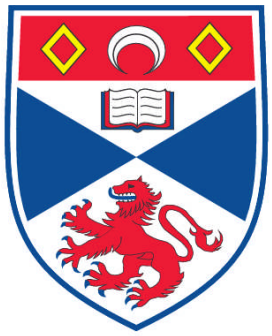
‘AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH’: THE PROBLEM OF THE INCARNATION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DEVOTIONAL POETRY

Jesse David Sharpe

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews



2012

'AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH': THE PROBLEM OF THE INCARNATION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DEVOTIONAL POETRY

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A thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of St Andrews

School of English

22 May 2012

ABSTRACT

In using the doctrine of the Incarnation as a lens to approach the devotional poetry of seventeenth-century Britain, '"And the Word was made flesh": The Problem of the Incarnation in Seventeenth-Century Devotional Poetry' finds this central doctrine of Christianity to be a destabilising force in the religious controversies of the day. The fact that Roman Catholics, the Church of England, and Puritans all hold to the same belief in the Incarnation means that there is a central point of orthodoxy which allows poets from differing sects of Christianity to write devotional verse that is equally relevant for all churches. This creates a situation in which the more the writer focuses on the incarnate Jesus, the less ecclesiastically distinct their writings become and the more aware the reader is of how difficult it is to categorise poets by the sects of the day.

The introduction historicises the doctrine of the Incarnation in Early Modern Europe through presenting statements of belief for the doctrine from reformers such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldryk Zwingli in addition to the Roman Catholic decrees of the Council of Trent and the Church of England's '39 Articles'. Additionally, there is a further focus on the Church of England provided through considering the writings of Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes amongst others.

In the ensuing chapters, the devotional poetry of John Donne, Aemilia Lanyer, George Herbert, Robert Herrick, and Richard Crashaw is discussed in regards to its use of the Incarnation and incarnational imagery in orthodox though diverse manners. Their use of words to appropriate the Word, and their embrace of the flesh as they approach the divine shows the elastic and problematic nature of a religion founded upon God becoming human and the mystery that the Church allows it to remain.

Thesis Declarations

I, Jesse David Sharpe, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 78,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 2008 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September, 2009; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2008 and 2012.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many people for the completion of this dissertation, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank some in particular. As I began to piece together the ideas that became this dissertation, I was greatly aided by the advice and help of Mardy Philippian, Timothy Carlisle, Brian Larsen, and Alan Rose, and most especially the staff of the Simpson University library – Larry Haight, Eric Wheeler, Suzanne Wheeler, and Curt Rice. The wonderful postgraduate community in 66 North Street has been an invaluable source of inspiration and support during the research and writing of this dissertation. For the laughter, coffee, and alcohol shared with Katherine Cooper, Dominic McNeil, Rob Woodridge, Jo Whitely, Rachel Holmes, John Dennison, Karin Koehler, Scott Brooks, and Phoebe Allen I am eternally grateful. Lindsay and the staff of Northpoint have provided a wonderful sanctuary during this project. The staff of the Special Collections of the University of St Andrews have been generous in their friendship and aide. Sandra McDevitt and the secretaries of the School of English have shown eternal patience and kindness to me and I cannot overstate my gratitude to them. To my mom and dad and my mother-in-law and father-in-law I love you all and I cannot state strongly enough what your support has meant to me. The friendship of Ravenel Richardson, Kristine Johanson, and Bronnie Johnston has been a continuous source of sanity and joy, thank you. To Professor Neil Rhodes I would like to state my appreciation for his kind and understanding supervision of my dissertation. You have been invaluable to me as I have written this, and I cannot thank you enough. To my sons Morley and Dashiell I have to say thank you for helping me keep everything in perspective. I love you both, and it has been a joy to watch you grow and mature while I have been working on this. But most of all I must thank my wife, Casey. You have read every word of this dissertation countless times, and your edits and advice have been of the greatest benefit to me. I know that where this dissertation succeeds it is yours, and all failures are my own. I love you.

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In line with contemporary scholarly practice, I have modernised spelling in the following cases: *i/j*, *v/u*, and the long s. Also thorns and yoghs have been transcribed as Roman characters. I have also silently expanded contractions.

I

INTRODUCTION

[1] In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God, and God was the WORD. [2] This was in the beginning with God. [3] Al things were made by him: and without him was made nothing. That which was made, [4] in him was life, and the life was the light of men: [5] and the light shineth in darkenesse, and the darkenesse did not comprehend it. . . .[9] It was the true light, which lighteneth every man that commeth into this world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. [11] He came into his owne, and his owne received him not. [12] But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sonnes of God, to those that beleeve in his name. [13] Who, not of bloud, nor of the wil of flesh, nor of the wil of man, but of God are borne. **[14]** AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, and dwelt in us (and we saw the glorie of him, glorie as it were of the only-begotten of the Father) ful of grace and veritie.
Rheims New Testament

[1] In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] And the light shineth in darknesse, and the darknesse comprehended it not. . . .[9] That was the true light, which lighteth every man that commeth into the world.[10] Hee was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.[11] Hee came unto his owne, and his owne received him not.[12] But as many as received him, to them gave hee power to become the sonnes of God, *even* to them that beleeve on his Name: [13] Which were borne, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.[14] And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (& we beheld his glory, the glory as of the onely begotten of the Father) full of grace and trueth.
King James Bible

[1] In the beginning was the Worde, and the Worde was with God, and that Worde was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made by it, & without it was made nothing that was made.[4] In it was life, and the life was the light of men.[5] And the light shineth in the darkenes, & the darkenes comprehended it not. . . .[9] That was the true light, which lighteth everie man that cometh into the worlde. [10] He was in the worlde, and the worlde was made by him: & the worlde knewe him not.[11] He came unto his owne, and his owne received him not.[12] But as many as received him, to them he gave power to be the sonnes of God, *even* to them that beleve in his Name,[13] Which are borne not of blood, nor of the wil of the flesh, nor of the wil of man, but of God. [14] And that Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we sawe the glorie thereof, as the glorie of the onely begotten *Sonne* of the Father) full of grace and trueth.
Geneva Bible

The contentious nature of the seventeenth-century English Church remains today. Its origins follow monarchs who lead the church in rather unexpected directions: this Protestant church was founded by a Roman Catholic Defender of the Faith, fought over by his children who moved it back and forth from Catholicism to Protestantism, and, when

the nation reaches the seventeenth century, it is presided over by a Scotsman who refuses to adopt Presbyterianism. It is moved further into ceremonialism by his son, and successor, Charles I, as well as Archbishop Laud, both of whom are executed by Puritans who rule the country for a brief period of time until the Restoration restores the monarchy in the person of Charles II, and under him the church returns to a high Protestantism, which it largely continues under to this present day. The exact nature of how reformed the Church of England is, and whether or not a Reformation even took place, are now the on-going debates of historians and scholars.[1]

The contentious nature of these debates has not escaped the scholars of the literature of the day, and so there has been (really since the beginning of the English reformed church) an attempt to define what is a Catholic writer and what is a Protestant writer. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the discussion of what defines a poet as being Protestant or Roman Catholic has largely been discussed in the light of two books, Louis Martz' *The Poetry of Meditation* and Barbara Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*.[2] Martz uses the devotional practices developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola to show how the Jesuit devotional methods can be seen in much of the English devotional poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with Lewalski arguing that a Protestant poetic is one which places a heavy emphasis upon scripture and the word due to Protestants' emphasis of *sola scriptura*. A problem to their approaches can be found in that Martz and Lewalski both claim the same poets to be either more Protestant or Roman Catholic depending upon whether Martz or Lewalski is writing the book. There has been much discussion regarding whether the poets of this period are closer to Rome or Geneva, and in the case of poets like John Donne or Richard Crashaw,

[1] David Daniell, *William Tyndale* (London, 1994), and *The Bible in English* (London, 2003); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2nd edn. (London, 2005); and Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'The Myth of the English Reformation', *Journal of British Studies* 30.1 (1991), 1-19.
[2] Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (London, 1962); Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, 1979)

who converted from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism and from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism respectively, which of their poems are for Rome and which are for Geneva.

The difficulty in defining the differences in these Christian sects is one that has existed since the Reformation began, and so it is no wonder that current scholarship of literature that is so filled with anxiety of ecclesiastical identity would also vacillate over categorising writers. In the devotional poetry of the period this becomes even more problematic, in that it is not just the religious persuasion of the writer that is argued over; rather, at times it is even poem by poem that the debate takes place. In the scholarly quests for distinctions, arguments can exist over the mention of the Virgin Mary; was she solely the devotional right of Roman Catholicism? Or is predestination and the mention of the 'elect' a clear sign of a poet's Calvinistic leanings? And if a poet is a Calvinist, does this place him in the camp of the Church of England or that of the Puritans? The problem, as will be shown, is that, despite all of the differences that exist between these three main sects of English Christianity, there is a series of shared foundational beliefs that undergird all of Christianity, and these places of agreement are more important to the religion than the places of disagreement. The creeds of the early Church were adopted by all three sects of English Christianity, and so an anxiety of identity is created, not because the beliefs are so different, but because they are so similar. Roman Catholicism, English Protestantism, and the Puritans all agree on the basic tenets of their faith, and so there is a Christian 'orthodoxy' that complicates all attempts to define rigidly the differences between these ecclesiastical bodies.

In considering the devotional poetry of the seventeenth century, it becomes clear that the poets of the time are not spokespeople for particular denominations nor are they rigid ideologues; instead, they are human beings who are trying to express a form of belief

and worship that is unique to them, and yet tied to a larger orthodoxy. In this dissertation, I will be considering how the central belief of Christianity, that of the doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, is interpreted uniquely by five different poets – John Donne, Aemilia Lanyer, George Herbert, Robert Herrick, and Richard Crashaw. These poets represent Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; their use of the Incarnation supports and challenges the monarchy and the social customs and beliefs of their day. They are diverse, and yet they all share an affirmation of Jesus Christ and his birth, trial, death, and resurrection. Through the consideration of the Incarnation, I believe that the reader will see that these attempts to create rigid divides between Rome and Geneva, as the refrain often goes, are highly problematic when applied to individual believers and writers. Even in the Synod of Dort, the Council of Trent, and the '39 Articles', there is great agreement on the basic tenets of the Christian-faith; it is not the fundamentals that are in dispute, but the accidents. And so by looking at the central piece of orthodoxy – the Incarnation – the reader will see that there is great fluidity of application of the doctrine while still maintaining an orthodox belief.

In this discussion of the Incarnation in seventeenth-century devotional poetry, it will be helpful to begin by defining what the Incarnation is and also by showing how this central belief was agreed upon by the Roman Catholics, English Protestants, and Puritans. A useful and general definition of the Incarnation has been provided by Alistair McGrath, and he defines the doctrine as such: 'the assumption of human nature by God, in the person of Jesus Christ'.[3] From this basic statement about the belief it is worthwhile to consider the three translations from the Gospel of John provided at the start of the introduction.[4] The three translations provided are from the Douai-Rheims, the Geneva,

[3] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 4th edn. (Oxford, 2007), p. 490.
[4] John 1.1-5,9-14; *The New Testament of Jesus Christ, translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin* (Rhemes, 1582); William Aldis Wright (ed.), *The Authorized Version of the English Bible, 1611*, 5 vols., (Cambridge, 1909); Lloyd E. Berry (ed.), *The Geneva Bible* (Peabody, MA, 2007).

and the King James (Authorised Version) Bibles, and they represent the three sects of Christianity during the seventeenth century. The Rheims is a Roman Catholic translation, with the Geneva being preferred by Puritans and the King James being Church of England. In reading these three representations of one of the clearest statements of the Incarnation to be found in the New Testament, it is can be seen that all three are presenting their readers with the same basic words to describe this core tenet of the Christian faith. When the reader reaches verse fourteen of chapter one, the point at which the Gospel strongly describes the divine becoming human, all three use the same phrase of 'And the word became flesh'. This description of God uniting with humanity bears no difference when it is presented to an English speaking Christian. No matter which of the three persuasions a person may have, they are presented with the same incarnate Jesus, and so it is from this commonality that this introduction will continue.

To begin the discussion of the Renaissance conception of the Incarnation, Martin Luther's analysis of John 1:14 is helpful. Of this passage he says,

> Thus the most precious treasure and the strongest consolation we Christians have is this: that the Word, the true and natural Son of God, became man, with flesh and blood like that of any other human; that He became incarnate for our sakes in order that we might enter into great glory, that our flesh and blood, skin and hair, hands and feet, stomach and back might reside in heaven as God does . . .[5]

As will be shown from the quotations that follow, Luther places the most emphasis upon the fleshiness of the Incarnation when compared to the other Reformers, but that does not mean that they do not also support the belief of God becoming man. One of John Calvin's

[5] Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works: Volume 22 – Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 1-4* (St. Louis, 1957), p. 110.

statements on the Incarnation is, 'Now it was of the greatest importance for us that he who was to be our Mediator be both true God and true man'.[6] Calvin then goes on to elaborate on this statement in language that is very similar to that of Luther's. Calvin writes:

> we trust that we are sons of God, for God's natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us (Gen. 2:23-24, mediated through Eph. 5:29-31). Ungrudgingly he took our nature upon himself to impart to us what was his, and to become both Son of God and Son of Man in common with us.[7]

And then, as he continues to build upon his statements concerning the Incarnation, he explains the significance of this doctrine to the Christian religion.

> For the same reason it was also imperative that he who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man. It was his task to swallow up death. Who but the Life could do this? It was his task to conquer sin. Who but very Righteousness could do this? It was his task to rout the powers of world and air. Who but a power higher than world and air could do this? Now where does life or righteousness, or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone? Therefore our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son.[8]

So it is that only by God coming down that humanity can be saved, and through Christ's redemption of humans, they are brought up to God. Lutheranism and the Presbyterianism

[6] John T. McNeill (ed.), *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Vol. 1, (Philadelphia, 1960), p 464.
[7] *Institutes*, p. 465.
[8] *Institutes*, p. 466.

that grew out of Calvin's writings are also joined by the Puritan theologian Huldrich Zwingli. Zwingli, using language reminiscent of Calvin, defines the Incarnation as such:

> This mediator Christ is therefore not only God but also a human being; and not only is he a human being, but also God; for if he were only divine, he would not be suitable to act as mediator. For God is one. . . . In God, however, there is nothing divisive or separated. Therefore he made his Son mediator who accepted human nature, not that he should be mediator by the sole strength of human weakness, but by the power of the divine nature which is united human strength so that, just as human weakness was joined to God through Christ and united with him, we too may be reconciled to God through Christ and united with him, we too may be reconciled to God through his suffering and sacrifice of Christ.[9]

Through these quotations, it can be seen that there was great agreement amongst the primary Reformation theologians on the European continent, and in moving to England the reader finds that the Church of England, which in the seventeenth century (especially under the reign of King James VI and I) sought a middle way between Calvin's teachings and (as will be discussed below) those of the Roman Catholic church, also provides theologians who approach the doctrine in similar fashion.

The English Reformed theologians agree with the interpretation of the Incarnation presented by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. However, they do so in language that is not as explicit about the body of the Incarnation. Theirs is a more esoteric description of the belief. In one of Lancelot Andrewes' sermons, the reader finds this statement:

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[9] E. J. Furcha (ed.), *Huldrych Zwingli Writings: Volume One – The Defense of the Reformed Faith* (Allison Park, PA, 1984), p. 129.

> And so have we here now in one, both twaine his *Natures*. *God sent his Sonne*, There his *Divine: made of a woman*, Here his *humane Nature*, That, from *the bosome of his Father*, before all worlds: this, *from the wombe of his mother*, in the world. So that, as from *eternitie*, *God* his *Father* might say, that verse of the Psalme. *Filius meus es tu, hodie genui te*: Thou art my Sonne, this day have I begotten thee. So, in *the fulnesse of time*, might the *Virign his mother*, no lesse truely say, *Filius meus es tu, hodie peperi te*: Thou art my Sonne, this day have I brought thee into the world.[10]

Here Andrewes still emphasises the humanity and divinity of Jesus, but there is less description of the flesh and bones of Christ and more discussion of humanity's role in the making of the Incarnation through the person of his mother, Mary. The phrases '*made of a woman*' and '*from the wombe of his mother*' are the strongest statements about the physical '*humane Nature*' of Jesus, and they intriguingly put Mary and women at the forefront of the issue. This understanding of the Incarnation will be of particular importance to Aemilia Lanyer, as will be seen in chapter three. In addition to Andrewes, Richard Hooker, in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ensures that he properly defines and addresses the importance of this doctrine in book five of his work. He defines the Incarnation thus:

> The Lord our God is but one God. In which indivisible unitie notwithstandinge wee adore the father as beinge altogether of himself, wee glorifie that consubstantiall worde which is the Sonne, wee blesse and magnifie that coessentiall Spirit eternallie proceeding from both which is the holie Ghost.

[10] 'A Sermon Preached on Christmas Day 1609' in Peter McCullough (ed.), *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons and Lectures* (Oxford, 2005), p. 169.

> Seeinge therefore the father is of none, the Sonne is of the Father, and the Spirite is of both, they are by these theire severall properties reallie distinguishable ech from other. For the substance of God with this propertie *to be of none* doth make the person of the father; the verie selfe same substance in number with this propertie *to be of the father* maketh the person of the Sonne; the same substance having added unto it the propertie of *proceeding from the other two* maketh the person of the holie Ghost.[11]

Hooker ensures that his definition of the Incarnation is united with an understanding of the Trinity (as will be discussed later in the chapter, this is also the intent of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds). The Incarnation is a part of the Trinity, and cannot be separated from it, but it is still a doctrine of humanity and God united, and so Hooker also says of the incarnate God in the person of Jesus:

> Wherefore taking to him selfe our flesh and by his incarnation making it his own flesh, he had now of his owne although from us what to offer unto God for us. And as Christ tooke manhood that by it he might be capable of death whereunto hee humbles him slefe, so because manhood is the proper subject of compassion and feeling pittie, which maketh the sceptre of Christes regencie even in the kingdome of heaven amiable, he which without our nature could not on earth suffer for the synnes of the world, doth now also by meanes thereof both make intercession to God for synners and exercise dominion over all men with a true, a natural, and a sensible touch of mercie.[12]

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[11] *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V* in W. Speed Hill (ed.), *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), p. 209.
[12] *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V*, p. 211.

Although Andrewes and Hooker do not emphasise the physical aspect of the Incarnation in as explicit terms, they do still completely agree with the humanness of God incarnate in Jesus; furthermore, Hooker mentions the humbling that was becoming human. However, as will be seen in the chapters that follow, the British devotional poets did often emphasise the physical in the Incarnation, it can be seen in the sermons of John Donne. In a sermon preached during Lent for the audience of the King at White-Hall, Donne uses the biblical text of 1 Timothy 3:16, and from this text he declares

> Here is the compass, that the essential Word of God, the Son of God, *Christ Jesus*, went: He was God, *humbled in the flesh*; he was Man, *received into glory*. Here is the compasse that the written Word of God, *went*, the Bible; that begun in *Moses*, in darknesse, in the *Chaos*; and it ends in Saint *John*, in clearnesse, in a Revelation. Here is the compass of all time, as was distributed in the Creation, *Vespere & mane*; darknesse, and then light: the Evening and the Morning made the Day; Mystery and Manifestation make the Text.[13]

The emphasis here of '*humbled in the flesh*' is a reminder as to just how important flesh and humility are to the doctrine, and it also indicates the up and down nature of the belief. In this sermon Donne unites Jesus and the Word of God, and sees him from creation to the apocalypse, but Donne is also explicitly stating the incarnational cycle. It is a Christological movement, constantly up and down, in which God humbles himself and from this humbled place is then able to raise up humanity with him in the resurrection. Because God has become human, humanity is united with God, and so God's movements through the world as the Incarnation in the person of Jesus becomes humanity's

[13] George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (eds.), *The Sermons of John Donne*, vol. 3, (Berkeley, 1962), p. 206.

movements; whereby, in his suffering, death, and resurrection it becomes humanity's suffering, death, and resurrection. The return of Jesus to heaven is the assurance that the rest of humanity can follow because one human has made the path. It is this constant movement of the Incarnation coming down for humans and then elevating them as being worthy of heaven that becomes the focus of the devotional poetry which will be discussed in this dissertation.

This chapter has primarily discussed the teachings of Protestant theologians, but when Roman Catholic writings on the doctrines are considered, it is clear that there is no disagreement between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics on this piece of religious belief. In *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, the First Contemplation for the First Day of the Second Week is 'upon the Incarnation'.[14] The founder of the Jesuits, an order that was illegal during the reigns of Elizabeth and James, instructs his followers to contemplate the Incarnation, and it is the first piece of doctrine that *The Spiritual Exercises* instruct for meditation. Additionally, The Creed of the Council of Trent makes no doctrinal statement regarding the Incarnation. Since much of the purpose of the Council of Trent was to address the issues of doctrinal controversy raised by the Reformation, it could be seen that the lack of a statement on the Incarnation could be because there was no disagreement on this point. Furthermore, when one reads The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, under the section on 'Decree Concerning the Symbol of Faith', this statement is found,

> For this reason it has thought it well that the symbol of faith which the holy Roman Church uses as the cardinal principle wherein all who profess the faith of

[14] W. H. Longridge (ed.), *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (London, 1919), p. 84.

> foundation *against which the gates of hell shall never prevail*, be expressed in the same words in which it is read in all the churches, which is as follows:[15]

At this point the Nicene Creed is quoted in its entirety, and as will be discussed below it is a creed whose primary point of concern is the Incarnation. This creed was generally accepted by all branches of Protestantism too, and it is mentioned in the Church of England's '39 Articles' as being one of their statements of faith. What this indicates then is that as the Roman Catholic Church begins its statement that will define itself against the Protestant churches, they affirm a place of common ground.

In turning to the creeds, it is important to note that there was much agreement between the Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding the truth of the early Church creeds, and it is the Nicene and Apostles' creeds that particularly were found to be statements of common belief. In the '39 Articles', being the statements of faith for the Church of England, Article 8 states, 'The three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.'[16] Of these three creeds recognised by the Church of England, the Apostles' and the Nicene are the most universally recognised in Christianity, and so it is pertinent to quote them as they are also fundamental statements of belief regarding the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Apostles' Creed most likely developed as a statement of faith during the sacrament of baptism, and is still performed in a catechistical manner during baptism in the Church of England. The creed is stated as such:

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[15] 'Decrees of the Council of Trent (1563)', in John H. Leith (ed.), *Creeds of the Churches*, Revised edn. (Oxford, 1973), p. 401.
[16] 'The Thirty-Nine Articles, 1571', in Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 289.

> I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.[17]

From this creed, it is clear that there is a very strong statement regarding the person of Jesus Christ. He is 'our Lord' and God's 'only Son'. The virgin birth and the work of the Holy Spirit are both affirmed. He is identified as having existed in time (the reign of Pontius Pilate); he suffered, died, descended further yet – even more than the descent into humanity – and he was resurrected and now resides in heaven. In addition to the actions of God in the flesh, there is also the reassurance of a bodily resurrection for the rest of humanity. It is a brief statement of faith, yet it fully acknowledges the Incarnation and the Incarnational cycle.

The Nicene Creed is longer and was initially drafted at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. The council was held to address heresies regarding the person and divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit; therefore, the creed's very wording is created so as to provide as accurate a definition of the doctrine as possible. The creed reads

> I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

[17] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York, 2004), p. 686.

> I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.
>
> Who, for us for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made human; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.
>
> And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.
>
> And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.[18]

As can be seen, the Nicene Creed emphasises many of the same points of doctrine as the Apostles' Creed; however, there is a great importance placed upon the fact that Jesus is one with God the Father, and in the second paragraph the language seems to betray an anxiety existent in the doctrine of the Incarnation with the repetitive and redundant phrasing of 'the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made'. The repetition of concepts in this

[18] *The Reformation*, p. 685.

phrasing is the result of the desire to create a statement of faith that would not allow any room for the Arian heresy and its emphasis upon Christ 'as a creature' to continue in the Christian religion.[19] The statement then makes the more intellectually difficult assertion that Jesus Christ was both man and God and places any attempts to assert the divinity over the humanity or the humanity over the divinity as acts of heresy. The Roman Catholic and the primary Protestant churches of the seventeenth century are affirming their continued acceptance of this belief through adopting the creeds as a part of their central statements of faith.

The final creed affirmed by the '39 Articles' is the Athanasian Creed. Though less used today, it still has wide acceptance in the Church as it also did in the seventeenth century. In addition to the inclusion in the '39 Articles', this creed is also to be found in the Lutheran 'Book of Concord', Zwingli's *Fifei Expositio*, the Callican Confession, the Belgic Confession, the synod of Dort, and Pope Pius V confirmed its place in the Roman Catholic mass.[20] The strong Protestant and Roman Catholic support that the creed received is important due to the emphasis it places on the importance of the Incarnation to the Christian faith with the creed explicitly stating that not believing in the Incarnation and its proper place in the Trinity is a damnable offence. The creed is long, but the precision of the language is important due to its attempt to define the Trinity and the Incarnation in such a way that will not allow those who would deny the divinity or humanity of the incarnate Jesus any room to use the creed for support. For this reason the complete creed is provided here.

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[19] *Christian Theology*, pp. 15-17.
[20] J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (London, 1964), pp. 48-51.

Whosoever desires to be saved must above all things hold the Catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally.

Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such also the Holy Spirit. The Father is increate, the Son increate, the Holy Spirit increate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal; just as there are not three increates or three infinites, but one increate and one infinite. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are obliged by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is made of none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three

Holy Spirits. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but all three persons are coeternal with each other and co-equal. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity must be worshipped. So he who desires to be saved should think of the Trinity.

It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also faithfully believe in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.

He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and he is man from his mother's substance, born in time. Perfect God, and perfect man composed of a rational soul and human flesh, equal to the Father in respect of his divinity, less than the Father in respect of his humanity.

Who, although he is God and man, is nevertheless not two but one Christ. He is one, however, not by the transformation of his divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of his humanity into God; one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person. For just as rational soul and flesh are a single man, so God and man are a single Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, whence he will come to judge living and dead: at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds; and those who have behaved well will go to eternal life, those who have behaved badly to eternal fire.

This is the Catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he will not be able to be saved.[21]

[21] *The Athanasian Creed*, pp. 17-20.

As is the case with the Nicene Creed, there is a great deal of repetitive phrasing as the author attempts to define both the unity and distinctiveness of each member of the Trinity, and in this, to properly portray the completely human and completely divine being that Jesus is. Through the reading of these three creeds, it becomes apparent how important and how difficult it is to the Christian faith to understand the doctrine of the Incarnation. Jesus was eternal, and yet had a beginning and physically existed on the earth at a particular point in history. He is divine glory, and yet was able to take on flesh. He is infinite, and yet he existed in a womb. He is omnipotent, and yet had to be nursed and reared by a human mother. The fact that God could become human – not merely appear human – and live in flesh is the central point of belief for Christians, yet it is also one of the most problematic intellectually as can be seen by the attempts to define the doctrine without falling into any heresies that would give prominence to the human or divine aspects of the Incarnation. Calvin too uses this language when he states

> 'we ought not to understand the statement that "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14) in the sense that the Word was turned into flesh or confusedly mingled with flesh. Rather, it means that, because he chose for himself the virgin's womb as a temple in which to dwell, he who was the Son of God became the Son of Man – not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ'.[22]

[22] *Institutes*, p. 482.

The catholic acceptance of these three creeds shows the agreement at the core of Christianity between these various branches of the religion and points to the shared orthodoxy that exists within Christianity. From the catholic, orthodox understanding of the Incarnation, I will now turn to how it was manifest in the '39 Articles', and from there to the British devotional poets of the seventeenth century who are using this central point of orthodoxy to try to bridge the human and divine in their relationships with God.

The '39 Articles' begin with four articles that are statements of faith about the Incarnation, showing the prominence that the belief has in the Church of England – it is the beginning of the Christian faith. The first four articles are

> 01. *Of Faith in the Holy Trinity*
>
> There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts or passions, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in Unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.
>
> 02. *That the Word of God or Son of God, which was made Very Man*
>
> The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us and to be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men.

> 03. *Of the going down of Christ into Hell*
>
> As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also it is to be believed, that he went down into hell.
>
> 04. *Of the Resurrection of Christ*
>
> Christ did truly arise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all men at the last day.[23]

Here the language of the creeds is not only affirmed through their adoption as statements of faith but the Church of England then reiterates them as they begin to define their distinct approach to the Christian faith. Once again a reader sees the emphasis on Christ in the Trinity, his humanity and divinity, his death and suffering, and his bodily resurrection. This belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is made explicit through the use of the phrase 'and took again his body, with flesh, bones and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature'. So it is that the '39 Articles' are also concerned with ensuring that the notion of God in flesh does not only exist in the person of Jesus Christ as he lived on earth, but also as he died, was resurrected, and now exists in heaven. Due to his ascension human flesh and bones now are with God in heaven, and so all of physical existence has been redeemed, not simply the soul. The result is that Christianity cannot ultimately esteem the soul over the body because both were taken on by God and both have been redeemed and both now reside in heaven at the right hand of God. As will be seen, it is the physical aspect of the Incarnation that the seventeenth-century devotional poets hold on to

[23] 'The Thirty-Nine Articles', pp. 285-6.

in their meditative verses. God as human redeems their humanity and allows their words to be more than symbols on pages, but a reflection of language that has been used by God. The Word came down from heaven and became flesh; therefore, the flesh can use the Word to return to heaven.

Much of the discussion regarding the incarnational elements of devotional poetry has been found in examinations of the Lord's Supper and the sacramental nature of the poetry. Examples of recent scholarship discussing the sacramental nature of Early Modern English devotional verse can be found in writings such as Eleanor J. McNees's *Eucharistic Poetry* and Robert Whalen's *The Poetry of Immanence*.[24] The discussion of sacramental poetics has greatly expanded our understanding of the incarnational focus of much of the religious poetry of the time, but even in this there is a tendency to try to identify a Protestant /Catholic divide in the language. While the concept of transubstantiation was only observed by the Roman Catholic church, the Lutheran idea of consubstantiation is very close to transubstantiation, so when it comes to the issue of the sacrament of Communion, despite the arguments over exactly how present Jesus is in the bread and the wine (if at all), the language used by individual authors can imply support for transubstantiation to a more memorial understanding of the sacrament without actually exposing their own position on the matter. The Church of England's statement in the '39 Articles' regarding Communion is article twenty-eight and it reads

> The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of love Christians ought to have among themselves to one another; but rather it is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. Insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily and with faith receive the

[24] Eleanor J. McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry* (London, 1992); Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence* (London, 2002).

> same, the bread which we break is a communion partaking of the body of Christ, and likewise the cup of blessing is a communion partaking of the blood of Christ.
>
> Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood in the supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.
>
> The body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the supper only after an heavenly and spiritual manner; and the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the supper is faith.
>
> The sacrament of the Lord's supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up or worshipped.[25]

This statement of faith for the spiritual element in the Lord's Supper is one that allows for great leeway in the interpretation and discussion of the sacrament in worship. The reader learns that the sacrament is indeed a 'sign of love' but that it is also more than this, which means that there is a memorial aspect to the act, but that the act also involves what the Church of England terms to be a 'sacrament' which it defines as, 'Sacraments ordained of Christ, be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him'.[26] The very term sacrament is understood as a 'sign of grace', which further means that there is a memorial component to the Lord's Supper, but in the memorial, there is also a spiritual force at work. While the Church of England directly denies the concept of

[25] 'The Thirty-Nine Articles', pp. 301-02.
[26] 'The Thirty-Nine Articles', p. 299.

transubstantiation they do recognise that there is a presence in the bread and the wine. Christ is present in the meal, but it is not defined exactly how this works. The recognition of the sacrament as both a memorial and a partaking of the presence of Jesus allows devotional poets a wide range of literary terminology in which to express and meditate upon the sacrament that celebrates the Incarnation, and through the presence of Jesus, in one form or another, it is in and of itself an incarnational act. Poets then may use terminology and imagery that would speak of sign or real presence without moving beyond the bonds of the '39 Articles'.

In contemplating the Lord's Supper writers are presented with a meal, a necessity of life, and in partaking it they eat, an act common to all humanity. This meal of remembrance (in which Christ is present) is another sign of the Incarnational paradox because God can be found in bread and wine which will be ingested by the believers, and through this meal, the believers will be fed physically and spiritually. Moreover, there is a celebratory element in members of a church coming together and sharing in a meal to remember when God became human in order to save humans from their sins. The celebratory nature of this has been nicely captured by MacCulloch when he states,

> From the Church's earliest days it has been a way to break down the barrier between the physical and the spiritual, between earth and heaven, death and life. It involves objects made by human beings and therefore part of everyday society: bread and wine, food and drink, which bring earthly joy, and which are fraught with danger because they can be enjoyed too much. That is what makes the Eucharist such a potent symbol of offering what human beings bring to God. Yet it is also associated with what Christ offers to humanity through his unique, costly,

> and painful offering to God: life and joy, which are much more than a full belly and a head full of alcohol.[27]

MacCulloch rightly places his emphasis upon the common aspect of the meal and how this commonality becomes a mediator between humanity and God and the physical and spiritual. Baumlin notices this as well when writing, 'For communication is a mode of communion, God (and man) speaking to man through the material body; the preacher – and the lover, we might add – is thus entrusted with the task of carrying on the Incarnation, bringing charity to all, knitting men together in a "knot of unity"'.[28] From this place of communion, the seventeenth century devotional poet has a great variety of means through which to meditate upon, present, and reach God. God was human and is human and is remembered and communed with through plain and simple objects of sustenance.

The expression of God in the mundane is central to the Incarnation, as can be seen in the sacrament of Communion, but this everydayness allows for it to be interpreted into the everyday lives of each believer, and so the expression and internalisation of the Incarnation – and in this regard, of Christianity – then becomes personalised. When delving into the muddied nature of determining Roman Catholic from Church of England from Puritan in the devotional practices in England in the seventeenth century it is helpful to be reminded just how much individuals in the time period were willing to transgress the boundaries that current scholarship attempts to place upon them. A statement by Thomas Browne in his *Religio Medici* gives an excellent example of this:

> There is no Church whose every part so squares unto my conscience, whose articles, constitutions, and customes seeme so consonant unto reason, and as it were

[27] *The Reformation*, p. 10.
[28] James S. Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse* (London, 1991), p. 201.

> framed to my particular devotion, as this whereof I hold my beliefe, the Church of *England*, to whose faith I am a sworne subject, and therefore in a double obligation, subscribe unto her Articles, and endeavour to observe her Constitutions: whatsoever is beyond, as points indifferent, I observe according to the rules of my private reason, or the humor and fashion of my devotion, neither believing this, because *Luther* affirmed it, or disapproving that, because *Calvin* hath disavouched it. I condemne not all things in the Councell of *Trent*, nor approve all in the Synod of *Dort*. In briefe, where the Scripture is silent, the Church is my Text; where that speakes, 'tis but my Comment; where there is a joint silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my Religion from *Rome* or *Geneva*, but the dictates of my own reason.[29]

As Thomas Browne begins his own declaration of faith, he affirms the common orthodoxy shared throughout Western Christianity and states that his own beliefs are not the mindless following of one denomination over another, but that he has chosen the one that most suits his private beliefs; however, he leaves open the idea that there can be faithful believers in the other branches of Christianity. The anxiety that exists in Renaissance England about categorising Christians into the various sects of Christianity is an anxiety that exists not because there was so much difference, but because there was so much in common between the divisions that comprised the Christian Church in England.

As Claire McEachern has stated, 'Part of the problem with mounting any inquiry into the social function of religion is not that it is elusive but that it is everywhere'.[30] Religion was everywhere, but as has been shown, it is not just that it was everywhere, but

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[29] Thomas Brown, *Religio Medici*, in L. C. Martin (ed.), *Religio Medici and Other Works* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 5-6.
[30] Claire McEachern, 'Introduction', in Claire McEachern and Deborah Shuger (eds.), *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 6.

that it also did not contain the clear distinctions required to make it easy to categorise one sect or denomination from another. As Joseph H Summers has noted of the period in England,

> The area of potential agreement included the devotional life and everyday activity. The "Imitation of Christ," whether as a volume or a practice, was common to most of the religious readers and writers of the time. Although Catholic influence was feared in England, it was often not recognized: Quarles's translation of the Jesuit Herman Hugo's *Pia Desideria* (with the Counter-Reformation plates intact) became a favourite volume, particularly among the Puritans. A remarkable quantity of religious reading was shared by all parties, both within and without the Church of England. St Augustine and other early Church fathers were considered generally authoritative, and St Bernard of Clairvaux, having received the approval of Aquinas, Calvin, and Luther, was widely read. Calvin, Beza, and other leading continental writers were the property of most English Protestants. Immensely popular contemporary books of devotion often failed to disclose the ecclesiastical and theological positions of their authors.[31]

Devotional literature could easily move between the various sects of Christianity because of the shared orthodoxy, and the *via media* sought by the Jacobean church made the fluid movement of believers from one sect to another easier to accomplish and more difficult to distinguish. To again look to Summers, wherein which he discusses diversity of Christian confessional groups that could practice within the Church of England's *via media*:

[31] Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (London, 1954), p. 54.

