—as a very slow education of the heart.” (144) As a great teacher, Herbert creates students of spirituality from readers and lovers of poetry. He accomplishes this by being himself a great student, who peruses his Scripture with the meticulousness of Calvin and explores his own attitudes with a poet’s great patience. Whether this leads to conversion is beside the point, but neutering the poet’s capacity

³² Helen Vendler, for instance, finds Herbert’s poetry separable from his religious sensibilities: “Herbert’s poetry is as valuable to those who share none of his religious beliefs as those who share them all. In saying this, I differ with Coleridge and with Eliot, both of whom believed that Christians made the best readers of Herbert.” *The Poetry of George Herbert* 4

to affect the spirituality of his readers would be an injustice as serious as blandly reducing him to a “Puritan” or “Anglican”.

Herbert’s poetry’s profundity lies in the way he invests the real world with spiritual importance. All activities and objects become opportunities for spiritual growth and regeneration. Herbert’s poetic persona encourages us to turn toward, not away from, the world of human action. He authorizes human action by believing in the possibility of real reform. His simple, almost pragmatic poetic sensibility believes resolutely in a supremely authorizing presence. He does not assume authority in the world, but instead demonstrates how we may interact in but an authorized world—a world both spiritual and physical. For Herbert, the real world is structured by a series of "encounters" with God mediated by various forces, church, body, priest, authority, but ultimately reducible to the singular experience of God's presence. Herbert is not a mystic, believing he has access to a rare experience of God only on certain occasions; instead, he is a regular believer in this most profound sense, believing God to be present in every place and time in human experience. Herbert’s spiritual perspective provokes in me a feeling of awe: the experience of God is not deferred to an experience of millennial future history, or limited to a series of sign-communications by which the believer endlessly questions the possibility of his own election. Instead, profound simplicity grounds Herbert’s perspective in the everyday. The world, and the world's bodies, are for Herbert haunted by God's presence. These bodies include the spiritual body created by the church but, as we will see in the next chapter, extend far beyond the spiritually-sanctioned space to encompass much of secular life as well.

CHAPTER 3

THE VISIBLE SPIRIT: HERBERT'S SACERDOTALISM

Introduction: Rhetorical Images

Nowhere more clearly than in *The Country Parson* does George Herbert show that his primary vocation is to teach. As a priest, “The deputy of God”, Herbert’s educational duties are greatly expanded from the poetic and inspirational tasks accomplished by his cohesive book of poetry, *The Temple*. His pastoral handbook enjoins the priest to teach many of the same lessons imparted by a reading of *The Temple*. As I’ve suggested, the progress of *The Temple* moves from architectural forms to bodily forms, for several purposes at once: to figure the reunification of the bifurcated human person, to exemplify the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, and to suggest how the spirit in the body of a human being also envisions the spirit in the body of Herbert’s audience, a church of its own constitutive parts.

Though his techniques differ, in *The Country Parson*, Herbert’s interests and goals remain largely unchanged from *The Temple*. Herbert remains interested in the redemption of the human body, using carnal language to figure spiritual ideas. Yet in this more doctrinaire work, Herbert clearly felt cautious about the flights of his imagination, and curtailed them more actively than in *The Temple*. But since human beings, especially a rural laity like Herbert’s county of Bemerton, have frail human bodies, negotiations between body and Holy Spirit remain a crucial part of Christian experience. Indeed, the work of the Holy Spirit matters even more in

The Country Parson than it does in *The Temple*. As we've seen, Herbert's descriptions of the Spirit in *The Temple* are cries into the void. As inky projections on the page, his words cannot look back at him and testify that they too feel the Spirit of God. The audience Herbert imagines will share the Spirit with him must remain an imagination. Not so at Bemerton; here Herbert speaks words of Spirit and sees the faces of his parishioners blinking in either wonder or disbelief. Therefore, the presence of the Holy Spirit becomes a crucial center around which the congregated people become a community, or a church.

Every preacher is, of course, tasked with making his or her parishioners feel the ineffable work of the Spirit of God within them. Few, however, have the imaginative fecundity of Herbert's pneumatology. As we've seen, Herbert has many ways for talking about, analyzing, and depicting the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, for Herbert, the Holy Spirit must become a physical object, or a sensation, something that his personal experience can confirm. This notion dramatizes the narrative of his faith in *The Temple*. Since he cannot see his God, he must turn to something that his merely sensual faculties can taste, feel, and judge as real. To this end, Herbert struggles with the physical, tangible reality of the Holy Spirit, or rather, its absence of physical and tangible particulars. The tremendous effort of his book of poetry finally clothes the invisible Spirit of God with a body: his own. By the experience of his own physical sensations, he learns about the holy things of God: he drags the Pauline spirit into the worldly flesh and in so doing comes to understand them as interdependent and mutually liberating. This effort took hundreds of poems to convey: his parishioners listen to him for one hour once a week³³. If he is going to

³³ In the section "The Parson Preaching", Herbert explains how long it benefits a preacher to conduct a sermon. His recommended time is one hour, because "he that profits not in that time, will lesse afterwards, the same affection which made him not profit before, making him then weary, and so he grows from not relishing, to loathing." (vii)

turn them to the path of righteousness, make them feel the conviction of sin and the redemption of the Holy Spirit, he will need more eye-catching techniques.

In this chapter, I move away from Herbert's depictions of poetic communities to examine how he interacted with real ones. Yet the centerpiece remains the same, the work of the Holy Spirit that organizes Christian life into churches and all the churches into the one universal body of Christ. I mentioned before that the Holy Spirit has a strange combination of roles. On the one hand, it represents the power of individual divine conviction to shake and disturb the established orthodoxies of faith. On the other, it is the authority, the basis or foundation, of all acts of the already-instituted Church. The Holy Spirit rests at the boundary between the bleeding edge and the Ancient of Days, simultaneously startling and reassuring, institutional and prophetic. This conflict between elements is as old as the Church and can even be seen in the initial description of Pentecost. The tongues of the inspired apostles—the organizational basis of all future church ministry—jump with fire that startles and surprises the gathered congregation. For some in the history of the Church, the Spirit's simultaneously institutional and prophetic power has seemed like a contradiction to be resolved³⁴. Yet others have seen it as the very tension that gives the instituted church its power³⁵. As long as Christianity has existed, the religion has struggled with

³⁴ The Protestant Reformation reignited these millennium-old debates, as so many new Spirit-inspired sects emerged through the door opened by Luther's individual model of reading scripture. The Ranters, the Diggers, the Levelers, and the Quakers all reflect the appropriation of language of the Spirit for innovative or disobedient church practices.