> In the England of 1609-1633 there were individuals who conformed to these patterns; they were far fewer than most of the discussions of the period's churchly affairs lead the modern reader to believe. The great majority, not only of the members of the Church of England but even of the theological disputants and the bishops of the Church, cannot be so easily categorized. Those who sought the much-praised *via media* between the two extremes found that it was no marked highway but a vaguely defined area; the paths which conscientious searchers for the truth found through it were rarely identical. Such a situation did not at all mean, however, that life in the Church of England was a pattern for Hobbes's view of the state of nature. The Anglican Church before 1633 was in one sense more truly 'catholic' than the Anglo-Catholics of the nineteenth century wished to believe. So long as an individual subscribed to the Articles, attended services a few times a year, and was not too singular in his actions, a wide latitude of belief and practice was allowed.[32]

Within the attempt to find a *via media* for the Jacobean church exists the desire to claim true Apostolic tradition, and this search was being carried out with all Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. Attaining the Apostolic tradition meant that one would mean that the church was correctly representing and practicing the ceremonies and structure of the early church. The church that ratified the biblical canon and wrote the early creeds that the various denominations agreed upon their core beliefs. As Prior says of the Jacobean church

[32] *George Herbert: His Life and Art*, pp. 53-4.

> A Protestant, but still very English, liturgy was grafted onto a visible church whose defenders needed to justify its existence as a reformed continuation of the Apostolic church, but which was nevertheless possessed of modes of doctrine and discipline to which the scripture did not give clear warrant. The result was that Christian history and the nature of the Apostolic church bulked large in the literature of religious controversy. Rather than Anglican versus puritan, or Calvinist versus Arminian, the principle cleavages amounted to differing schools of thought on how the Apostolic tradition might be interpreted, and what implications these interpretations had for matters of practical ecclesiology.[33]

From this search for a true 'primitive church' to follow, Prior argues that the desire for a *via media* brings with it the tension of trying to navigate the various claims to the 'true church' that existed in Jacobean Britain.

> Jacobean ecclesiology was not defined by consensus, but represented a continuation of post-Reformation debates that were animated by the problem of reconciling a definition of the Church as a spiritual association of free Christians with a Church "established" by statute and annexed to the imperial Crown. Given the fact that the Church continued to draw fire from a range of Protestant critics, the whole enterprise of building, refining, and in some cases tearing down an historical ecclesiology lay at the very root of the problem, and furthermore the language in which it was built, refined, and torn down was central to the way in which contemporary political and religious discourse was carried on.[34]

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[33] Charles W. A. Prior, *Defining the Jacobean Church* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 19.
[34] *Defining the Jacobean Church*, p. 21.

Here Prior shows much of the difficulty in using the religious language of seventeenth-century England to define the various Christian camps with which individual believers would align themselves, because the same language by all political and religious movements, but for different purposes. The difficulty in placing individual believers into Christian sects by way of their rhetoric becomes more problematic when applied to the devotional poets because they were often more concerned with exhibiting personal belief than defending or attacking schismatic arguments. Using George Herbert as an example, Summers nicely summarises the difficulties that exist when trying to categorise the devotional poets of the seventeenth century:

> It is difficult to make our fairly rigid modern conceptions of Puritan and Anglican, or of high, broad, and low, apply to a man who was engaged in no major theological or ceremonial controversies after his university days and who died before 1640. The religious differences in Herbert's lifetime, moreover, were much more complicated than the modern labels indicate.[35]

As this dissertation will show, when individuals move closer to the central orthodoxy of Christianity, the Incarnation, the religious differences that arise are of personal interpretation and application rather than denominational defence. Though critical studies of Early Modern religious poetry have increased in numbers over the last twenty years, this dissertation is unique in its consideration of the Incarnation as both a point of unity and individuality for the devotional poets of the period. When one looks at the way in which the Incarnation and its theological implications are interpreted and applied by devotional writers, one finds that this doctrine that is a point of unity for Christianity becomes a

[35] *George Herbert: His Life and Art*, p. 49.

destabilising force in the individual because the individual can interpret and apply the doctrine with great diversity while still adhering to an orthodox understanding of the tenet.

The mystery of how a person can be fully God and fully man is one which the creeds do not attempt to answer. While they state that Jesus is God incarnate, they never explain how this can be, and so at the heart of the religion is a mystery that justifies the flesh because God could become flesh without ceasing to be God, yet it did not end sin, death, and the corruption of the physical world because there is still the promise of a 'new earth' that will set all creation right.[36] A tension remains then, because the physical is redeemed, but it will still need to be replaced. This creates a problem for the devotional writers as to how much emphasis and attention should be given to the flesh, and the results of how much attention is given to the physical has surprised some critics. As Richard Rambuss has stated, 'Articulating a devotion that is profoundly attuned to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, of God becoming flesh – becoming a man – these religious works exhibit surprisingly little inclination to efface the corporeal'.[37] What Rambuss's surprise betrays is a current preference for the spiritual over the physical that did not exist to the same degree in the seventeenth century, and that it is actually in the physicality of Jesus that some of these poets find their greatest comfort. This is further supported by Rambuss when he writes that

> Seventeenth-century religious verse is densely nuanced psychologically, yet arguably many of its most profound subjectivity effects are incited, in accordance with the incarnational theology I have here been calling to the fore, by this poetry's

[36] Revelation 21.1. William Aldis Wright (ed,), *The Authorized Version of the English Bible, 1611*, vol. 5, (Cambridge, 1909).
[37] Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (London, 1998), p. 2.

> reflection upon Christ's body in its extreme vulnerability *as a body*, as a truly human form, not a 'phantasticall' one.[38]

However, this revelation of the emphasis of God in the flesh rather than a '"phantastical" one' should be no revelation at all because of insistence upon a physical existence, death, and resurrection of Jesus found in early church creeds and the '39 Articles's. This devotional focus on the body of Christ becomes especially applicable for devotional writers as they seek the ineffable through the familiar. That God has a body – arms, legs, face, hair, ears, mouth, nose, hands – can then be used as a means to understand the Holy Spirit, God the Father, and the Trinity, all entities that defy attempts to be contained in knowable form. Therefore, what Friedman says of John Donne's writings can also be applied to the seventeenth-century devotional writers as a whole.

> But before that transcendent illuminated vision of self-knowledge can be achieved, God presents His face to us here, by accommodation, in many guises and through many veils. The only saving one is the one that most resembles us, His incarnation as the Christ. And we can follow Donne, in the sermons as in the divine poems, as he tries to find the lineaments of resemblance between himself and the iconic face which spans the poles of his identity, being more like him than any other creature and at the same time unimaginably distant and unlike.[39]

Similarly, when discussing the Incarnation in relation to devotional writings in the seventeenth century J. Mark Halstead also finds that the Incarnation, by way of its physical

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[38] *Closet Devotions*, pp. 14-15.
[39] Donald M. Friedman, 'Christ's Image and Likeness in Donne', *John Donne Journal* 15 (1996), 87.

nature, allows writers to use the everyday physical world as a means to understand and approach God. He writes that there is

> the distinction between a downward or deductive approach to incarnation and an upward or inductive approach. The former approach celebrates God's initiative in the incarnation, emphasizing his desire to share our grief and suffering, to become involved in the reality of human existence, to reveal his nature to humankind by becoming human himself. The inductive approach, on the other hand, suggests that incarnational theology leads our understanding upwards from the familiar, the human, to the divine, so that understanding and loving God (whom we cannot see) must begin by understanding and loving our fellow human beings (whom we can see, and who show in tangible form something of God's nature). Thus the spiritual world is a more accessible mirror which reflects and symbolizes spiritual reality.[40]

The ability then to use the plain and easily accessible daily routines of the writers as ways to access God is because of the Incarnation.

In this dissertation I will be primarily discussing how the Incarnation – that 'the Word was made flesh' – is used by five seventeenth-century devotional poets to try to understand, justify, or navigate the world in which they lived. The Incarnation offers the stability of knowing that God has partaken in the normal, physical existence of a human being, and yet it remains problematic because it gives the physical existence great weight and importance. If God became human, lived as a human, died as a human, was resurrected as a human, and returned to heaven in human form, then the actions, emotions, and thoughts of humans become the things of the Divine. And as God was revealed to

[40] J. Mark Halstead, 'John Donne and the Theology of Incarnation', in Liam Gearson (ed.), *English Literature, Theology and the Curriculum* (London, 1999), p. 156.

humanity through the flesh and the word allows these poets to meditate, through words, upon flesh and find God.

In the poetry, both secular and sacred, of John Donne the use of words to try to create lasting unity between flesh and spirit – his, his and his lovers', his and God's – can be understood as using the language, imagery, and theology of the Incarnation to try to overcome separation. His poetry appropriates the Word for his flesh and the redemption of his body and soul as he attempts to guarantee permanent relationships both on the earth and in the heavens, and he desires these relationships to be both physical and spiritual.

In the work of Aemilia Lanyer, the reader finds that meditation upon the trial and death of Jesus becomes a locus through which to understand one's place in society, and that place is one of equality for all humanity. Lanyer finds that the life of Jesus justifies women and places them on equal ground with men. She understands and presents the Incarnation in such a way that one must view the actions of Jesus – and society's response to them – as also being the actions of God, and in this she recognises that Christ's Passion was not just a tale that tells believers how they were saved, but also how they must live. She finds that when God became human, every human action he performed and every action performed to him became a theological statement, and so her statement in her poetry becomes the recognition of Jesus's response to the sexes and their response to him – the Word made flesh remakes society through the words of her verse.

George Herbert recognises the access that the Incarnation gives him to God, and so he can often be found in *The Temple* conversing with God as he would a fellow human. There is reverence given to God because of his exalted status, but there is also the acknowledgment that as the Son came down and was flesh in the person of Jesus, so too his rising in the flesh exalted the flesh to heaven. Furthermore, the Gospels contain the conversations of Jesus with his family, friends, followers, and enemies, which are then a

record of human interaction and discussions with God, and because of this Herbert can also converse with God through the risen Lord; he can exchange his words with the Word and know that he will receive a response because God has a human voice which was recorded in text.

Robert Herrick's *Hesperides* becomes an attempt to redeem the world. In Herrick's poems one finds him attempting to use the festival and all of its earthly delights to create moments of paradise. Herrick looks to the world that God came down and resided in and participated in and seems a physical realm that can be celebrated through the physical. He emphasises the flesh of the Word, and in this sees in the celebration of the body and nature a way to celebrate the world created by the Word, and the world who knows it is loved by the Creator because he has said so; he has created the world and said that 'It is good' and that at this point of the creation of the physical was the Word, because 'In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made'. Herrick then uses his *Hesperides* to make a world through words, and in so doing he incarnates his world through joyous celebrations of creation.

Finally, with Crashaw one finds that words can be used to experience Christ at the point of his death and our salvation. The Word becomes incarnate in the poetry of Crashaw as he attempts to bring the body and blood of Jesus to his readers, not images of it, but the actual body and blood. His poetry becomes more than sacramental because he does not try to recreate the Communion meal for his readers; rather, he attempts to bring his readers to the body of Jesus on the cross, and he desires them to feast and drink upon the wounds of the body of Christ when it is open and transgressed – this then will

overcome the readers' transgressions and bring them to communion with the horror of God dying for them so that they may live.

In all of these works, the reader finds that the Incarnation can be understood in an orthodox manner yet can still produce diverse responses. The doctrine that God assumed human form – was '*humbled in the flesh*' – and now lives creates lively devotional works, and a central and uniform doctrine of belief still allows for individual interpretation and representation. In the chapters that follow the Incarnation will be used a lens to help understand how various authors of ranging from Roman Catholic to Protestant use the central tenet of the Christian faith to try to understand their own situation in life and in relation to God.

II

JOHN DONNE'S INCARNATING WORDS

The Incarnation is a doctrine of union. It is the union between God and humanity, the union of the Divine with the flesh, of creator and created, of the high becoming low and the low becoming high, and of the finite being taken into the infinite. In the Incarnation the divisions that separate individuals from each other and from God are done away with, because if the divine can become human and relate to humans as one of them, it can also bring humans into the divine – into the Holy Trinity. This ability of the Incarnation to transcend boundaries and to bring about temporal, and eventually eternal, union becomes vital to John Donne's attempts to overcome the anxiety of separation, an anxiety that has been well documented and discussed in the scholarship of his writings. For example, John Carey has famously written of a possible fear of apostasy in Donne's life and writings.[1] In this Carey sees an underlying anxiety that the Reformation and its schismatic nature spread throughout society, including a potential antagonism existing between John Donne and the rest of his family after John converted from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. Robert N. Watson has shown that Donne's writings contain an anxiety regarding the fear of death and the possibility of the separation of body and soul after death.[2] This division of person would not only separate the very being of a person from itself, but also separate the individual from humanity, from creation, and from God at the point of death. And Ramie Targoff has recently shown the intense anxiety revealed in Donne's desire to ensure the union of body to soul, and that it is only in this union that

[1] John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*, New edn. (London, 1981).
[2] Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence* (London, 1994).

existence is truly possible.[3] This desire for unity, and the example of complete unity presented in the Incarnation, then becomes the locus for John Donne in his attempts to overcome separation between self, individuals, and God. Furthermore, this chapter will show that the Incarnation and its symbolic representations in the Communion sacrament are themes that Donne returns to time and again both to self-incarnate and force the Incarnate-God into creating lasting unity.

While the anxiety of separation and the attempts to overcome it through Incarnational imagery can be found throughout Donne's writings, due to space considerations, and in keeping with this dissertation's theme of devotional poetry, it will be poems in the collections of the *Songs and Sonnets* and the *Divine Poems* that will be considered in this chapter. Of the poetry, Raman Selden has said that it 'is pervaded by an intellectual sensitivity to the ramifications of the idea of incarnation and revelation',[4] and with Jesus Christ being the ultimate revelation of God to humanity, the ramifications of revelation of the Incarnation present Donne with the perfect conduit through which to explore the idea of the revealed self (one of body and soul) in relation to others. For Donne, the soul lives and moves and has its being in its body, and the body is nothing without the soul. Furthermore, without the unified body and soul, there is no true self, no complete being, with which to approach another person.

In Ramie Targoff's recent study of the body and soul relationship, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, she focuses on the importance that Donne places on the body's need for the soul and the soul's need for the body, culminating in the final unification of the resurrected body and soul. Much of this chapter will be building upon the work of Targoff, amongst others, but where her emphasis was primarily on the unification of the body and the soul, this chapter will focus on the attempts Donne provides in his poetry to create unity

[3] Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (London, 2008).
[4] Raman Selden, 'John Donne's "Incarnational Conviction"', *Critical Quarterly* 17.1 (1975), 60.

between individuals and between humanity and the divine. As Richard E. Hughes has stated of Donne's theology 'his is an incarnational theology, sustained by his belief that all things are in Christ and Christ is in all things',[5] and he further states that 'as theologian he accepted the Incarnation as an ever-recurring event with human action transformed into sacrament by Christ's indwelling presence'.[6] The fact that all things are in Christ and he is in all things allows Donne the dynamic that he needs to inform all divisions of his life with a sense of the incarnated self. This then creates an intense pursuit of communion and union that was paramount to John Donne, and in his pursuit of unity, the reader finds that it is through the Incarnation that Donne seeks to bring about his goals. The unification of body and soul then becomes the basis for the unification of individual to individual. As Felicia Wright McDuffie finds, 'Donne's most distinctive focus is the embodiment of the Word in body itself, not only in the incarnation of Christ, but in the bodies of all of humanity'.[7] The 'Word in body' and the 'bodies of all humanity' here correctly illustrates that while Targoff is indeed correct to see the need for a unified body and soul in Donne's writings, it is emblematic of a deeper desire, the desire of complete communion of humanity, the desire that can lead to the meditation of 'No Man is an *Iland*'.[8] Finally, this ability of individuals to find communion with one another becomes emblematic of the ability of individuals to find union with the Divine, the incorporeal God, which leads Eleanor McNees to state, 'For Donne, the Incarnation introduces the possibility for a fusion of divine and human'.[9]

As the reader begins to work through the writings and sermons of John Donne, one is repeatedly met with the concept of death, and in these discussions about death, Matthew

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[5] Richard E. Hughes, 'Metaphysical Poetry as Event', *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 3 (1971), 195.
[6] 'Metaphysical Poetry as Event', p. 195.
[7] Felicia Wright McDuffie, *To Our Bodies Turn We Then* (London, 2005), p. 69.
[8] John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Oxford, 1975), p.87.
[9] Eleanor McNees, 'John Donne and the Anglican Doctrine of the Eucharist', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 29.1 (1987), 95.

Horn finds 'that Donne feared the space between the physical death of his body and the physical resurrection of the same – a temporary annihilation'. Because of this, Horn surmises, 'Donne wrote for permanency'.[10] The desire for permanency and the permanency of union will be of primary interest in this chapter, and whereas Horn considers this from the perspective of the prose work *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, the same strain of thought can be found running through Donne's poetry. From reading various critical approaches to Donne's writings, it becomes clear that there is general consensus that the anxiety about unity is the primary concern found in his works. Studies of the prose works, such as those by Horn or Jeffrey Johnson,[11] show that Donne's theological concerns are of death and overcoming it, and this is confirmed when considering scholarly treatments of the poetry. However, through all of this, the role in which the Incarnation plays has never been given the proper attention that it deserves. Both Theresa M. DiPasquale and Robert Whalen have written well-argued works about the sacramental imagery within Donne's writings,[12] and yet, while acknowledging the Incarnation, both largely focus on the Eucharist, stopping at the point of sacrament instead of pushing on to the figure that the Sacraments represent – the person of God incarnated. It is as if symbol comments on symbol without recognising the symbolised. In this chapter, while recognising the role that sacramental imagery plays in the poems of John Donne and in the role the sacrament plays in bringing about unity, I will also consider how Donne not only sacramentalises his relationships, but that he can be found trying to both incarnate himself in the being of his lover and using the Incarnation as a legal contract that forces God to act in a supernatural manner, creating permanent unity with creation and the creator for the human being that is John Donne.

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[10] Matthew Horn, 'John Donne, godly inscription, and permanency of self in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*', *Renaissance Studies* 24.3 (2010), 367.
[11] Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Woodbridge, 1999).
[12] Theresea M. DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament* (Cambridge, 1999); Robert Whalen, *Poetry of Immanence* (London, 2002).

In Donne's hands the doctrine of the Incarnation becomes an active symbol in both his secular and sacred verse. While the Incarnation in the sacred verse is hardly unexpected, it is Donne's much discussed habit of the erotic in the sacred and the sacred in the erotic that has been given most recent critical attention. The fluidity in his poetry which transgresses these boundaries between the sacred and the profane has been remarked upon by Robert Whalen when he states that 'these poems are exemplary of the Incarnation's claim not only to imbue creation with divinity, to invest sublunary realities with celestial significance, but also to subject the Logos to a body, mutability, and death'.[13] And yet it is the death of God in the crucifixion of Christ, without the annihilation of God, that can give Donne confidence in his determination to use the Incarnation's underlying theme of permanent unification of separate parts, whether he uses it in his erotic desires for union with a lover or in his devotional desires for union of his body and soul in the Trinity.

As this chapter begins to look at the incarnational nature of John Donne's verse, what becomes apparent is Donne's placing himself, or others, in incarnational roles in order to examine his fears of separation, a concept that is briefly commented on, though not developed, by J. Mark Halstead.[14] In the *Songs and Sonnets* this can be seen by Donne's use of positive incarnational imagery when the union of two individuals is realised and negative incarnational imagery when lamenting a separation that cannot be overcome. This sought-after union, the combining of the erotic with the sacred, has been described by Raymond-Jean Frontain as 'the recognition that love is not polarized between body and soul, or between the erotic and the spiritual, as it is in Petrarchan and neoplatonic thought, but is capable of uniting the two, the physical being the typological adumbration of the spiritual, in an understanding of human sexuality that depends heavily upon

[13] *The Poetry of Immanence*, p. 59.
[14] J. Mark Halstead, 'John Donne and the Theology of Incarnation', in Liam Gearson (ed.), *English Literature, Theology and the Curriculum* (London, 1999), p. 166-7.

incarnational theology'.[15] As the chapter moves on to the 'Divine Poems', the use of incarnational imagery takes on greater significance as it is often the vehicle through which Donne tries to ensure his redemption and salvation; the greater significance is that in God he will have eternal unity with self, others, and God.

The reason for beginning the discussion of Donne's use of incarnational imagery in his poetry with the *Songs and Sonnets* is twofold. Firstly, though few of Donne's poems can be dated for certain, it is generally agreed that most of the poems in the *Songs and Sonnets* were composed before those in the *Divine Poems*, so by treating the *Songs and Sonnets* first, there is a rough sense of chronology provided in this discussion of Donne's use of the incarnation. Secondly, Donne's use of incarnational imagery in the *Songs and Sonnets* informs and anticipates many of the ideas found in the *Divine Poems*. Therefore, there will be a cyclical nature to the discussion which mirrors much of Donne's presentation of the Incarnation, in that in seeing the divine in the erotic and the erotic in the divine, this chapter will show that the soul must exist in the flesh and that the flesh must then be carried back up into the soul, or by putting it yet another way, the divine must move into the human and the human must be taken into the divine.

With the *Songs and Sonnets*, this chapter will begin by looking at the positive incarnational imagery found in 'Air and Angels', 'The Ecstasy', and 'A Valediction: of My Name in the Window'. These poems show the Incarnation working through a deified Love taking on flesh as the poet's beloved, two lovers' souls needing to act through their bodies in order to experience love, and the transubstantiation of a name on a mirror as an attempt to create real presence in lieu of a departed lover with these three poems using incarnational language to convey a unity of poet and his beloved. 'Twickenham Garden' and 'A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day' will then be used as a counterpoint to this

[15] Raymond-Jean Frontain, 'Introduction: "Make all this All"', in Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (eds.), *John Donne's Religious Imagination* (Conway, AK, 1995), p. 5.

positive version of the Incarnation through its use of sacramental language to lament the inability of the poet to bridge his separation from the one he longs to be with. The negative incarnational language used in these two poems works as an attempt by Donne to impart a divine nature upon himself; however, it becomes clear that these attempts at creating a divine or lasting union through self-incarnational writings fail. The attempts by him to redeem his relationships through incarnational means become a major theme in the *Divine Poems* as he then struggles to find assurance of his salvation through uniting himself to the Incarnation and telling God how to save and preserve him.

'Air and Angels', a notoriously difficult poem, is of interest because here the poet's beloved is Love incarnate. As Raman Selden says of the poem, 'Donne's incarnational conviction appears again in a more scholastic dress in "Air and Angels" which explores the soul/body opposition with theological precision'.[16] Recalling the beginning of 'The Good-morrow' which opens with 'I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I | Did, till we loved',[17] 'Air and Angels' begins with the lover realising that although he has known others before, these women were not Love.

> Twice or thrice had I loved thee
> Before I knew thy face or name

As the poet begins to know the 'face or name' of this love, the reader sees him grappling with how to understand and engage with what he is experiencing. And as one reads on, one sees the poet trying to move the vision into a person.

> So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,

[16] 'John Donne's "Incarnational Conviction"', p. 65.
[17] All quotations of John Donne's poetry, excepting the 'Holy Sonnets', are from Robin Robbins (ed.), *The Complete Poems of John Donne* (London, 2010).

Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be.
Still, when to where thou wert I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing did I see (3-6)

Here the poet begins to describe what he hears and attempts to see, yet this 'shapeless flame' and 'glorious nothing' is not something he can truly love. It is a being, somewhat angelic, that can be 'worshipped' or contemplated, but it cannot actually be loved. Now the reader sees the dilemma that Donne brings to the love poem. The immaterial concept of love cannot exist outside of the physical, as can be seen when he compares his soul's need for a physical existence to Love's need for a body:

But since my soul, whose child Love is,
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,
More subtle than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too;
And therefore, what thou wert and who
I bid Love ask, and now
That it assume thy body I allow,
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow. (7-14)

These lines show a break from the Neoplatonic emphasis of the Petrarchan idea of love sonnets. While the Petrarchan ideal presents love as something that should be worshipped from afar, Donne shows that Love must be felt, and so the poet must move this 'glorious nothing' past the immaterial, which he does when he states that Love must 'take a body too'. Furthermore, in these lines the poet compares the necessity of Love needing a body

to the soul needing a body, as it 'Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do'. Donne presents the reader with the argument that not only can Love not exist in an immaterial, yet 'worshipped' state, as 'Angels' may, but that the soul can only act through the 'flesh'. The reader sees that the divine and immaterial require a corporeal body in order to actually act, as Baumlin notes of this poem, that 'souls cannot meet, much less love, without the mediation of bodies'.[18] It is only through the physical that the immaterial can find its being. R. V. Young notes that

> For Donne, then, a human being is not a soul lodged, much less trapped, in an altogether dispensable body; to be human is, rather, to be an intrinsically composite creature – a body animated by a soul this is its formal cause and principle of existence. Love between a man and a woman, therefore, is both physical and spiritual, involving the soul and body of each in inextricable fashion.[19]

Achsah Guibbory is correct when she makes the observation that, 'Donne's view of love is profoundly incarnational, for Donne, like his God, needs the body, which is the necessary "booke" of love'.[20]

The second stanza of 'Air and Angels' has always been especially problematic for readers and critics, and in this, it is primarily lines twenty-three to twenty-eight that have caused confusion and frustration. The lines read

> Then, as an angel face and wings
> Of air, not pure as it, yet pure, doth wear,

[18] James S. Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse* (London, 1991), p. 216.
[19] R. V. Young, 'Angels in "Aire and Angels"', *John Donne Journal* 9.1 (1990), 3.
[20] Achsah Guibbory, 'Fear of "loving more"', in M. Thomas Hester (ed.), *John Donne's "desire of more"* (London, 1996), p. 205.

So thy love may be my love's sphere,
Just such disparity
As is 'twixt air and angels' purity
'Twixt women's love and men's will ever be.

Much of the trouble in these lines has arisen from the fact that the images and conceits used regarding air and angels are obscure and up for debate. More recently, attempts to figure out the exact relationship between the poet, the lover, the air, and the angel have taken place in an article written by Peter De Sa Wiggins, which was then responded to by R. V. Young.[21] Although they differ as to which characters take on which characteristics, they are both equally assured of the incarnational meaning of the imagery found in the poem's discussion. Regardless of which character is the air and which the angel, what is generally agreed upon is the idea that angels and air are both pure entities, though of differing degrees of purity. Furthermore, as has been pointed out by A. J. Smith, there was a Renaissance belief that angels manifested their presence physically by way of taking on air and using this substance to give them form.[22] Therefore, this image returns to the initial discussion in the poem, and the reader finds that the angel must once again take on physical form in order to act; however, where the initial image was of Love needing to take a physical body in order to interact with the poet, here an angel incarnates itself through air, so the poet (or lover) is becoming incarnate through the substance of the other. In this, the incarnation is the indwelling of one lover in another, and the relationship is moved from two separate and distinct beings into a union in which the two have become one. Yet, there is still the issue of the 'disparity' ''Twixt women's love and men's', which means that this is a frustrated union. While Donne is able to overcome the divide between

[21] Peter De Sa Wiggins, '"Aire and Angels": Incarnations of Love', *English Literary Renaissance* 12.1 (1982), 87-101; R. V. Young, 'Angels in "Aire and Angels"'.
[22] A. J. Smith (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (London, 1996), p.354, note for lines 23-4.

the lovers because the woman is the emotion of love incarnated, and therefore capable of full interaction with him, body and soul, their love cannot ever be fully equal, and as Donne states in 'The Good Morrow',

> What ever dies, is not mixed equally;
> If both our loves be one, or, thou and I
> Love just alike in all, none of these loves can die. (19-21)

'Air and Angles' ends telling the reader that these two lovers are 'not mixed equally', so the reader knows that the love and the relationship will die. Although the speaker uses positive incarnational language, he is not the one performing the incarnation, rather it is Love doing the work, and even this incarnation, while bringing forth a reality by which connection can be made, is ultimately still incomplete – their love is not equal. In 'The Ecstasy' and 'A Valediction: Of my name', the incarnational work by the poet becomes that of creating incarnation, whether textually or alchemically, and in these actions the union is attempted in such a way than an indwelling of one lover in another will be equal and lasting.

The 'Ecstasy' combines positive incarnational imagery with imagery of the process of the creation of the philosopher's stone to show two lovers attaining a communion with one another by way of their souls being perfectly united and then returning and reincarnating their flesh. In this, there is a furtherance of the concept of incarnation in love and that the importance of the physical cannot be separated from the spiritual if unity is to occur. As the reader works through this poem, she will move through a narrative in which two lovers watch their souls leave their bodies and become entwined in what should be a perfect union of two people's souls, yet Donne does not leave the lovers as united souls

drifting above their bodies, rather he forces the souls back into the bodies because it is through the unified soul and body that an individual can find communion with another. It is a poem that seems to support a Neoplatonic ideal of a rarefied love between the essences of two lovers unencumbered by their bodies, but as Raman Selden says '"The Ecstasy" cannot be labelled unequivocally "Neoplatonic", or "Christian" without being grossly oversimplified: its poetic idiom acquires its distinctive contours from the pressures of interacting metaphors. A close reading of the poem suggests that the metaphor of incarnation is structurally determining at the deepest level',[23] a point reiterated by Felicia Wright McDuffie.[24] So the reader finds that 'Human nature is itself inherently mixed, after all, the soul necessarily dwelling in the body, coming to know and love other souls through the body's senses'.[25]

In addition to the incarnational work of bodies needing the indwelling of the spirit in order to function properly in a relational manner, Donne also explicitly uses the language of alchemy to describe the pursuit of a higher knowledge or experience being sought by these lovers. Walker and Abraham have both argued convincingly that the actions described in the 'The Ecstasy' mirror the process by which it was believed that alchemists could create a philosopher's stone.[26] As Abraham reminds us, the philosopher's stone 'could transmute metal into gold, or earthly man into divine'.[27] It is this second aspect of the philosopher's stone that Donne is interested in with 'The Ecstasy'. He seeks, by way of the philosopher's stone, to possess the divine power needed to create the incarnation of incorporeal into the corporeal; however, the poet's use of alchemical imagery in the poem is not an affirmation of alchemy, rather it is another

[23] 'John Donne's "Incarnational Conviction"', p. 64.
[24] *To Our Bodies Turn We Then*, p. 8.
[25] *John Donne and the Rhetorics*, p. 205.
[26] Lyndy Abraham, '"The Lovers and the Tomb": Alchemical Emblems in Shakespeare, Donne, and Marvell', *Emblematica* 5.2 (1991), 301-20; Julia M. Walker, 'John Donne's "The Extasie" as an Alchemical Process', *English Language Notes* 20.1 (1982), 1-8.
[27] '"The Lovers and the Tomb"', p. 302.

method of highlighting the incarnational requirements of the communion of body and soul between the lovers. As Edgar Hill Duncan says of Donne's use of alchemical imagery, 'the value of the concept for Donne lies in its aptness for illustrating, explaining, or intensifying the idea which it embodies or to which it is juxtaposed'.[28]

The 'The Ecstasy' begins with the lovers seated on 'a pregnant bank'. (2) Their hands 'were firmly cemented', (5) and

> With a fast balm which thence did spring;
> Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
> Our eyes upon one double string.
>
> So t'ingraft our hands, as yet,
> Was all our means to make us one,
> And pictures on our eyes to get
> Was all our propagation.
>
> As 'twixt two equal armies Fate
> Suspends uncertain victory,
> Our souls (which to advance their state
> Were gone out) hung 'twixt her and me.
>
> And whilst our souls negotiate there,
> We like sepulchral statues lay; (6-18)

[28] Edgar Hill Duncan, 'Donne's Alchemical Figures', *ELH* 9.4 (1942), 262.

The lovers are able through some process, whether alchemical or other, to send forth their souls through their eyes. The twisting and threading of the 'eye-beams' – which are also the souls sent out from the bodies – is a spiritual copulation, while the physical holding of hands 'Was all [their] means to make [them] one' through their bodies. Their physical interaction was sensual, and yet still impotent, while their 'pictures on [their] eyes' was all their 'propagation', because, despite their physical contact, the bodies were unable to 'make [them] one', and their souls, though 'twisted', were unable to truly 'propagate' them. They are lovers entwined in an absurd embrace of fornicating souls and reserved physical touching. It is an absurd rendering of the Petrarchan ideal of love, as nature is prepared for their acts of love, as the 'pregnant bank swelled', the bodies remain chaste. The souls meet, and 'spring', and 'twist', but they are not one, because as Donne makes clear, the lovers must not just mingle souls, but bodies too, as they cannot experience unity while their bodies lie 'like sepulchral statues' detached from their souls. In order for their love to be realised, the souls must move into their bodies.

The souls must be incarnate in the body, 'So soul into the soul may flow, | Though it to body first repair'. (59-60) Two people can be joined by spirit, but they are not perfectly joined until body and spirit are whole in the individual and then wholly given over to the other. The lovers cry out

> 'But oh, alas! So long, so far,
> Our bodies why do we forbear?
> They're ours, though they're not "we": we are
> Th'intelligences, they the sphere. (49-52)

This cry relates to the reader that there is a pain but an importance in returning. They have reached a form of union, but they are not complete, just as the reader sees the declaration that 'they are not we', the bodies are not the union, but the bodies are the 'spheres', and as the spheres move through the heavens, so must these heavenly beings move through their spheres. A. J. Smith sees in this that 'The tone of their outcry speaks of a grievous deprivation while their bodies remain inactive'.[29] And so there must be a return to their bodies, as the poem says:

'As our blood labours to beget
    Spirits, as like souls as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
    That subtle knot which makes us man,

'So must pure lovers' souls descend
    T'affections and to faculties
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
    Else a great prince in prison lies.

'T'our bodies turn we, then, that so
    Weak men on love revealed may look:
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
    But yet the body is his book. (61-72)

[29] A. J. Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 191.

This poem then pushes past the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic conception of love as pure and unsullied by the body. The hands of the lovers may indeed be 'cemented', but this is really not what should be 'cemented' between them. The lovers realise that 'pure lovers' souls' must 'descend' or 'Else a great prince in prison lies'. Intriguingly then, the soul away from the body is not freed, but imprisoned, which is a wonderful inversion of the typical understanding of the relationship between the body and the soul. And the 'the body is his book', in which the flesh becomes word. So the reader not only has an inversion of the body and soul relationship, but also the incarnational paradox of the Word becoming flesh. Donne here is not just breaking the Petrarchan ideal of a barely physical object of desire but also playing with the concept of Christ, as the reader sees this 'great prince' in a 'prison' of the purely spiritual existence that is only overcome through taking on a body, but a body that is meted out to his followers through a book.

Barbara Lewalski states, 'the Christian mysteries of the Incarnation and of scripture revelation are proper models for these spiritual lovers in their decision to manifest the perfections attained in the realm of the spirit in the less exalted domain of the body'.[30] It is the concept of the incarnation, the spirit and the flesh united, that Donne sees as being required for communion to exist between two individuals, and as Ramie Targoff observes of these lines, 'It seems almost certain, however, that the exposition of love to weak men is not the purpose of their incarnation. We turn to our bodies, Donne suggests, because we cannot love without them'.[31] Lewalski and Targoff are certainly correct in these readings, but there is also irreverence at play in the poem that is not touched on in their understandings of the poem. What the reader is given is a positive incarnation that requires these two lovers to move through their bodies and souls, without preferring one over the other, and yet, through the incarnational imagery found in the second to last

[30] Barbara K. Lewalski, 'A Donnean Perspective on "The Extasie"', *English Language Notes* 10 (1973), 262.
[31] *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p. 57.

stanza, the reader is pulled out of the poem and reminded of the book in which the poem is being read. As J. B. Broadbent states 'Here the lovers, one soul united with one body, are emblems of God taking on the flesh'.[32] However, as the two become one in the biblical sense, there is the alchemical process also at play. The two lovers 'cemented' with a 'balm', experiencing their souls leaving their bodies and floating above and 'twixt' them, their souls becoming one, and their bodies being purified so that they are not 'dross to us, but allay', is the alchemical process of the opus which completes the philosopher's stone and so creates a divinity between them that allows for a perfect union,[33] but once again, it is not at any of these states that Donne ultimately leaves the lovers. They may be trying through idealised and alchemical means to create unity and divinity, but Donne pushes them back into their bodies, and into their book. The reader then is experiencing the 'mysteries' which 'in souls do grow', in a like manner that a Christian experiences the mysteries of the soul in God, through 'his book' which is the divine in the flesh made word, which then becomes the 'dialogue of one' (74) created by the poet. And so as the reader sees the words of the poet, little has changed as the souls are 'to bodies gone' (76) because the bodies are this book which is being read, and the actions are the words, letters, which appear on the page, the same letters used no matter what is occurring between the lovers.