³⁵ Figures like the ancient Montanus (155 AD) have opposed the conventional structure of the Church while claiming to a "fuller revelation of the Spirit" than the Church's own (Burgess 49). His followers became one of the early examples of charismatic groups that in antiquity included the Gnostics, Monarchians, and the Marcionists, all traditions proposing a Spiritual tradition counter to the mainstream Church's. Opposed to these radical—and democratizing—views of the Holy Spirit is the pre-Augustinian Bishop of Carthage Cyprian, who exhorted that Spiritual visions, and Spiritual authority, belong to priests alone. When Chrysostom called for a belief in "character" rather than "charismata" as the primary power of the Spirit, he effectively spelled the end of the prophetic age. See Burgess for more on the history of the Spirit in the early Church.

identity. Is it a “pilgrim church” as it began, an assembly of congregated faithful, implanted in or moving through a hostile world of sin and suffering? Or is it a powerful institution, built on the Rock of Ages to endure and give legitimacy to the kingdoms of man³⁶? The Spirit seems to promise both these possibilities at once, and from this reality comes its powerful role in constituting church communities. When all speak with the Spirit, the Church is good, free from both stagnation and dangerous upheaval, a unified force but also a righteous, realistic appraisal of the justice, or injustice, of power and stability³⁷. Innovation becomes the colony of the central social unit, a natural extension of the Spirit. Therefore, as new converts enter the Christian community, the Church changes form, incorporating the perspective of these new adherents; however, the Spirit does not change, being divine. It only extends its reach, the center remaining the same. In this way, the Holy Spirit promises a means of safely colonizing human beings and incorporating ideologies into one worldwide community. It is coercive, colonial, and centralized in the same moment.

As a priest, Herbert’s role is to place the Holy Spirit, the organizing unit of church society, into the very center of his parishioner’s lives. This task leads him to a remarkable conclusion that can be read between the lines of *The Country Parson*. Not to be disappointed in his goal of making his parishioners lead spiritual lives—lives governed and ordered by the

³⁶ Obviously, this question is bound up in the relationship between Church and State, one that has never been resolved in any period. In my reading, the cryptic injunction of Jesus to “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s” seems just as likely to express contempt for all things worldly as it does to indicate a grudging respect for the authority of government.

³⁷ Considered broadly, the very idea of the Spirit seems to suggest both these exact notions of human community. On the one hand, are we joined together to believe one thing—a role in which the Spirit seems to act as a kind of secretly coercive force on human reason and belief, a centralizing element of the community? Or are our larger social perspectives corrected by the individual power of the Holy Spirit, a corrective that presumes the masses must be wrong, that only the “voice crying in the wilderness” can stand apart and judge by the true conviction of the Spirit of God?

presence of the Spirit—Herbert makes it his personal task to act out the role of the Spirit *in* their lives. This means acting out both halves of the Holy Spirit’s role. He must be an institution, a revered edifice of the church, a stable rock on which the parishioners of Bemerton pitch their tents in the war of Christian life. But at the same time he must be surprising, a startling and innovating force of change in their very lives. He must be everywhere, see everything, and be everything to them. Not an occasional distraction, Herbert’s preacher must be a galvanizing force at the center of his people’s existence. He must be plainly visible, as visible as the structure of the church itself. He must also be felt as well as seen, pricking the inner conscience of the believer. Moreover, his presence must be felt in places where it cannot be seen. As an empty police car deters crime, Herbert’s preacher must ensure he is assumed to see and know things that lie beyond the scope of his time, energy, or ability. This means that he must confer to his parishioners the feeling of the Holy Spirit, staying in them always, so that they can be governed from within instead of without. Herbert believes this ideal, but thinks it unlikely among such an uneducated people as his parishioners in Bemerton. For that reason, Herbert’s parson must be everywhere, the Spirit in the visible world, until such time as the parishioners can contain the Spirit within them. In *Paradise Lost*, the Archangel Michael commends a “Paradise within” to the newly-fallen Adam and Eve, the interior world of the Spirit. Though likewise pastoral, the “Paradise within” also has angels guarding its gates, protecting against entrance from the hostile and dangerous world. Until his parishioners install angelic guardians of their own, Herbert’s parson must act as that angelic groundskeeper for them.

Herbert’s parson need not be everywhere: he need only appear so. To establish the importance of appearance in this text, I turn to the debate surrounding the use of images in preaching and in rhetoric broadly. In his *Apology for Poetry* Phillip Sidney makes a famous

distinction in the history of renaissance rhetoric and imagination: “[the philosopher’s] knowledge standeth...upon the abstract and general” but the poet “coupleth the general notion with the particular example” to reinforce and explain the way of virtue. Human beings struggle to learn virtue in the abstract, requiring an image to present the idea with the force of particularity. Sidney connects this pedagogical problem with the “first accursed fall of Adam”; from that time on, “our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.” In the prelapsarian world, human imagination sufficed to comprehend high notions in their generality. Now, living sweaty, smutty, corporeal lives, we require corporeal example for these high, mystic, unseen generalities—an image.