This movement from body to soul to body to page allows for the creation of a form of permanence that will also be seen in the poetry of Robert Herrick and his use of his poetry as a 'book of life', but here in 'The Ecstasy', Donne has presented the reader with a scenario in which the act of reading moves the lovers through their incarnational movements, and leaves them little visibly changed. Poetry has moved and not moved the lovers. 'And if some lover such as [they]' (73) listens in on the dialogue created by Donne,

[32] J. B. Broadbent, *Poetic Love* (London, 1964), p. 237.
[33] '"The Lover's and the Tomb"', p. 318.

they will see that the poetry has insisted on an incarnational relationship, and yet the poem acknowledges that the poetry cannot produce it. As A. J. Smith says, 'The change must be small, presumably because the resort to bodies does not alter the nature of their bond, but activates a love which now needs only to be shown in its consequences'.[34] The lovers have not been able to become divine through their alchemy, just as the poet has been unable to enflesh their love through the words. McDuffie states of the union found in 'The Ecstasy', 'Redemption of the soul through Christ can, at least in part, repair the toll that the fall has taken on the body',[35] yet the toll has not been repaired, not even in part, because though the love attains the physicality of a page. Although their souls are able to move through the narrative of the poem, their bodies are left on the 'pregnant bank' of the page that swells as the reader turns the page, yet remains the same because there is no real movement taking place once the reader and the poet leaves the lovers. They are forever on the page, and the reader will always see them in the same fashion each time the poem is returned to. Catherine Gimelli Martin argues that as this poem ends 'The statically negotiating souls, who "like sepulchral statues lay" (line 18) all day now spontaneously speak, move, and have their being in a new incarnational Oneness that then summons a proper "witness" (God, a pure lover, or their own consciences)';[36] and in this, it is the reader acting as 'God, a pure lover, or their own consciences' the proper witness who exists outside the reality taking place in the poem, able to judge the actions of the lovers, yet the reader is not the Christ of the poem, because while the reader can look on, the reader cannot enter into the poem. The flesh becomes the word to the reader, but the reader cannot be the flesh that becomes word to the poem. The reader is left with a mystery that cannot be interacted with beyond the holding of the hands with the book,

[34] *The Metaphysics of Love*, p. 193.
[35] *To Our Bodies Turn We Then*, p. 70.
[36] Catherine Gimelli Martin, 'The Erotology of Donne's "Extasie" and the Secret History of Voluptuous Rationalism', *Studies in English Literature* 44.1 (2004), 138.

viewing the book with their eyes, and trying to navigate the relationship that takes place between the words and the viewer.

In turning to 'A Valediction: Of my Name in the Window', the reader will see a similar action to what is described in 'The Ecstasy' taking place. In 'A Valediction of my Name', the poet is found to be using words to try to incarnate himself in the body of a lover by way of the eyes and reading, and, as Robert N. Watson notes 'Donne characteristically strives to make a romantic connection immortal, and then to reconfigure that connection as immortality itself'.[37] But where there is a positive incarnation that takes place in 'The Ecstasy' in which the poem is able to navigate some sort of unification that exists between the poet, the lovers in the poem, and the reader (though it only exists while the poem is read), the incarnation that takes place within 'A Valediction: Of my Name' is ultimately negative because of the acknowledgement of the inability of the writer to create anything more than a temporary union, and it is one that can be easily overcome by the reader if she so desires.

The poem relates the story of a lover etching his name into the window of a lover so that she will remember him when he takes his leave at the beginning of a journey. Ramie Targoff notes of the poem 'that leaving behind a *memento* of the self will both alleviate the experience of absence and hold out the promise of a future encounter',[38] yet it is not a promise so much as a hope, and a hope which the poet admits may be foolish. As the poem begins, the poet describes the etching taking place, 'My name engraved herein | Doth contribute my firmness to this glass'. The engraving strengthens the glass, and so too will the reading of the name strengthen the union of the two lovers, as is seen in the second stanza:

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[37] Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence* (London, 1994), p. 198.
[38] *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p. 67.

'Tis much, that glass should be
As all-confessing and through-shine as I;
'Tis more, that it shows thee to thee,
And clear reflects thee to thine eye.
But all such rules love's magic can undo:
Here you see me, and I am you. (7-12)

The incarnating work begins as the woman looks through her window and cannot help but see the name of her lover. Though the window may cast up her own reflection, it is in this reflection that the lover is combined with her, because he is now within her, and he is her. The '[w]ord [is] made flesh' through her eyes, and she is completely herself and him. In this she is both the incarnation of their love, and the believer taking in the sacrament of the poet to her, and he is transubstantiated into her, a point that Michael Schoenfeldt briefly touches on when he states of the poem, that it 'attempts to find some sort of material correlative that will defeat the psychological devastations of material absence. The speaker fantasizes that engraving his name in the window of his mistress can create a kind of real presence, in his absence, in his mistress's mind',[39] yet, despite the religious language, as Targoff notes, 'his purpose is not to create a spiritual bond, but a physical union'.[40]

This physical bond that is being pursued takes on greater significance as the name that is sacramentally presented to the lover by the poet is described in language that mirrors Jesus's words to his followers. In the third stanza Donne writes,

As no one point nor dash,

[39] Michael Schoenfeldt, 'Thinking Through the Body', *Graat* 25 (2002), 29.
[40] *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p. 68.

Which are but accessory to this name,

The showers and tempests can outwash (13-15)

These lines recall the message that Jesus gave when he said 'Till heaven, and earth perish, one jote, or one title of the Law shal not scape, til all things be fulfilled'.[41] In this, the poet is now more closely aligning himself to Christ as the poem now declares that it is more than simply providing a sacrament to the communicant. Donne is presenting the reader with the poet who is representing his journey as being akin to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that this poet's return will be like a second coming in which he has 'prepared a better place' for his lover. The engraving of the name is also tied to scripture, as through these words, the poet, though gone, is revealed to his lover. The scenario that is given to the reader is the sacrament of the incarnation, the word made flesh, and an inspired text that reveals the poet to the lover. And this text that is transubstantiated into her being makes her body into the temple of his name:

Then, as all my souls be

Imparadised in you, in whom alone

I understand and grow and see,

The rafters of my body, bone,

Being still with you, the muscle, sinew and vein,

Which tile this house, will come again. (25-30)

In treating the sacramental elements of Donne's writings Robert Whalen observes, 'For the radical bringing together of disparate elements in the Eucharist – body and bread, blood

[41] Matthew 5.18, Lloyd E. Berry (ed.), *The Geneva Bible* (Peabody, MA, 2007), all quotations of scripture from this edition.

and wine, the Word become flesh that is the conceptual heart of Christianity – is not unlike the violations of decorum in which Donne allows sacramental topoi to inform and be contaminated by profane texts', [42] yet as the reader looks at the 'profane texts' the contamination is similar to the contamination experienced by the lover as she, through text, takes in the poet. So it is not enough to see the poem as only being sacramental (a view of the poem that has been well discussed, especially by Theresa M. DiPasquale),[43] but it is also one that is scriptural. In this poem the poet is God because he gives her a sacrament of remembrance, and a text that appears to promise his return. However, the poem does not end at the third stanza; rather, the poet continues in his musings, and ends not on a note of triumphal return, but in the despair of an impotent sacrament and text.

Although the poem begins with confidence that the name in the window will suffice as a means to impart the poet into the lover, guaranteeing with it a triumphant return, as the poem continues, the poet acknowledges that his lack of true physical presence may be eclipsed by another suitor who can be physically present with his love. At first the confidence remains, though there is a sense of pleading to be found in the verses that follow.

> So, since this name was cut
> When Love and Grief their exaltation had,
> No door 'gainst this name's influence shut:
> As much more loving as more sad
> 'Twill make thee; and thou shouldst, till I return,
> Since I die daily, daily mourn. (37-42)

[42] *The Poetry of Immanence*, p. 23.
[43] *Literature and Sacrament*, pp. 201-04.

But then there is the inevitable recognition that despite his best efforts, the name in the window can easily be overcome.

When thy inconsiderate hand
Flings out this casement, with my trembling name,
To look on one whose wit or land
New batt'ry to thy heart may frame,
Then think this name alive, and that thou thus
In it offend'st my Genius.

And when thy melted maid,
Corrupted by thy lover's gold (and page),
His letter at thy pillow'th laid,
Disputed it, and tamed thy rage,
And thou beginn'st to thaw t'wards him for this,
May my name step in, and hide his.

And if this treason go
T'an overt act, and that thou write again,
In superscribing, this name flow
Into thy fancy from the pane.
So, in forgetting thou rememb'rest right
And unawares to me shall write. (43-60)

The name in the window can be overcome by simply opening the window. The lover would still be able to look out, yet she need not see his name, and through this window could see the face of another. Likewise, her maid could be bought, and a treasonous lover could step in. The most that the poet can hope for is that his lover would accidentally glance out the window, see his name, and write that instead of the new love she has found. The incarnating of himself through a sacramental scripture is insufficient, for, as he says, 'But glass and lines must be | No means our firm, substantial love to keep'. (61-2) Although he tries to impart himself onto her glass through his etched name, he knows that he is ultimately incapable of bringing about the union that he truly desires. Furthermore, these lines are followed with the closing couplet that reads, 'Impute this idle talk to that I go, | For dying men talk often so'. (65-6) This couplet then brings the reader back to the poet as Christ, and as Jesus spoke of his leaving and the text and sacrament that will bind his lovers to him, regardless of the length of his journey through death,[44] so too does the poet equate his journey and the death that may await. The poet is ultimately a false Christ, who, though through 'love's magic' may be able to create a kind of connection despite distance, is not divine and the sacrament is purely memorial, and holds no transubstantiation or taking in of him by his lover.

As 'Air and Angels' and 'The Ecstasy' have shown that the immaterial must act through the material, and as 'The Ecstasy' and 'A Valediction: Of my Name' have shown that attempts by the poet to incarnate lovers through text may in fact be a fruitless endeavour for creating a true and lasting communion, so it is with 'Twickenham Garden' and 'A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day being the Shortest Day' that the reader sees the complete breakdown of the incarnational image and concept as a means to create true union between two individuals. It is in both poems that the poet creates a lover who

[44] 1 Corinthians 11.24-5.

describes himself as an anti-incarnate being, and the imagery turns from an incarnation of life seeking life to an anti-incarnation of life creating death through the indwelling of the spirit. In 'Twickenham Garden' the desire for union, despite physical separation, is shown to be completely untenable. Here the poet acknowledges that he cannot create physical and spiritual unity where it does not already exist. Rather than being an embodiment of the divine, whether through the acknowledgement of a divine lover taking human form or a writer creating a sacred and sacramental script, the poet is mortal, and as he has written, 'since my soul, whose child Love is, | Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing doe', so he must live and act within the confines of his physical existence.

'Twickenham Garden' begins with the poet in a state of deep lament entering a garden. He is

> Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears,
> Hither I come to seek the Spring,
> And at mine eyes, and at mine ears,
> Receive such balms as else cure everything. (1-4)

However, rather than 'balms' he finds that he is a curse upon his surroundings, or as the poet says:

> But oh, self-traitor, I do bring
> The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
> And can convert manna to gall;
> And that this place may thoroughly be thought
> True Paradise, I have the serpent brought. (5-9)

As the reader now finds, this garden 'may thoroughly be thought | True Paradise', and so it is in an Eden where the poet begins his corruption. The poet here does not identify as the Devil, as he is not 'the serpent', rather he introduces 'the serpent' into 'Paradise' and so is a 'self-traitor'. This act of treason takes place with language that shows the corruption of God's food of life into the poet's offerings of death. First there is the 'spider love which transubstantiates all'. As Robin Robbins points out in his notes to the poem, spiders were 'supposed to convert [their] food to a powerful poison',[45] which in turn shows that the 'food of life', or 'balms', the poet seeks do not bring forth life through divine love changing the elements of the 'balms' into a divine, incarnate being, rather his 'spider love' changes the 'balms' into poison. He does not transubstantiate bread into the body of God to bring spiritual nourishment, instead he 'transubstantiates all', including this garden, a symbol of life, to death.

The next image is that of the poet being able to 'convert manna to gall'. And while this reference is most often glossed as turning the sweet manna into the bitter gall, there are also biblical references here that not only show a movement from sweet to bitter, but once again reveal the poet converting a gift from God that is life-giving into a cursed offering for death. Manna was the food in the Old Testament that God gave the Israelites while they were wandering in the desert, and in the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself as manna given to the Israelites.[46] So Jesus is both the Eucharist and manna. He is the sustenance that the devoted need for their spiritual life, and as Jesus ties himself to the bread and the manna, the poet in 'Twickenham Garden' identifies himself as the corrupter of this divine food. He is the transubstantiating 'spider love', and he is also the 'gall' offered to Jesus as he hung on the cross at the point of redemption for all humanity. And it

[45] *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, p. 254.
[46] John 6:35

must be remembered that the offering of gall was rejected by Jesus.[47] In what Bernard Richards terms a 'retrograde transubstantiation',[48] Donne is able to turn Manna, a gift from God to humans to save them from suffering, into gall, an offering from humans to God in order to alleviate God's suffering at the time of his death, which was then rejected by God. It is not just that Donne brings poison or evil into this Edenic place, it is that Donne is converting life-giving gifts from God into the substance that was rejected by God in his human form.

Intriguingly though, this garden exists both in the pre- and postlapsarian states. As Sallye Sheppeard says, 'To be sure, the serpent's presence makes this garden a genuine Eden but not a fallen one. Eden contains both virtue and temptation in its prelapsarian state, a state implied in 'Twickenham Garden' by the lady's constancy to ideal love and the speaker's carnal desire'.[49] While Sheppeard is correct in seeing the garden as still the unpolluted Eden for the woman alluded to in the poem, it is clear that this is a garden after the fall for the poet. The woman is pure, but he is in a place of death and loneliness, both of which are not possible in a prelapsarian world. What the reader is presented with is that the poet does not merely pervert what exists in the garden; he brings something which did not previously exist in the garden, the serpent. He seeks 'balms' in the garden, but instead he brings death. He destroys paradise.

In the second stanza Donne changes his conceit. The garden no longer exists as a kind of Eden. Now the focus is on how the garden, a place once of life and growth, is dead. The reader discovers that

> . . . Winter did

[47] Matthew 27:34
[48] Bernard Richards, 'Donne's "Twicknam Garden" and the Fons Amatoria', *The Review of English Studies* New Series 33.130 (1982), 181.
[49] Sallye Sheppeard, 'Eden and Agony in *Twicknam Garden*', *John Donne Journal* 7.1 (1988), 67.

Benight the glory of this place,

And that a grave frost did forbid

These trees to laugh and mock me to my face (10-13)

The poet is pleased by this death in nature because the plants will not be mocking his own death with their growth and life. As the reader moves on, she finds that the poet wants to become part of the garden, but not as a plant that will return to life in the spring, rather he continues with the theme of being an incarnation of death. He cries

Make me a mandrake, so I may groan here,

Or a stone fountain weeping out my year. (17-18)

He wants to be a mandrake, a plant that kills those who hear its cry,[50] or a 'stone fountain' that can do nothing except 'weep'.

The weeping imagery is continued from the second to the final stanza, but now it is once again joined with imagery of the sacrament of Communion. The concepts in the first two stanzas are brought together in the third. The poet calls 'Hither, with crystal vials, lovers, come | And take my tears, which are love's wine'. (19-20) The drinking of the poet's tears then becomes equated with the drinking of the wine, the blood of Christ, in the Communion meal, and as Baumlin observes, 'the passage is easily read as an elaborate parody of the Roman Mass'.[51] Furthering his point Baumlin, finds that this 'communion, then, becomes a communion in bitterness and sorrow; though it can confirm a communicant-lover's faith its saving power, apparently, is denied'.[52] The Lovers are then instructed to take the tears, 'loves wine', and to 'try your mistress' tears at home', (21)

[50] C. A. Patrides (ed.), *John Donne: Complete English Poems* (London: 1994), p. 4, note 2.
[51] *John Donne and the Rhetorics*, p. 174.
[52] *John Donne and the Rhetorics*, p. 174.

compare the taste of his tears to the tears of those they love, 'For all are false that taste not just like mine'. (22) However, the fidelity that is contained within the taste of his tears is no source of comfort because he says that none will taste like his as 'none is true but she'. (26) Once again the sacrament of Communion is found to be a curse when used by Donne. It is not an incarnation of Christ to provide nourishment and comfort to believers; rather it is a polluting substance that curses those who consume it because they realise their lover is untrue. The negative imagery of the incarnation is not only found to express loss and separation, it is found to pollute everything. He is now, through his anti-incarnation, not the creator and saviour but the destroyer and killer.

These themes of anti-incarnational and death-bringing actions of the poet can also be found in 'A Nocturnal upon Saint Lucy's Day being the Shortest Day', a poem that is similar to 'Twickenham Garden'. In 'A Nocturnal', the poet takes on attributes of power that are relegated to the divine (especially those of creation, recreation, and redemption), and through the language of incarnation and alchemy, shows himself to be inadequate for the task at hand. The use of incarnational and alchemical imagery in the poem has led Raman Selden to describe it as a poem which 'embodies the negative counterpart of that incarnational conviction, which is expressed in its most positive form in "The Ecstasy"'.[53] And this holds true, because as the reader moves through 'A Nocturnal', he finds that the imagery of two lovers being united is not one of unmoving pregnancy, but of constantly moving death.

As in 'Twickenham Garden', 'A Nocturnal' is situated in nature in the dead of winter. As the poem begins, the reader is greeted with the following stanza that reads as being very similar to sentiments found in 'Twickenham':

[53] 'John Donne's "Incarnational Conviction"', p. 68.

'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's:
Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmasks;
The sun is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;
The world's whole sap is sunk:
The general balm th'hydroptic earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the bed's feet, life is shrunk,
Dead and interred; yet all these seem to laugh
Compared with me, who am their epitaph. (1-9)

The poet is now seeing dead creation as joyous in comparison to him. He is then in a worse state than is found in 'Twickenham', and yet he continues to offer instruction to lovers. While 'Twickenham' had the poet instructing lovers to taste his tears, here in 'A Nocturnal' they are instructed to

Study me then, you who shall lovers be
At the next world, that is, as at the next Spring,
For I am every dead thing,
In whom Love wrought new alchemy (10-13)

No longer are lovers invited to a parodic sacrament, instead they are entreated to study what the poet has become, which is 'every dead thing' and through whom 'Love wrought new alchemy'. The 'dead thing' that he is and the 'new alchemy' that is 'wrought' in him prove to be acts not of creation, but of destruction and annihilation. The following lines and stanzas move through alchemical and supernatural acts that do not bring forth life and

divinity but reverse creation to the point that the world, the poet, and his lover, cease to exist. In this he becomes the anti-incarnate, the anti-creator, and the anti-philosopher's stone. The poet embodies an anti-incarnational form to such a degree that creation is overturned and reversed, so that through the separation of himself and his beloved the reader is moved backwards from creation to a state of chaos and eventually *nihilo*. As Raymond-Jean Fronatain says, 'The speaker becomes the antithesis of the creating Word of God that first animated the universe; he is "Of the first nothing, the Elixer", the alchemical element needed to effect the process of de-creation'.[54] Through this portrayal of the poet's reverse incarnation, we also see Donne using alchemical imagery to describe a failed ability to create life through the same process used successfully in 'The Ecstasy'.

The combination of alchemy and incarnation in negative modes are intertwined as the poem continues. The poet writes that Love has created

> A quintessence even from nothingness,
> From dull privations and lean emptiness.
> He ruined me, and I am re-begot
> Of absence, darkness, death – things which are not. (15-18)

Rather than using metals and the earth to create an alchemical 'quintessence', Love has done so from 'nothingness'. Furthermore, this is not the 'only begotten son' of Love who brings forth life and redemption, instead we see a man 're-begot | Of absence, darkness, death – things which are not.' Here the poet is using the language of Christian salvation, of being reborn with Christ into new life with God; however, his rebirth is the anti-rebegetting as he becomes what is not. Instead of becoming a part of the incarnation

[54] 'Introduction: "Make all this All"', p. 4.

through identification with Jesus' death and resurrection, he is the anti-saved, the anti-incarnate, and a type of anti-Christ; furthermore, as Dennis Klinck argues, there is an echo of an anti-Trinitarian hand in this work of non-creation when we recall the three parts working here. As Klinck says, 'here, Donne, or the speaker, is made "nothing" by a trinity of non-entities: "absence, darkness, death".[55] He is not rebegotten into life with the creator; rather he is now rebegotten into nothingness, a state of absolute non-being. This is especially interesting in light of the insight provided by Clarence H. Miller when discussing the nocturns of matins. Of this he says, 'According to the traditional interpretation, the triplicities of the nocturns of matins also signify a movement from a dead world to renewal through grace, a movement reflected in the three periods of history (before the law, under the law, after the Incarnation) and paralleled in the three nocturns'.[56] The reader then sees Donne take the traditional understanding of the nocturn, and he inverts it. His poem moves from life to death, and from a unified world to one divided by the anti-Incarnation.

The poet is moving back through his humanity, and rather than finding communion with the divine Love, he is made by Love into a being of nothingness that then begins to work back through nature creating division, divorce, and chaos, instead of a saviour's acts of unity through life. Here life brings death, instead of death bringing life, and in the next stanza, this anti-incarnational work through the poet becomes an anti-creational work as the poet is more than just an anti-Christ – he becomes an anti-God.

> All others from all things draw all that's good –
> Life, soul, form, spirit – whence they being have;
> I, by Love's limbeck, am the grave

[55] Dennis Klinck, 'John Donne's "knottie Trinite"', *Renascence* 33.4 (1981), 245.
[56] Clarence C. Miller, 'Donne's "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" and the Nocturns of Matins', *Studies in English Literature* 6.1 (1966), 81.

Of all: that's nothing. Oft a flood
Have we two wept, and so
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two Chaoses when we did show
Care to aught else; and often absences
Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses. (19-27)

In this stanza the reader sees that the work being done is not about the creator coming to be with his created; it is about the created (the poet) realising his inability to create life and the lamenting that comes with the inability to bridge life and death; however, the movement is much greater than simply lamenting the ability to bridge death and life (an act that we see taking place in the stanza following), in that the poet, through his anti-divine and anti-alchemical work, actually causes creation to move backwards from its present state, back through a flood, back through chaos, and ends at the point of nothingness, *nihilo*, the point at which God began his work of creation. As Rosalie L. Colie says, the poem 'plays upon notions of creation *ex nihilo* which, though mediated by the mimetic imagery of alchemy, was the prerogative of God, a prerogative merely usurped by the creative artist'.[57] As opposed to 'The Ecstasy' where the bodies realise their love by the united souls returning to the bodies in order to have true love through the communion of body and soul of two individuals, 'A Nocturnal' shows the lovers having their souls withdrawn and their bodies left as 'carcasses'. There is no union in this rebirth.

As the reference to carcasses implies, the poet is moving from the 'we' being himself and a deified 'Love', to the poet and a lover. The work of Love's 'quintessence even from nothingness' finds its source when the reader sees the lines 'But I am by her

[57] Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica* (Princeton, 1966), p. 133.

death (which word wrongs her) | Of the first nothing the elixir grown'. (28-9) The work of anti-creation comes by way of a death that does not function as a sacrifice bringing forth life, but the 'elixir' that begins an alchemical reaction destroying life and creation. The death divorces the poet from himself and all creation.

> Were I a man, that I were one
> I needs must know; I should prefer,
> If I were any beast,
> Some ends, some means; yea, plants – yea, stones – detest
> And love: all, all, some properties invest. (30-4)

This 'elixir' and re-begetting have left the poet in a place where he is less than the beast, plants, and stones. He ends at a point of annihilation when he recognises that 'If I an ordinary nothing were, | As shadow, a light and body must be here'. (35-6) Without the unity of his lover, the poet has nothing, no physical condition to even cast a shadow. He laments, and he sets forth a memorial to her. Young lovers are instructed 'To fetch new lust, and give it you, | Enjoy your summer all'. (40-1) The poet will not be taking part. As he contemplates the death of a lover during the festival of St Lucy, a festival held during the shortest day of the year, the poet writes that despite the joys that other lovers have to look forward to as the sun returns, he is different. He will have no Spring, 'nor will [his] Sun renew'. (37) All the poet can do in this festival during the death of the world is to lament and worship the death he now has become a part of.

> Since she enjoys her long night's festival,
> Let me prepare t'wards her, and let me call

> This hour her Vigil and her Eve, since this
> Both the year's and the day's deep midnight is. (42-45)

The *Songs and Sonnets* contain poems of love that lament the lovers' inability to create a lasting union. There is always the possibility of unfaithfulness, the reality of departing from one another, and the inevitability of death. Although love in Donne's poems requires a body through which it can act, it is a mortal body which must cease to exist in its present form at some point in time or another, and so Donne must now look to the resurrection of the body and the soul as a means to transcend death and time, and he must look to God to ensure the possibility of this permanent resurrection which will allow for perfect and unending unity between God and all of creation. With this in mind then, Achsah Guibbory's statement is helpful

> These love lyrics embraced the positive valuing of the body and love that could be seen as represented by the Incarnation, while distinguishing the transcendent passion of his lovers (as it integrates the spiritual and physical dimensions of existence) from the exclusively sensual love of the profane, idolatrous world.[58]

This comment offers an insight into how the Incarnation plays a role in the attempt to bring the bodies and souls of two lovers together, but Donne is unable to find a permanent transcendence through his attempts at eternal human relationships. Guibbory is correct in seeing the use of the Incarnation as a way to attempt transcendent love, but she is incorrect because the attempts for transcendent love between two people must exist in the sensual. Furthermore, it is the sacred and transcendent that is taken into lovers as their incarnational

[58] 'Fear of "loving more"', pp. 212-13.

attempts at union are entirely profane and idolatrous because they do not seek to bring each other closer to God, but closer to each other, and the lasting union that is grasped at is not a union with the divine, but the use of the divine for a worldly union. They worship each other and themselves, and they seek union human to human, the divine only exists to provide the language and template for their love. The attempts at human transcendence then continue to fail. But as the reader turns to the sacred poetry that Donne wrote, there is an interesting play with the body and soul that takes place between Donne and the Incarnation. It is in the Incarnation that Donne finds a divine body that he can love, commune with, express himself into, and receive into himself. It is in the sacred verses that Donne finds the means to use the language of human love as a means of finding union with the incarnational Christ, rather than the Incarnation as a language for human love. However, there is a problem for Donne, because, while he believes in God and the resurrection of the body and soul, he desires a guarantee that he will be amongst those who are raised to life eternal and not cast into oblivion in hell.

Donne's search for unity between individuals and his attempt to appropriate aspects of the Divine in order to attempt to create these acts of unification, which were previously discussed with regard to the *Songs and Sonnets*, find their religious counterpart in the *Divine Poems*. It is in the *Divine Poems* that the reader is shown a Donne whose fear of being alone takes on its greatest urgency when he anxiously contemplates how to guarantee his salvation, because, as Donne sees it, hell is the separation of the individual from God, or as Charlotte Clutterbuck says of the 'Holy Sonnets', 'all the anguishes . . are subsumed into one overwhelming anguish – the anguished desire for a loving God who is always just out of reach'.[59] For Donne, to be completely isolated from God is to be isolated from all other creation, and the true damnation, the true horror of hell, is to be

[59] Charlotte Clutterbuck, *Encounters with God in Medieval and Early Modern English Poetry* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 138.

irretrievably alone. It is as Donne tries to find eternal security in God that the reader sees him using various techniques to negotiate with God; the reader observes him use an incarnational understanding of a Christian's relationship with God to debate with God, and at times even tells God what to do. Even the famous invitation to rape that occurs in 'Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart', while seeming like an act of submission is only Donne being submissive to God if God submits to Donne's calls for his salvation. Helen C. White puts it nicely when she states that, when it comes to Donne's religious verse, 'It is of himself alone that he is thinking as he argues with himself, strives to reassure himself, cries to his God for mercy, in happier moments gives thanks to his Saviour for his patience'.[60] There is often a power struggle between Donne and God, and the struggle is in terms of Donne's need for communion between self and God and all other life. This is not to say that the *Divine Poems* does not contain pieces that reflect a Christian who accepts God's authority in his life; rather, the poems display a complicated and complex relationship between a believer and God, and this is one of the strengths of the collection as devotional verse, because it does show the conflicts and contradictions that would be involved in a relationship between a human and the divine.

Donne is using the verses in the *Divine Poems* as constructions that will provide him with documents that he can present to God as a means to guarantee his salvation; as Charlotte Clutterbuck argues, 'Much of the tension in Donne's poetry arises from his depiction of the individual's desire to claim for himself the promises of salvation history'.[61] It is in these attempts to claim 'the promises of salvation history' that Donne uses the Incarnation and God made flesh as a way in which to argue for the unity of the human (body and soul) with the divine, because it is in the Incarnation that this has already been accomplished. The use of the Incarnation of Jesus and its physical and spiritual

[60] Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets* (New York, 1956), p. 124.
[61] *Encounters With God*, p. 115.

ramifications as described by Donne in arguing for salvation can be seen in the 'La Corona' cycle, when in the first poem of the cycle Donne says

> But do not with a vile crown of frail bays
> Reward my Muse's white sincerity,
> But what thy thorny crown gained, that give me,
> A crown of glory, which doth flower always. (5-8)

Donne does not want the reward of his poems to be the laurel, instead he demands from God that, in return for these poems, God should give him a 'crown of Glory'. The reward for the poems is found not in the headdress of the poet, but in the headdress of the tortured and crucified Jesus. The reward sought for the poems in 'La Corona' is that these words, this sacred text, should unite Donne with the divine and bring forth his salvation. As in the *Songs and Sonnets*, there is a part of Donne that seeks to find some way to guarantee that he will receive what he desires. He is motivated in his quest for God by doubt, doubt that the bodily resurrection he believes in and desires will not take place, and so he constructs words and arguments in ways which he hopes can bring about his desired end.

In looking at the 'La Corona' cycle in which the ending line of each sonnet is the opening line of the next, the reader sees a poet ruminating on the Incarnation and salvation. The cycle consists of seven sonnets that move through the life of Christ from his birth to ascension. While this devotional work has been placed in the Roman Catholic period of Donne's life,[62] it is worth noting here that the reader can witness how a writer whose focus is on one of the core tenets of Christianity can be of devotional value to either Protestants or Catholics, as is evident by how well this piece sits alongside the other poems in *The*

[62] R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 89.

Divine Poems. The cycle is an act of praise and devotion that looks at salvation as coming through the physical life of Jesus. As has been briefly discussed, the first sonnet is a dedicatory poem in which it is set forth that these poems are an expression of Donne's desire for eternal life through Christ, but it also points to Donne's need to have assurance of his salvation. In the following six sonnets, Donne's case for why these poems about the life of Jesus should result in his guaranteed salvation are put forth in language that places its emphasis on the humanity in Jesus, and the ways in which God works through humans (flesh and blood) to bring forth salvation for humanity and union between the divine and the flesh.

As the cycle continues, the reader is taken to the 'Annunciation' in which the Incarnate Lord is residing in the womb of Mary. The second line of the sonnet declares to the reader the great mystery and paradox that is at play in this pregnancy as Donne writes, 'That All, which is always is all everywhere'. In this poem the mystery of the Incarnation begins with the God who is omnipresent being a baby, a being whose existence is limited by a womb, and has a clear beginning in history. Of this paradox DiPasquale comments, 'Through the Incarnation of Christ, the plurality of a human "all" is united with the perfect singularity of the divine "All"'.[63] The paradoxical state of God as child and human is continued in the following lines as Donne continues in his description of this 'All' 'Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear; | Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die'. The reader is now prepared to meditate upon the existence of a being who should not exist, and whose actions are a contradiction of its very nature. Donne then begins to directly address Mary in the poem, and in this the paradox of the human and divine is moved past the Incarnation in Jesus, and is found to be affecting humanity beyond the body of Jesus, as that body must reside in Mary as it gestates.

[63] *Literature and Sacrament*, p. 68.

> Lo, faithful Virgin, yields himself to lie
> In prison, in thy womb; and, though he there
> Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet he'll wear,
> Taken from thence, flesh which death's force may try.
> Ere by the spheres time was created, thou
> Wast in his mind, which is thy son and brother;
> Whom thou conceiv'st, conceived; yea, thou art now
> Thy maker's maker, and thy Father's mother (5-12)

The unity of the Incarnation being completely God and completely human is not limited to the person of Jesus. As Donne shows here, in Mary, greater humanity is taken in to the sacred mystery of God's work. God is yielding himself to Mary, submitting divinity to the need for sustenance by way of an umbilical cord. God gains the flesh necessary for his sacrificial work from Mary, and so she, who was conceived of by God, now conceives God, and is creating her creator, and giving birth to her Heavenly Father. Donne finishes the poem with the perfect embodiment of the Incarnation, '*Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb*'.

Of 'Annunciation', Felecia Wright McDuffie has rightly observed Donne's contrasting Platonic language with the doctrine of the Incarnation, and it is worth quoting in its entirety. She states,

> In the sonnet sequence *La Corona*, Donne speaks of the incarnation as Christ's assumption of a body in order to make himself weak enough to enter our world and die. Donne associates Jesus' body and the means by which he assumes it (Mary's

> womb) with Platonic imagery. The womb is a "prison" and a "little room." Christ "wears" the flesh he takes from Mary, invoking the idea of the body as a garment for the soul. Yet Donne moves beyond a simply Platonic use of the images. Because both Mary and Jesus are without sin, their bodies are not evil but simply weak. Paradoxically, it is this weakness that allows Christ to assume the sins of the world and die. Donne describes the "imprisonment" of Mary's womb in a positive way.[64]

This is an important passage to keep in mind as the reader moves through the rest of cycle of sonnets, especially as the importance of the unity of body and soul in the womb is a theme that Donne returns to in his final sermon, 'Deaths Duell'.[65] As the sequence continues, the life of Jesus Christ is laid out, beginning with the 'Nativity', a poem that opens with the lines '*Immensity, cloistered in thy dear womb*, | Now leaves his well-belov'd imprisonment'. This 'well-belov'd imprisonment' is the central point of the Christian religion, and so as Mary is portrayed as a loving mother of God, so too is God understood to be lovingly submissive to this woman who is his mother. Donne then calls to his soul to appreciate that which the lines of the poems are showing him. He states, 'Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how he | Which fills all place, yet none holds him, doth lie'. (9-10) 'Nativity' recounts those first tales in the life of Jesus with the visit of the wise men, Herod's desire to kill him, and the flight to Egypt. In this, Mary is part of the divine miracle, which Donne reminds the reader of when he closes the sonnet with the line 'With his kind mother, who partakes thy woe'. Humanity is sharing with God the difficulties of his sacrifice – a point that Donne also speaks of in 'Good Friday: Made as I was Riding Westward that Day' when he writes

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[64] *To Our Bodies Turn We Then*, p. 35-6.
[65] 'Deaths Duell', in Neil Rhodes (ed.), *John Donne: Selected Prose* (London, 1987), pp. 310-326.

> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was God's partner here, and furnished thus
> Half of that sacrifice which ransomed us? (30-32)

Mary shares in the 'woe' of her son. Jesus is of her flesh, and she is his protector, and in this she is also a contributor to the divine miracle that Christianity centres on with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God does not just work through a body given to Jesus, but also through the body of Mary.

The next sonnet in the cycle is 'Temple', in which Donne shows Jesus, while being fully human, possessing a divinity which sets him apart from other children his age. Donne equates Jesus' ability to debate authoritatively in the Temple to the divine nature showing itself in his life, and this revelation of divinity continues in Christ's life.

> The Word but lately could not speak, and lo,
> It suddenly speaks wonders. When comes it
> That all which was and all which should be writ
> A shallow-seeming child should deeply know? (5-8)

The union of God and man in this child illustrates that the 'immensity cloistered' does show through from time to time, and that Jesus 'By miracles exceeding power of man' shows himself to the world.