Arming thinkers with a means of confronting the unseen, the image-abstraction distinction appertained in the early modern religious imagination. Images serve as immediate reminders of the invisible objects of faith. In the discourse of late medieval scholastics, images approached our imaginations with the “nondiscursive, immediate certainty” of “sensory perception” (Shuger 210). Human beings tend to trust things put before their immediate vision, or made lively and scintillating in their imagination. As a result, the ability to conjure forth vivid images to concretize abstract notions of faith became a crucial weapon in the godly arsenal of early modern preachers. Indeed, as Sidney suggests, Scripture itself uses images to give form and body to God, whom human imagination struggles to conceive in His by-definition inconceivable reality. From this idea came the revered icons of Catholicism, powerful images both for human contemplation and the inspiration of human will. In the Catholic model, even the priest himself, capable of ritually invoking God’s miracles, serves also as an image of God on earth. In Catholic imagination, all ritualized images, including the priest’s own body, become markers of divinity, capable of exerting their distinctive force upon both will and imagination.

For a seventeenth-century Protestant preacher, with characteristic distrust of Catholic iconography, the use of images becomes more problematic. Images serve to give churchgoers a sense of something, but the presence of God is invisible, unapproachable, and absolute³⁸. Visual icons serve as distractions from the unimaginable reality of God. Whether appearing before the believer's eyes or before his or her imagination, they create a superficial picture of God in the mind and heart. Rather than giving them leave to exercise their fallen imaginations, the preacher and the church surroundings should be reinforcing the impossible, even blasphemous nature of attempting to picture God, to trap the holy in a tinsel image, or see his likeness in a figure in a frock.

Though divine image is forbidden, English Protestant preachers such as John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes make use of vivid, unforgettable imagery to demonstrate important spiritual ideas. Even the most radical Protestant preachers like William Perkins or Peter Sterry employ vivid images in their preaching. High and low church clergymen may use imagery differently, yet the reliance on image in preaching is nearly absolute. For instance, Perkins conjures up a "grain of mustard seed" as a powerful image of man's need for grace; the image's meagerness describes the small strength of man's will and his absolute dependence on grace. In contrast, Donne creates the vivid, grander image of an island in the sea to describe the phenomenon of human interconnectedness. In either case, English preachers make recourse to the image to describe with particular forcefulness the abstract objects and requirements of their faith.

This reliance on images in the act of preaching seems more comfortable and appropriate for Protestant thinkers than the use of iconography in the church or, perhaps worse, in the figure of the priest himself. After all, renaissance rhetoric insists on the necessity of the using images to

³⁸ See Calvin 1.4 on the difficulty in approaching knowledge of God.

persuade the will, so their presence in Protestant sacred rhetoric seems like an inevitability. Yet sixteenth and seventeenth century English Protestants are not above iconizing the priest, the altar, or the church as well. In fact, some church officials believe these externals every bit as necessary for the convincing of sin and the persuasion to hold to right obedience. The distinction between image and abstraction receives particular charge in the context of Protestantism, because the faith of Luther, and especially Zwingli and Calvin, problematizes the miracle at the heart of Catholic sacerdotalism: communion. Protestants from Luther to Calvin have a range of interpretations for Christ's instructions about communion, which I will not rehearse here, but in general, they share the suspicion that the priest himself enjoys any invested power capable of summoning up the presence of Christ. On this difference alone, the schism between old and new church must be absolute, considered almost irreconcilable faiths. To believe the priest has power to invoke the presence of God is to invest him with powers exceeding any ordinary human's; moreover, to believe in God's literal presence in the physical space of the church is to have a very different conception of space and time than that conceived in the modern secular imaginary. Regina Schwartz makes the case that the "real absence" of God in Protestant thinking about the Eucharist marked a profound break with an earlier, more animistic way of thinking about the physical world. God's presence in the physical substance of communion elements implies a permeable barrier between the worlds of spirit and matter, a barrier which can be crossed over by creatures and ideas of various power and benevolence or malignancy toward man. In contrast, to believe, as Zwingli did, that the communion elements were mere symbols of a spiritual process that occurs nowhere on earth—that belongs solely in the hands and realm of God—is to maintain a firmer distinction between the world humans inhabit and the worlds for which they are destined.

Rather than spurring a disdain for this world, in all its corporeal separateness from God, this kind of Protestant thinking can so completely distinguish the corporeal and spiritual worlds as to reinforce in some minds that nothing in the one can be done to achieve the other. The Calvinism of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century denigrates the physical world and deprives human beings the possibility of in any way effecting or realizing their own spiritual ascendancy. In short, distinguishing material and spiritual too firmly serves to make the already material world even more material. Notwithstanding the North American Puritans who read their heavenly fortunes in earthly signs, a thunderstorm or a hostile attack by natives, the distinction between spirit and body allowed some Protestant priests to comfortably enjoy the fruits of their corporeal productivity, and to sit luxuriate in a world of physicality. “Things indifferent” to the conduct of the church, such as lights, candles, organs, and so forth, became opportunities to make the high Anglican Church comfortable and suited to the wishes of the priest and his parishioners. On the other side, radicals like the Ranters used their inability to effect grace as justification for a lifestyle of sensual pleasure and willful disobedience to law. Trying to take away their images of false contemplation and idol worship, iconoclasts removed, or drastically reduced, the presence of God above and around His worshippers, shoving Him, of course, deep within them, where His pricks and compulsions can be comfortably ignored.

To combat this problem, Herbert’s parson sets himself up as visible image and constant reminder of God. He assumes an appropriate measure of God’s dignity and authority to combat the sins and apathy of his parishioners. Yet for Herbert, fulfilling this public responsibility is no less fraught with anxiety and danger than preparing one’s own self for salvation and winning the terrifying battles of sin and obedience raging within the heart of every Christian. If *The Church* is born out of Herbert’s fear of failing to live up to his God’s impossible internal standard, *The*

Country Parson dramatizes the fear of living up the tremendous external standards of God's surrogates, the priesthood. Moreover, as the previous discourse began to unfold, Herbert's need to assume this dignity has a more than pedagogical purpose. After all, human beings may be taught a variety of things using an image as example of higher precept. Herbert's foremost purpose in iconizing himself as priest is to return something lost to the world-picture of Christian life. In the image of the priest, he recreates in small form that irrecoverable presence of God's body which haunted the sanctuaries of the Catholic Church. In the figure of the priest, in all his life, inside and outside the church, Herbert institutes the presence of the holy. He makes visible, palpable, daily, and regular that which is supremely ineffable, not only to teach the ignorant, but to restore the world's lost divinity, reducing the absolute barrier between this world and the next, to the betterment of souls and the inspiriting of secular life.

Bodily Language

Herbert's strategy as a preacher has three main elements. Already familiar from my analysis of *The Church* is his characteristic melding of spiritual and bodily language. Herbert uses this language for several reasons, but at least partly because of its exceptional power. Figurations of a physical kind make the concerns of abstract faith into lively particulars. People live physical lives: to know the spiritual one must encounter it through the physical. Moreover, his use of this language suggests to his parishioners that the human body could be redeemed at all, providing an image of hope for the adherents of the faith. Finally, this sort of language comes naturally to Herbert. "Naturally" in the previous sentence is used advisedly; after all, for reasons we will concern ourselves with below, sincerity becomes incredibly important in judging the testimony of the Spirit of God. In "Agonie", Herbert figures the Spirit's process by letting go of his rational structure-building to create a totally emotional figurative expression of what sin is.

Similarly, in *The Country Parson*, Herbert uses physical language because it is the language of his heart. As a preacher, he is under special obligation to use language that reflects his sincere personality and feeling. Otherwise, he cannot be sure, and in turn his parishioners cannot be sure, that he is truly speaking words inspired by the Spirit.³⁹

Clearly, Herbert's parson has relatively low expectations for his audience of "country people". According to Herbert, all people have short attention spans, listening for only a single hour at a time. They also have short memories, regarding recent events with more care and interest than late ones (vii). Country people in particular are petty, remembering long grudges over petty things. In a particularly memorable phrase, Herbert remarks that country people "are thick, and heavy, and hard to raise to a point of Zeal, and need a mountaine of fire to kindle them" (vii). If ever a sentence shows the sincere testimony of endless hours of hard work, this one certainly qualifies. If not drawn from his experience of frustration, the sentence is remarkably classist and, regardless, should be seen as an inspired if unfortunate bit of stereotyping. As often happens with Herbert, the metaphor of the sentence sounds so natural we miss just how surprising it really is. Herbert apparently means that country people are stupid or stubborn or both, and as such are rarely moved by sermons. The "mountaine of fire" results from the strenuous effort of the preacher, whose kindling brings out the unspoken but certainly implied word "wooden", perfectly suited to describe the deadness of his audience. Though the metaphor works quite effectively in these ways, we shouldn't forget just how imaginative it is. I cannot read that sentence without seeing these country people before my eyes, like great lumps

³⁹ I suspect Herbert's concern with bodies throughout his entire life has quite a bit to do with his own experience with illness. Having a sickly body draws one's attention to the promise of a healthy one. Unprovable as it is, this idea provides a framework for understanding Herbert's repeated recourse to language of corporeality.

of humanity. Though “thick” and “heavy” both apply to the audience’s minds, I see them distinctly as mounds of flesh, dense, impenetrable, and unmovable. The four elements of Renaissance alchemy seem to appertain here, their scale descending in a vertical chain to the lowest, the base dirt from which humans are made. The “mountaine of fire” kindled by the preacher is a higher element, fire, that promises to fire up and turn the highly corporeal people into a more spiritual matter. The flesh of country people is not just corrupted and sinful; it is by nature an inanimate mound. When I say that Herbert is concerned with inspiring the physical, this passage leaps to mind as a notable example of a place where intellectual capability, spiritual experience, and bodily flesh become highly interdependent, even indistinguishable. Herbert’s parson not only seeks to teach his laity; he wants to wake up their dead flesh into new and profound life.

The first flesh (and thereby soul) Herbert’s parson seeks to wake up is his own. In the parson’s state of life, perhaps one of the more idealized sections of an admittedly idealistic work, Herbert worries about two different sides of the sins of the flesh. The first is how sinfulness appears, how it “shows”; this matters because the parson must be trusted not to sin in order to reprove it. The other half details how the parson watches against the internal effects of sin. Ideally, the parson should stay a virgin, praying at all times for the “gift of continency”, and wonders at the extraordinary powers of those saints who mastered their own flesh through “daily temperance, abstinence, watchings, and constant prayers, and mortifications in times of peace and prosperity” (ix). Like a watchman on the walls, Herbert’s parson must be always awake, fighting off the leadenness of sleep and the death-like stupor of sinfulness. Herbert makes a remarkable two part injunction: the parson “keeps his body tame, serviceable, and health-full;

and his soul fervent, active, young, and lusty as an eagle.”⁴⁰ This sentence implies many things about Herbert’s belief of the interconnectedness of bodily and spiritual health, but it is not clear whether he means to suggest the body’s mortification or its exaltation. In any case, the language applied to the soul is clearly corporeal, and not just corporeal. In this sentence, all those pleasures the parson denied the flesh come exploding out in this sentence on the soul. The soul receives attributes that, in the body, would be counted sinful, but here suggest only youthfulness and energy. Since Herbert’s Calvinism admits a human soul every bit as corrupted as a human body, it seems imprudent to call a soul “lusty as an eagle”, especially in light of the description of continence going before. “Lusty” would seem to mean not just lusty for God, but lusty in general. Herbert’s explosive energy in this sentence shows an obvious displacement of the energy denied in the earlier discourse of the body. In effect, as so often happens, spirit and matter become confused. All we can be sure is that Herbert wants a religion that is lusty, young, active, and fervent just as much as it is tame and serviceable. He wants to see the power of human corporeality on display, even if he must reference its powers always displaced to the soul. The parson’s body becomes a place held in remarkable tension, a strange vessel, outwardly placid, but containing within it both a mountain of fire and a remarkable lustiness. This is no austere preacher, but a lively and inspiring figure: almost a poet.

Herbert’s desire to sanctify the physical as a place for human devotion does not signify desire to exceed the bounds of dogma but to more rigorously define the goals and possibilities from within it. Since the gifts of Pentecost gave human beings the power to redeem the corrupted flesh, attempting to expand those powers further only actualizes this existing potential.