Building upon the foundation created in the previous four poems, Donne now moves the Incarnation, and the paradox that it represents, to its purpose on earth, that of the redemption of humanity. The fifth sonnet in the cycle is 'Crucifying'. Here the death

of Christ is described, and though this is an act of complete submission, as Jesus allows himself to be executed as a criminal, Donne describes it as Jesus being 'lifted up'. While the body of Christ is certainly lifted onto the cross, the movement of death is one downward. It is not a glorification of the divinity in the Incarnation, but a submission to humanity and the flesh as God must now die. But Donne correctly describes the human and divine movement down to death as a spiritual glorification in that this is the act that will allow humanity and God to be united once again.

> Now thou art lifted up, draw me to thee,
> And at thy death, giving such liberal dole,
> *Moist, with one drop of thy blood, my dry soul*. (12-14)

This act of death is one of life and communion, and Donne recognises that the physical blood of Jesus' body is the price needed to save humanity. The liquidity of the blood will rejuvenate the dry land of his soul. It is a physical transaction that is required to save Donne's, and all humanity's, immaterial soul. The physicality of Jesus' sacrifice is what Donne looks to in order to achieve eternal life, but death cannot be the end in this Easter story, and so the next poem completes Christ's Passion and meditates upon the resurrection.

'Resurrection' is a poem of victory, and the victory is not just Christ's but potentially Donne's as well. The sonnet recognises the physical and spiritual work taking place in these actions and reads:

> *Moist with one drop of thy blood, my dry soul*
> Shall (though she now be in extreme degree

Too stony hard, and yet too fleshly) be
Freed by that drop from being starved, hard, or foul;
And life, by this death abled, shall control
Death, whom thy death slew; nor shall to me
Fear of first or last death bring misery,
If in thy life-book my name thou enrol.
Flesh in that last long sleep's not putrefied,
But made that, there, of which and for which 'twas,
Nor can by other means be purified
May then sin's sleep, and death's, soon from me pass,
That, waked from both, I, again risen, may
Salute the last and everlasting day.

In this poem, the physical and immaterial trade places with a physical soul and an immaterial drop of blood. As the drop of blood falls on Donne's soul, the soul takes on physical properties when it is described as being 'too stony hard, and yet too fleshly'. The real soul of the poet is 'fleshly', but the 'one drop' of Jesus's blood is figurative, still it will free him. Then there is Death, who in his deified and immaterial state can be slain by the flesh of Jesus. Donne hopes his name is in the Book of Life (prefaced by that all important 'If' which signifies the doubt that never seems to leave Donne's devotional poems), and as the poem continues, the reader sees that once again the flesh is tied to the text (Book of Life) which is salvation and unity found within the text. Lines nine through eleven make it perfectly clear that it is not the spiritual parts of the person of Jesus that bring forth salvation, but it is by the flesh, and only by flesh, that humanity can be 'purified'. The blood shed by Jesus is described in connection with his body which, while

dead, was not 'putrefied', but arose to life, and so Donne is able to follow Jesus and die, knowing that his body and soul will not simply waste away in the tomb, but will be resurrected on that 'last, and everlasting day.' And with 'Resurrection' the reader finds, as DiPasquale states, that the 'all' and 'All' of the 'Annunciation' is conflated and 'will allow the poet/speaker to feel that his own flesh is Eucharistically one with Christ's, that he can write of Christ's resurrection as his own'.[66]

Finally, the 'Ascension' brings Jesus back to heaven and completes his movement from a physical and earthly existence to a place in the immaterial Godhead. The triumphant resurrection of Jesus raises all with him, and so Donne is able to proclaim

> Behold! The Highest, parting hence away,
> Lightens the dark clouds which he treads upon;
> Nor doth he, by ascending, show alone,
> But first he, and he first, enters the way.
> O strong ram which hast battered Heaven for me,
> Mild lamb, which with thy blood hast marked the path,
> Bright torch, which shin'st that I the way may see,
> Oh, with thine own blood quench thine own just wrath,
> And if thy Holy Spirit my Muse did raise,
> *Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise*. (5-14)

The upwards movement of the Incarnation is as important as the movement down, and so it is that the poetic cycle is completed with the 'Ascension'. The final line of the poem points back to the very first line of the first poem, both by repeating the line and through

[66] *Literature and Sacrament*, p. 68.

reminding both the reader and God that it is Donne's desire that these poems bring salvation and bodily resurrection for him. The word is directed towards the Word, and the Word made flesh celebrated with the words of flesh should become a permanent text in the Book of Life, because the text in an earthly book provides a physical meditation of the soul of the writer. Donne is trying to incarnate the verses here in 'La Corona' in much the same way he was in 'The Ecstasy' and 'A Valediction: of My Name'; however, the success of the incarnating poems is not based upon the work of the verses or of alchemy, but on the work of the Incarnation, and so it is the Word made flesh in the *Divine Poems* that is sought to bring about the lasting union of body to soul, body to body, and humanity to God. Furthermore, as these lines describe Jesus as the 'ram which hast battered Heaven', a reader cannot help but be reminded of the opening to 'Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart'. The relation between Jesus being the 'ram which hast battered Heaven' and Donne asking the Trinity to 'Batter my heart' shows the continual upward and downward working of the Incarnation. Jesus is both the mechanism through which heaven can be 'battered' as 'first he, and he first, enters the way' in which the rest of humanity must follow into heaven, and is, likewise, the means through which the Trinity can then move down and 'Batter' entrance into the believers' hearts. It is this continuous movement of salvation, both up into heaven and down into the believers' hearts (and both violently performed) that marks the Incarnation's bridging of the human and the divine and the flesh and the spirit and providing the way to the 'everlasting day.' Donne uses 'La Corona' to create his physical offering to Christ, and thereby he requests that Christ reward him with the immaterial 'Crown of Glory' which will guarantee Donne's salvation and everlasting unification of his body and soul with God and creation. He then describes the physical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a reminder that it is through the physical that God chose to work to bring about the salvation of individuals, which will result in the resurrection of the dead on

the Day of Judgment. And because God works through the physical to unite himself to his beloved followers, Donne can approach God through the physical act of writing poems.

While 'La Corona' provides a cycle with an argument that can be followed from beginning to end, and which then circles back on itself, the 'Holy Sonnets', despite Helen Gardner's proposal for a thematic sequencing of the poems,[67] contain no thematic sequencing that has gained general consensus. This can be seen in the major editions of the poems that have been issued since Helen Gardner proposed her thematic sequences for the verse. Both A. J. Smith and C. A. Patrides use the traditional sequence for the sonnets;[68] Robin Robbins breaks the poems up into two sequences of twelve sonnets, with some sonnets found in both groupings, while others have been re-titled and moved out of the 'Holy Sonnets',[69] and, finally, the *Donne Variorum* edition prints three different sequences.[70] Despite the fact that there is great disagreement about how the sonnets should be linked with each other, the reader does find that there are common themes that Donne often returns to, such as his inability to perfectly follow Christ, his hope for a physical resurrection, and his fear that he may not be amongst those destined for heaven. His is an uneasy Christianity which is filled with doubt, though not necessarily mistrust. While the order of the sonnets is an issue for continued debate and inquiry, what can be gained from looking at the pieces as a whole, no matter what order they happen to be arranged in, is that the relationship Donne has with God is very problematic.

The relationship between Donne and God that is presented in the 'Holy Sonnets' is one in which Donne and creation are truly fallen. Donne's representation of his problematic relationship with the world and creation can be seen in 'Holy Sonnet XII:

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[67] Helen Gardner (ed.), *Divine Poems* (Oxford, 1952).
[68] A. J. Smith (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (London, 1996); C. A. Patrides (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (London, 1994).
[69] *The Complete Poems of John Donne*
[70] Gary Stringer et al (ed.), *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 7, pt. 1, (Indianapolis, 2005).

Why are wee by all Creatures'. Donne opens the poem by asking 'Why are wee by all creatures waited on?';[71] the poem begins by setting forth the dilemma that the creatures that brought sin, death, and division to the world are also considered to be the reigning creature in the world. Donne appropriately asks why this is the case, and although he does not provide an answer for this question by the end of the poem, he does point the reader back to the sacrifice of Jesus and the redemption available to all. The contemplation of the earth and beasts that reside on it, in regards to their relationship with humanity, brings forth the same paradox of high versus low found in the doctrine of the Incarnation, and so Donne writes

> Why doe the prodigall elements supply
> Life and food to mee, being more pure then I,
> Simple, and further from corruption?
> Why brook'st thou, ignorant horse, subjection?
> Why dost thou bull, and bore so seelily
> Dissemble weaknesse, and by'one mans stroke die,
> Whose whole kinde, you might swallow and feed upon? (2-8)

As nature, whose spiritual superiority can be argued for, subjects itself to a position of servitude, death, and food for humanity, mirroring the work of Christ, Donne has to admit that there is no logical reason for nature and its creatures to suffer in such a way because of humans' mistakes. The Christ-like sacrifice of nature and beasts for the benefit of humanity leads Donne back to humanity's sins and so he writes

[71] All quotations from the 'Holy Sonnets' are from C. A. Patrides (ed.), *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (London, 1994).

Weaker I am, woe is mee, and worse then you,
You have not sinn'd nor need be timorous,
But wonder at a greater wonder, for to us
Created nature doth these things subdue,
But their Creator, whom sin, nor nature tyed,
For us, his Creatures, and his foes, hath dyed. (9-14)

Donne admits that it is his sin, humanity's sin, that has caused creation to suffer, and so why must the creatures suffer, and since they are unable to sin, why must they be subservient to humans? Falleness creates disorder, but Donne points to 'their Creator, whom sin, nor nature tyed, | For us, his Creatures, and his foes, hath dyed'. It is important to note here that Donne has asked a question that he is unable to answer (another divine mystery?), and this puzzle points him back to Jesus and the work of the incarnational sacrifice; however, in this construction, the beasts are 'his Creatures', but humanity is 'his foes'. Donne cannot explain the hierarchy in nature, but he can acknowledge the disparity between humans and beasts as is found in the responsibility for sin and the death of the 'Creator'. Nature is fallen through sin, but it is redeemed through Jesus, and while humanity may forget or overlook this from time to time, nature has been so strongly imprinted by this divine drama of loss and redemption that it cannot help but show the work of the supernatural in the physical realm of the world. Donne makes this explicit in his meditation on the image of the cross, 'Of the Cross', where all of creation reflects and mirrors the image of the cross and presents a constant reminder of the work performed for nature by God, but the poem also implies that this image is constantly overlooked by the world. The unifying work of God through the Incarnation seems to only have been overlooked by humanity, and there is a conflict between the submissive movements of

God and the assertive movements of humanity's self aggrandisement. As the work of salvation plays out in 'The Holy Sonnets' it is often portrayed as a fight, not between the Devil and God, but between humanity and God, and sometimes this fight becomes overtly violent.

'Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart' is a poem of anxiety. The message in the poem has been simply summarised by Anthony Low as 'Donne cannot surrender himself to God',[72] yet more attention has been paid to this 'Holy Sonnet' than any other. The poem is a cry by one who is not taking hope in the inescapable grace of a predestinarian understanding of redemption, rather it is one who is fearful and needs reassurance that there will be some form of salvation. In this, there is not the passive voice of the poet that Targoff ascribes to the poem,[73] instead this is an active voice of one who is trying to force the hand of God in the working of predestined grace. The poem opens with Donne commanding the triune God to work a violent grace in his life, but it is not the violence of men towards Jesus, but of God towards a man.

> Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
> As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee,'and bend
> Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new. (1-4)

In these first four lines the violence that Donne calls for is shocking in its brutality. The torture that was enacted upon Jesus in his death can never be far from the mind of a Christian, as it is his death that gives the religion its meaning, and in this poem, the poet calls upon an equally violent work by God in order to enact the salvation he longs for.

[72] Anthony Low, 'John Donne: "The Holy Ghost is Amorous in His Metaphors', in John R. Roberts (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric* (London, 1994), p. 217.
[73] *John Donne, Body and Soul*, p. 120.

Donne here is acknowledging the horror and wonder at the centre of the Christian religion. In a belief system in which God must become a man, and then be horrifically killed, the believer must find a way to make peace with the fact that Christianity also teaches that each human is fallen, and therefore guilty of the crucifixion. In addition to this, the concept of predestination (whether in a more Roman Catholic-friendly version by way of St Augustine, or in the strongly Protestant type espoused most famously by John Calvin widely being discussed and debated in Renaissance Britain) exacerbates the problem that despite the believer's responsibility for the death of God, he or she can do nothing to redeem themselves or repay God for the sacrifice. In this sonnet, as Donne acknowledges his own sinfulness and his inability to save himself, he embraces the antagonistic relationship towards God that the predestinarian understanding of salvation provides the believer. And while there is much debate and criticism involving the predestinarian beliefs of Donne, and while this poem clearly has a predestinarian focus, it is unclear whether this is more in the Augustinian or Calvinistic tradition, but what is clear is that the desire for salvation and union by a corrupt sinner must take place through the divine entering the filth and fighting humanity. Donne admits his own part in the fight, and so he takes the violence into himself and demands that God meet him again (as was previously done on the cross) in the violence of divine grace.

As the poem continues, Donne describes the fight for salvation as warring towns. 'I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due, | Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end'. (5-6) It is a war that Donne does not want to win; he knows that he cannot win, but he also knows that he cannot submit, and so he baits and antagonises God into battle. It is in the third, and final, conceit of the sonnet that the shockingly violent conception is used by Donne. The image that he finally uses is one of adultery and rape:

Yet dearely'I love you,'and would be lov'd faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemie,
Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe;
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee. (9-14)

Donne finds himself in a betrothed relationship with the Devil, and as the marriage nears, he calls for God to break the betrothal, the marriage knot or bonds. In this, Donne turns the idea of the Church as the bride of Christ on its head; Donne is not the Bride of Christ and is legally engaged to Satan. Although he admits his love for the Trinity, he sees no way out of the relationship, and so he calls on God, but this call to God does not continue in a purely legal fashion. Donne wants God to act as a lawyer to free him from his biding betrothal; however, he asks God to rape him, thereby bringing about an adultery that would break the bonds of betrothal. It is in the sexual transgression that Donne demands of God that the incarnational cycle and paradox is found. The pure and holy Trinity must come down to the sinner's level, much like Jesus's incarnational entry into human flesh, and meet the sinner in his own filth and save him at this level of depravity. It is an incarnational understanding of salvation in which God must take part in the profane, physical existence yet remain pure in order that he may purify the sinner who is incapable of cleansing himself, so that the sinner can ascend to communion with God. Once again, it is an incarnational cycle, the movement down by the superior in order to lift up the inferior and the acts of redemption involving the violent and bloody work in and on the body in order that the body and soul can be purified. In this sonnet Donne demands that he take part in the violence of the Incarnation, thus guaranteeing his salvation.

While in 'Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart' the poet cries to God to descend and violently overwhelm him, 'Holy Sonnet II : As due by many titles' looks to God's apparent indifference to Donne's continual sinning and to God's decision to not make Donne perfect here on earth. As M. Thomas Hester says of the poem, '"As due by many titles" applies that central topos of Renaissance homiletics and poetics – man as a word striving to communicate with The Word – in order to explicate the limitations and powers of man to re-create himself *in imagine dei*'.[74] Donne begins the poem with a lament which moves into a legal argument that reads like a reminder to God to fulfil his legal obligations to Donne. As Kate Gartner Frost and William J. Scheick say of this, 'Donne's sonnet raises the subject of debt and ownership, traditional for terms for Christian redemption',[75] or as R. V. Young describes it, this 'establishes the misery of man's natural condition by seeing his situation as that of a debtor who tries to cancel his debts by inviting God to foreclose on his already hopelessly over-mortgaged self'.[76] The opening four lines of the poem read

> As due by many titles I resigne
> My selfe to thee, O God, first I was made
> By thee, and for thee, and when I was decay'd
> Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine,

As Donne continues in the following ten lines of the poem, the reader is presented with the legal aspects of his argument, supplemented with the added weight of the Incarnation. He

[74] M. Thomas Hester, 'Re-signing the Text of the Self: Donne's "As Due By Many Titles"', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *"Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse"* (Columbia, MO, 1987), p. 60.
[75] Kate Gartner Frost and William J. Scheick, 'Signing at Crosse Purpose: Resignation in Donne's "Holy Sonnet I"', *John Donne Journal* 19 (2000), 142.
[76] *Doctirne and Devotion*, p. 13.

points to the incarnational aspect of each individual, the *imago dei*, and the struggle between the Devil and God for believer's souls when he states

> I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine,
> Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid,
> Thy sheepe, thine Image, and till I betray'd
> My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine;
> Why doth the devill then usurpe on mee?
> Why doth he steale nay ravish that's thy right?
> Except thou rise and for thine owne worke fight,
> Oh I shall soone despaire, when I doe see
> That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me,
> And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee.

The reader is presented with the body of the believer being a Temple housing God. The believer is now a part of the Incarnation, as the believer has the Holy Spirit, part of the Trinity, residing in them, thereby making them (in a manner of speaking) human and divine. Although this is a lesser Incarnation, in that they are not fully human and fully God, they are human with the Holy Spirit residing in them, and their bodies act as a temple and a constant place of worship for God, yet this temple resides in individuals that Donne clearly admits to being imperfect and full of sin. As M. Thomas Hester says of the poem, it 'does not present the initial step in a contritional progression, but a wilful denial of the speaker's ability to enact his own determination'.[77] These believers', 'images of God', the all powerful being, are continually used in the service of Satan. Since Satan has such sway

[77] 'Re-signing the Text of the Self', p. 69.

with believers, Donne is concerned that he will be lost to the devil. The poem ends with the last four lines describing an act in which, as Richard Strier says, 'Donne turns to God, but instead of a prayer for unmerited mercy, he produces something like a threat'.[78] While this poem is secure in the incarnational aspect of Donne's existence, it also recognises that it is not a true incarnation, rather it is a reflection of the true incarnation, and so there is the fear that its incomplete nature can easily be overcome by the Devil, as seen by Satan's apparent ability to 'ravish' him and the paradox of Satan's hatred for Donne and yet the devil's going to great lengths to keep Donne. In this though, Charlotte Clutterbuck is able to find hope, 'While the sense of the last line is that Satan will try to hold onto the Seeker's soul, the poem ends with the words "lose mee", which, reinforced by the double rhyme "chuse me", suggests that God in fact may choose the Seeker, while Satan loses him.'[79]

In 'Holy Sonnet II: As due by many titles' there is yet again the language of ravishment and violent salvation for the believer, as previously discussed in 'The Ascension' and 'Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart'. Jesus is the battering ram of heaven, allowing fallen humanity into perfect heaven. The Trinity is the ravishing battering ram which can break into a sinner's heart, and the devil ravishes the believer who is the Temple of God. All of these acts are unnatural (sinners in heaven, God in sinners, and the devil having his way in the Temple), so all require violent acts in order to exist. In this one-way discussion between Donne and God, violence and sex and destruction are used in a demanding and shaming manner. Additional examples can be found in the opening of 'Holy Sonnet I: Thou has made me' which reads 'Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?', as well as in 'The Litanie' canto 28 when Donne states that when Jesus became human, he 'By taking our blood, ow'st it us again'. (245) God owes humanity because he

[78] Richard Strier, 'John Donne Awry and Squint: The "Holy Sonnets" 1608-1610', *Modern Philology* 86.4 (1989), 370.
[79] *Encounters With God,* p. 133.

created humans and he became human and it is through the physical that the work of salvation was performed and is remembered. In a related passage in Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Donne tries to use God's laws as found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus to show why Jesus must save his sick body, and if not his body, then surely his soul,

> And it is thine owne Law, O God, that *if a man bee smitten so by another, as that hee keepe his bed, though he dye not, hee that hurt him, must take care of his healing, and recompence him*. Thy hand strikes mee into this bed; and therefore if I rise againe, thou wilt bee my recompence, all the dayes of my life, in making the memory of the sicknes beneficiall to me; and if my body fall yet lower, thou wilt take my *soule* out of this bath, & present it to thy Father, washed againe, and againe, and again, in thine own *teares*, in thine owne *sweat*, in thine owne blood.[80]

The path that Jesus has won for his followers as found in the 'La Corona' cycle with the poem 'Ascension' has now become a vehicle by which Donne can argue that Jesus must behave in certain ways because he has provided a path for humanity to God by way of his becoming human. The incarnational paradox of the high becoming low now takes on the responsibility that the high must then raise up the low. Donne is appealing to God's sense of ownership, God's sense of law, and God's humanness in his quest to create arguments that God will be unable to overcome, and therefore God will have no choice but to save Donne when the Day of Judgement comes. Donne is doing his best to use God's reasoning against him in order to guarantee his salvation and thereby his permanent unification of self with God and creation.

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[80] John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 17-18.

Donne's 'To Christ'[81] can be seen as a summary of his method for relating to God. The poem is simple in its construction and rhyme scheme, employing the rhyming of only two sounds for the eighteen lines of the poem, yet there is quite an audacious statement being made by Donne to God. It is odd as a hymn because it is more concerned with telling God how and when to forgive Donne's sins than with praising God. As Raymond-Jean Frontain says of the poem, 'Each stanza of that poem concludes with a postponement, the final stanza being structured grammatically according to a condition, the demand in which can only be satisfied in the future'.[82] He spends the first two stanzas describing types of sins he is guilty of and then asking God to forgive them, only to end each of the stanzas with the line 'When thou hast done, thou hast not done, | For, I have more'.[83] Donne, while trying to be penitent and contrite, is still telling God that his work is incomplete and that his forgiving grace is insufficient for Donne's transgressions. The third stanza is the key. Donne admits

> I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
> My last thread, I shall perish on the shore:
> Swear by thyself that at my death this Sun
> Shall shine as it shines now and heretofore;
> And, having done that, thou hast done,
> I have no more. (13-18)

[81] Also often entitled 'A Hymn to God the Father', being a version of the poem appearing with slight variations.
[82] 'Introduction: "Make all this All"', p. 16.
[83] Lines 5-6 and 11-12. In these quotations, the spellings of 'done' have been standardised, despite the fact that Robbins makes the pun explicit by spelling 'done' 'Donne'. I find this editorial decision to be excessive as much of the wit is lost through spelling out the joke.

Donne confesses his fear of damnation at death. It is a fear which he believes to be a sin, a sin that will not allow God to completely absolve him of all his sins until the point of death, and this is the crux of the problem for Donne: he can have no security in his own salvation until he does die, at which point he will either be accepted by God or damned. His final sin cannot be forgiven until he is past his ability to repent; however he still tries to guarantee his salvation on this side of death by making God 'swear by thy self', a promise that Joseph E. Duncan rightly remarks is reminiscent of God swearing to Abraham in Genesis 22:16,[84] and is important for its insistence on Old Testament law to guarantee New Testament grace.

The Christianity that Donne presents his readers within the *Divine Poems* is one of disbelief, yet this should not be inferred to be a statement of unbelief. That he sometimes shows distrust in God does not mean that he believes that God is untrustworthy. What we are given is a struggle, both in the *Songs and Sonnets* and the '*Divine Poems*, of someone who deeply loves his physical existence and the material world in which he inhabits, but is still left with the knowledge that it is a fallen and doomed world full of strife, loneliness, departing, and death. His world and his life must pass, so he fervently holds on to the belief that the union of the body and soul create the individual, so the resurrected individual must have a body and soul. He does not allow for a dualism of body against soul, nor does he allow for the soul and the immaterial to be held loftily above the body and the physical existence. The incarnation of Jesus presents the best way to defend the position of the worth of this physical existence and the necessity of a bodily resurrection at the Day of Judgement, for if God could become fully human without polluting his perfect being, and if death does not defeat, him and the resurrection is one which features a Christ who can be touched and who eats (as he does when he appears to his disciples), and who

[84] Joseph E. Duncan, 'Resurrections in Donne's "A Hymne to God the Father" and "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse"', *John Donne Journal* 7.2 (1988), 186.

tells his followers to remember him through the sacrament of communion (a thoroughly physical act which would involve touching, smelling, tasting, consuming, and eventually expelling the body of Jesus) the poet then has an excellent venue to present his case for why the body and soul together create the human and why he is justified in loving his physical life and why he wants it to continue on when the physical world ceases to be and he has long since died.

In addition to the fact that the incarnation gives worth to the physical as well as to the spiritual, there is also the belief that the created can now approach the creator. If God became human and was dependent upon and was cared for by humans, and said that he was going ahead of his followers to prepare a place for them in heaven because they are now children of God, then his followers can likewise approach God and petition him as a child would a parent. This ability to approach and talk to God in a way that is sometimes combative serves Donne well in his poems. He can then argue, accuse, question, demand, and repent while talking to God without the worry that he is moving himself beyond grace, because he has been led to this position by God, by Jesus – by the Son of God who is the Son of Man.

Finally, and more problematically, the inability to know with complete assurance what happens after death and the need to have a bodily resurrection which will also bring about perfect and unending communion of all creation between itself God, can bring about the desire to try to create ways, on one's own, which might provide the guarantee that all that is hoped for will indeed come to pass. Donne illustrates relationships in the *Songs and Sonnets* that use incarnational, scriptural, and alchemical means to try to create and hold a lasting union between two lovers which can, at best, only be a temporary togetherness, and then some form of separation must occur. There is the idea that the *imago dei* of each person will allow for a small or incomplete incarnation and communion to exist between

two people, but since it is a fallen and incomplete reflection of the divine, it cannot be permanent and is doomed to failure in one way or another. The *Divine Poems* then posit a situation where the Incarnation is a true and complete act and being, and the communion that can be created is one which is permanent and unceasing, but has the one complication that it is hidden, or not yet fully revealed, and so leaves room for doubt. Donne has God be a silent partner in the discussion as all conversations and complaints and arguments are started and completed by Donne. Donne pushes and argues with God, but Donne also provides all the responses, and God can only be found in the Word and in the Incarnation. Ultimately, Donne does not give his readers solace if they look to his poems for assurance of life after death, but he does provide an example of someone who seeks out God and believed that God could be approached and does care about individuals. If the creator of all that exists is willing to become human and humble himself in his earthly station so that he can provide an exalted position to his believers, then he will not waste his work, but will save those whom he has done so much to be in communion with. Perhaps, because the Incarnation provides an insight into just how God wants to interact with his people, Donne and his readers can take some solace in the belief that he will not cast them aside when they die and reach his shore. He has done so much to be with them; he will forgive their final sin of fear, and will welcome them.

III

INCARNATION AS SOCIAL PROTEST IN *SALVE DEUS REX JUDAEORUM*

Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is a curious work, as it is a book of devotional poetry written to obtain patronage from some of the most wealthy and powerful women of Lanyer's time, yet the devotional content leads to a theology of liberation, primarily liberation for women from a patriarchal hierarchy but also liberation from the tyranny of class divisions. That the book failed to secure patronage seems certain considering the little that we do know of Lanyer's life and the relative critical silence that exists between its publication in 1611 and A. L. Rowse's edition of the work in 1978.[1] However, even though the book is very concerned with trying to secure patronage, Lanyer did write a poem that is devotional in purpose and shows great dexterity and wit in its use of theology. With *Salve Deus*, Lanyer has produced a book where rather than writing religious verse in the same vein of Donne and Herbert, where the focus is on God residing in the inner recesses of the heart, she largely eschews concerns of developing the internal, personal relationship of her readers to Christ. Instead, she presupposes that her readers will already be in the process of deepening their personal relationships with God, which allows her to argue that this inward understanding of God must then manifest itself in outward actions that should result in a new social order in which men and women would be equal. It is to the Incarnation that Lanyer goes to build her arguments for her social

[1] For biographical information see Susanne Woods, 'Introduction', in Susanne Woods (ed.), *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer* (Oxford, 1993), pp. xv-xlii; A. L. Rowse (ed.), *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady* (London, 1978).

radicalism. The social Gospel[2] that she preaches is founded upon an understanding of the Incarnation as historical and volatile, and she uses theological elements of the doctrine of the Incarnation to tie the humanity and divinity of Christ to the value and importance of women, for it is through her commentary on the Passion of Jesus that she not only discusses the importance of God becoming man, but also that God became man through woman. It is at the point in history when the human and the divine are perfectly united that Lanyer focuses – not on Jesus's teachings but on his actions and on the actions of others towards him. Because Jesus Christ is both God and man, actions performed by him and to him take on greater significance because they are then actions performed by and to God, and Lanyer argues that the implications of the decisions and actions by Jesus and those around him have ramifications in her own day, and that these ramifications call for a new ordering of society.

The centrality of the doctrine of the Incarnation to Lanyer's arguments in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* has been well discussed by Janel Mueller;[3] however, it is not only the Incarnation that is vital to a proper understanding of the radicalism in *Salve Deus*, but two related doctrines must also be kept in mind when approaching the book. The doctrines are those of *theotokos* (the understanding that Mary was not only the mother of Jesus, but the mother of God – literally 'bearer of God') and *communicatio idiomatum*, or 'communication of attributes' (which is the belief that whatever is said of the human in Jesus must also be said of the Divine and vice versa). The agreement for the importance of these doctrines originates from the same church councils that are historically responsible for the orthodox definition of the Incarnation, and so Aemilia Lanyer is working within a theological framework that is as central to the Christian faith as the Incarnation. While

[2] I am using this term in its common sense of meaning an understanding of the Gospels in which social application of the teachings of Jesus are stressed.
[3] Janel Mueller, 'The Feminist Poetics of "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum"', in Marshall Grossman (ed.), *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon* (Lexington, KY, 1998), pp. 99-127.

theotokos and 'communication of attributes' will be discussed at length in regards to how Lanyer uses the suffering and death of Jesus as her argument for emancipation, it is helpful to first discuss the primary theological approaches to *Salve Deus* as they currently stand.

Although Lanyer's *Salve Deus* is a work of devotional verse, there has been very little critical work written to try and explain the overarching theology of the book. According to Barbara K. Lewalski some sections of the books show Lanyer 'Marshalling biblical evidence with rhetorical force and flair, she claims that God himself has affirmed women's moral and spiritual equality or superiority to men'.[4] The reason for this may be as Lynette McGrath states that, 'although the title of Lan[y]er's poem suggests a fairly straight-forward project of Christian praise which would have been regarded as appropriate for a woman of her period, the work itself deviates considerably from the conventional norms for women's sacred poetry'.[5] The book's arrangement is eleven dedicatory pieces (mostly written to women of high social standing), the central poem 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum', 'The Description of Cooke-ham' (a country-house poem), and finally 'To the doubtful Reader' which is a short, prose piece describing the inspiration for the central poem. The majority of criticism primarily focuses on the dedicatory poems and 'The Description of Cooke-ham' as these poems provide valuable historical insight into the society of powerful women that existed at the time of the book's composition, so great attention has been given to this 'community of good women'.[6] When the theology of 'Salve Deus' is discussed there are largely two topics considered, firstly, that Lanyer created a 'new Gospel', and, secondly, that the book performs an incarnating work in the readers.

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[4] Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Of God and Good Women', in Margaret Patterson Hannay (ed.), *Silent But for the Word* (Kent, OH, 1985), p. 212.
[5] McGrath, Lynette, '"Let Us Have Our Libertie Againe": Amelia Lanier's 17th-Century Feminist Voice', *Women's Studies* 20.3-4 (1992), 341.
[6] 'Of God and Good Women', p.207.

The concept that Lanyer creates a 'new Gospel' with her book, one which overthrows the patriarchal and canonical Gospels found in the Bible, is a problematic theory. Although others have expounded upon this idea, the primary arguments for this belief can be found in Achsah Guibbory's essay 'The Gospel According to Aemilia'.[7] While the title poem, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum', does appear to be an unique contribution to seventeenth-century devotional poetry, it is difficult to read it as a 'new Gospel' of Christ, most especially as it does not actually tell the Gospel story, rather only one episode from Jesus's life. Ultimately, Guibbory conflates the concepts of 'inspiration' and 'revelation'. When Lanyer describes receiving the title for the poem in a dream (as she does in 'To the doubtful Reader' when she relates that the she understood the dream as 'a significant token, that I was appointed to performe this Worke')[8] she is claiming divine inspiration for her poem, but she is not claiming that it is divine revelation. Divine inspiration is akin to an artistic muse, whereas divine revelation 'does not mean merely the transmission of a body of knowledge, but the personal self-disclosure of God within history'.[9] The greatest point of revelation then is the Incarnation, in which Jesus was the physical revelation of God to humanity, but this revelation is also found in the 'Word', and the Bible then acts as written 'self-disclosure'. This is of the utmost importance for Lanyer's 'Salve Deus' because the power of her arguments comes from the fact that the Gospel narratives 'reveal' God as much as Jesus did when he walked the earth. It is vital for Lanyer that the narratives provided by Scripture reveal God, because it is through the text that she will argue that the treatment of Jesus is equal to how one treats God. Lanyer

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[7] Achsah Guibbory, 'The Gospel According to Aemilia', in Marshall Grossman (ed.), *Aemilia Lanyer* (Lexington, KY, 1998), pp. 191-211; Catherine Keohane, '"That Blindest Weakenesse be not Over-Bold": Aemilia Lanyer's Radical Unfolding of the Passion', *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997), 359-389; Kari Boyd McBride and John C. Ulreich, 'Answerable Styles: Biblical Poetics in the Poetry of Lanyer and Milton', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100.3 (2001), 333-354.

[8] Susanne Woods (ed.), *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer* (Oxford, 1993), p. 139. All quotations of Lanyer's works are from this edition.

[9] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 4th ed., (Oxford, 2007), p. 154.

herself declares the authority of Scripture over her poems when she tells Queen Anne 'To judge if it agree not with the Text'. (76)[10] So, unlike the biblical text of Christ's life, this is not a narrative that provides the reader with a story that can be read and understood on its own; it cannot exist outside of the biblical accounts, and because of its incompleteness and its dependence upon the biblical Gospels for rhetorical power, it is better to consider Lanyer's poem as a commentary on the significance of the death of Jesus and its theological implications for the roles of women in society. As Barbara Lewalski puts it, 'As poetic interpreter, Lanyer treats her material variously, sometimes relating events, sometimes elaborating them in the style of biblical commentary, sometimes meditating upon images or scenes, often apostrophizing participants as if she herself were present with them at the events'.[11] It is not that Lanyer has received a new revelation of God which she has written in her book, but that she has been inspired to use the Passion story to illustrate the misuse of the Gospels in creating the theology which was justifying the subordination of women in seventeenth-century Britain.

The second approach is to read *Salve Deus* as an incarnating and sacramental work that presents a Eucharistic Christ to Lanyer's readers.[12] In this theory, she plays the role of a priest, a role which has been elaborated on by Micheline White.[13] The view of Lanyer as a priest who is sacramentally providing Jesus to her readers through her Passion poem is a fruitful one, and one that furthers our understanding of just how potent the story of Jesus is that Lanyer gives to her readers. Lanyer is both theologian and priest as she provides her readers with a teaching of Jesus that will free them physically and spiritually and also as she provides the blood and body of Jesus for her readers to consume; for she writes 'For

[10] 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie'.
[11] 'Of God and Good Women', pg. 213. This point is also made by McBride and Ulreich, 'Answerable Styles', p. 336.
[12] John Rogers, 'The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.4 (2000), 435-446.
[13] Micheline White, 'A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) and the Priestly Gifts of Women', *Criticism* 45.3 (2003), 323-341.

here I have prepar'd my Paschal Lambe'. (85)[14] What the reader finds when investigating the theology the poem presents is that Lanyer is incredibly adept at working within a system of theology in which the Bible is taken as truth, both historically and theologically. She acknowledges the Genesis tale and the Gospels as historical narrative, and yet this does not lead to a lifeless exegesis, rather Lanyer takes the historicity of these two tales, the fall of humanity and the Passion of Jesus, and creates a liberation theology brimming with the potency to potentially change the society in which it was created. As Lewalski says, 'Lanyer manages her surprising fusion of religious meditation and feminism by appropriating the dominant discourse of the age, biblical exegesis'.[15] And while there have been discussions of Lanyer's work, and just how seriously the devotional aspect of the book should be taken, especially regarding the extent to which she continuously references and pays tribute to the wealthiest and most powerful women in England, the theology and politics contained in the Passion tale are hardly in line with what one expects when reading religious poetry written to gain patronage.[16]

When Aemilia Lanyer writes the biblical account of Jesus's death and resurrection, what she realises, and shares with the reader, is that this central story of Christianity should lead to a society in which men and women are equal and there is no need for social hierarchy, and while Mary Ellen Lamb has argued well for the socio-economic radicalism in the book,[17] this chapter will primarily focus on the ramifications of the sexual politics that Lanyer's book promotes. In writing the book and showing her ability to perform theology in such a nuanced manner, Lanyer illustrates that women are in fact capable of

[14] 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie'.
[15] Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Seizing Discourses and Reinventing Genres', in Marshall Grossman (ed.), *Aemilia Lanyer* (Lexington, KY, 1998), p. 53.
[16] As has been discussed by Catherine Keohane, '"That Blindest Weakenesse be not Over-Bold": Aemilia Lanyer's Radical Unfolding of the Passion', *ELH* 64.2 (1997), 361-362.
[17] Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Patronage and Class in Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*', in Mary E. Burke, et al (ed.), *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*. (Syracuse, 2000), pp. 38-57.

complex reasoning and arguing, thereby supporting her argument for the equality of the sexes and making 'the Lutheran promise of the priesthood of all believers genuinely meaningful for women'.[18] At the same time, however, she recognises that she cannot be seen rising above her station and so includes lines which apologise for her attempt, as a woman, to produce serious theological and philosophical discussion in verse.[19] Lewalski makes this argument when she states, 'Aemilia's several apologias for her poetry excuse it as faulty and unlearned by reason of her sex, but her disclaimers seem closer to *humilitas* topos than to genuine angst.'[20]

Acknowledgment of the paradox of the Incarnation is paramount to a proper understanding of Lanyer's central poem, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum'. The Christological and incarnational focus of the poem has been remarked upon by many, but once again, this is often used to discuss the community of women or the incarnating aspect of her language rather than the actual doctrine of the Incarnation and its importance to the power of the poem's arguments.[21] Once the centrality of incarnational theology is acknowledged in the poem, it becomes clear that it is the downward and upward movement of the Divine in humanity that she uses to undermine the social and sexual politics of her time. That the creator of the universe would be a weak man suffering and being tried upon false charges is an absurdity that Lanyer found great strength and liberation in; so it should not be surprising that she could also realise the bankrupt and illegitimate ordering of social rank and wealth while still trying to ensure that she would have a voice and place within the structure of those very ranks of the nobility.