⁴⁰ As above, I think the mention of healthfulness in conjunction with language of mortification implies Herbert’s alignment of physical health with spiritual health.

Therefore, when Herbert uses words like “taste”, “feel”, “delight”, and “savor” to describe the experiences of God’s grace, he stays within the bounds that Christian thinkers since Paul have prescribed for spiritual experience. Particularly, Herbert desires to create a church; knowing a church is only architecture until the Spirit fills it, he imagines how the people might experience their own hearts being transfigured by the Spirit’s presence. This act of imagination has two important correspondences: one, Herbert’s church and temple may be created anywhere, out of any people, though his prescriptions intend primarily an audience of English clergymen, and two, that the experience of grace in preaching and spiritual interaction will register for both preacher and auditor in the language and images of everyday life. In short, Herbert desires to spiritualize the corporeal. He does not use corporeal language only because it most easily describes to a “thick, and heavy” people the way to heaven, but because he believes that the corporeal itself may be redeemed, that the walls of the church may be knocked down to make a church of every place, because one is made of every people.

In *The Country Parson*, Herbert frequently uses the language of eating, drinking, and experiencing other “pleasure”. Often, he uses descriptive language like this to deplore his parishioners’ addiction to various sins of the flesh. *The Country Parson* abounds with injunctions against “drinking”, “Luxury”, “sleep, and the pleasure that comes with sleep” and others (iii, v). But the manual also uses many such descriptors not to decry carnal addiction but to model spiritual rectitude. Sensual language figures the kind of aspiration I have observed in the poems of the church, the desire to make spirit out of body, just like the spiritual church is made from physical place.

In particular, the language of eating provides to-hand metaphors for Christian regeneration. According to Herbert, the parson has “digested” various commentaries on scripture

and church discipline, has compiled his own “body of divinity” that is “most savory to him” (v). He handles his Scripture in sermon in a way that keeps them “unbroken” and “sweet”, rather than “crumbling a text into parts”, and to preserve both “sweetnesse” and “variety” (vii). Language like this implies first that the parson’s rhetoric adds relish to an unsavory lesson, but also that during the sermon, the parson presents a whole, delectable, and various meal of God’s grace, just as he does in the sacrament of communion⁴¹. As Herbert says in his description of old customs, for his parish audience, the parson “pares the apple, and gives them the clean to feed on” (xxxv).

An accurate representation of God’s grace not only invites but requires the use of physical language. To continue the metaphor of a meal, Herbert’s parson is the chef, or chief preparer. The ingredients come from God, but the parson must prepare them so that they please as variously as do the fruits prepared by Milton’s Eve at supper time:

contriv'd as not to mix
Tastes, not well joynd, inelegant, but bring
Taste after taste upheld with kindest change. (333-335)

Unlike Eve, Herbert’s parson does more to prepare the feast for his guests than arrange the elements. After the Fall, a little cooking and seasoning is required. In the parson’s case, the process involves selecting those elements of Scripture that he will use in sermon, “moving and ravishing texts, whereof the Scriptures are full” (vii). Once the parts are selected, in their whole and uncrumbled form, the parson considers them with depth and meditation “by dipping and seasoning all our words and sentences in our hearts before they come into our mouths, truly affecting and cordially expressing all that we say, so that the auditors may plainly perceive that

⁴¹ My first chapter talks about the alignment of sacrament and language in spiritual discourse. As sermons are necessarily even less secular than poems, the effect intensifies in this genre.

every word is heart-deep” (vii). In this sentence, the language of heart and stomach become powerfully confused, so close they almost seem identical in meaning. The verbs “dip” and “season” have such evocative power that when Herbert says the words shall “come into our mouths” we feel they will have a distinctive flavor from their time marinating in the parson’s heart. The Spirit is the content of the holy heart, the seasoning that gives the words their flavor of sweetness. Surely, the parson, who enjoys these words in his own mouth, will get the best savor from this meal, but all the parishioners will taste something of the flavor of the preacher’s heart. Further, because this language has the powerfully evocative power of Herbert’s verse, we can recognize it as sincere, to Herbert’s parson as well as to his listeners.

Once again, this use of physical and spiritual language drags my analysis into questions about the sacrament of communion. Herbert’s view of the sacrament has been established elsewhere, but I want to elucidate how it relates to my claim here about Herbert’s corporeal rhetoric in his sermons. Theologically speaking, Herbert lies between the mystical, transubstantial picture of reality of Lancelot Andrewes and the purely materialist vision of Thomas Hobbes. His communion is the communion of John Calvin, a transport to the Real Presence rather than a descent of that presence into the bread. Yet, as I’ve explored before, Herbert remains consistently devoted to the idea that human beings can experience the presence of God through their emotions. For Herbert, human emotion can taste the mystery of the divine, but the sacramental touch of the priest does not guarantee the presence of God. In keeping with Protestant theology, Herbert demands the physical must be touched with something truer and realer than the artifacts of ordination, the soul of the inspired believer. For Herbert, the physical elements of communion have their own mystical character, but only insofar as they are “seasoned” with the emotion of the speaker’s heart. In this manner, Herbert has his real presence

and eats his universal church. In the process, he makes recourse to Calvin's idea that the Holy Spirit seals the communicant's faith and the process of "ingesting" God takes place on entirely the metaphysical level, through the transport to God's Real Presence in heaven. Yet even here, while writing this prescriptive text for preachers and for himself, Herbert's desire to physically taste the mystical presence of God remains. Once again, this taste takes an emotional character. In the true "seasoning" of the believer's heart, its washing and washing in the waters of God, he or she really feels the presence that might otherwise be a symbol, or an image beyond our world.