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[18] Gary Kuchar, 'Aemilia Lanyer and the Virgin's Swoon', *English Literary Renaissance* 37.1 (2007), 48.
[19] 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majesty' lines 35-6, 61-6; 'The Authors Dreame to the Ladie *Marie*, the Countesse Dowager of *Pembrooke*' lines 217-24; 'To the Ladie *Anne*, Countesse of Dorcet' line 9; 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' lines 273-88, 319-20.
[20] 'Of God and Good Women', p. 208.
[21] For example see 'Of God and Good Women' or Theresa M. DiPasquale's *Refiguring the Sacred Feminine* (Pittsburgh, 2008), pp. 126-37.

The theology Lanyer presents to her readers in her retelling of the Passion is a theology which centres all arguments regarding social structure on the three days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. Lanyer looks directly to the actions of the players involved in the trial, death, and resurrection of Christ and based on what she finds in Scripture, she is able to declare that, while there may have been a claim to men's superiority to women before Jesus's death and resurrection, it is not defensible afterwards. While some have downplayed the importance of the 'Salve' in Lanyer's work, relegating it to nothing more than a token religious piece to justify her bid for patronage,[22] when it is viewed in light of the theology it promotes and is understood in light of the strains of thought found in both the dedicatory poems and 'Cooke-ham', it becomes impossible to believe that this is just a poem written for personal advancement. The subject matter Lanyer chooses for the main focus of her poem is no minor point in the Christian religion, in fact it is very significant that Lanyer decided to centre it on a retelling of the Passion of Christ.[23] It has been said that 'Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation',[24] so when Lanyer looks to the Incarnation, the core belief in Christianity, and at the Passion of Christ, the central story for Christianity, and bases all of her arguments for the equality of individuals on biblical readings, she is in fact basing her claims on what was regarded as the highest authority on earth, God's Word. As Janel Mueller writes:

> For this purpose, which is to say, oddly from a contemporary point of view, she looks to the figure of Christ in history, to divinity humanized or humanity divinized, as she reads the record of Scripture with wholly unconventional eyes. The mystery that explodes into a demonstrated truth in her poem, "Salve Deus Rex

[22] A form of this can be seen in 'Of God and Good Women', pp. 203-4.
[23] Koehane confirms this when she states that the Lanyer's use of her topic is itself a feminist subversion ('"That Blindest Weakenesse be not Over-bold"', p. 361).
[24] Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh* (Oxford, 2005), p. 1.

> Judaeorum," is Lanyer's understanding of Christ's incarnation viewed in the light of the Crucifixion as a public, historical action taken by men alone; this vindicates, once and for all, female nature and feminine values and it authorizes gender equality ever after.[25]

When Lanyer speaks of men's betrayal, desertion, and killing of Jesus, and of women caring for and lamenting the death of Jesus, she goes to the core of Christianity and shows that when the central event in Christian history took place, women showed great wisdom while the men were ignorant. Men had the blood of Jesus on their hands, yet women were innocent.

As previously mentioned, while the Incarnation is the main doctrine Lanyer considers in her 'Salve Deus', there are two others that must be kept in mind when reading the 'Salve'. Before illustrating how the 'communications of attributes' and *theotokos* were used by Lanyer, it will be helpful to briefly discuss how they were being described within Early Modern Europe. The 'communication of attributes' is the belief that whatever is said of the humanity of Jesus must also be said of God; therefore, if it is said that Jesus slept, then God slept; if Jesus ate, then God ate. As Martin Luther says of the doctrine:

> We Christians must ascribe all the *idiomata* of the two natures of Christ, both persons, equally to him. Consequently Christ is God and man in one person because whatever is said of him as man must also be said of him as God, namely, Christ has died, and Christ is God; therefore God died – not the separated God, but God united with humanity. . . . On the other hand, whatever is said of God must also be ascribed to the man, namely, God created the world and is almighty; the

[25] 'The Feminist Poetics of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*', p. 101.

> man Christ is God, therefore the man Christ created the world and is almighty. The reason for this is that since God and man have become one person, it follows that this person bears the *idiomata* of both natures.[26]

Though space does not permit, John Calvin's and Richard Hooker's statements regarding this doctrine are in complete agreement with Luther's,[27] but I have chosen to quote from Luther because his statements regarding the 'communication of attributes' is as explicit as Lanyer's. The importance of this doctrine for Lanyer and her writings can easily be seen in the fact that when the 'communication of attributes' is ascribed to Jesus, then all of the actions taken for or against him by humans also become actions taken for or against God. Returning to Luther, he joyously celebrates this doctrine and its importance when he writes

> O Lord God! We should always rejoice in true faith, free of dispute and doubt, over such a blessed, comforting doctrine, to sing, praise, and thank God the Father for such inexpressible mercy that he let his dear Son become like us, a man and our brother! Yet the loathsome devil instigates such great annoyance through proud, ambitious, incorrigible people that our cherished and precious joy is hindered and spoiled for us. May God have pity! We Christians should know that if God is not in the scale to give it weight, we, on our side, sink to the ground. I mean it this way: if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, his side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet he can also readily go up again, or leap out of the

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[26] *On the Councils and the Church*, in Robert H. Fischer (ed.), *Luther's Works, Volume 41: Church and Ministry III* (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 103.

[27] John Calvin's discussion is stated in John T. McNeill (ed.), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 482, and Richard Hookers is in W. Speed Hill (ed.), *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Book V*, in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 3, (London, 1977), pp. 216-34. Both views agree with Luther's, but are not as succinctly stated.

> scale! But he could not sit on the scale unless he had become a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in his own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God.[28]

This quote clearly shows the importance that the doctrine carries for an incarnational understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Moreover, Luther strongly ties the death of Jesus, the death of God, and the incarnational cycle of upward and downward movement. Lanyer's approach to the trial and death of Jesus requires the same weight behind it when she uses the treatment of Jesus by the authorities for her call for the freedom of women.

In addition to 'communication of attributes', a reader must also remember the concept of *theotokos*, or the belief that Mary was the mother of God, not just the mother of Jesus. Since Mary was the mother of both the human and divine in Jesus, then she carried God in her womb. Once again, it is Martin Luther who provides a good summary of the implications of this belief when he states

> Thus it should also be said that Mary is the true natural mother of the child called Jesus Christ, and that she is the true mother of God and bearer of God, and whatever else can be said of Children's mothers, such as suckling, bathing, feeding – that Mary suckled God, rocked God to sleep, prepared broth and soup for God, etc.[29]

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[28] *On the Councils and the Church*, pp. 103-04.
[29] *On the Councils and the Church*, p. 100.

The language in this passage closely mirrors that found in one of Lanyer's dedicatory pieces, 'To the Vertuous Reader', when she writes

> . . . Also in respect it pleased our Lord
> and Saviour Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man, beeing
> free from originall and all other sinnes, from the time of his conc-
> eption, till the houre of his death, to be begotten of a
> woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to
> a woman; and that he healed wom[e]n, pardoned women, com-
> forted women: yea, even when he was in his greatest agonie and
> bloodie sweat, going to be crucified, and also in the last houre
> of his death, tooke care to dispose of a woman: after his resur-
> rection, appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his
> most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples. (40-50)

Here is a statement of the being of Jesus that is perfectly in keeping with both *theotokos* and the 'communication of attributes'. While this is a nice piece of argumentation on its own, as the reader realises that every statement about Jesus is also a statement about God, the impact of Lanyer's observations in this section are unsettling – unsettling because it shows how much every action performed by and to Jesus is a theological statement on the relationship between God and humanity. So before her readers even reach the main poem, they see God in the person of Jesus placing himself under the authority of a woman, becoming dependent upon a woman, and caring for women to the point where even while hanging on the cross he made sure that his mother would be looked after when he died. Likewise, in his ministry he continually included and reached out to women. Furthermore,

when Lanyer states that 'without the assistance of man, beeing free from originall and all other sinnes, from the time of his conception' she reminds the reader that it is because Jesus was born of a virgin, conceived without the aid of a man, that he is able to be free from original sin. It is here, before the main poem begins, that the reader sees Lanyer identifying men, rather than women, as the primary culprits responsible for the original sin that required the death and resurrection of Jesus to overcome. Lanyer also ties this first century identification of women with Jesus to her own seventeenth-century world when she, as Helen Wilcox states that, 'In the case of Lanyer's "Salve Deus," it is the countess of Cumberland's heart that is said to contain Christ's "perfect picture" (108) drawn by the poet's pen. The countess's role in the poem is therefore almost comparable to the function of the Virgin Mary: she conveys the incarnate Christ to the world'.[30] When the narrative of Jesus's life is then returned to in the 'Salve Deus', there has already been this seed planted in which the unique relationship of God to the socially inferior women will be reinterpreted.

While the two theological beliefs of 'communication of attributes' and *theotokos* are not often discussed in relation to devotional poetry, their appearance in the poetry of the time is not unique to Lanyer as it also can be found in some of John Donne's Divine Poems, such as the lines 'Whose womb was a strange Heav'n, for there | God clothed himself, and grew,' (41-2)[31] or in 'Good Friday: Made as I was Riding Westward that Day' in which Donne sees Mary as a kind of co-redeemer with God,

> Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
> Who was God's partner here, and furnished thus

[30] Helen Wilcox, 'Lanyer and the Poetry of Land and Devotion', in Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, and Garret A. Sullivan, Jr., *Early Modern English Poetry* (Oxford, 2007), p. 244.
[31] 'A Litany' in Robin Robbins (ed.), *The Complete Poems of John Donne*. (London, 2010). All quotations from Donne's poetry are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

Half of that sacrifice which ransomed us? (30-2)

As Donne sees Mary as a co-redemptrix with God for the salvation of humanity, so too does Lanyer, and then we also see that through the use of the Incarnation, *theotokos*, and the 'communication of attributes' the work of the Mother Mary is moved beyond the reproach of Protestant hesitations about focussing on Mary as Lanyer reaches back to the pre-Roman Catholic era of Christianity and shows that God used lowly women in an elevated manner in the time period in which Protestants claim was the true church, a point that Gary Kuchar misses when writing of the Virgin Mary's presence in the poem.[32] Although the use of these two theological concepts in devotional poetry is not exclusive to Lanyer's work, the way in which she uses the concepts is hers alone. She uses orthodox theology and a literal interpretation of the Bible to substantiate all of her claims for social change, and since the established church of her day insisted on orthodoxy and a literal reading of the Scriptures, her arguments gain great weight through the fact that one is continuously led back to Scripture by her, so to disagree with Lanyer is to not only quibble with her arguments but to quibble with the Word of God. Therefore, from the very beginning of the poem, 'Salve Deus', the reader is presented with a steady movement from Lanyer's contemporary environment back through history to the central point of Christianity, the life of Jesus.

Lanyer's devotional text moves the act of devotion out from her readers' hearts and into the greater society as a whole; it is a movement from the intangible to the tangible, and in this it mirrors the movement of Jesus in the Incarnation. This movement of the Incarnate Jesus that Lanyer presents to her reader is the movement from heaven to death,

[32] Gary Kuchar, 'Aemilia Lanyer and the Virgin's Swoon: Theology and Iconography in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*', *English Literary Renaissance* 37.1 (2007), 47-73.

and from this focus on the death on the cross, we are not left with a devotion on death and mortality, but on action, or as John Rogers reminds, Lanyer's poetry

> is not simply *about* the crucifixion; the justification for its composition is founded on the deep cultural logic of Christianity's understanding of the crucifixion and especially on the theology of justification that necessarily accompanies any early modern consideration of the Passion of Christ.[33]

This becomes apparent when the reader realises that within her Christological theology of social order, Lanyer makes devotional practice a public act because when the incarnational sacrifice of Jesus is understood in relation to how individuals should treat one another, there is an inherent relationship between devotion to God and inter-personal relationships. Lanyer focuses on God's descent into human form and then uses this to discuss the various reactions groups of people have to God as Jesus at his moment of greatest weakness during his trial and death, the 'founding paradox of Christian dogma – of power disguised as humbleness'.[34] As has been noted by others, what she reminds us is that instead of praising and worshipping Jesus, the male religious and political leaders persecute, torture, and kill him, whereas the women, regarded as the inferior sex, are able to see God as Jesus, and therefore interpret the importance of the actions that are taking place before them.[35] Lanyer shows that it is the inferior in society, the women, who recognise and celebrate Jesus as God, and that it is this celebration, and their involvement in the suffering of Jesus, that lets them identify with him. As Lynette McGrath states, 'Attaching women to Christ and emphasizing those Christian virtues culturally defined as

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[33] 'The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition', p. 437.
[34] Kari Boyd McBride, 'Sacred Celebrations', in Marshall Grossman (ed.), *Aemilia Lanyer* (Lexington KY, 1998), p. 64.
[35] 'Of God and Good Women', p. 207.

feminine is not, however, a capitulation to a weakened position. It is, on the contrary, a startlingly radical attempt to rewrite the nature of power'.[36] The reader see this when at the trial of Jesus, marking one of the most important moments of the incarnational paradox, the women recognise Jesus for who he is, and he rewards by reaching out to them, while rejecting the male figures in authority at his trial, as Susanne Woods has stated, 'Lanyer's identity is with the women of the New Testament who understand a God who enters his own creation in order to save it',[37] and shows that 'God himself has affirmed women's moral and spiritual equality or superiority to men'.[38] Before Lanyer even begins her retelling of the Passion, she directs her readers' attentions to the honour that God has bestowed upon women in the past. As she says,

> God . . . gave power to wise and virtuous women, to bring downe their pride and arrogancie. As was cruell *Cesarus* by the discreet counsell of noble *Deborah*, Judge and Prophetesse of Israel: and resolution of *Jael* wife of *Heber* the Kenite: wicked *Haman*, by the divine prayers and prudent proceedings of beautifull *Hester*: blasphemous *Holofernes*, by the invincible courage, rare wisdome, and confident carriage of *Judeth*: & the unjust Judges, by the innocency of chast *Susanna*: with infinite others, which for brevitie sake I will omit. (31-40)[39]

What is interesting about this passage is that all of the illustrations are taken from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. So while Lanyer primarily uses the Passion of Christ to

[36] Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 230.
[37] Susanne Woods, *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet* (Oxford, 1999), p. 150.
[38] *Lanyer*, p. 212.
[39] 'To the Vertuous Reader'

make her argument, she also ensures that her argument can be supported by the Genesis tale and various other passages in the Old Testament, thereby showing that the theme of her argument can be found to run throughout Scripture. This then is a devotional text that also acts as a theological and political treatise on the place of women in society. Lanyer is creating a text that appropriates the devotional poetry genre for her attack on society, but in doing so she still ensures that she surrounds her writings with the texts and people that can both protect her arguments from attack and give them greater legitimacy in the public sphere.

The very layout of the 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' is an attempt to begin to shift the reader's understanding of what devotional and dedicatory verse can look like. The narrative poem begins in a manner that does not seem revolutionary, and in this it seems as if the structure of 'Salve Deus' is created to protect Lanyer. There is a bookend device being used in the poem as Lanyer frames her Passion tale with commendatory sections which, like the dedicatory poems, praise the wealthy – in particular, Lady Margaret, Countess Dowager of Cumberland. The poem opens with a few lines in honour of the memory of Queen Elizabeth and then proceeds to praise Lady Margaret, and subsequently dedicates the work to her. The dedication to the Countess begins in the normal fashion of a compliment. Lanyer begins by calling attention to the greatness of Lady Margaret, but then she quickly moves to a long sequence of lines in which it is the greatness of God, and more specifically Christ in heaven that becomes the focus of praise. While it would be easy to read these lines as Lanyer equating the greatness of the Countess to God in heaven, there is in fact something much more subtle taking place. Lanyer is not equating Lady Margaret with God; rather, she is preparing both her and the reader to move from a place in which the physical and material is a place of power worthy of praise to a place where only the immaterial – such as personal virtue or God in heaven – is to be considered

worthy of praise. This is Lanyer's first movement to direct the reader away from an acceptance of the society as it exists, with power being conferred through birth or wealth or physical beauty, to a place where greatness is understood in terms of an individual's nearness to God, which, in Lanyer's opinion, may mostly be those of the lower stations in life. For, while not explicitly stated in the section, no matter how powerful Lady Margaret (or any of the other prominent women with poems dedicated to them) is, she is nothing when compared to God. All of her possessions, whether physical or material, are insignificant when viewed alongside the divine. As these unusual lines for a potential patron continue, the reader finds that Lanyer apologises to Lady Margaret for her digression from compliments, 'Pardon (good Madame) though I have digrest | From what I doe intend to write of thee' (145-6); however, then Lanyer continues to direct the Countess's attention away from herself and to God's greatness, which she has been describing as that which 'no mortall eie can see'. (148) This movement from physical majesty to immaterial majesty is one that the Countess is then allowed to follow and participate in, and considering the problems with her estate, find comfort in.[40] For Lanyer says 'That outward Beautie which the world commends | Is not the subject I will write upon', (185-6) she will instead focus on the immaterial wealth the Countess does posses, her virtue, that which cannot be seen by the eye. And as Lanyer sings of the Countess's virtue, she also moves on to a discussion of how 'outward Beautie' has caused the downfall of many great women of the past, from Helen of Troy to Matilda.[41] As Lanyer shows, physical and material graces may seem worth desiring, but they can also be dangerous. Instead, it is the soul's pursuit of God and virtue that is to be most desired, and it is virtuous traits that truly mark a person out as majestic is seen as Lanyer ends her introduction to the Countess and begins her Passion retelling. She writes,

[40] 'Re-writing Patriarchy and Patronage', p. 87.
[41] The discussion is found in lines 209-240.

This Grace great Lady, doth possesse thy Soule,
And makes thee pleasing in thy Makers sight;
This Grace doth all imperfect Thoughts controule,
Directing thee to serve thy God aright;
Still reckoning him, the Husband of thy Soule,
Which is most pretious in his glorious sight:
Because the Worlds delights shee doth denie
For him, who for her sake vouchsaf'd to die.

And dying made her Dowager of all;
Nay more, Co-heire of that eternall blisse
That Angels lost, and We by *Adams* fall;
Meere Cast-awaies, rais'd by a *Judas* kisse,
Christs bloody sweat, the Vineger, and Gall,
The Speare, Sponge, Nailes, his buffeting with Fists,
His bitter Passion, Agony, and Death,
Did gaine us Heaven when He did loose his breath. (249-264)

From an introduction in which Lanyer moves dedicatory praise of the wealthy to a meditation on the worth of virtues above all else, she begins her narrative of Christ's trial, death, and resurrection. As the reader moves through the rest of the poem, it is this theme of greatness residing in the low, while those with temporal power are actually ignorant and powerless, that will continuously confront the reader. It is the human Jesus who will be praised, not for his physical or material wealth, but for his virtues, his humility and

kindness and restraint and love in time of great duress. What marks Jesus as great is his unquantifiable graces. And so the meditation on the Incarnate God's trial is prefaced with a note of distrust in the physical world and its ranking of individuals' importance. It is this note of distrust that Lanyer hopes will move her readers, especially the Countess, from an understanding of Christ's life that affirms the current social structure, to one which calls it all into question, and then proceeds to level it, for 'yet the Weaker thou doest seeme to be | In Sexe, or Sence, the more his Glory shines'. (289-90) Lanyer creates a horizontal society where the only vertical relationship is between humanity and God, and through the incarnational work of God, she also creates a level spiritual society in which all believers can approach God and know that he will answer them, no matter what strife or trials exist. Because of the incarnation, God is now both one of them and above them, leading them up to him.

In her retelling of Jesus's death, Lanyer presents Lady Margaret with a Jesus who is fully human and God, who has been submissive to women, and who has continued to be nurtured by women just as he has cared for and nurtured women, arriving at the moment of greatest suffering in his life. At the point of the Passion tale, Jesus is at his most humble and his most human, and it is here that the gender lines are most clearly defined by Lanyer. As Mary Ellen Lamb has said, '*Salve* rereads the passion as a narrative of gender relations – of continuing and characteristic male cruelty to Christ and other innocent victims, especially women'.[42] The men persecute, abandon, and kill Jesus. The women weep for him, defend him, and are rewarded with the first sight of the resurrected Lord. As Lanyer says,

When spightfull men with torments did oppresse

[42] Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Patronage and Class in Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*', in Mary E. Burke, et al (eds.), *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Syracuse, 2000), pp. 49-50.

Th'afflicted body of this innocent Dove,
Poore women seeing how much they did trangresse,
By teares, by sighes, by cries intreat, may prove,
What may be done among the thickest presse,
They labor still these tyrants hearts to move;
In pitie and compassion to forbeare
Their whipping, spurning, tearing of his haire. (993-1000)

That the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus are moments in his life of great humility is made perfectly clear by Lanyer. She states 'Loe here thy great Humility was found,' (473) and 'the sonne of Man to be, | To purge our pride by thy Humilitie'. (479-480) This is the perfect embodiment of Donne's phrase, '*humbled in the flesh*'[43] as Jesus is God, and yet he is allowing himself to be arrested, falsely tried, beaten, and killed by those whom he created. He is, at this moment, the true embodiment of the meek inheriting the earth. The paradox of the Almighty God being a weak man on trial is one which Lanyer continuously draws attention to. The reader finds lines such as 'He was content to stoope unto their Lure, | Although his Greatnesse might doe otherwise' (523-24) and

Now al their powres, their wits, their strengths, they bend
Against one siely, weake, unarmed man,
Who no resistance makes, though much he can (550-52)

and again 'Perfections height in lowest penury, | Such glorious poverty as they never knew.' (893-94) The height of perfection submits to death by corrupt men in order that he

[43] George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (eds.), *The Sermons of John Donne*, vol. 3, (Berkeley, 1962), p. 206.

might save them. As B. R. Siegfried writes, 'She reminds her reader that Christ's suffering, and the blatant cruelty which provoked that suffering, must be traced to powerful men who abused God, ignored God's authority, and had no real authority of their own'.[44] Because the incarnation is a movement from high to low and low to high, divinity to flesh and flesh brought up to divinity, the incarnational paradox is inherent in the humble station of Christ before his judges. He is both divine power and weak flesh, the male judges are powerful humans and ignorant of the divinity standing before them. The women in the tale, however, are like Christ. They are of a humble station on earth, and yet, by devotion to Jesus, are brought up to his divine nature. They see Jesus's divinity when the men do not. Lanyer makes this explicitly clear when she contrasts the fact that Jesus remained silent during his trial before Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod, but was willing to speak to the women who wept for him. Lanyer recounts that Jesus could not be moved

> To speake one word, nor once to lift his eyes
> Unto proud *Pilate*, no nor *Herod*, king;
> By all the Questions that they could devise,
> Could make him answere to no manner of thing;
> Yet these poore women, by their pitious cries
> Did moove their Lord, their Lover, and their King,
>
> To take compassion, turne about, and speake
> To them whose hearts were ready now to breake (977-84)

[44] B. R. Siegfried, 'An Apology for Knowledge: Gender and the Hermeneutics of Incarnation in the Works of Aemilia Lanyer and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 6.3 (2001), paragraph 17.

Jesus revealed his true nature to the daughters of Jerusalem because they could recognise who he was, or as Lorna Hutson says, 'Lanyer figures the climax of the narrative as a drama of interpretation, in which women elicit radiance and meaning from the event which had remained mute and indecipherable to masculine exegesis'.[45] And because the women recognised who he was, they thought 'the world were done' (992) when Jesus – God – was condemned to death.

Lanyer condemns men's inability to recognise the incarnate God in front of them, and thus it is men who Lanyer accuses of failing God. All twelve disciples were men and they all deserted Jesus at the time of his arrest. 'His hatefull foes are ready now to take him, | And all his deere Disciples do forsake him.' (623-24) Furthermore, Lanyer writes the damning lines that 'Though they protest they never will forsake him, | They do like men, when dangers overtake them.' (631-32) And so the men who were closest to Jesus are either traitors, like Judas, or cowards, as men always are when faced with adversity. This then means that Jesus must meet his end without the male disciples he had handpicked to follow him. He is led to his trial, and now Lanyer recounts how a series of men condemn Jesus to his death; furthermore, the reader also sees that it is the High Priest Caiaphas, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, the political and religious leaders of Israel as being ultimately responsible for killing God. The trial marks the point at which the poem turns from the failing of men to the triumph of women; for as the reader finds a cowardly Pilate giving in to the demand to crucify a man he knows to be innocent, his wife defends Jesus's, and as a result makes her case for why his actions will free women from their curse. She sees the fates of the sexes tied to how they respond to Jesus at this moment. Lanyer has Pilate's wife do more than plead for Jesus' innocence; rather she turns this moment into a defence of Eve in particular and of women in general.

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[45] Lorna Hutson, 'Why the Lady's Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun', in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *New Feminist Discourses* (London, 1992), p. 170.

This defence of Eve is Lanyer's great innovation in the Passion tale. In the Gospel accounts of the story, only one verse in the book of Matthew refers to Pilate's wife, and it reads, 'when [Pilate] was set downe upon the judgement seat, his wife sent to him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that juste man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dreame by reason of him'.[46] Lanyer takes this brief mention of the only person to defend Christ's innocence and expands the one sentence to create her apology for Eve. It is with Pilate's wife that Lanyer is able to use the concept of the Incarnation and the significance of Jesus's life and death as an opportunity to reinterpret the Eden story, and the concept of original sin, as a means to subvert the social and religious ordering of the sexes. She places in the mouth of Pilate's wife the argument that she believes frees women from their submission to men. Pilate's wife looks back through scripture and points to the moment when Adam eats the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as the moment that original sin is created. As Wendy Miller Roberts reminds, 'in the Early Modern period, the Genesis story was a primary locus of discussion regarding the nature of the world, government, and people'.[47] Moreover, Lanyer is not the first to return to the Eden tale to redeem women from the curse of subjugation. Cornelius Agrippa used the Garden of Eden and the Genesis narrative to argue for the supremacy of women in his work *Of the Nobilitie and Excellencie of Womankynde*. Esther Gilman Richey has discussed the similarity of the arguments in Lanyer's and Agrippa's writings,[48] but it is interesting to note that while Agrippa used the Cabala and Gnosticism to justify women, therein making them into purely spiritual beings, Lanyer's approach to the same arguments looks to the humanity of Jesus and the divine and in so doing she is able to redeem women without

[46] Matthew 27.19, Lloyd E. Berry (ed.), *The Geneva Bible* (Peabody, MA, 2007), all quotations from this edition.
[47] Wendy Milller Roberts, 'Gnosis in Aemilia Lanyer's "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum"', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 59.2 (2005), 14.
[48] Esther Gilman Richey, '"To Undoe the Booke": Cornelius Agrippa, Aemilia Lanyer and the Subversion of Pauline Authority', *English Literary Renaissance* 27.1 (1997), pp. 106-28.

stripping them of their humanity, because it is the flesh and the human that is the source of the justification of their sex and the means by which they are able to identify with God. So in the midst of Lanyer's retelling of the central story of the Christian religion for the purpose of social revolution, she also includes a brief narrative discussing one of the other primary biblical tales for social ordering, and in this she does not support the theological view of her day which blamed women for causing the fall of all humanity and nature. Instead, she shows men to be the greater transgressors.

The movement of Lanyer's 'Salve' is a movement towards 'Eves Apologie', rather than the death and resurrection of Christ, and as Catherine Keohane states of Lanyer's insertion of extra-biblical narration such as the 'Apologie', 'These are not "digressions" but Lanyer's attempts to involve women in the story, and moreover, to declare that women tried to change its outcome'.[49] But where Keohane is correct in seeing the 'Apologie' as something other than a 'digression', she forgets that women were already in the biblical narrative, and what Lanyer does is not 'involv[ing] women in the story', but emphasising their involvement and in so doing, highlighting the recognition by women of the Incarnate God in their presence. In addition to this, Lanyer's ability to include a discussion of the origin of sin at the point of its defeat shows that she is like Pilate's wife and the women who weep for Jesus, because she has seen the work of the Incarnation when the men of her own time continue to misconstrue the Passion tale and the biblical Gospels in such a way that allows for the oppression of women, and so it is in the 'Apologie' that Lanyer's rhetoric becomes most direct. As Lyn Bennett states, 'Certainly in its dramatic presentation, and perhaps also in the intensity and directness of its argument, "Eves Apologie" is unique within Lanyer's volume'.[50] And it is this directness that allows Lanyer

[49] '"That Blindest Weakenesse be not Over-Bold"', p. 363.
[50] Lyn Bennett, *Women Writing of Divinest Things* (Pittsburgh, 2004), p. 207.

to move away from narrative and into the mode of priest, one with a prophetic voice.[51] Many have commented on the fact that the voice in 'Eves Apologie' could be either Pilate's wife's or Lanyer's, but as Bennett rightly states, 'it seems safe to say that "Eves Apologie" is meant to be read as a multivocal plea for equality, simultaneously expressed by the poet, by Pilate's wife, by Eve, and – by extension – all women'.[52] This once again brings to mind the point that it is probably better to view Lanyer's 'Salve' as commentary and sermon rather than a new Gospel. Lanyer never claims Apostolic lineage, rather she claims to be a priest, and as a priest she pontificates upon the significance of Christ's trial and death in light of the doctrine of salvation. In this the reader is called to consider Scripture, and

> To judge if it agree not with the Text:
>
> And if it doe, why are poore Women blam'd
>
> Or by more faultie Men so much defam'd?. (76-8)[53]

Susanne Woods puts it well when she writes:

> Authority in the Renaissance can only come, ultimately, only from God, and while Lanyer makes much of her patron, Margaret, Countess of Cumberland, the *Salve Deus* presents an image of Christ that underlines the poet's other authorizing strategies. Christ is lowly. He is friend to the women who surround the Passion story as Lanyer presents it. He is the bridegroom of the Church, explicitly

[51] 'Answerable Styles', p. 333.
[52] *Women Writing of Divinest Things*, p. 201.
[53] 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie'.

> represented by the Countess of Cumberland. The Passion of Christ becomes both the essence and emblem of glorious humility and the empowering force of grace.[54]

Here the readers, this 'circle of good women', are invited to take the text for the sermon and judge if the commentary and exhortation agree with Scripture. In this, the rhetorical force of the 'Apologie', which has been well discussed by Lyn Bennett,[55] is strengthened by the fact that the argument rests not on the words of Aemilia Lanyer, but on the Word of God – the final proof of truth. Additionally, with having first eaten the fruit, 'The best one could hope to do was to ague Eve's lesser culpability, which Lanyer does with rhetorical vigour. But her contextualizing of the Eden narrative within her elaboration of the Passion narrative allows Lanyer to make a historicized argument for actual equality'.[56]

Pilate's wife reminds us that Eve had to be coaxed and outwitted by the serpent before she ate of the fruit, whereas Eve simply had to offer it to Adam and he ate. As Lanyer says, Eve was 'by cunning deceav'd' (773) whereas with Adam, 'No subtill Serpents falshood did betray him.' (799) Roberts also makes this point when she states that 'Lanyer's "situational ethics" attempt to both exonerate Eve of her crime by legitimizing her decision on the basis of her good intent in a morally ambiguous situation and to increase the severity of Adam's crime by recounting the clear moral guidelines he was given to confront an unambiguous situation.'[57] But Lanyer does not have Pilate's wife stop her argument here. She then uses the terms of patriarchal authority to show how tenuous their arguments for the superiority of men are. Su Fang Ng makes the point 'that female weakness that men criticize is constitutive of the very thing of which men are proudest, conflating the forbidden fruit with book learning, from which women are barred:

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[54] Susanne Woods, 'Vocation and Authority', in Marshall Grossman (ed.), *Aemilia Lanyer* (Lexington, KY, 1998), p. 92.
[55] *Women Writing of Divinest Things*, pp. 177-208.
[56] 'Answerable Styles', p. 345.
[57] 'Gnosis in Aemilia Lanyer's "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum"', p. 15.

"Yet Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke | From *Eves* faire hand, as from a learned book"'.[58] Lanyer realises that this reasoning may be insufficient for her case, so she then contrasts Eve's, and thereby women's, first eating of the apple with men putting Jesus to death. Pilate's wife says

> Her weakenesse did the Serpents words obay;
> But you in malice Gods deare Sonne betray.
>
> Whom, if unjustly you condemne to die,
> Her sinne was small, to what you doe commit;
> All mortall sinnes that doe for vengeance crie,
> Are not to be compared unto it:
> If many worlds would altogether trie,
> By all their sinnes the wrath of God to get;
> This sinne of yours, surmounts them all as farre
> As doth the Sunne, another little starre. (815-24)

Lanyer makes the point that women did indeed take the first bite of the apple, but men are going to kill God – surely the greater sin.[59] Looking to Luther once again, one reads

> Anyone who kills a man may be called a murderer of a being who belongs to God and in whom God is present, but he who kills Christ has killed God's Son, indeed, God and the Lord of Glory himself.[60]

[58] Su Fang Ng, 'Aemilia Lanyer and the Politics of Praise', *ELH* 67 (2000), 438.
[59] Theresa M. DiPasquale, 'Woman's Desire for Man in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*', *Journal of English and German Philology* 99.3 (2000), 358; 'A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys?', p. 332.

Both sexes ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Both sexes are complicit in original sin and the fall of the world, but only men killed Jesus. Only men killed God. The women wept and stayed near while the disciples fled. Women went to the tomb and saw the resurrected Christ, while the disciples were in hiding and had to be told by these same women that their saviour lives. Lanyer ends 'Eves Apologie in defence of Women' with lines in which 'thy wife (O *Pilate*) speakes for all' (834) when she says,

> Then let us have our Libertie againe,
> And challendge to your selves no Sov'raigntie;
> You came not in the world without our paine,
> Make that a barre against your crueltie;
> Your fault beeing greater, why should you disdaine
> Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?
> If one weake woman simply did offend,
> This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end. (825-832)

This speech and its belief that the subservience of women was a punishment of the Fall can also be found in another seventeenth-century writer, Owen Fellltham. He writes,

> If wee argue from the *Text*; that *male* and *female* made *man*: so the *man* being put *first*, was *worthier*. I answer, *So the Evening and the morning was the first day*: yet few will thinke the *night* the *better*. That *Man* is made her *Governour*, and so

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[60] 'That These Words of Christ, "This Is My Body," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics' in Robert H. Fischer (ed.), *Luther's Works: Volume 37: Word and Sacrament III* (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 62.

> *above her*; I beleeve rather the punishment of *her sinne*, then the *Prerogative of his worth*: Had they both stood, it may be thought, she had never beene in that *subjection*: for then it had beene no *curse*, but a *continuance of her former estate*; which had nothing but *blessednesse* in it.[61]

This quotation from Felltham also contains a call to 'argue from the *Text*' which is similar to Lanyer's 'judge if it agree not with the Text', and the text of Scripture argues that in Eden men were equal to women.