Structure and Stasis

Much of Herbert's rhetoric involves overcoming stasis, making the outward forms of the church lively by overcoming the repetitive nature of religious service. Regular and consistent worship practice should instill the presence of holiness and faith into daily life, but just as often, it reduces Christian worship to a predictable formula, segregated to certain days outside the mainstream of the week. As Herbert says, church is held only on Sundays, when "it is easy for [the parishioners] to compose themselves to order, which they put on as their holy-day cloathes, and come to Church in frame, but commonly the next day put of both" (xiv). If the parson sees his parishioners only on Sundays, his parishioners circumscribe the portion of their daily life that he observes. This is a problem: their spiritual health, which is the parson's interest, concerns him much more than what they merely do on holy days. In order to fulfill his divine vocation, Herbert's parson cannot be a static, ignorable structure to which the parishioners may present their best face and courtesy. Instead, he must be a constant, animating presence in their lives. As such, he desires to see them "most naturally as they are, wallowing in the midst of their affairs" (xiv). However, Herbert's parson is not an intruder spying on his parishioners. In fact, the

purpose of his “circuit”, or long walk through the town, is to prevent himself from becoming an outsider in his people’s lives. Herbert’s parson moves among his parishioners so he may be one with them. His purpose is not to judge them from afar, but to inspire them from within.

As in my analysis of *The Church*, I will be using the metaphor of the church and spirit to characterize the relationships among Christians to each other and to God. Herbert’s conception of the church is far broader than many of his interpreters admit. Indeed, the whole of *The Country Parson* consists of transforming a rural community into a church itself. Chapters like “The Parson in Circuit”, “The Parson Comforting”, and others are instructions on how to make his whole parish into a united church. Once again, the very architecture of a church provides an image for Herbert’s conception of how English Christianity should function. The authority creates and sustains the masonry, the broad static beams that keep the whole frame in order. Without this, there would be no place for worship in the way Herbert approves. Yet without the animating Spirit of God, the building of the church is only a hollow shell, an inanimate husk of matter. Being “in Gods stead” (xx) the parson must provide this animation to his community. He must be the Spirit itself, moving among them, sanctifying their labor and daily life, and preventing the atrophy and hardening of predictability. Like the broad beams of the church, the regular services, catechisms, and ceremonies of the church remain essential to the structural unity of the church, but through them moves the spontaneous animate spirit which is the parson himself, an example of light and holiness at all times, not behind the pulpit alone.

Herbert uses this idea in his description of catechism. Like the architectural framework of the church, catechism provides the basis for the work of Christianity. Herbert’s view on catechism belongs with his adherence to “Authority” generally. As argued in *Return to the Middle Way*, Herbert’s position on church leadership and obedience can be generally described

as Elizabethan “middleness”, neither the high church position of Laud nor the extreme congregationalism of Puritans like William Prynne and Richard Baxter. On the subject of catechism, Herbert obeys the English ecclesiastical authority not only because obedience is a good, but also because obedience creates uniformity: “that the same common truths may be every where professed” (xxi). Catechism creates Christians, fulfilling Herbert’s pastoral injunction to “infuse a competent knowledge of salvation in every one of his flock”. As a pillar of church architecture, catechism ensures a stable foundation on which to build the lofty spiritual edifice of the church. But Herbert refuses to let this regular, self-consistent good atrophy into a commonplace ritual devoid of active spiritual power. As such, Herbert’s pastor does not allow his parishioners to answer catechism only in formalized utterances, “because to answer in form may still admit ignorance.” Instead, his questions are “propounded loosely and wildely”. By means of a looser structure, “the Answerer will discover what hee is.” (xxii) The parson desires to turn the catechism from a rote mechanism into a force of spiritual self-inquisition—from a static form into an active body. Further, Herbert’s pastor demands “the very words” of the catechistic answer from the younger generations of churchgoers, to build the foundation of their faith on the firm ground of doctrine, but in the older population, Herbert desires “the substance” of the spiritual precept behind the catechism (xxi). The parson does this not only to respect the elder parishioners, but also to require them to show a well-bodied and fully fleshed-out faith, a religion of which the rote catechistic answer provides only the bones. This demonstrates his faith in them to move beyond static forms into a lively faith. Finally, the parson requires catechism be performed in front of the entire community of the church. This reminds the community that the church is a living organism, fused by the linked hearts of human beings, protected and sustained

by pillars and altars, yet enlivened its living Spirit. In short, catechism provides the basis of the church as community, doctrine, and example for works.

Creating a community built on the solid, but not static, foundation of the Holy Spirit requires Herbert's parson to envision that community from the ground up. Just as he refuses to allow his parishioners to visit him only on Sundays, when they "compose themselves to order, which they put on as their holy-day cloathes", he refuses to allow them "secular" lives, lives outside the purview of the church's interests. Chapter XXII, "The Parson's Completeness", an astoundingly idealistic document, puts forward Herbert's notion of a community in which the religious experience is not only the center but the governing force of every sphere of life.

According to critics like Malcomson, Herbert's arrangement of country life in this way is part of a broader strategy in which he rewrites social relations to put the priest at the premier political and socioeconomic position. Perhaps it does this, but I suggest that Herbert's scheme, impossible as it is, also aspires to keep his parishioners leading spiritual lives. By means of his constant presence, he intends them to be continually reminded of the Holy Spirit that guides them and unifies them into a community. To be fair, Herbert takes his expansion of the priest's social role almost laughably far. As he explains, "The Countrey Parson desires to be all to his Parish" (xxiii). He might stop there, with this amazingly inclusive purview of pastoral responsibilities, but he continues, "not onely a Pastour, but a Lawyer also, and a Phisician." The parson "endures not that any of his Flock should go to Law; but in any Controversie, that they should resort to him as their Judge". The reasons for the parson's engrossment of legal power is not ambition or a desire for control, but for the purpose of making spiritual examples out of these decidedly secular professions. When the parson observes a poor man stealing from a rich, "he absolutely restores [the stolen item] as a Judge; but when he hath done so, he assumes the Parson, and exhorts to

Charity”. The parson will fit the role of a judge, but when he does so he continues immediately to resume his role as a parson. Controversy and judgment provide opportunities for teaching about charity. Acting as physician, the parson also has need of those special skills, “or at least his Wife, of whom in stead of the qualities of the world, he asks no other, but to have the skill of healing a wound, or helping the sick.” By offering himself as physician, or a member of his own family, the parson keeps himself, and his holy position, at the center of his parishioners’ consideration. Moreover, as with the legal profession, medicine provides opportunities to illustrate spiritual lessons, “even as our Saviour made plants and seeds to teach the people”. As both lawyer and physician, the parson removes the need for these secular professions to exist. By acting out these professions, he ensures that his parishioners remain firmly in the bounds of a world ordered by the experience of a communal church. The result, as with Herbert’s objection to the putting on of church day order with church day clothes, is a village where spirituality remains always front of mind. As the visible exemplar of their faith, the figure of the priest keeps people firmly grounded in the world of the spirit rather than the flesh. To be clear, this is an idealism that surpasses most idealism, but it still shows the intensity with which Herbert believed his own presence could serve as an animating spirit keeping Christianity alive in a world of sin and division.

The Psychology of Priesthood

As a consequence, I suspect, of the modern critical obsession with secularism, critics have examined *The Country Parson* as an object of cultural, if not strictly religious, importance. Christina Malcomson suggests the document represents an attempt by Herbert, the disappointed aristocratic courtier, to reposition his move to Bemerton as a decision to subvert and reject the aristocratic patronage system. According to Malcomson, Herbert seeks to show how his new

position, rather than being a lesser social station, is superior—not just religiously but socially as well. Hence the intense interest in the priest’s relationship with gentry and nobility, the careful negotiation of these disparate social stations, as well as the expanded roles of the priest. In these ways, Herbert repositions the role of the priest as having more capacity for social power than the nobleman. Malcomson’s theory is partially convincing in light of the work of Michael Schoenfeldt, which establishes a continuity between the courtly language used in Herbert’s early life and the devotional language his classic poetic corpus. According to Malcomson and others, as a document concerned with navigating complex social relations among different stations, the primary source for *The Country Parson* is not the preaching manual but the courtesy book. As a text negotiating social value, *The Country Parson* is not a “sincere” book, as *The Temple* is sometimes presumed to be. Michael Schoenfeldt writes that “The parson’s act of self-composure...is a creative and coercive gesture”; even “holiness and reverence” when “revealed as persuasive strategies...begin to lose connection with the interior spiritual reality they ostensibly represent.” (*Prayer and Power* 1-2) For Schoenfeldt, the “burden of persuasion” involved in preaching devotion to others necessarily revokes the sincerity of that devotion (quoted from Shullenberger 99). More recently, Malcomson says Herbert’s parson’s manual was “written to reformulate the terms of social identity as exempt from the system of status” (2).

I do not want to discredit the work that has been done in this regard, but I would like to suggest that the primary purpose of *The Country Parson* is religious. This comes paired with my suggestion throughout—that the poems of *The Church* have primarily religious message, context, and schema. Neither of these claims is that controversial, but the idea that Herbert’s religious psychology deserves exposition might be, because it supposes that religious psychology itself deserves exposition. Throughout these chapters, I have been at this task, examining one

after another of the varieties of religious experience. A special variety of this experience is that of the priest. Herbert opens his discourse on sacerdotal responsibility with the words, “A Pastor is the Deputy of Christ for the reducing of Man to the Obedience of God.” The Lord, “being not to continue on earth...constituted Deputies in his place, and these are Priests.” In Herbert’s description, priests share the purpose of God, acting as surrogates for God, so that fallen human beings remember the Lord and their duty toward him. This role sounds grandly ambitious for a fallen human being to undertake, and from the anxiety of fulfilling this ambition comes Herbert’s vacillations in “The Priesthood” and “Aaron”, two of his most arresting poems on priesthood. Yet in *Country Parson*, Herbert raises the stakes higher. Priests share in two particulars the role of their absent Lord: first “Dignity...that a Priest may do that which Christ did, and by his authority, and as his Vicegerent.” Second, a Priest has “Duty...that a Priest may do that which Christ did, and after his manner, both for Doctrine and Life.” That a priest must act like Christ surprises few Christians, who adopt Christ’s example as an ideal, if not idealized, model of human behavior. This task alone confounds the will of fallen human beings, providing the particular tension of “Aaron”. In that lyric, Herbert brilliantly dramatizes the crisis of the priest doubting his own sanctitude:

Profaneness in my head,
 Defects and darkness in my breast,
 A noise of passions ringing me for dead
 Unto a place where is no rest:
 Poor priest! thus am I drest. (6-10)

In a sense, this struggle belongs to all believers, who, even if not following Christ by vocation, must imitate him to secure salvation and the righteous life. The struggle is the lifeblood of the poems of *The Church*, the spirit and source of tension in nearly every lyric. It is a problem profound enough to inspire huge volumes of religious verse, make one an anchorite or flagellant, or, more mildly, spend one’s entire life wrestling with doubts about one’s own salvation.

The Temple deals entirely with this half of the problem of faith. Though some poems stray overtly into considerations of priesthood, the main matter of the lyrics remains how the individual reconciles his own sinful nature with God, drawing himself to obedience and faith, against all the slings and arrows of the world and his own baser life. In this respect, the purpose of the poetry is universal, explaining its wide appeal. It is, as I have argued elsewhere, universal in another sense, as Herbert strives to create a community of readers, or a Church, out of the experience shared with his audience. For all this, it remains the internal struggle of the priest, which he shares with each common believer. In Herbert's Protestantism, the fundamental Christian struggle is personal, a debate between selves, a reconciling of bad impulses and good ones, a hope from deep within, a cruel battle against the senses, and a surrender to the beyond. Yet, *The Country Parson* shows an entirely different struggle. After all, ordinary Christians do not need to make themselves out to be "Deputies" of Christ; indeed, it would be entirely presumptuous to do so.