While Lanyer's main focus in her retelling of Christ's Passion is upon the roles of the sexes in their response to God in his time of greatest trial, this focus has a wider application than gender roles in society. In the Gospels one reads Jesus saying, 'in as muche as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me'.[62] Regarding the political application of Lanyer's work Kari Boyd McBride and John C. Ulreich state, 'this argument for gender equality is merely the springboard for a more radical and more dangerous political critique, a poetic narrative that historicizes her challenge to the socioeconomic structure',[63] or as Wilcox states, 'This concern with Christ's lowliness is part of the egalitarian ideal present throughout Lanyer's volume, by which no gender or class should exercise "tyranny" (87) over any other'.[64] Lanyer explicitly makes her statement for the levelling of all society when she writes, 'All sprang but from one woman and one man, | Then how doth Gentry come to rise and fall?', (35-6)[65] If all humanity share a common ancestor in Adam and Eve, and if the death and resurrection of Jesus restores the world to a prelapsarian state of equality of the sexes, then there is no longer a basis for building a society in which birth determines social rank and

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[61] Owen Felltham, 'Of Woman', in *Resolves* (London, 1628), p. 101.
[62] Matthew 25.40.
[63] 'Answerable Styles', p. 345.
[64] "Lanyer and the Poetry of Land and Devotion", p. 245.
[65] 'To the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorcet'

power, rather, like Christ, a person's greatness comes from the recognition of the Incarnation.

While much of the critical attention given to Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* has focussed on the introductory and concluding poems, it is the Passion of Jesus that is at the centre of the book, and it is the person of Jesus who is at the centre of her arguments for liberty. In her poems, it is the Incarnation that must be the focus of attention, or else her message is lost. The significance of one person being fully God and fully human must have great significance in the lives of those who follow the Incarnation. She rightly realises the importance of *theotokos* and the 'communication of attributes', and through her retelling of the story, she forces her readers to confront how they must respond to the Gospels if they believe that they are a record of the life and death of the Incarnation. Through her insistence upon the continued applicability of the life of Christ to her own time, she not only incarnates the Word to her readers but she also incarnates society as a whole. Aemilia Lanyer's presentation of the Incarnation is one, as with Donne, that places great emphasis upon the physical nature of God in man, but instead of trying to create an assurance of the permanent unity of individuals after death, she tries to create unity and equality in her own time through the treatment of the body of the Incarnate Jesus. Likewise, the redemption of the physical through the actions of Jesus allows her access to the Divine, because as she writes, 'the Weaker thou doest seeme to be | In Sexe, or Sence, the more his Glory shines'.

IV

GEORGE HERBERT DISCUSSING THE WORD

George Herbert's *The Temple* contains an all-pervading presence of the Incarnation. As Robert B. Shaw has said, 'Herbert by writing his poems was wrestling with paradox. He was applying all his efforts of expression to things which the common consent of believers deems inexpressible'.[1] The focus of the book has been described as Christological, but it is more specific than this. Every poem in the book must be understood in light of the Incarnation in order for the book as a whole to carry its greatest impact, or to look to Shaw once again, 'Herbert's poems, like the sacraments, are witnesses to the Incarnation'.[2] Through reading *The Temple* one gets a sense that Herbert not only believes in God but that he also converses with God by means of the Incarnation, and furthermore, that the poems of *The Church* are a record of this conversation. As Douglas Bush has said, 'With all his sophisticated art, he seems unaware of an audience, so that we rather overhear him than read him',[3] or put another way, 'Herbert's poetry is talk, and God, silent or speaking, is the poet's constant interlocutor'.[4] In Herbert's poetry there is a very clear dichotomy in which God is the unknowable force that animates all, and the triune God who can be accessed because he has first pursued us – and knows us; furthermore, through the Holy Spirit, the believer is guided and becomes a son of God with Jesus and is able to approach God as the child of a loving, yet stern, father. In this we see Herbert both acknowledge and circumvent the inability to know and understand the

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[1] Robert B. Shaw, 'George Herbert: The Word of God and the Words of Man', in Peter S. Hawkins and Anne Howland Schotter (ed.), *Ineffability* (New York, 1984), p. 81.
[2] 'George Herbert: The Word of God and the Words of Man', p. 89.
[3] *English Literature in the Earlier 17th Century*, 2nd edn., pg. 143.
[4] Robert Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets* (Oxford, 2000.), p. 49. Richard Strier, *Love Known* (London, 1983), p. 166, also notes this when he says, '"The Church" is primarily the record of an intimate relationship'.

infinite and divine. It is his Christological and incarnational emphases that allow him to create a means by which he can speak to and with God, and in this we find one of the richest and most nuanced poetic representations of a believer's relationship with God.

The topic of George Herbert's *The Temple* and its relationship with the Incarnation has been studied several times before. The first significant work was by Richard Hughes in his article 'George Herbert and the Incarnation'. While this article makes the important claim that Herbert's 'sense of the Incarnation pervades nearly every poem he wrote, and each poem is a further celebration of the Incarnation',[5] it ultimately tries to align Herbert's understanding of the Incarnation with Gnosticism. This rather unfortunate assertion is made despite the fact that Gnosticism is anti-Incarnation, as can be evidenced by the fact that 'A central Gnostic notion was that matter was evil and sinful';[6] therefore, Herbert can be an Incarnationalist or a Gnostic, but not both. However, Hughes's essay did importantly call for a closer look at the importance of the Incarnation in *The Temple*. This call was taken up in Jeannie Sargent Judge's *Two Natures Met: George Herbert and the Incarnation*.[7] Judge's work primarily looks at the doctrine of the Incarnation and how the various theological aspects of the doctrine can be found to play out in the poems of *The Temple*. Most recently, Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise has published the book *Le Verbe Fait Image* which builds upon her article, 'Herbert's Theology of Beauty',[8] and looks at the Incarnational properties of the imagery used by the metaphysical poets, with Herbert and Richard Crashaw as primary studies, in a manner akin to the creation of verbal icons. These critical works are correct in their assertions of the importance of the Incarnation in *The Temple*; however, as critics begin to explore the Incarnation in relation to *The Temple* it is clear that there are many more avenues for discussion, and so, while keeping the work

[5] Richard E. Hughes, 'George Herbert and the Incarnation', *Cithara* 4 (1964), 28.
[6] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 4th edn., (Oxford, 2007), p. 295.
[7] Jeannie Sargent Judge, *Two Natures Met* (Oxford, 2004).
[8] Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise, '"Sweetnesse readie penn'd": Herbert's Theology of Beauty', *George Herbert Journal* 27.1&2 (2003/4), 1-21; *Le Verbe Fait Image* (Paris, 2010).

that has been done by Hughes, Judge, and Miller-Blaise in mind, this chapter will explore the relationship that the Incarnation provides for Herbert as he seeks and relates a personal and intimate conversation with God. These poems function as conversations between God and Herbert, but it is also found that the poems are in conversation with each other discussing and clarifying observations and arguments raised throughout *The Temple*, so that what is ultimately presented to the reader is an intimate yet accessible look at the private discussion of a believer with himself and with God, and it is the Incarnation that allows for a human to approach the divine as a friend or, at times, an equal.

From this point of intimacy with the divine, Herbert is able to express a truly catholic Christianity that incorporates all aspects of the incarnation. Because Herbert's pursuit is Christ, and not doctrine, the reader finds a Christianity that is at home with both Catholics and Puritans. In this catholic Christianity, we also see elements of the four other poets studied in this work. When Herbert approaches and considers God incarnate in Jesus, there is the anxiety and battle found in Donne's relationship with God; however, Herbert is able to navigate towards a true sense of peace and trust that overcomes his anxieties. Where Lanyer points to the need for social and sometimes revolutionary applications of the theology of the Incarnation, Herbert never ceases to see a prophetic role for Christians in a Church that was made subservient to the monarch and was subsequently a branch of the government. Herbert believes that in the eyes of God, and most especially in the Church, all are equal;[9] furthermore, to give preferential treatment to the wealthy is an act of betrayal that makes the parson a 'Judas'.[10] As with Herrick, Herbert celebrates food and drink and festivals. Although he promotes sombreness, Herbert is a joyfully sombre parson – one unafraid to sing. And finally, as with Crashaw, there is the use of grotesque and baroque, as can be seen in the discussion of Herbert's 'The Bag'. There is a

[9] For example, 'Chap. VI: The Parson Praying', in *A Priest to the Temple, or, The Country Parson*, in F. E. Hutchinson (ed.), *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford, 1941), pp. 231-2.
[10] *A Priest to the Temple*, p. 226.

very corporeal manner to the God that is encountered in *The Temple*. There should never be the accusation that Herbert's vision of God is neo-platonic or Gnostic, because his God has a physical body that has been broken. He knows God was flesh because he has tasted and drunk God. He knows his God lives because his God is his subsistence in this world, and so what Herbert gives his reader is a complicated relationship with God. This is a relationship that never forgets that God is King, but it is also one that is intimate. As Anthony Low says, 'if Herbert's religion were merely a matter of power politics, of dominance and submission . . . it is unlikely that his poems should be so widely liked and so accessible in an age that so deeply suspects and resents all such political and economic relationships', and he goes on to state that the other relationship apparent in the poems is 'that of father and child'.[11] Herbert argues and badgers and repents and praises and fears and ultimately believes. He cannot reach God, but he can consume him. He cannot describe God, but he can talk to him, and so while critics such as Terry G. Sherwood have made important insights into Herbert's poetry through looking at the formal 'prayerfulness' of the verses,[12] what the reader is given is much more intimate than formal prayer as Herbert's words are answered by God. Ultimately, Herbert introduces the reader to the Incarnation, and in *The Temple* the reader is invited to witness and enjoy the various movements and motions that make the relationship a conversation between Herbert and God by way of Jesus.

That the architecture of *The Temple* has a Christological emphasis can be understood when we look at how 'The Church-porch' and 'The Church Militant' relate to *The Church*. Although there has been much debate regarding how all the pieces of the work fit together, the work can be understood in light of the fact that both the Temple and the Church have had rather fluid definitions historically, and Herbert's *The Temple* shows

[11] Anthony Low, *Reinvention of Love* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 103.
[12] Terry G. Sherwood, *Herbert's Prayerful Art* (London, 1989).

this to be the case as well. While *The Temple* could point to the various incarnations of the historical temple in Jerusalem (and possibly even the Tabernacle), this is too limited of a reading to incorporate all of the meanings that Herbert presents his readers with in his book of poems. Likewise, *The Church* could be based on seventeenth-century British churches, but once again, this is too narrow of a reading to incorporate all that the reader is presented with in *The Church*. A better way to view the architecture of the book is to view the terms in their various, mutable forms. *The Temple* then is not a literal building, but a place of worship, and because of the immense human and incarnational/Christological themes of the book, it is also the Temple that is the body, the 'Temple of the holy Ghost'.[13] Likewise, *The Church* is a physical church, and the bride of Christ, and the body of the believer. The book operates as a movement in ('Church Porch' to *Church*) and out (*Church* to 'Church Militant'), just as the title allows for the physically external location of communion with the divine in an actual Temple, and as an internal location of communion with the body acting as the place of communion. This view of the architecture allows for a fluidity that incorporates the various functions that Herbert places on the Temple and Church without losing the significance that the words 'temple' and 'church' add to our understanding of the work. In light of this view of Herbert's work as architect of his poetry, without denying assertions such as Stanley Fish's that *The Temple* functions as a catechism[14] or relating the work to the Old Testament Temple or seventeenth-century English churches, I will be discussing the architecture of the book in relation to the dichotomy of Law and Gospel of the Old and New Testaments as well as the dichotomy contained in the human/divine conversation that Herbert carries out in much of *The Church*.

[13] 1 Corinthians 6.19, William Aldis Wright (ed,), *The Authorized Version of the English Bible, 1611*, 5 vols., (Cambridge, 1909), all quotations from the Bible are from this edition.
[14] Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple* (London, 1978).

The three components of *The Temple* – 'The Church Porch', *The Church*, and 'The Church Militant' – can be viewed in relation to the three parts of the Bible – the Law, the Gospels, and the Acts and Epistles. The Christian understanding of these three components allows for Jesus to be found throughout the Bible with[15] the Old Testament prefiguring him, and the Acts and Epistles teaching believers how to live in light of his life and death. This then is what we find in the three parts of *The Temple*: 'The Church-porch' acts as the Law, the Old Testament, and teaches the reader what it means to be a righteous believer in seventeenth-century Britain. 'The Church Militant' shows the reader how the Church is ever moving westward through history and anticipates how it will continue to move into the future. But in both of these sections, the reader can only make sense of them when they are placed in the proper context of *The Church* as the central focus of a Christian's life. It is in *The Church*, in a relationship with Christ, that the failures of the ability to live righteously, as 'The Church-porch' demands, are agonised over. And it is in 'The Church Militant' that the reader is reminded that *The Church*, though personal and introspective, is still tied to history and society. It cannot be divorced from space and time because God's redemption of humanity was obtained through his entering space and time in the person of Jesus. As Mary Ellen Rickey points out, the title indisputably suggests the place of worship of the Old Testament, while also implying the living temple of the Pauline epistles.[16] A number of the poems in *The Temple* are about the relationship of the two temples: the Covenant of Works of the Old Testament, with its observances centred first in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple, is superseded by the Covenant of Grace of the New Testament, with its substitution of the human heart as fountainhead of devotion.[17] Rickey further notes that with the 'plentitude of variations on the theme, Herbert must certainly have intentionally and designedly have chosen a title for his book that would

[15] Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 4th edn., (Oxford, 2007), p.126.
[16] Mary Ellen Rickey, *Utmost Art* (Lexington, KY, 1966), pp. 4-5.
[17] An example of this will be discussed when considering the poem 'The Thanksgiving'.

signal both sides of the Works-Grace comparison',[18] which then helps to accentuate the various paradoxes and dialectics that would be required of a Christian, and which Herbert also portrays in his book of verse. There is the social and historical movement of the Church, just as there are also static church buildings, and an individual believer must act in accordance to the moralities of Christianity, while also living free from the bondages of sin through justification through Christ. The believer must likewise acknowledge God as King, while also approaching him as a Father, and Christ as a brother, through the Incarnation. Herbert's *The Temple* does all of this, and so the architecture must also be understood as static and ever changing as one approaches each new poem.

Although it is the incarnational Jesus that gives him access to the divine, Herbert often addresses his poems to 'God' or 'Lord', rather than to Jesus. Herbert exists in a physical world, and believes in a physical resurrection, but it is a relationship with the eternal and ineffable Lord that is his goal. This can be observed through the manner in which *The Church* ends – which is with the poem 'Love (III)', a poem that combines Jesus and God into one being, and allows Herbert to exist in the same space as them as he enjoys the first banquet and final Holy Communion after the judgment. Jesus allows for a very personal and intimate knowledge of God, which Herbert uses to create a method for relating to God which is unique in British devotional verse. He is both reverent and irreverent, and this allows him to express his joys and fears confident that he cannot lose his access to God in the process.

A poem that appears towards the end of *The Church* is a perfect encapsulation of how he will communicate with God in his verses. The poem is 'Bitter-sweet'. It is a short poem, only eight lines in two stanzas each consisting of six syllables, but it has a wealth of personality and theology. The poem begins with what is probably Herbert's cheekiest line,

[18] *Utmost Art*, p. 5.

'Ah my deare angrie Lord'.[19] It is here that the reader sees how much of Herbert's relationship with God is one of antagonism and love, and as the poem continues, the reader sees it is also a relationship of rebellion and submission. The affection and condescension contained in that little phrase is unexpected for a poet often esteemed for his piety and seeming simplicity. It is a wonderful admission of the role of the angry, punishing God in Herbert's theology, but it also contains the affection and love Herbert experiences that tempers the concept of the wrathful God, and as the poem continues the reader sees how vibrant, how humorous, and how genuine Herbert's relationship with God is and how it speaks to his view of God's affection for him. The next seven lines read:

> Since thou dost love, yet strike;
> Cast down, yet help afford;
> Sure I will do the like.
>
> I will complain, yet praise;
> I will bewail, approve:
> And all my sowre-sweet dayes
> I will lament, and love. (2-8)

This summary of what God should expect from Herbert is a lovely piece of oxymoronic irreverent reverence which provides the reader with the insight to observe that Herbert is pious, yet playful; submissive, yet assertive, and as the reader continues on in *The Church* one sees that what leads Herbert to believe that he may approach God so familiarly is the Incarnation. Humanity can talk to God familiarly, and expect him to respond in a like

[19] All quotations of Herbert's poetry are from Helen Wilcox (ed.), *The Complete English Poems of George Herbert* (Cambridge, 2007).

manner, because he has already done so in the person of Jesus. As Helen Wilcox says, 'This activity of conversation with God – so fundamental to Herbert's concept of the devotional lyric – is shown to be communal ("the Churches banquet"), reciprocal ("heaven in ordinarie, man well drest"), powerful ("Engine against th' Almightie'), and paradisal ("the land of spices")'.[20] It is a varied approach to God, but it is done with confidence, and reading *The Church* is an invitation to listen in.[21]

Although a reader approaching *The Church* for the first time will not immediately be greeted by 'Bitter-sweet', the intimate and personal nature of the relationship between God and Herbert is also found upon reading the first four poems of *The Church*. For these introductory poems I will largely be basing my approach upon the ideas of James Boyd White in which he promotes and thoroughly discusses the idea that the poems speak to each other and build upon one another.[22] Within these four poems ('The Altar', 'The Sacrifice', 'The Thanksgiving', and 'The Reprisal') the groundwork is laid for all that comes after as Herbert prepares himself and the reader for an encounter with God. These four poems act out a mini-liturgy as the reader is taken through an acknowledgement of one's falleness and a need for redemption through a sacrifice. There is a meditation on the trial and death of Jesus; reminding the believer what God has gone through to put things right. This is then followed by a thanksgiving that acknowledges the horrors suffered by Christ and the believer's inability to save oneself and to repay the debt owed to God. Finally, through the admission of the inability to repay God for the sacrifice of Jesus, one realises that in ones inability to save oneself, one must simply accept the sacrifice and through acceptance give oneself over to Christ and God, and yet in this, as Robert Shaw

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[20] Helen Wilcox, 'George Herbert', in Thomas N. Corns (ed.),*The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 188.
[21] An interesting note in relation to this can be found in Roberts W. French's finds that 'Equally appropriate is the frequent usage of "thou" (538) and "thee" (384); when Herbert is not talking **about** God, he is likely to be talking **to** God'. 'Review: *A Concordance to the Complete Writings of George Herbert* ed. Mario Di Cesare and Rigo Mignani (Cornell Univ. Press, 1977)', *George Herbert Journal* 1.2 (1978), 64.
[22] James Boyd White, *"This Book of Starres"* (Ann Arbor, 1994).

points out, 'The grace of the Incarnation is such that we may share in God's omnipresence *without* exchanging our identities'.[23]

As Herbert begins his condensed liturgy, he first presents the reader with an altar. What is of utmost importance with this poem is that 'The Altar' is both an object, a very altar, and Herbert himself. In this poem the reader is presented with one of Herbert's most frequently used images, that of the heart of stone. It is this concept of the heart of stone that so effectively begins *The Church*. It is important that Herbert's body is the church in which this service will take place, and it is important that the sacrifice and redemption is both physical and metaphysical; furthermore, as Thomas Hester points out, 'The union of the shape and the heart of the poem imitates generally and particularly the Incarnation it celebrates. In this sense, the poem does not plead for an annihilation of the self but for a continuous, continued re-creation'.[24] This is further reinforced when we consider that the poem is presented in a perfectly constructed form, with the shape poem portraying in its presentation a complete and finely wrought altar, yet it opens with the lines, 'A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant reares, | Made of a heart, and cemented with teares'. There is a contradiction here.[25] Herbert presents his readers with a perfect altar; then tells them that it is 'broken', and this introduces the readers to one of the main themes that will be carried out in the book, the outside – the presentation may be flawless, but the inside, the heart, is broken. There is going to be a dichotomy between what the reader is presented with in the finely constructed poems and the content of the poems which is the conversation of a broken man striving as best he can to reach communion with the divine. It is vital that Herbert, and more specifically his heart, is the object upon which Jesus will be sacrificed, and that upon this stone, the blood will run and redeem the unfeeling and inanimate object

[23] Robert B. Shaw, *The Call of God* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), p. 104.
[24] Thomas M. Hester, 'Altering the Text of the Self: The Shapes of "The Altar"', in Mary A. Maleski (ed.), *A Fine Turning* (New York, 1989), pp. 111-112.
[25] Helen Wilcox, '"All Things are Big With Jest": Irony in Herbert's "Temple"', in Helen Wilcox and Richard Todd (eds.), *George Herbert: Sacred and Profane* (Amsterdam, 1995), p. 134.

that is Herbert's heart outside of communion with Christ. Herbert's heart, his being, is unsuitable for God's presence, but through the atoning work of a physical God, through blood and tears, Herbert can become the Temple in which God can reside, and with this Herbert can cry that God's 'blessed SACRIFICE be mine, | And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine'. (15-6) This 'SACRIFICE' is found in the very next poem.

There is no romanticism regarding what Jesus has undergone in order to be the sacrifice upon the altar of Herbert's heart. Herbert allows Jesus to speak for himself in this poem, the only poem presented entirely from Christ's voice. 'The Sacrifice' introduces us to Jesus and the cost of humanity's redemption through the anguished cries of Jesus as he undergoes his Passion. Through the poem, the reader realises that the sacrifice that will 'sanctifie this ALTAR' is not a simple act by God, instead it is an action that Jesus does not want to undertake – a lonely and miserable death that will never, and can never, be repaid by any human. The atrocity that Herbert decides to confront his reader with at the beginning of the body of the devotional work is heart-rending and terrifying, but much of its power is gained through a reading of the poem in context with the others. Herbert's crisis of the cross becomes terribly visible when 'The Sacrifice' is read and understood as commenting on and complicating 'The Altar' and 'The Thanksgiving'. This is one of the points that is lost in an approach that treats each poem in *The Church* individually. What is lost can be seen in Helen Vendler's reading of 'The Sacrifice' separate from its surrounding poems. Although she does make some excellent observations regarding 'The Altar', she sees the poem as 'a piece of "false wit"'[26]. Similarly, she seldom mentions 'The Sacrifice', and when she does, she is rather unappreciative of the poem. While she admits that 'no one can deny the finished elegance of *The Sacrifice*',[27] she also states that

[26] Helen Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert* (London, 1975), p. 63.
[27] *The Poetry of George Herbert*, p. 137.

'it is not, in spite of its subject, one of Herbert's immediately moving poems'.[28] However, Rosemond Tuve's work to place the poem in its devotional tradition,[29] and Chana Bloch's work placing it in its biblical context, do much to heighten the emotional impact of 'The Sacrifice',[30] yet when the poem is also placed in relation to its surrounding poems, and when the reader acknowledges the conversation taking place between the pieces, the meaning and importance of what Herbert is doing with the voice of Christ gain greater resonance for the reader thereby making it much more difficult for the poem to not contain the emotion necessary to move the reader. When Herbert introduces his *The Church* with poems that show his 'hard heart' to be the object upon which God has been killed, it is very difficult not to be moved by Jesus's constant refrain of 'Was ever grief like mine?' at the end of each stanza in 'The Sacrifice'. This refrain is only deviated from twice, when, both times, it changes to 'Never was grief like mine'; once at the point of abandonment by God, and then at the point of death. This is not a sentimentalised sacrifice; the death of God incarnate is an act of anguish and pain, and as Gene Veith states, 'The poem portrays the awesome inversion implicit in the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement'.[31] Over and over again Herbert has Christ explain just how difficult it was to be the 'SACRIFICE' that 'The Altar' calls for. It is very interesting that when Herbert decides to describe Christ's suffering, he does so in a very similar manner to the one found in Lanyer's *Salve Deus* in that the descriptions of the horrors of the cross are given in terms of the communication of attributes such as when Herbert has Christ observe

> Then they condemne me all with that same breath,
> Which I do give them daily, unto death,

[28] *The Poetry of George Herbert*, p. 137.
[29] Rosemond Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (London, 1952), pp. 19-99.
[30] Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word* (London, 1985), pp. 65-79.
[31] Gene Edward Veith, *Reformation Spirituality* (London, 1985), p. 65.

Thus *Adam* my first breathing rendereth:

Was ever grief like mine? (69-72)

Here Jesus is describing himself as the creator of humanity, so once again the reader is presented with how terrible the reality of the Passion is because we are constantly reminded of who Jesus is, what he is doing for humanity in the Passion, and how blind and ungrateful humanity is.

In Herbert's construction of his collection, *The Church*, there is an interesting and important bookending that takes place. The poems 'The Altar' and 'The Sacrifice' introduce the reader to a broken relationship in desperate need of repair. Physical anguish of God in the person of Jesus is required to emphasise this divide between humanity and the divine, but when we reach the end of *The Church*, we find 'Love (III)', and here the sacrifice of Jesus is revisited, but in a very different context. *The Church* begins with the voices of Herbert and Jesus inhabiting different poems. They are disconnected. Christ's flesh and blood are ripped from him as he is sacrificed for and on Herbert, who is represented as a stone, an inanimate object, incapable of true conversation or relationship. However, in 'Love (III)', Jesus and Herbert are able to converse and inhabit the same place. Furthermore, the sacrifice, the offering of Christ's body, is freely and happily given in 'Love (III)'. It is between these two points that the rest of *The Church* plays out. There is wrestling with God; there is pain and frustration and remorse and rejoicing and celebrating and repentance and acceptance. There are all the elements of a difficult, but loving, relationship that is worked through, and where we end is not so much a point that has been gained but that has been realised.

It is with 'The Sacrifice' that the conversation truly begins. From the words of Christ on the cross, we are moved to Herbert's response in the very next poem, 'The

Thanksgiving', with the first ten lines of the poem acting as a summary and response to the tragedy that Christ underwent. We read:

> Oh King of grief! (a title strange, yet true,
>
> To thee of all kings onely due)
>
> Oh King of wounds! how shall I grieve for thee,
>
> Who in all grief preventest me?
>
> Shall I weep bloud? why thou hast wept such store
>
> That all thy body was one doore.
>
> Shall I be scourged, flouted, boxed, sold?
>
> 'Tis but to tell the tale is told.
>
> *My God, my God, why dost thou part from me?*
>
> Was such a grief as cannot be. (1-10)

Herbert here agrees with Jesus and admits that there never was a grief likes his, especially at the point of being abandoned by God. The Incarnation was a movement by God towards humanity, yet the crucifixion finds God in human form, Jesus, being abandoned by God at the very point of redemption. The concept of being abandoned by God is clearly one that is terrifying, that is the breaking of the omnipotent Trinity, and critics like Janis Lull have been more comfortable describing this as a 'supreme tragic fiction'[32] that Jesus performs 'as if it were real',[33] yet as can be seen from the discussion of the 'communication of attributes' in the Lanyer chapter God in the person really does die, and so there is a true tragedy at play when the paradox of the immortal God dying is portrayed in this poem. For Christ, this is a grief that he endures, but that we will never experience,

[32] Janis Lull, *The Poem in Time* (London, 1990), p. 53.
[33] *The Poem in Time*, p. 53.

and so as 'The Thanksgiving' continues to unfold, Herbert relates how he aims to justify himself to God such as when he writes,

> If thou dost give me wealth; I will restore
>
> All back unto thee by the poore.
>
> If thou dost give me honour; men shall see,
>
> The honour doth belong to thee.
>
> I will not marry; or, if she be mine,
>
> She and her children shall be thine.
>
> My bosome friend, if he blaspheme thy name,
>
> I will tear thence his love and fame. (19-26)

But after all of these promises, there is an acknowledgement that there is nothing he can do to repay the sacrifice of the crucifixion. As the anxiety builds with Herbert's realisation of his inability to put his relationship right with God, we read

> Nay, I will reade thy book, and never move
>
> Till I have found therin thy love;
>
> Thy art of love, which I'le turn back on thee,
>
> Oh my deare Saviour, Victorie! (45-8)

Here Herbert believes that he has found a way to rectify himself to God through the use of meditation and devotion upon God and God's word. It seems like this will work, but then the crucifixion works its way back in, and we see the futility of even meditation and

devotion to bridge the gap. Herbert's realisation becomes anxiety and then nothingness, for there is nothing he can do.

> Then for thy passion – I will do for that –
>
> Alas, my God, I know not what. (49-50)

He is left dumbfounded, or as Richard Strier says of the ending, 'When the speaker focuses his attention on the cross, his attitude turns from competition to awe'.[34] He ends his 'Thanksgiving' with the knowledge that, while he can give thanks, he cannot give equal sacrifice. And so it is to the next poem, 'The Reprisal' that we must look to see how Herbert manages to come to terms with his debt.

'The Reprisal' begins in resignation. The first two lines find Herbert admitting that 'I have consider'd it, and finde | There is no dealing with thy mighty passion'. He is at a loss, and oddly, he feels defeat in the contemplation of Christ's trial and death. 'For though I die for thee, I am behinde; | My sinnes deserve the condemnation'. (3-4) And through the rest of this four stanza poem, we see the same back and forth movement playing out between Herbert and his desires to perform acts that will somehow justify the work that God has done for him, but once again, it is resignation to God's work that he must accept, and it is finally through this resignation that victory is found, for in the second stanza we read

> O make me innocent, that I
> May give a disentangled state and free:
> And yet thy wounds still my attempts defie.

[34] Richard Strier, *Love Known* (London, 1983), p. 52.

For by thy death I die for thee. (5-8)

He wants to be free. He wants the gift of innocence, but he simply cannot accept it yet, so his anger is stirred, and he turns on God in the third stanza:

Ah! Was it not enough that thou
By thy eternall glorie didst outgo me?
Couldst thou not griefs sad conquests me allow,
But in all vict'ries overthrow me? (9-12)

He is indeed overwhelmed. After allowing Jesus the opportunity to express how difficult it was to die for humanity, Herbert cannot move past, nor surpass, this moment of divine love and grace, and he is haunted by it, and his book becomes haunted by it, and this becomes the dialogue upon which the rest of *The Church* turns, and as 'The Reprisal' ends, we also see how *The Church* as a whole will end. Herbert will rage and complain and cry out and object, but in the end, he always recognises the futility of all these actions. He accepts that the only response to the overwhelming weight of 'The Sacrifice' is submission, and through this submission, he is brought into Christ, into the Incarnation, and he can then be with God and know peace, know rest. And so it is in the last stanza that we read

Yet by confession will I come
Into the conquest. Though I can do nought
Against thee, in thee I will overcome
The man, who once against thee fought. (13-16)

Although not explicit, the poem does end in communion. It is not the communion meal, Herbert is in Christ, and through confession they commune within one another, or as Strier states, 'The regenerate Christian becomes a "member" of the body of which Christ is the head, and is therefore "in" Christ'.[35] Summers reminds us that in 'his English writings Herbert always used "altar" and "sacrifice" according to the "orthodox" Protestant tradition of his time: "altar" is never applied to the Communion Table nor is the Holy Communion ever called a "sacrifice"',[36] so readers should not assume that 'The Altar' and 'The Sacrifice' have been an offering of the Eucharist to them, rather, it is after these events occur that a believer can expect Holy Communion to take place. It is also of interest that when the reader looks at the following poem, even though it does not fall into the same conversation of the four previous poems, the reader sees the first reference to Herbert drinking the communion wine. In 'The Agonie' the death of Jesus and the role that sin plays in his death is discussed in the imagery of a wine press. In what is assuredly an uncomfortable and macabre illustration of the consequences of sin on the body of Jesus, Herbert allows his readers to contemplate the bitter-sweet nature of the communion meal and the sanctification which they enjoy. As Robert Whalen states, 'The Christ who in Pauline terms becomes sin . . . is filled here with sin's poison, which displaces the divine blood that in turn becomes that of the communicant, who, presumably, was filled hitherto with the sin now coursing through his saviour's veins'.[37] In this short homily, Herbert's lesson on sin tells us that

> Who would know Sinne, let him repair
>
> Unto mount Olivet; there shall he see

[35] *Love Known*, pp. 53-54.
[36] Joseph H. Summers, *George Herbert* (London, 1954), p. 141.
[37] Robert Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence* (London, 2002), p. 122.

A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
His skinne, his garments bloudie be.
Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein. (7-12)

With this stanza reminding the reader of what Christ agonised over in 'The Sacrifice' and beginning to hint at the correlation between the agony and the Eucharist, Herbert makes it explicit:

Who knows not Love, let him assay
And taste that juice, which on the crosse a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquour sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine. (13-18)

It is here again that a dialectic is used as a way to describe God's relationship to humanity through the work of the Incarnation and Passion, in that 'Both sin and love are defined by the blood of Christ'.[38] Believers are 'Sinne', or at least the reason for it, and they are the wine press, the torturers that force out the 'bloud', but God, Jesus, is the 'Love'. Although believers must lament his death and agony, they must also love and enjoy his gift of his 'bloud' that they get to pleasantly and intoxicatingly enjoy as wine, or as A. J. Smith states, 'As Christ's agony is the immediate embodiment of the spiritual condition of sin so

[38] *Reformation Spirituality*, p. 68.

Christ's blood is the present witness of the spiritual disposition of love'.[39] And with this introduction to the dialogue between God and humanity by way of Jesus, with the homiletic instruction as to how to approach, remember, and enjoy communion, we move on through the rest of *The Church*.

While the poems of *The Church* are indeed finely crafted, they are not sterile, and this is because the poems reflect a relationship between God and a believer that is deeply steeped in theology and scripture, but is still personal. It is this personal nature that is expressed through simple, highly monosyllabic,[40] verse and describes Herbert's pain and anguish to the Lord whose pain and anguish he recently lamented causing. In this it is a pious poetry that has not lost its acknowledgment in which believers may feel that God has failed them. This type of complaint is beautifully rendered in 'Affliction (I)', a poem that has repeatedly been named as one of his most personal poems.[41] In it he describes his physical afflictions, but the reader also sees him afflicted with God.

As 'Affliction (I)' begins, the reader sees the bridging of God and man. It is clear that the work of the Incarnation has been completed. God has sought Herbert, and Herbert has responded as the reader sees in the opening line 'When first thou didst entice to thee my heart', and from here, the following three stanzas recite a loving embrace of the glories and advantages he finds in God's service; but, it is in the fourth stanza that this changes. The six-line stanza begins with the first four lines reading much like Herrick's portrayal of a redeemed and festive world, even including a mention of May:

At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnesses;
I had my wish and way:

[39] A. J. Smith, *Metaphysical Wit* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 162.
[40] Joseph H. Summers, 'George Herbert and Elizabeth Bishop', *George Herbert Journal*, 18.1&2 (1994/5), 50.
[41] See Helen Wilcox's note to this poem in the section 'Modern Criticism', p. 160.

My dayes were straw'd with flow'rs and happinesse;
There was no moneth but May. (19-22)

There is a hint that a change is coming in the poem when the first line of the stanza begins with the two words 'At first', and as the reader reaches the fifth line, the change in tone arrives in full.

But with my years sorrow did twist and grow,
And made a partie unawares for wo. (23-24)

Just as line one of the stanza begins with a warning that a change is coming, so too there is a hint in line five, the transitional line, that things have not always been quite as glorious as Herbert has been indicating. One reads that 'with [his] years sorrow did twist and grow', the sorrows did not begin, rather, they grew. Although the poem up to this point has seemed filled with nothing but joy and contentment, the reader sees here that there was an unacknowledged pain lurking behind the poem, as Herbert shows when he has written in the third stanza that 'my thoughts reserved | No place for grief or fear', (15-16) there was certainly some strife that existed outside of his thoughts, and though his mind would not admit them, his body did. Stanza six is nothing but a harsh and arresting statement of pain – physical, psychological, and spiritual.

My flesh began unto my soul in pain,
Sicknesses cleave my bones;
Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein,
And tune my breath to groanes.

Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce beleeved,

Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived. (25-30)

The fifth stanza of 'Affliction (I)' is the first stanza completely concerned with suffering. We have moved from the suffering saviour to the suffering believer, and from here the tone not only changes, but the emphasis changes as well. If the first four stanzas had not made it clear that Herbert was addressing God in this poem, and if the poem had simply begun at stanza six, then it could very easily be read with the understanding that it is the affliction of the title that is being addressed by Herbert. But since it is God that is being addressed, a reader finds herself not just being presented with the idea that suffering still exists in the life of the believer, but that God may be the affliction that is being endured. This God of afflictions has entered *The Church*, and God's cruel actions are seen in the very next line when Herbert declares that 'When I got health, thou took'st away my life'. (31) It appears here that God/affliction is working against him. Herbert is able to restore his health, but God then strikes back more furiously and takes away his life, and more, 'for [his] friends die'. (32) Following this we have three more stanzas of suffering, of Herbert's attempts to overcome or persevere through it – whether by work, academics, or purging – with the complaint that God sabotages it every time. And so, in stanza ten, Herbert turns on God declaring 'Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me'. (55) He looks to his 'books', (56) but they do not show the way, and then he dreams he was something else, 'a tree'. (57) Trees do not require relationships, they simply exist, and that is all that is required of them. By living they fulfil their role in creation, but humans must negotiate between this fallen world and a perfect God. They must 'Be yee therefore perfect, euen as your father, which is in heauen, is perfect',[42] yet they are told that this is

[42] Matthew 5.48.

impossible,[43] and so the reader is prepared for the turmoil and near renunciation of faith that concludes the poem in stanza eleven.

The ending of 'Affliction (I)' is in no way comforting. This is not a poem that takes a reader through a trial, admits frustration at God, and then brings everything back around with an ending that admits faith in spite of not understanding and praises God in the midst of anguish. This poem ends within the affliction and with Herbert's threat to find another lord, and requests to have a way out of the 'irresistible grace' that he finds himself bound by.

> Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;
>
> In weaknesse must be stout.
>
> Well, I will change the service, and go seek
>
> Some other master out.
>
> Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot,
>
> Let me not love thee, if I love thee not. (61-6)

As Sean McDowell says, 'The conclusion of the poem is as dark of any of Donne's poems that place the selfishness of the speaker in opposition to the divine will',[44] and as Helen Wilcox points out, the ending plays 'on the multiple meanings of "love"',[45] and 'the many contrasts between superficial and genuine devotion contained in'[46] the word. The first four lines of the stanza set up a rebellion against God. Herbert will be meek, but only because he must. He will find strength in his weakness, a weakness brought on by God. These two lines contain an idea of a rebellious submission, and then he turns to the idea of walking

[43] Romans 3.23.
[44] Sean McDowell, 'Finding Readers', *George Herbert Journal* 26.1&2 (2002/3), 77.
[45] '"All Things Are Big With Jest"', p. 138.
[46] '"All Things Are Big With Jest"', p. 138.

away from God and Christianity entirely. The 'Ah my deare God!' in the final line of 'Affliction (I)' is a long way from the cheeky 'Ah my deare angrie Lord' that begins 'Bitter-sweet'. This is not a cry of affection. As God had turned the joy that Herbert first found in salvation to a life of affliction, so too Herbert has now turned the love of irresistible grace back on God and made it seem like he only loves God because God compels him. When he declares 'Let me not love thee, if I love thee not', the difficulty of the idea of a God as afflicter of torments, becomes more complicated and disturbing when Herbert states that there is the possibility that he only loves God because he has no choice, and if this is the case, he is confined to his love, and must ask for a way out. He does not want to love God against his will, and it is a terrifying prospect that this may very well be the curse of his life in Christ. Michael Schoenfeldt rightly states, 'Suspended uncomfortably between rebellion and submission, autobiography and art, politics and prayer, the poem confronts the chilling possibility of a malevolent divinity'.[47] He could be joined in Christ to God, and from this point of irresistible grace, unable to leave what he has found to be a toxic and poisonous relationship. The refrain from Jesus of 'Was ever grief like mine' is now a taunting call for a believer, complicit in the torturing and killing of his God, stuck in a bond that causes regret for the way he has made Jesus suffer, but also containing a greater regret for being tied to a God who causes nothing but pain and suffering to those faithful to him.

However, the reader is not left with 'Affliction (I)'. Instead, as one reads on, there is comfort found in the next poem, 'Repentance'. With 'Repentance', Herbert begins with the statement 'Lord, I confesse my sinne is great; | Great is my sinne', (1-2) a statement that is especially powerful when following right after 'Let me not love thee, if I love thee not'. Herbert here uses a brilliant piece of repetition to end one poem and begin the next.

[47] Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power* (London, 1991), p. 78.

With the negative parallelism of 'Affliction (I)' ('not love thee', 'love thee not') describing a positive state of being, that of loving someone, being so closely followed by a positive parallelism in 'Repentance' (the act of confession in order to rectify a situation) describing a negative state of being, that of sinfulness, the reader is led, very quickly, through an emotional transition that allows the feeling of wanting to leave God, while also acknowledging the ceaseless movement towards God. While highly clever, and clearly well constructed, this is not Herbert trying to use rhetoric to manipulate readers into a false reconciliation with God; instead it is a very complex, yet simply stated, portrayal of the back and forth movement of the life in Christ for the believer. The cries of frustration and anger that we find in 'Affliction (I)' are not superficially forgotten in such a quick transition to 'Repentance', rather, the relationship between Herbert and God takes on a much more human understanding. It is human to change emotions quickly – to be accusatory one moment and repentant the next, and in the transition that exists between these two poems, we get a sense of Herbert relating to God as a person, in a kind of lovers' spat. The reason that this can happen, and the reason that Herbert need not explain away or apologise for approaching God as a person is because God indeed was a person. Through the Incarnation, humans are allowed to approach God in their humanity and know that he will respond in kind as well, because he already has. The emotions of 'Affliction (I)' are real, and they are never completely apologised away, even if he does seek forgiveness for a lack of trust. This type of unresolved return to God is also seen at the end of 'The Collar', when, after railing against God, and not wanting to submit to his rule, the poem ends with:

> But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
>
> At every word,

Me thoughts I heard one calling, *Childe*:

And I reply'd, *My Lord*. (33-36)

Once again there is a fighting followed by a returning to God, but here there is no repentance besides the inherent repentance contained in the reply of submission: '*My Lord*'. And it is this type of approach to God, this use of the Incarnation as a medium between God and humans that is discussed in the next two poems, 'Faith' and 'Prayer (I)'.

In both 'Faith' and 'Prayer (I)', Herbert uses the Incarnation and the incarnational paradox, to describe how humanity can believe in and talk to God. 'Faith's first stanza sets forth a question that asks if faith, bestowed by the Lord, brings 'all things' to man:

Lord, how couldst thou so much appease
Thy wrath for sinne, as when mans sight was dimme,
And could see little, to regard his ease,
And bring by Faith all things to him?

Faith in this question would be working in the same manner as the Incarnation. Faith is being sent down to humans from God in order that they can use it to approach him, and that, by this same faith, he is then able to bless them. Faith, then, is constantly descending and ascending. And in this movement God does indeed use faith to bring all things to him. Significantly, in the next stanza the Lord is shown providing for Herbert's need in the very same image found in the ultimate communion meal described in 'Love (III)'. In 'Faith' on reads:

Hungrie I was, and had no meat:

I did conceit a most delicious feast;
I had straight, and did as truly eat,
As ever did a welcome guest.

So faith is an act that works with the Incarnation and is a part of the Eucharist meal. It is part of the movement God uses to bring humanity to himself. And following the tying of faith with the Eucharist, Herbert then ties faith with scripture, and in particular he looks at the fall of humanity and the birth of Christ as two points in which faith allows him to take part:

Faith makes me any thing, or all
That I beleeve is in the sacred storie:
And where sinne placeth me in Adams fall,
Faith sets me higher in his glorie.

If I go lower in the book,
What can be lower then the common manger?
Faith puts me there with him, who sweetly took
Our flesh and frailtie, death and danger. (17-24)

It is interesting here that the inversion of high and low as a movement by God is to be found again. While it is not surprising to read the lines 'sinne placeth me in Adams fall, | Faith sets me higher in his glorie', the very next line shows that the 'sets me higher' is a movement down when followed by the lines 'If I go lower in the book, | What can be lower then the common manger?' The 'glorie' of God is found in a lowly act at the birth

of Christ, and this lowly act, once again, brings people of all stripes up to God. This is then applied to Herbert's contemporary society when he states that

> A peasant may beleeve as much
> As a great Clerk, and reach the highest stature.
> Thus dost thou make proud knowledge bend & crouch
> While grace fills up uneven nature. (29-32)

Faith then not only brings the believer into scripture, into communion with God, but it also performs a levelling of society because all reach the same height through faith. And all of this is done in an action that moves with the incarnation. It is, ultimately, a fleshly faith, and Herbert emphasises this when he ends 'Faith' with the stanza

> What though my bodie runne to dust?
> Faith cleaves unto it, counting ev'ry grain
> With an exact and most particular trust,
> Reserving all for flesh again.

'Affliction (I)' presents the reader with the question of whether a believer would willingly choose to be in a relationship with a God who causes affliction to his believers, and 'Repentance' shows a reconciliation, but it is 'Faith' that completes 'Affliction (I)'. 'Affliction (I)' states 'My flesh began unto my soul in pain, | Sicknesses cleave my bones', which is then inverted in the ending of 'Faith' with 'What thou my bodie runne to dust? | Faith cleaves unto it'. The cleaving 'sicknesses' have been replaced by 'faith', and it is faith that is able to restore the body after death. The promise of a resurrected body, a true

body of flesh (not just a spiritual reawakening), that Herbert presents his readers with is very reminiscent of the one discussed in the Donne chapter. With both Donne and Herbert, there is the guarantee of a bodily resurrection, just as Jesus experienced in the Gospels,[48] but where Donne's belief in the bodily resurrection comes from a fear of death, Herbert's belief comes from a faith that first originates with God, so it is not, ultimately, dependent upon Herbert. The idea that all aspects of communication involve a revolving up and down motion, one best encapsulated in the Incarnation, is found in the very next poem, 'Prayer (I)'.

'Prayer (I)' is an oft discussed poem. This sonnet is an incomplete sentence that seems to be trying to define what exactly prayer is to believers, the Church. Although the poem at times feels like a failed attempt to exhaustively describe what prayer is, and though it ends with what may seem to be an anti-climax with the two words 'something understood', there is really no other definition of prayer that needs to be given, because all of this (prayer, faith, repentance, incarnation) exists in what the Church has traditionally described as mysteries. Since all these mysteries contain the same continuous up and down movement (a movement that Mario A. Di Cesare also finds in the incarnationally focussed Gospel of John),[49] concluding that prayer is simply 'something understood' between God and the Church is oddly comforting and appropriate.

'Prayer (I)' exists in the nebulous space between earth and heaven, but there is also a very strong Christological emphasis to be found in the poem. Although it seems obvious that prayer must have an upward thrust, we see that prayer also involves the movement down to humanity and, in many instances in the poem, involves the work of the Incarnation. The work of God coming to humanity so that it can return to him is clearly seen in the second line of the poem when Herbert tells the reader that prayer may be

[48] Mark 16.14.
[49] Mario A. Di Cesare, 'Herbert's "Prayer (I)" and the Gospel of John', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *"Too Rich to Clothe the Sunne"* (Pittsburgh, 1980), p. 103.

described as 'Gods breath in man returning to his birth'. The God-breathed creation of Adam is now returning that breath to God when the Church talks to him, and while prayer as a force of creation, makes perfect sense in a religion whose creation myth and knowledge of God comes solely through words, it is the third stanza that shows prayer as a part of the Incarnation. Although there are other images of God as life-giver and redeemer with prayer variously being described as 'Christ-side-piercing spear', 'The six-daies world transposing in an houre', and 'Exalted Manna', it is line eleven that is particularly noteworthy. Line eleven contains only six words, but those six words completely sum up who Jesus is in the Incarnation and what believers become when they commune with God by way of the work of the Incarnation, 'Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest'. Prayer then is not just words, it not just an action, but it is a being. Prayer is the 'Word . . . made flesh'.[50] And here prayer, relationship with God, all interactions between creator and created, move by way of the Incarnation. Herbert is Christological in his poetic emphasis; he only presents his readers with Christ as a way to know God. If God the father is beyond all comprehension, then God as a carpenter is very easily considered. If God is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, above all approach and reproach, then a working-class God is approachable by anyone regardless of social standing. This too allows Herbert to approach God with his voice and to hear God speak to him in a language that he can understand. Just as the Bible was the Word of God written in the language of God's people, so too was the Word incarnate as one of God's people, and so when Elizabeth Clarke states that 'Herbert is all too aware that no external voice actually intrudes into his poetry: at least, if it does, it speaks in his own familiar accents',[51] she is both correct and incorrect, because there is an external voice, but because of the Incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in this *Temple*, God's voice will speak in Herbert's 'familiar accents', and this

[50] John 1.14.
[51] Elizabeth Clarke, *Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry* (Oxford, 1997), p. 268.

dialogue will continue until the final moment of complete communion that is found in the final Eucharist of 'Love (III)'. This point is similarly missed by A. D. Nuttall when stating that 'the very act of dramatising [the words of God] (which is a kind of usurpation) they blaspheme it',[52] because the words of God can be known since he has already provided them through his Word.

The inspiration of God can continue through the poet without the poet needing to fear the blasphemy of claiming a new revelation from, nor of misrepresenting God. To return to the second line of 'Prayer (I)', Nuttall states that 'The image is very beautiful but at the same time obscurely troubling. Most of us prefer fresh air to CO2'.[53] These images are not troubling because they are not bound by the rules of nature, rather they are bound by the Incarnation, and as such, everything can be and has been redeemed through the physical presence of Jesus and the indwelling of God. Through this grace then, the believer and poet is able to return not actual breath but creation and creativity back to the one who sent it. Prayer comes from God to humanity (the beings made in his image) and return to them through God becoming their flesh, or as William Shullenberger says, 'Prayer, like preaching, carries the possibility of atonement for speaker and for auditor because of Christ's typological inhabitation of the human speech act'.[54] Herbert can speak as God, because God is in Herbert. God and his workings may be unknowable, but, because of the Incarnation, they can be 'something understood'.

'Faith' and 'Prayer' lead the reader to what is perhaps the greatest of the Christian sacraments, 'The H. Communion', and it is in 'The H. Communion' that the reader sees how much the incarnational life and death of Jesus is the one doctrine that allows humanity

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[52] A. D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God* (London, 1980), p. 3.
[53] *Overheard by God*, p. 33.
[54] William Shullenberger, '*Ars Praedicandi* in George Herbert's Poetry', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *"Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse"* (Columbia, MO, 1987), pp. 106-107.

access to God. This poem, perhaps composed of two poems,[55] provides two images of the bridging work of the incarnation. These images are ones of moving from place to place or world to world. First we see that the communion meal is able to bridge body and soul:

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 walls that parts
Our souls and fleshly hearts;
But as th' outworks, they may controll
My rebel-flesh, and carrying thy name,
Affright both sinne and shame.

Onely thy grace, which with these elements comes,
Knoweth the ready way,
And hath the privie key,
Op'ning the souls most subtile rooms (7-22)

[55] For a discussion of the various arguments for and against this see Helen Wilcox's notes to the poem under 'Texts' and 'Modern criticism', pp.181-2.

It is the physical sacrament, the bread and wine, that is able to effect the unification of body and soul in humanity, and as we will see, it also repairs the relationship between God and humanity.

For sure when Adam did not know
To sinne; or sinne to smother;
He might to heav'n from Paradise go,
As from one room t'another.

Thou hast 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. (33-40)

It is in the incarnational meal that Herbert now explicitly brings the body back into proper alignment with the soul, and it also brings us back to the point of an Edenic state in which we can freely go from heaven to earth, we have our relationship with God restored and we can walk with him in the cool of the day.[56]

This then is what Herbert presents his readers with and how he frames his discussions with God: they are intimate, because God has intimated himself to Herbert; they feel human, because Herbert is human, and so was God; they are personal, because God approaches each believer personally; therefore, Herbert can write from his own experiences and know that they will apply to all his readers. The poems can be intensely personal, and yet can be approachable and relatable by those who have never met him, nor

[56] Genesis 3.8.

live in his century, nor believe in his religious convictions, because we are all human, and the embrace of the humanness (the flesh and the soul), and the emphasis upon a God who knows and understands the body and soul (because he has had both body and soul) allows his readers to join in, or listen in, on his conversations with God no matter what our backgrounds because we are being shown a human relationship when we read *The Church*. Jesus as Christ and the incarnate God is the bridge, and so, while the poems discussed so far have primarily been at the beginning of *The Church*, we now know how the relationship will continue throughout the collection. *The Church* will be a meditation of how Christ has redeemed humanity, and there will be praise, anger, frustration, trust, fear, illness, health, death, rebirth, sin, stony hearts, eating, drinking, and rejuvenation and it will continue on, the up and down, the back and forth, it will continue until all things come together, as they must. All things will end and will be consumed and consummated and communicated. It will lead to love, eternal and irresistible love, and that is where Herbert will lead us, to the final communion meal that we find in 'Love (III)', but to get there we must get lost in the turmoil. There are many critics who have attempted to find an overarching movement or narrative in *The Church*, but there is not one, because there does not need to be one. *The Church* begins with the admission that we need a sacrifice and that Jesus has performed the sacrifice, so we must repent and accept this horrible and anguishing gift, and through the acceptance, we are brought into communion with God, and this then is the relationship that the believer must live out until the end of life or time. And because there is no clear trajectory of life, except towards death, there is no clear trajectory in *The Church*, except towards the final banquet, the final communion meal, between each individual believer and the Lord.

Herbert is indeed true to his word. He does exactly what he promises in 'Bitter-sweet'. He continues with his back-and-forth. We read of the complaining, and the

praising, the bewailing, and the approving, the lamenting, and the loving. And we know that Herbert is able to do all of this, because, as he tells us:

> But since thy breath gave me both life and shape,
> Thou knowst my tallies; and when there's assign'd
> So much breath to a sigh, what's then behinde?
> Or if some yeares with it escape,
> The sigh then onely is
> A gale to bring me sooner to my blisse. (7-12)[57]

Herbert is able to link his sighs (sighs described earlier in the poem as expressions of grief) as being of the same substance that God breathed into Adam at the creation of man. Yet, since the theme of this poem is affliction (grief) Herbert also uses this as an opportunity to remind his reader that they can approach God with their grief because God 'wast in the grief' (2) that Herbert experiences, and more significantly that Jesus's 'life on earth was grief'. (13) Grief, then, can be known by God, because he has experienced grief. Jesus acts as a conduit that allows all of our emotions access to the divine, because the divine has experienced them. He is not an untouched, unfeeling Lord, rather he is a human in every way, or as Robert B. Shaw puts it, 'This is the truth with which Herbert quells whatever disquiet may linger in the poems which picture God as the author of affliction. The Incarnation was a total submission to the conditions of humanity, including its bodily and spiritual ills'.[58] In this, we also know that not only can God exist in humanity in the person of Jesus, but the Incarnation was also a foetus in a woman, as we see in 'Anagram of the Virgin Marie'. Mother Mary was the one 'In whom the *Lord of hosts* did pitch his

[57] 'Affliction (III)'.
[58] *The Call of God*, p. 82.

tent!' (2) God then inhabited man and woman in his time on earth, and there is nothing beyond his knowledge, but this does not keep Herbert feeling as if the Lord has abandoned him at times.

Although Herbert generally approaches God without doubt of his being heard, there are times when he feels he has been abandoned. There is a tradition in Christianity of declaring the feeling of abandonment. As a religion that so strongly promotes the idea of a personal relationship with God, there is the tradition that although the almighty can approach humans, and he promises to never leave, believers are able to chide God for seeming to have abandoned them. The Psalmist cried 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken mee?',[59] a cry that was legitimated when, at the point of death, Jesus cried the same words.[60] At the point of dying as the sacrifice to save all humanity, a point that cannot be more important to Christians as it is one of the most significant moments in God's working create unity with humanity, Jesus felt that he was alone, that God the Father had left God the Son. And so, we see Herbert participating in this tradition when he writes:

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

My bent thoughts, like brittle bow,
Did flie asunder:

[59] Psalm 22.1.
[60] Matthew 27.46.

Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
Some to warres and thunder
Of alarms.

As good go any where, they say,
As to benumme
Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
Come, come, my God, O come,
But no hearing.

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
To crie to thee,
And then not heare it crying! all day long
My heart was in my knee
But no hearing.

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
Untun'd, unstrung:
My feeble spirit, unable to look right,
Like a nipt blossome, hung
Discontented.

O cheer and tune my heartlesse breast,
Deferre no time;
That so thy favours granting my request,

They and my minde may chime,

And mend my ryme.[61]

This poem is a beautiful lament and rebuke, made all the more significant by the fact that it is followed by 'Christmas'. As Herbert states in that poem, 'The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?'[62] But, returning to 'Deniall', the reader is presented with Herbert's view of an unhearing God, one with whom he can have no contact, and is representative of a life broken, as the rhymes are broken at the end of every stanza until the end. But even in ending the poem with what seems to be a reconciliation is really Herbert declaring that he knows the only way to fix the brokenness is for God to turn back to him and to 'cheer and tune [his] heartlesse breast' so that all will be set right, but the poem does not actually show this taking place. In this, Strier is correct when he states that 'The poet cannot, in this sense, mend his "ryme" himself. He cannot mend his spiritual state by mending his representation of it'.[63] However, there is the hope that it will happen, and as Chana Bloch points out, 'His suit is granted as he speaks; his rhyme is mended, and the firm cadence of the last line is, in its own way, a form of praise'.[64] Herbert cannot completely mend himself as he mends his poem, but he can offer praise in the knowledge that as he can mend his creation, his 'rhyme', so too can God mend his creation, the poet, and it is in the next poem that we see God perform this action, by way of mending humanity as he sews the human and divine into one. 'Christmas', the point of God entering the world as a human, is what Herbert uses to assure his readers that God will indeed listen to them. They will not be 'dust' with tongues, but creatures made in the image of God. This dichotomy of the known and unknown God is made explicit in the next poem.

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[61] 'Deniall'.
[62] 'Christmas', line 15.
[63] *Love Known*, p. 191.
[64] *Spelling the Word*, p. 278.

In 'Ungratefulnesse', Herbert takes time after 'Christmas' to meditate on the God that we are given in the Christmas story. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are intertwined. They comment and complicate each other, and it is the mysteries in them that Herbert finds beautiful and baffling. As he states, 'Thou hast but two rare cabinets full of treasure, | The *Trinitie*, and *Incarnation*'. (7-8)[65] These treasures, though, are not equally accessible to humans. Of the Trinity, he says,

> The statelier cabinet is the *Trinitie*,
> Whose sparkling light accesse denies:
> Therefore thou dost not show
> This fully to us, till death blow
> The dust into our eyes:
> For by that powder thou wilt make us see. (13-18)

The '*Trinitie*' is too glorious for humans to experience, and, for this reason, we have the Incarnation, which, while not as stately, is in some ways more significant for us because Herbert tells us,

> But all thy sweets are packt up in the other;
> Thy mercies thither flock and flow:
> That as the first affrights,
> This may allure us with delights;
> Because this box we know;
> For we have all of us just such another. (19-24)

[65] 'Ungratefulnesse'.

As Herbert completes this set of Christmas poems, we see that all God's 'sweets' are in the Incarnation. Significantly, we see that we can know God by way of the Incarnation, 'for we have all of us just such another'. We all have this box because we all have a physical body and an ethereal soul, just as God did, but, as Herbert shows when he closes out the poem, 'man is close, reserv'd, and dark to [God]'. (25) We have our own cabinet, a 'poore cabinet of bone' (28) in which 'Sinnes have their box apart'. (29) And so it is that although we can know God through the Incarnation, it is only through the cross that we truly have access to God, because 'God does not expect to find in man what He expects to give him. A heart that is "free and eager and joyful" is given only by the Spirit',[66] and through this gift God is able to pierce the 'box apart'.

Herbert tells his readers in 'Prayer (II)',

> Of what an easie quick accesse,
> My blessed Lord, art thou! how suddenly
> May our requests thine eare invade! (1-3)

Even though prayer gives us easy and speedy access to God, there is still a distance that must be bridged. We cannot simply talk with God face to face. Although we know that God, in Jesus, has a face that can be seen, we do not know what it looks like. We can take the Eucharist, we cannot have a meal with God. We are divided. 'The Bag' contains a grotesque (and Crashavian) image of how Jesus's death gives a way to send our cares and concerns to heaven. Through imagining our prayers and petitions as letters, we can put them in the 'bag' that was formed in Jesus's side when the soldier speared him as he hung

[66] *Love Known*, p. 27.

dead on the cross. That this bag is fleshly and has been explored erotically – both heterosexually (Schoenfeldt) and homosexually (Rambuss) – attests to the strongly sensual and oddly intimate access provided by the cross through Jesus to God.[67] It is this pocket, secure and near his heart, that we have our route to the divine:

> If ye have any thing to send or write,
>
> (I have no bag, but here is room)
>
> Unto my fathers hands and sight
>
> (Beleeve me) it shall safely come.
>
> That I shall minde, what you impart;
>
> Look, you may put it very neare my heart. (31-6)[68]

'The Bag' represents the closest that any believer can get to God while still bound by their physical existence. They can put their thoughts and prayers in the very body of Jesus, but they cannot open that cabinet that is 'more statelie'. They cannot see or experience God in full triune existence. All that can be approached is the Incarnation; however, even though it contains ''all the sweets', it is incomplete. Herbert can experience the Eucharist 'in remembrance of me',[69] but he cannot have the true communion banquet with God on this earth, and so as Herbert's 'Church' proceeds towards the end, there is really only one place that he can complete his collection of poems. It is where the liturgy ends, and it is where the Bible ends. This is the hope he would give to his readers – a meal with God, but here it is not symbolic or nostalgic, rather it is a true meal with God in heaven. It is the final banquet where all is put right.

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[67] *Prayer and Power*, pp. 249-250; Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (London, 1998), pp. 35-36.
[68] 'The Bag'.
[69] I Corinthians 11.25.

Herbert prepares his reader for the final communion meal. He offers an 'Invitation' to the 'Banquet', with both poems overflowing with the joyous strains of one of Herrick's feasts. He reminds the reader of the fact that 'Death' has been transformed from a fearful end of life into a beautiful reminder that the decayed corpse, the skeleton, is powerless, for there is always the bodily resurrection to look forward to. 'Dooms-day' is followed by the 'Judgement', and the reader is reminded that it is a 'Testament' that will answer for one's transgressions. It is the Incarnation that has once again been the force that allows us a life with God, but this is a new life, one that allows his reader entrance to the 'Trinitie'. Then there is 'Heaven' – a reminder of the promise of eternal rest and '*Leisure*', and that which God withheld in 'The Pulley' is finally being granted to humanity, but it is not here, at the point of rest, that Herbert is going to leave his reader. The reader is in heaven; he has overcome death, but the book and the journey are not over. The true celebration is going to be the next and final poem of *The Church*. 'Love (III)' is the end of 'The Church'. It is a final moment in which Herbert and the reader are offered true communion and true relationship with God.

The glimpse of the final banquet with God is so overwhelming that, despite the fact that he now stands in the presence of God, Herbert cannot allow himself or the reader 'quick and easie access' to God. He is there with God, and God's grace is now truly irresistible, because it has been accepted to the point of death; however, even though it is inescapable, Herbert still hesitates. Herbert may have handed over 'a Testament'[70] to get past 'Judgment' and into 'Heaven', but he still 'grow[s] slack'.[71] He simply cannot accept that he is here. In 'Love (III)', the two finally come together for all time. Where 'The Altar', 'The Sacrifice', and 'The Thanksgiving' opened the book with Herbert and Jesus speaking to one another, though inhabiting separate poems, 'Love (III)' allows them to

[70] 'Judgement', line 13.
[71] 'Love (III)', line 3.

exist completely in the same space. Herbert no longer needs to contemplate how to get his words to God, because he is standing there with him. Speaking of the similarities in theme between 'Prayer (I)' and 'Love (III)', P. G. Stanwood states that 'There are two themes, one which reaches forth, the other which stands ready to receive and can be completed only in receiving; for prayer, like love, is offered to be answered, and answered in order to make love possible'.[72]

'Love (III)' is not a poem simply about the Lord's Supper, but about the final feast that comes after the judgement, and this finality is essential when approaching the verse. Although most of the recent critical readings of the poem take it out of its relationship to the preceding poems, it is much more dramatic, and the exchange between Herbert and Christ makes much more sense, if seen in a post-Judgement situation. Michael Schoenfeldt has rightly brought to the forefront the erotic and social implications of the poem, but in doing so, he has overstated their importance in the poem.[73] Regarding the erotic readings of the poem, R. V. Young is correct when he states that 'it is misleading to suggest that "Love (III)" is permeated by scarcely concealed erotic preoccupations under a surface of conventional piety. Nothing is more conventional than for Christian devotion to be expressed in unmistakably erotic figures that point beyond themselves to what, from a Christian perspective, is the most ecstatic fulfilment of the most intense desire',[74] or as Whalen says, 'the result is a true *consummation*, a marriage of human and divine in a poem that boldly invests spiritual experience with erotic intensity'.[75] While Michael Schoenfeldt provides some very interesting insights into the poem when he reads it in relation to the concept of rules of courtesy, he misses much when he does not allow for the

[72] P. G. Stanwood, 'The Liveliness of Flesh and Blood', *Seventeenth Century News* 31 (1973), 53.
[73] Schoenfeldt's reading can be found in *Prayer and Power*: 'Love (III)' in relation to courtesy, pp. 199-229, and the erotic, pp. 255-270. Warren M. Liew also addresses the erotic reading of the poem in his article 'Reading the Erotic in George Herbert's Sacramental Poetics', *George Herbert Journal* 31.1&2 (2007-8), 33-62.
[74] R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 136.
[75] *Poetry of Immanence*, p. 159.

poem to be at a place after death and the earth have passed away, because in this moment, there is an absurdity in the speaker's insistence upon decorum. He is with Christ in heaven at the end of time, and the implication of this is that it is the complete being of the poet (body and soul) participating in the feast, not just the soul.[76] This is the 'resurrection of the body and the soul' meeting the resurrected 'Love'. There is no more need for practices in courtesy because all courtesies have passed. This is irresistible grace because all has played out, and grace has been offered, and it has been accepted. Likewise, while Chana Bloch's scholarship of the poem should be praised for the emphasis it gives to the scriptural influences on the poem,[77] her belief that the poem should not be read as taking place in heaven is unfortunate. She states that 'Herbert's real subject, as his title tells us, is not an idea about heaven but an experience of love'.[78] Bloch is correct in saying that the poem is about love, but this is the ultimate love between humanity and God because it no longer requires the mediator of the Incarnation, rather it is Love experienced in a manner that cannot be experienced outside of heaven.

The Eucharist is at the end of the liturgy, just as this communion is at the end of *The Church*, and so within the context of *The Church* the reader has heard and seen the movement towards and away from God through Christ, and yet, here it ends. There is no discussion about free will versus predestination because the discussion is absurd when redemption and salvation are completed. And this is why Richard Strier's reading of the poem is such a powerful one, because while the speaker is still going through the motions of the politics of courtesy, he is really putting up the last vestiges of the inadequacy he feels in the presence of God.[79] He knows he must submit, but he cannot yet do so. It is the final play of rebellion by a believer who cannot forget the fact that he has done nothing to

[76] *Herbert's Prayerful Art*, p. 50.
[77] *Spelling the Word*, p. 98-112.
[78] *Spelling the Word*, p. 101.
[79] *Love Known*, pp. 73-83.

earn his seat at the table, but it is also the relentless pursuit by Love. Love that knows he has already triumphed but is also benevolent and allows a final rebellion before insisting that everything takes its proper order. When we read the final lines of 'Love (III)', we see the final reconciliation of God to Herbert, and this reconciliation takes place in the familiar and domestic – heaven taking place in the incarnational paradox, which Young describes well when he states that 'The simplicity of the language reflects the wondrous realisation that the overwhelming Presence is accessible, somehow, in the most ordinary things, bread and wine, and in the most ordinary actions, "So I did sit and eat"'.[80] God has allowed all of the cheeky devotion found in 'Bitter-sweet', he has allowed the feelings of abandonment, the complaining, and the praising, and he even allows Herbert to pull back when in heaven, and then God simply ends it. 'You must sit down' sayes Love, and taste my meat: | So I did sit and eat.' Courtesy and fear give way to obedience and acceptance of 'Love'.

George Herbert's *The Temple* is the great devotional poetic work of the seventeenth century. In this book, he has attempted to encapsulate the life of a believer, and has succeeded. He provides a way for humans to know and speak with their unknown God. He looks to Christ, to the Incarnation, and through his emphasis on God as man, he is able to offer humanity a way to understand God. His emphasis on Jesus and the humanity of God provides a way to both look to God in heaven and the afterlife, while still allowing the physical world and the physical existence to have a meaningful role in the life of a believer. There is no mysticism that insists on moving believers on from this world, and there is no need for believers to give up the hope of a greater life beyond this existence. He manages a middle way, and in it, manages a dialectic that holds together

[80] *Doctrine and Devotion*, p. 139.

Protestant and Catholic, sombre and joyful, sacred and profane, personal and corporate devotion.

V

ROBERT HERRICK'S CHURCH OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

O Herrick, parson of my heart
I'll go to church with thee,
And bear a humble willing part
In thy sweet liturgy.

The Trinity by thee confessed,
Thy book of common prayer,
Are Julia's leg, Anthena's breast,
And Dianeme's hair.[1]

Robert Herrick was truly a bawdy poet and priest. He writes of women's breasts and thighs; he celebrates wine and food; he calls for the devout observation of festivals; he is the great English *carpe diem* poet, and he is constantly reminding his readers of their mortality. And he sings of God. And it is this that makes his discussion of the body/soul dilemma so interesting and enigmatic. While Donne may provide readers with a sense of a writer moving along a path from a sensual love of the flesh to a love of God, Herrick does not allow for any such reading. In fact, it is the obsession with the body, the physical, that has caused such frustration when his religion and vocation as priest are considered in connection with his poetry.[2] Many critics ignore the sacred verse section of *Hesperides*, 'His Noble Numbers', and instead limit themselves to the secular 'Hesperides'. That the poems in 'Hesperides' far outnumber 'His Noble Numbers' cannot be disputed, but this does not mean that his sacred verse is less important just because there is less of it, nor is it wholly distinct from the sacred verse, because it is still consumed with discussions of eating, drinking, festivals, and death. While some have found the Christian beliefs

[1] Christopher Morley, 'The Nightpiece to Herrick', in *The Middle Kingdom* (New York, 1944), p. 5.
[2] Ann Baynes Coiro has aptly stated that 'It may be argued that Herrick is the poet of anxiety – and that much of that anxiety is ours'. 'Introduction: Robert Herrick and the *Hesperides*: On the Edge of the Renaissance', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), i.

presented in 'His Noble Numbers' to be 'unconvincing' due to the simplicity of the sentiments and verse forms found there,[3] the reader must remember that the Christianity presented in 'His Noble Numbers' is in communion with the secular volume. The *carpe diem* poet often found in 'Hesperides' still exists in 'His Noble Numbers' and it is this which makes 'His Noble Numbers' a collection that both deserves more attention and rewards the reader with a richer understanding of the whole, for we find when reading *Hesperides* as a whole that the body/soul dilemma is almost entirely focussed on the body, with the soul being seldom present. Herrick is a priest of the world, and his incarnational understanding is one in which creation is not simply justified, but lifted up and found to be capable of Edenic innocence in the here and now. Herrick becomes a sort of christ, leading the way to the redemption of the present and physical world.

While the majority of Herrick's sacred verse is found in 'His Noble Numbers', he created the two sections to be read together and his book to be considered in its entirety, and so a discussion of his incarnational understanding of the world must begin in the 'Hesperides'. That Herrick meant for his book to be read as a whole has been convincingly argued by many, and while T. S. Eliot famously called Herrick a 'minor poet' because he was unable to find an over-arching theme in his work,[4] others since, most especially Ann Baynes Coiro and Roger B. Rollin,[5] have found that there is an overall theme to the poems, and that it is not just a collection of beautiful lyrics with some funny or disgusting epigrams unfortunately or mistakenly tossed in. When *Hesperides* is considered as a whole, the reader begins to see patterns of thought emerge from the more than 1,400 poems, many of which are epigrams. As Rollin says, 'his is not a book meant

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[3] Joseph H. Summers, *The Heirs of Donne and Jonson* (London, 1970), p. 57.
[4] *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), p 46.
[5] Ann Baynes Coiro, *Robert Herrick's* Hesperides *and the Epigram Book Tradition* (London, 1988); Roger B. Rollin *Robert Herrick*, revised edn., (Oxford, 1992) and 'Witty by Design: Robert Herrick's *Hesperides*', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (London, 1995), pp. 135-50.

for browsing: it is quite clear that the poet himself thought of *Hesperides* as a "long [continuous] work" ("To the generous Reader" [H-95], l.6), to be read from beginning to end, in sequence'.[6] Likewise, the book itself begins with a sonnet, 'The Argument of his Book' (H-1), which tells the reader what Herrick's main themes are going to be, and shows that he intends his readers to approach the book as a complete unit, or as Anne Baynes Coiro nicely put it, the poem is 'a succinct statement of intent'.[7]

That 'The Argument' can be considered an overview of what is to be contained in both sections of *Hesperides* is further reinforced by the fact that the next seven poems are addressed to the book, thereby creating an introduction that leads the reader into the volume and sets the tone for what is come. Regarding the seven poems addressed to the book, one is addressed to its muse,[8] five are addressed to his book,[9] and a final poem declares 'When he would have his verses read' (H-8), in these Herrick is leading his readers into a work that he anticipates will be considered in all its parts, and that will require both a proper setting and response for the verses. The reception he demands is one which is festive, and in this festive and celebratory mood the reader will be more receptive to his theology of temporal pleasure brought through the participation in the carnal, carnival, and carnivorous – the bacchanalian celebration of women, wine, and meat.