The Country Parson dramatizes this different narrative. In this treatise, Herbert confronts ways of fulfilling that other charge of priesthood, the one not shared with ordinary believers. The parson must not only fulfill the "Duty" of acting like Christ as other Christians do; he must additionally achieve the "Dignity" of Christ. He must assume the authority and appearance of Christ, acting as "Vicerent" to secure human beings' dutiful obedience. In this office, he applies the two sacraments of the Church of England, rituals without which human beings cannot achieve salvation. He cannot forgive sin, but he must render human beings submissive so that God may forgive them. His touch must visibly carry with it the power and love of his office, all that the glory of God may be greater than it would with no example of grace. In short, he must assume power on the earth that God alone can grant. Even more, he must force recognition of

that power from others, must make them recognize the “Dignity” of his office and the glory which stands behind his office like a fire. Here, we have the self-apparent power and dignity of the first stanza of “The Priesthood”:

Blest Order, which in power dost so excell,
That with th’ one hand thou liftest to the sky,
And with the other throwest down to hell
In thy just censures. (1-4)

The poem that follows questions and worries at this appearance, until Herbert’s speaker opens up the question if *any* priest, himself or the great thunderers of stanza one, are worthy the dignity of their tremendous office. Yet in *The Country Parson*, Herbert’s prerogative is not investigative but vocational. He does not question the decrees of God or the word of Saint Paul that explain the function of the priest, “according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God” (Coloss. 1.24). Though not his desire, his duty requires him to assume the dignity of God’s deputy on the earth, to appear for human eyes, ears, and hearts as a visible reminder of Christ and his sacrifice for human life. If we feel reductive in our judgments, we could summarize the formula thus: in *The Temple*, Herbert worries about being (or feeling) holy, in *The Country Parson*, seeming or “showing” holy.

Many critics have used just this phrasing to expose the rhetorical personality of Herbert the parson. After all, the poet of interiority in *The Church* seems always vigilant to be sincere, avoid all pride of office, and to value generally the “substance” of things rather than their outward show. Many readers have endured disappointment, I think, when turning from this sensitive devotional poet to the work of the preacher who must coax and cajole, perhaps even deceive, his audience of parishioners into obedience. Such readers might recall that assuming the dignity of the priesthood is not an end in itself, but a means “for the reducing of Man to the Obedience of God.” Obedience to authority, says Herbert in *The Country Parson*, is a good of

itself, unless that authority is corrupted or schismatic. In Herbert's view, priestly dignity does not serve the priest, who feels uncomfortable in his heavy and awkward clothes, but the parishioners themselves, and God, who receives service by their obedience. Herbert's desire to use rhetoric, persuasion, appearance, and "show" in order to convince his parishioners of their sin, fits in with the requirement of his office. The priest must make himself into an image of God to be taken seriously in his vicegerent role. He must make God's presence more real by imitating, in sensual particulars, the authority that God really holds alone.

I hope to alter the critical conversation over *The Country Parson*. Critics often entertain a nebulous distrust of this work, because Herbert asks for apparently deceitful attempts at persuading an audience of "thick, and heavy" uneducated believers. Social readings of *The Country Parson* assume that Herbert's own statement on his composition must be insincere, or because he occasionally makes gestures toward insincere demonstrations of emotion as effective means of persuasion, coercive or selfish motives implicate the whole work. Based on my analysis of *The Country Parson*, I suspect Herbert wants to accomplish the priest's vocation exactly, no more and no less. Even if Herbert also wants preferment, I believe he wants foremost to fulfill this vocation. As I described above, fulfilling the office of a priest should challenge any honest, self-searching Christian, let alone an introspective, self-critical Protestant like Herbert. The task concerned him enough to write a sequence of anxious poems on the priesthood, questioning and worrying over his or anyone's fitness for the astounding challenge of being God's surrogate. From this continuing anxiety emerges *The Country Parson*, not as a means of expanding the offices of priesthood but only as a means of proving equal to them. In Herbert's period and every period, priests preach and minister sacraments hundreds of times in the year, but that does not preclude a priest from feeling unsure about his ability to fulfill those tasks. For

that reason, I assume Herbert wrote *The Country Parson* to work through the difficulties of clerical responsibility, not to surpass but to fulfill them.

Herbert's spirituality is unique because, while we might expect him to entertain a suitably Protestant disdain for the flash and sparkle of the world, he seems remarkably interested in the world around him. He is, to be certain, a powerfully religious thinker, but his spiritual life revolves around renovating the world around him to resemble and fulfill his spiritual principles, rather than rejecting the world for contemplation of these principles alone. For this reason, Herbert could never be content with mere criticism, no more than he would be content with removing himself from the Anglican Church to become an independent. Instead, Herbert's Christianity involves getting one's hands into the matter of communities and helping for them. Because he does entertain a serious suspicion of his own faculties, he is more likely to appeal to authority than to make his own decisions about how the church community should be run. His modesty also leads him to commend success to God, or rather to share success with him, as God's creation. The difficulty in approaching the perspective of a thinker like Herbert comes from our desire to group him as Walton does, with anchorites and vanishingly unworldly saints, or as Herbert's recent social critics have, with Renaissance courtiers seeking preferment in a world of changing religious ideologies. Herbert's perspective, I think, was born from the ground up as a reaction to his social environment, but it also reflects his diehard religious conviction, won from personal experience of what he believed was God's grace. As such, Herbert simultaneously believes that God has a plan for England while recognizing that the church divisions would only grow more intense as the Stuart era continues. As a result both of this pressure and his astounding faith, Herbert set himself up as England's teacher, yet only within a minimal sphere of influence. Again, his spiritual modesty—the fact that at no time did he

consider himself a prophet—prevented any larger cultural enterprise. *The Temple* and the rectorship of Bemerton were enough. Herbert is a visual thinker; the appearance of things intimately concerns him. When he looked about the nation of England, he saw his own experience; he saw his small trust of country parishioners; and he set about to make them match to the extraordinary experience of grace that he had felt in his own life. In his role at Bemerton, Herbert sought to match his incredibly high goal for the priest. He sought to act in God's stead as the watcher and protector of grace within human life. If his pastoral career missed his mark by inches or miles, at least he could content himself that "hee shoots higher that threatens the Moon, then hee that aims at a Tree" (*The Author to the Reader*). One could not accuse Herbert of having too little faith in the world, even in himself.

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