It is telling that 'The Argument's odd numbered lines all begin with either the phrase 'I sing'[10] or 'I write',[11] thus letting the reader prepare oneself for what is to come, and also indicating that the themes that follow each statement of 'I sing' or I write' are related to and speak to one another. In addition to this, the declaration 'I sing' is the call of

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[6] 'Witty by Design', p. 141.
[7] *Robert Herrick's* Hesperides *and the Epigram Book Tradition*, p. 5.
[8] 'To his Muse' (H-2).
[9] 'To his Booke' (H-3), 'Another' (H-4), 'Another' (H-5), 'To the soure Reader' (H-6), and 'To his Booke' (H-7).
[10] J. Max Patrick (ed.), *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick* (New York, 1963), lines 1, 3, 7, 9. All quotations and numbering are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.
[11] lines 5, 11, 13.

an epic poet or bard as he begins his tale,[12] and with Herrick introducing the volume with the call of the bard, it would bear to reason that all which follows the declaration of intent is indeed part of the great tale of the singer. Through a reading of the poem, one gains insight into what Herrick has set out to do, and will have a measuring rod by which to judge his success. In 'The Argument', he says,

> I Sing of *Brooks*, of *Blossomes*, *Birds*, and *Bowers*:
> Of *April*, *May*, of *June*, and *July*-Flowers.
> I sing of *May-poles*, *Hock-carts*, *Wassails*, *Wakes*,
> Of *Bride-grooms*, *Brides*, and of their *Bridall-cakes*.
> I write of *Youth*, of *Love*, and have Accesse
> By these, to sing of cleanly-*Wantonnesse*.
> I sing of *Dewes*, of *Raines*, and piece by piece
> Of *Balme*, of *Oyle*, of *Spice*, and *Amber-Greece*.
> I sing of *Times trans-shifting*; and I write
> How *Roses* first came *Red*, and *Lillies White*.
> I write of *Groves*, of *Twilights*, and I sing
> The court of *Mab*, and of the *Fairie-King*.
> I write of *Hell*; I sing (and ever shall)
> Of *Heaven*, and hope to have it after all.

This poem makes it clear that the focus of the work will be worldly, earthly, physical. He will 'sing' of nature in the birds and flowers; he will celebrate the festivals throughout the year, and the festivities of marriage, which allow for youth and love and 'cleanly-

[12] A. Leigh Deneef, *"This Poetic Liturgie"* (Durham, 1974), p. 5.

Wantonnesse'. (6) That this phrase is used to describe the actions of youth and love is of the utmost importance. Throughout the *Hesperides*, there is the sense that carnal is not sinful[13] when acted upon within certain situations involving the festive, the carnival, and it is within the carnival that physical love leads back to the purifying aspects of nature, the rain and dew, to bring life; the perfumes and oils to heal and cover the smells of disease or death. The reader is then reminded of the transitory nature of life and '*Times trans-shifting*', also the constant changes in nature with the transition of roses to red and lilies to white. The world is in change and unstable, and with the movement to twilight, fairies, death, and the afterlife, Avon Jack Murphy sees an indication in the poem of the inability to 'have everything in [Herrick's] poetic universe under absolute control'.[14] Furthermore, Deneef points out that this movement through creation and the supernatural presents Herrick as implying 'that the volume which this poem indexes is a world complete in itself'.[15] This then is how to approach *Hesperides*. Herrick tells us that he wants his book to be read as a complete work, and yet, while complete and concrete in its construction, there is a constant reminder of change and loss, which is what he is trying to overcome with his *Hesperides*. In fact, T. G. S. Cain sees the concept of 'Times trans-shifting' and its connection to death to be the great subject of the book.[16] Although there is a constant reminder of death and decay throughout the work (another aspect of 'Times trans-shifting'),[17] this reminder helps the reader to realise the necessity of salvation, and the book is consumed with a physical salvation and a physical paradise that is achieved

[13] Douglas Bush points out that even in the '*Noble Numbers* the Christian's sense of sin in not very acute'. *English Literature in the Early Seventeenth Century: 1600-1660*, 2nd edn., revised, (London, 1962), p. 119.
[14] Avon Jack Murphy, 'Robert Herrick: The Self-Conscious Critic in *Hesperides*', in Roger B. Rollin and J. Max Patrick (eds.), *"Trust to Good Verses"* (London, 1978), p. 54.
[15] *"This Poetic Liturgie"*, p. 8.
[16] T. G. S. Cain, '"Times trans-shifting": Herrick in Meditation', in Roger B. Rollin and J. Max Patrick (eds.), *"Trust to Good Verses"* (London, 1978), pp. 103-23.
[17] George Walton Scott, *Robert Herrick, 1591-1674* (London, 1974), p. 116.

through the combining of the carnal, carnival, and carnivorous to incarnate, if only briefly, a heaven on earth.

The movement in 'His Argument' from '*Brooks*' to a desired afterlife in heaven embodies much of the incarnational understanding of Herrick. The Latin root of incarnation, 'carn', is also the root of carnal, carnival, and carnivore, which Herrick seems to have in mind when negotiating his conflict of body and soul, or sacred and profane. He is the priest who, in creating his *Hesperides*, is creating his own book of life that will bring forth immortality for himself, and for those he includes. With his fear of the possible non-existence of the afterlife, Herrick uses *Hesperides* to celebrate the temporal, to create a heaven on earth. While Donne looks to the Incarnation as a means to negotiate with God a means for guaranteed salvation, Herrick tries to guarantee his salvation with or without God. Where Lanyer uses the incarnational paradox of the high becoming low and the low being raised up to justify a radically altered society based upon virtue, rather than on gender or birth, Herrick sees the Incarnation justifying the physical to the extent that he almost sees no need to rise above it.

That Herrick is a poet of the carnal is easy to see, and the varied critical reception of such carnal verses from a priest has been well summarised by Roger B. Rollin.[18] 'Hesperides' is replete with poems to imaginary women, named and not. These women are eroticised, as in 'The Vine' (H-41), anatomised, such as in 'Upon Julia's Breasts' (H-230) and 'Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast' (H-440), and ogled, such as in 'Upon Julia's Clothes' (H-779). This is clearly not a normal subject for a country parson, yet Herrick presents these verses, and many, many more besides, to his readers as part of his 'cleanly-Wantonnesse'.[19] The carnal of the incarnate is celebrated with little censure, and as William Kerrigan has successfully argued, Herrick indeed manages to be 'jocund' and

[18] Roger B. Rollin, 'Robert Herrick and the Erotics of Criticism', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *Renaissance Discourses of Desire* (London, 1993), 130-42.
[19] 'The Argument of his Book' (H-1), line 6.

'chaste',[20] just as he stated in his poem 'To his Book's end' (H-1130). There are epigrams against adultery,[21] but when Herrick is discussing the beauty of his women, or when he is discussing the wanton actions of young lovers, there is no sense of these being sinful acts. Sin, in *Hesperides*, is action taken outside the bounds of beauty. As a means of comparison, Coiro points out that 'while Jonson targets moral flaws, Herrick is fascinated almost exclusively with physical grotesqueries and physical sins'.[22] Rather than allowing for a separation of the two, Herrick conflates the physical with the moral. Michael C. Schoenfeldt[23] rightly argues that the epigrams of beauty and disgust reflect the tensions in the social hierarchy of the English Renaissance, but in addition to this, there appears to be a spiritual aspect to the poems as well. The holy can be seen by the fact that Herrick's lovers are always described in terms of beauty, whether it is their skin,[24] their legs,[25] their breasts,[26] their teeth,[27] their breath,[28] their hair;[29] Herrick's women are exemplars of loveliness. Whereas the sinful are those whose teeth are rotten,[30] who soil their

[20] William Kerrigan, 'Kiss Fancies in Robert Herrick', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), 155-71.
[21] 'Upon Scobble. Epigram' (H-126).
[22] Hesperides *and the Epigram Book Tradition*, p. 156.
[23] Michael C. Schoenfeldt, 'The Art of Disgust: Civility and the Social Body in *Hesperides*', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), pp. 127-54.
[24] 'Upon the losse of his Mistresses' (H-39) and 'The Lawne' (H-416).
[25] 'The Vision' (H-142), 'Love perfumes all parts' (H-155), 'To Dianeme' (H-403), 'Upon Lucia dabbled in the dew' (H-729).
[26] 'Love perfumes all parts' (H-155), 'How Roses came red' (H-258), 'The Frankincense' (H-417), 'Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breast' (H-440), 'Fresh Cheese and Cream' (H-491), 'To Roses in Julia's Bosome' (H-1070), and 'Upon Julia's breasts' (H-230).
[27] 'Upon Lucie. Epigram' (H-649) and 'The Candor of Julias teeth' (H-741).
[28] 'The Vision to Electra' (H-56), 'His embalming to Julia' (H-327), 'Upon a Virgin kissing a Rose' (H-144), 'On Julia's breath' (H-179), 'The Perfume' (H-251), and 'Upon Julia's sweat' (H-719).
[29] 'The Vision' (H-142), 'To Dianeme' (H-160), 'To the Western wind' (H-255), 'The parting Verse, or charge to his supposed Wife when he travelled' (H-465), Upon Julia's haire fill'd with Dew' (H-484), 'What kind of Mistresse he would have' (H-665), 'How his soule came ensnared' (H-876) and 'Upon Julia's haire, bundled up in a golden net' (H-881).
[30] 'Upon Glasco. Epigram' (H-129), 'Upon some women' (H-195), 'Upon Bridget. Epigram' (H-419), 'Upon one who said she was always young' (H-462), 'Upon Ursley' (H-543), 'Of Horne a Combe-maker' (H-595), 'Upon Madam Ursly, Epigram' (H-668), 'Upon Franck' (H-728), 'To women, to hide their teeth, if they be rotten or rusty' (H-738).

garments,[31] whose breath reeks,[32] who are lecherous.[33] *Hesperides* is a book celebrating the carnal as long as it is a celebration of beauty, an attribute of the divine.

While the focus of this chapter is primarily the discussion of Herrick's use of the carnal as participatory in a redemptive process, it is important to touch briefly on his disturbing, disgusting, and vile epigrams of the body in order to better understand the world that Herrick creates in his *Hesperides*. If one was to experience Herrick just through anthologies, it would be easy to have the opinion that he wrote beautiful poems of feasts and flowers and little else. He could seem to be pleasant and a bit naïve. The anthologised Herrick is very easy to be condescending towards as he can be seen as a pretty, yet simple, poet, but it is the disgusting epigrams that help to complicate this reading of him. While he may indeed 'Sing of *Brooks*, of *Blossomes*, *Birds*, and *Bowers*: | Of *April*, *May*, of *June*, and *July*-Flowers'[34], he also includes epigrams like '*Upon* Ralph' (H-959)

> *RAlph* pares his nayles, his warts, his cornes, and *Raph*
> In sev'rall tills, and boxes keepes 'em safe;
> Instead of Harts-horne (if he speakes the troth)
> To make a lustie-gellie for his broth.

He may celebrate an earthly ideal, but he never allows himself, or his readers, to stay in that ideal. He pushes us past. He writes wonderful epithalamia celebrating the union of

[31] 'Upon Skoles. Epigram' (H-650), 'Upon Cuts' (H-373), 'Upon a cheap Laundresse. Epigram' (H-474), 'Upon Lupes' (H-969).
[32] 'The Custard' (H-131), 'Upon Linnit. Epigram' (H-381), 'To the Painter, to draw him a Picture' (H-108), 'Upon Gryll' (H-135), 'Upon a free Maid, with a foule breath' (H-588), 'Upon a sowre-breath Lady. Epigram' (H-598), 'Upon Lungs. Epigram' (H-637), 'Upon Jone and Jane' (H-659), 'Way in a crowd' (H-551).
[33] 'Upon Scobble. Epigram' (H-126), 'Upon Greedy. Epigram' (H-326), 'Upon Batt' (H-184), 'Upon Luggs. Epigram' (H-199), 'No Lock against Letcherie' (H-233), 'Upon Letcher. Epigram' (H-532).
[34] 'The Argument of his Book.' (H-1), lines 1-2.

two people becoming one flesh in marriage,[35] but he also writes '*Upon* Scobble. *Epigram*' (H-126)

> *SCobble* for Whoredome whips his wife; and cryes,
> He'll slit her nose; But blubb'ring, she replyes,
> Good Sir, make no more cuts i'th'outward skin,
> One slit's enough to let Adultry in.

Herrick does not naively see the world as a place replete with beauty. He acknowledges, and more significantly condemns, the vile while also working in it. There is a realism in Herrick's world that is often overlooked or ignored by critics. The 'mocking epigrams'[36] seem so severe that they shock, but this is what is needed when the poems of the beautiful can appear so artificial. He writes in extremes. He longs for the ideal, but he acknowledges that the ideal is not the every day world. And, as will be shown, it is through a combination of the beautiful found in the carnal, carnival, and carnivorous that Herrick presents his readers with the possibility of brief encounters with the ideal. The 'mocking epigrams' balance the book and remind the readers of a need to escape the everyday, but at the same time, Herrick offers no ultimate assurance of a true and lasting existence in the ideal.

As the reader begins to look at Herrick's use of the carnal, it will be observed that he does not just direct his focus toward women but also toward nature. As Herrick states in 'His Argument', he sings of plants and flowers, and often in these poems of nature, the reader is met with eroticised tales in which plants enact metaphors or metamorphoses whereby they are the carnal or are changed by the carnal. 'The Vine' is a poem in which

[35] Mark 10.7-9. William Aldis Wright (ed.), *The Authorized Version of the English Bible, 1611*, 5 vols., (Cambridge, 1909), all quotations from the Bible are from this edition.
[36] A title used by Coiro in her Hesperides *and the Epigram Book Tradition*, p. 155 and following.

Herrick dreams that his penis is a vine that circles and entraps a woman. In 'Upon the Nipples of Julia's Breasts' (H-440), Herrick's description of the nipples is actually a list of natural objects that become visual metaphors for the flesh of Julia's breasts:

> HAve ye beheld (with much delight)
> A red-Rose peeping through a white?
> Or else a Cherrie (double grac't)
> Within a Lillie? Center plac't?
> Or ever mark't the pretty beam,
> A Strawberry shewes halfe drown'd in Creame?
> Or seen rich Rubies blushing through
> A pure smooth Pearle, and Orient too?
> So like to this, nay all the rest,
> Is each neate Niplet of her breast.

However, as mentioned before, it is not just plants that describe the intimate parts of the body, but the sexual body that creates the plants we see around us. Thus we find in 'How Lillies came white' (H-190) that they got their colour when Cupid,

> He with his pretty finger prest
> The rubie niplet of her [his mother] breast;
> Out of the which, the creame of light,
> Like to a Dew,
> Fell downe on you,
> And made ye white.

In this poem we see much of the same language as found in 'Upon the Nipples'. And Herrick continues to return to this theme as found in "How Roses came red' (H-258), in which the reader is told that roses were once white,

> Till they co'd not agree,
> Whether my *Sapho's* breast,
> Or they more white sho'd be.
>
> But being vanquisht quite,
> A blush their cheeks bespred;
> Since which (beleeve the rest)
> The *Roses* first came red.

And again in 'To the Willow-tree' (H-262) a plant is praised for its ability to aid lovers, through its ability to give shade and privacy to young lovers as they go through the various parts of courtship and love and heartbreak. Time and again, plants are either used to describe the carnal, or exist in their forms because of, or in order to aid, the carnal, a theme which can also be found in Richard Crashaw.[37]

From the carnal and the eroticised and eroticising nature, the reader is also led to the carnival. The carnival or festive poems in Herrick's *Hesperides* are some of the most celebrated of his work, particularly 'Corinna's going a Maying' (H-178). This is a poem with a polytheistic[38] emphasis on the importance of the observation of May Day

[37] 'Out of Virgil, In the praise of the Spring'.
[38] Achsah Guibbory, 'Enlarging the Limits of the "Religious Lyric": The Case of Herrick's *Hesperides*', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *"The Muses Common-Weale"* (Columbia, MO, 1988) , p. 31; Leah Singalou Marcus, 'Herrick's *Hesperides* and the "Proclamation Made for May"', *Studies in*

celebrations. The narrator in the poem is pushing Corinna out of bed and her house so that she does not oversleep and miss the festivities. He censures her for sleeping late.

> Nay! not so much as out of bed?
> When all the Birds have Mattens seyd,
> And sung their thankfull Hymnes: 'tis sin,
> Nay, profanation to keep in

Nature has performed its sanctifying duties and is now ready to partake in the day. Nature is pure and is participating in the festival; Corinna is in sin because she sleeps.[39] Deneef takes this further and states that 'She is out of accord with the rest of nature', and by these actions 'She desecrates herself and the rite by not appearing'.[40] The narrator instructs, 'Wash, dresse, be briefe in praying: | Few Beads are best, when once we goe a Maying'. She need not tarry long in her religious preparation for the day as nature and the festival are already sanctified, and since it is sin to not join in the celebration, then long prayers keep her in sin, for 'nature is alive with personality, alive with worship'.[41] Herrick argues that rushing through traditional devotional acts are to be commended because partaking in May Day is an act of devotion in and of itself, as 'there is a sense of organic union with nature and a collapsing of any distinctions between what is natural, what is pleasurable, and what is worshipful'.[42] Outside, the festivities are described in religious terms.

. . . see how

Philology 76.1 (1979), 65; George Walton Scott, *Robert Herrick, 1591-1674* (London, 1974), p. 127; Joseph H. Summers, *The Heirs of Donne and Jonson* (London, 1970), p. 60.
[39] Leah S. Marcus, *Politics of Mirth* (London, 1986), p. 159; *Robert Herrick*, p. 86.
[40] *"This Poetic Liturgy"*, p. 58.
[41] Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, 'Herrick and the Cleansing of Perception', in Roger B. Rollin and J. Max Patrick (eds.), *"Trust to Good Verses"* (London, 1978), p. 199.
[42] 'Herrick and the Cleansing of Perception', p. 202

Devotion gives each House a Bough,
Or Branch : Each Porch, each doore, ere this,
An Arke a Tabernacle is (31-4)

Youthful love and the giving of a 'green-gown' are all considered a wonderful part of the celebration with the youth sanctifying their physical acts of love through having a Priest marry them, though Herrick also describes the play of 'Many a jest told of the Keyes betraying | This night, and Locks pickt' without any hint of these acts being immoral. The carnival redeems the actions of the day, and the only sin is to not join in. As a means of contrast, Milton's *Comus* operates in the opposite manner,[43] with the righteous needing to be tempted into participating in the sinful festive which is located 'In the blind mazes of this tangled wood'. (181) With Herrick, there is no sense of an evil nature luring the faithful astray. In fact, the iniquity of not participating is tied with a philosophy of *carpe diem* because the festival exists in a day that comes once a year. However, this sanctification is not an eternal one. As the poem ends, the reader is presented with the lines

And as a vapour, or a drop of raine
Once lost, can ne'r be found againe:
So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade;
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drown'd with us in endlesse night.
Then while time serves, and we are but decaying;

[43] John Carey (ed.), *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, 2nd edn., (London, 1997).

Come, my *Corinna*, come, let's goe a Maying. (63-70)

Each May Day is the marking of another year passed and another year aged. To skip the carnival is to miss celebrating life, and as this life is the only assured life, to not celebrate is to waste God's gift of temporal existence. As Deming says of the poem, 'it is the fullest statement of his ceremonial vision of the relation between Nature and Art, between external and poetic contexts, and between Time and Space',[44] or as Rollin puts it, 'here as elsewhere in *Hesperides* he acknowledges that love is a means of easing, not resolving, the tension between existence and extinction'.[45]

'The Hock-cart, or Harvest Home: To the Right Honourable, Mildmay, Earle of Westmorland' (H-250) contains similar themes as 'Corinna'. There is feasting and celebration; there are lusty youths and maids, and there is food and drink: 'Mutton, Veale | And Bacon', (30-1) 'here a Custard, there a Pie', (33) 'If smirking Wine be wanting here, | There's that, which drowns all care, stout Beere'. (36-7) Once again the reader is greeted with great carnival and revelry, and once again there is the reminder at the end of the poem that all of this will pass. Although 'Corinna' celebrates with the thought of the inevitability of mortality, 'The Hock-cart' reminds the reader that this day of pleasure exists as a release from the daily strife that will come again as work and routine resume.[46] Herrick ends the poem with the lines:

And that this pleasure is like raine,
Not sent ye for to drowne your paine,
But for to make it spring againe.

[44] Robert H. Deming, *Ceremony and Art* (Paris, 1974), p. 56.
[45] *Robert Herrick*, p. 90.
[46] *Robert Herrick*, p. 51.

These lines then are a reminder, once again, of the temporary nature of the festival, and 'the ceremonial escape is artistic communion with the realm of death, transfiguration, and rebirth, in order to cause an analogous renewal within the spirit of the participator'.[47] Though there has been some debate regarding how to read the final two lines of the poem, they cannot be explained away,[48] and perhaps Mary Thomas Crane states it best when she says 'That this poem is difficult to place ideologically'.[49] Ultimately, it is not a poem of political ideology (though Claude J. Summers is correct to see a 'paternalistic rather than an egalitarian attitude'[50] in the poems of festival and country life), rather it is one about life and its processes, and in this it fits perfectly within *Hesperides*. This is a book of the passing of all things, and so the appreciation of all things as they pass, even while desiring and striving to hold on to them as long as humanly and artistically possible.

Herrick's is not a call to live every day as carnival, but to experience the carnival to the utmost, to celebrate it with all of one's being, as a temporary stay against mortality and toil. In Herrick's temporal Christianity, in his flesh-centred incarnational view of the world, there is never a naïve view that all of life is celebration, but that celebration exists to give greater meaning to life. The carnal and the carnival meet as the celebrants experience nature, in plants, animals, food, and each other, and find in those days of festivity a sanctified and redeemed world which, for at least a little while, is edenic in its pleasures and innocence, and as Marcus states of 'The Hock-cart', 'if either the Lord or his laborers refuse to play the parts that the poem sets out for them . . ., the festival and its magic will fail'.[51] The Lord and the workers must play their roles in this spiritual excercise, just as Corinna cannot be left to sleep the day away. The incarnational and

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[47] Thomas R. Whitaker, 'Herrick and the Fruits of the Garden', *ELH* 22.1 (1955), 23.
[48] *Ceremony and Art*, p. 147.
[49] Mary Thomas Crane, 'Herrick's Cultural Materialism', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), 43.
[50] Claude J. Summers, 'Herrick's Political Poetry: The Strategies of His Art', in Roger B. Rollin and J. Max Patrick (eds.), *"Trust to Good Verses"* (London, 1978), p. 173.
[51] *Politics of Mirth*, p. 149.

redemptive spirit of the holiday can only work through the participation of communicants. As Alan Fischler states, 'Our perceptions of the presence of God in Nature occur in transitory moments, and our chance to achieve these perceptions is equally fleeting'.[52] Douglas Bush, while remarking on the co-mingling of the pagan and Christian in Herrick's *Hesperides*, rightly observes 'that this world of natural beauty and natural feeling is partly divine reality and partly idyllic illusion'.[53] This is one of Herrick's ways of justifying the world, and it requires an active role by a 'priest' in order for the justification through carnival to occur. The festive is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, and as Marcus notes, 'in *Hesperides*, holiday has to be made to happen'.[54] By the pastoral actions he takes, Herrick looks to the beautiful and the pleasurable in the carnival and uses it as a means to return society to a place in which all can enjoy creation, regardless of social station.

Just as Herrick uses the carnal and carnival in co-operation as a religious means to redeem the temporal, he also uses the carnivorous as a means to sanctify the physical. The carnivorous, as he imagines it, functions communally, almost as a pagan eucharist, in fact, as Jonathan F. S. Post says of 'Corinna', 'it also seems highly doubtful that all of these delights can be fully recuperated in the name of religious orthodoxy',[55] and this is true for it often feels as if the Christianity in *Hesperides* is a Christianity without the need for Christ because Herrick is able to create his own salvation. The sharing of a meal with meat is blessed because it is an aspect of the same redemptive movement of the carnal and carnival, but not because it is redemptive in and of itself. As has already been shown in 'The Hock-cart', Herrick includes various kinds of meat in his description of a festive feast. The reason for the feast is the celebration of the harvest, and the animals slaughtered

[52] Alan Fischler, 'Herrick's Holy Hedonism', *Modern Language Studies* 13.2 (1983), 16.
[53] *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*, p. 119.
[54] *Politics of Mirth*, p. 141.
[55] Jonathan F. S. Post, 'Herrick: A Minority Report', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), 15.

to be eaten as part of the feast aid in making the day exceptional. Such large quantities of meat would not be found on labourers' tables apart from festival days; therefore, the carnivorous takes its place with the carnival and the carnal as aspects of the creation of edenic innocence and celebration of the world.

Herrick's use of meat in a religious context in 'Hesperides' can also be found very early in his book. The poem 'Steame in Sacrifice' (H-66) recalls both Old Testament[56] and pagan sacrifices[57] to gods with the lines,

> IF meat the Gods give, I the steame
> High-towring wil devote to them:
> Whose easie natures like it well,
> If we the roste have, they the smell.

Here there is no discussion of an altar, nor religious trappings, rather, the cooking of the meat itself acts as the sacrifice to the gods. As Herrick is the priest, he is all that is required for the work of his hands to be consecrated, so as he prepares, cooks, and consumes his meals of meat and wine, he is able to commune with the gods and bring others into communion through the sharing of the meal. And as he also makes clear, the gods are content with the unseen and ethereal scent of the meal, while his act of devotion is to eat, to physically partake and interact with the sacrifice: to enjoy the physical while the gods enjoy the incorporeal. This is a theme that Herrick would like his readers to grasp, because he includes an incredibly similar epigram later in 'Hesperides',

> THe Gods require the thighes

[56] The biblical laws of sacrifice are found throughout the book of Leviticus, but primarily chapters 1-8.
[57] Robert H. Deming sees these lines as referencing the first and second books of the *Iliad* and the third book of the *Odyssey*, *Ceremony and Art*, pp. 96-7.

Of Beeves for sacrifice;
Which rosted, we the steam
Must sacrifice to them:
Who though they do not eat,
Yet love the smell of meat.[58]

However this is not the last time that Herrick discusses meat and its scent as sacrifice. In the epigram 'Bad Princes pill their People' (H-826), he inverts concept so that he might show how society and religion out of their natural order are an abomination. Where true deities enjoy the immaterial aspects of the sacrifice and leave the physical to humanity to enjoy, in 'Bad Princes', the reader sees religion and politics united in the use of sacrificed meat. If good gods give the meat to the people, then gods, and in Herrick's world this includes kings, who misuse their power keep the meat for themselves and only give the people the 'smoak'.

LIke those infernall Deities which eate
The best of all the sacrificed meate;
And leave their servants, but the smoak and sweat:
So many *Kings*, and *Primates* too there are,
Who claim the Fat, and Fleshie for their share,
And leave their Subjects but the starved ware.

That Herrick equates the gods and the king can be seen in the dedicatory poem 'To the Most Illustrious, and Most Hopefull Prince, Charles, Prince of Wales'; however, what

[58] 'The smell of the Sacrifice' (H-736).

is interesting for this discussion is that power improperly wielded and bad religion are both expressed in terms that keep people from being able to physically experience and enjoy their sacrifices. The eating of the meat provides people with strength and sustenance. A proper relationship with the deity must express itself in such a way that the gods enjoy watching their worshippers prepare and consume the sacrifice. The gods are immaterial, and so it is the immaterial that must be their portion of devotional acts. People are physical beings; therefore, they express their devotion through dedicating and enjoying physical acts. When religious devotions and beliefs require their followers to make do with the immaterial, they are 'infernall' and will starve the devout who require the physical sustenance to survive. In Herrick's conception of religion then, we see a world that is holy because it is physical, and the acts of redemption and devotion that the gods require are for the people to properly enjoy and partake in this physical creation. Any neo-platonic view of Christianity that denies the world, any sect of Christianity that seeks to keep people from pleasurably interacting with creation, which denies the carnal, the carnival, the carnivorous, is 'infernall'.

With the importance that Herrick places on the physical world, it is of little surprise that these same ideas are carried over to his sacred verse in 'His Noble Numbers', and while some critics have argued that the festival and ceremony in both parts of *Hesperides* show Herrick's commitment to the Laudian Church of England,[59] this does not entirely explain the unsettling religion that is presented in the book. No one now doubts the Christianity of Archbishop Laud, but no one is certain of Herrick's religious conviction, so a simple Laudian versus Puritan reading of *Hesperides* is incomplete when the reader acknowledges that much of the ceremonial and festival in the poems is just as pagan as Christian and Herrick is certainly closer to Rome than to Geneva, but it is the Rome of

[59] Leah S. Marcus, 'Herricks *Noble Numbers* and the Poetics of Playfulness', *English Literary Renaissance* 7.1 (1977), 108-126; Claude J. Summers, 'Tears for Herrick's Church', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), 51-71.

Caesar, not of the Pope, or as A. B. Chambers puts it, '*Noble Numbers*, clearly, is a decidedly mixed affair, liturgical on one hand, classical on the other. It is the work of a Christian priest strongly attracted to classical authors, concepts, and points of view'.[60] Despite this, there is still a very strong devotional component to the verses in the collection as Miriam K. Starkman has shown.[61] However, when one begins to read 'His Noble Numbers', the first poem, 'His Confession' (N-1), seems to try to separate this collection of sacred poems from the bawdy and irreligious verses of 'Hesperides'. Yet, when the reader considers the book as a whole, one finds that 'His Confession' is a humorous and coy acknowledgement of the less-than-holy poems found in 'Hesperides' without a true acknowledgement of guilt. Instead of a cry of repentance his readers find the lines,

> Ev'n so those Lines, pen'd by my wanton Wit,
> Treble the number of these good I've writ.
> Things precious are least num'rous: Men are prone
> To do ten Bad, for one Good Action.

'His Confession' does indeed confess that the sacred verses are 'good' and that the secular may not be,[62] but he also presents the 'Bad' actions as a part of life. The 'Good' acts of a human are precious because they are rare, so then the bad acts are part of the natural order and, therefore, not necessarily sinful. This is confirmed in his next poem, 'His Prayer for Absolution' (N-2).

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[60] A. B. Chambers, 'Herrick and the Trans-shifting of Time', *Studies in Philology* 72.1 (1975), 87.
[61] Miriam K. Starkman, '*Noble Numbers* and the Poetry of Devotion', in J. A. Mazzeo (ed.), *Reason and the Imagination* (London, 1962), pp. 1-27.
[62] J. Max Patrick makes the point in the notes to this poem that '*Hesperides* contains more than four times as many poems as *Noble Numbers* and more than five times as many lines; but many of the poems in *Hesperides* could be classified as "pious Pieces"'. So here we see that Herrick does not completely confine his sacred verse to 'His Noble Numbers', p. 450, note 1.

FOr Those my unbaptized Rhimes,
Writ in my wild unhallowed Times;
For every sentence, clause and word,
That's not inlaid with Thee, (my Lord)
Forgive me God, and blot each Line
Out of my Book, that is not Thine.
But if, 'mongst all, thou find'st here one
Worthy thy Benediction;
That One of all the rest, shall be
The Glory of my Work, and Me.

Herrick does ask for absolution here, but he also implies with this request there is the possibility that the poems found in 'Hesperides' may not in fact be in need of forgiveness or redemption. He does refer to them as 'unbaptized Rhimes', but then asks for forgiveness only for the lines 'not inlaid with Thee', God. The implication is that some of the lines are indeed inlaid with Him. Furthermore, he asks God to 'blot each Line | Out of my Book, that is not Thine'. Since we believe that this book was seen through to print by Herrick,[63] he does not seem to have seen any need to 'blot' out the lines of his secular verse. As Deming argues, 'This smacks of a playfully serious poetic pride and quite a bit of devotional pride as well . . . . the extent of God's actual blotting of lines or of letting lines "wither" will be . . . very slight indeed because there will be no need for either activity'.[64] In addition to this, Herrick concludes 'Hesperides' with a poem in the shape of an altar that ends with the lines,

[63] As discussed in J. Max Patrick's note to the title page and text of *Hesperides*, *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick* (New York, 1963), p. 6.
[64] *Ceremony and Art*, p. 66.

This pillar never shall
Decline or waste at all;
But stand for ever by his owne
Firme and well fixt foundation. (11-14)[65]

Herrick has called on God to rid his 'Hesperides' of any lines that are not God's, yet he ends 'Hesperides' with a poem assured in its eternality. There is an assurance in Herrick's verse that his book is eternal in the form in which he has created it. There is no fear that God will 'blot' anything from his book. Herrick plays with the idea that he may have to repent for some of his 'unbaptised' lines, but he implies that all verses will stand because God is in all of them. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott finds this to be the case when, in discussing 'The Argument', she states that 'we can take seriously his claim that Heaven is a basic topic in *Hesperides*';[66] furthermore, she follows it with the observation that 'Herrick may in fact be telling us that even in this poem about brooks and bridal cakes and "cleanly-*Wantonnesse*," he is singing about Heaven, and he always *will* be singing about Heaven'.[67] This physical piece of devotion, this book, is God's in its entirety, from the beginning of 'Hesperides' to the end of 'His Noble Numbers'. All is God's, including such opposites as 'The Vine' (H-41) and 'Sin seen' (N-37), and Herrick even makes this explicit in his poem 'Gods presence' (N-237) which reads,

GOD is *all-present* to what e're we do,
And as *all-present*, so *all-filling* too.

[65] 'The pillar of Fame'
[66] 'Herrick and the Cleansing of Perception', p. 205.
[67] 'Herrick and the Cleansing of Perception', p. 205.

And as one reads through 'His Noble Numbers', one sees a continuance of the themes of carnivorous, carnival, and carnal. In fact, Herrick's use of the various aspects of 'carn' meets the incarnational God in the 'Noble Numbers' in such a way that what has seemed pagan in the preceding section of his book becomes a means to approach God in Christ, even to the point that we find a poem in which the carnal of Christ is exchanged for Herrick's heart as an act of salvation, and these bizarre acts of devotion, which include the final poem implying that Jesus may have failed to ascend to Heaven in the resurrection, and may in fact still be in Hell,[68] makes it difficult to agree with the standard view of 'His Noble Numbers' which sees the poems as 'a collection of rather dull poems on conventionally Christian devotional topics'.[69]

Herrick continues with the emphasis on the carnivorous with the poem 'To keep a true Lent' (N-228) in which he instructs his readers to realise that observing Lent does not mean to abstain from meat or 'Flesh', but

> It is to fast from strife,
> From old debate,
> And hate;
> To circumcise thy life'. (17-20)

Forgoing meat is not an act of devotion, rather how a person lives is true devotion. If the gods are pleased by the scent of our meals, then to forgo meat is a contradictory act of worship. It deprives the worshipers and the worshipped from the sacrifice that is supposed to be given. Herrick asks

[68] 'His Coming to the Sepulchre'
[69] 'Enlarging the Limits of the "Religious Lyric"', p. 28.

IS this a Fast, to keep
The Larder leane?
And cleane
From fat of Veales, and Sheep? (1-4)

And the answer for Herrick is a definite no. He even mocks the custom of meatless Lent when he also asks

Is it to quit the dish
Of Flesh, yet still
To fill
The platter high with Fish? (5-8)

There is a similar criticism of how to keep a true lent which George Herbert has written. In his work *The Country Parson* he writes that there are times when eating flesh is preferable to meat, and in fact shows greater dedication to the true concept of fasting.

> Now fasting dayes containe a treble obligation; first, of eating lesse that day, then on other dayes; secondly, of eating no pleasing or over-nourishing things, as the Israelites did eate sowre herbs: Thirdly, of eating no flesh, which is but the determination of the second rule by Authority to this particular. The two former obligations are much more essentiall to a true fast, then the third and last; and fasting dayes were fully performed by keeping of the two former, had not Authority interposed: so that to eat little, and that unpleasant, is the naturall rule of fasting, although it be flesh. For since fasting in Scripture language is an afflicting

> of our souls, if a peece of dry flesh at my table be more unpleasant to me, then some fish there, certainly eat the flesh, and not the fish, is to keep the fasting day naturally.[70]

Here Herbert can be seen arguing that the task of the fast is to eat something 'unpleasant' thereby remembering through suffering. Herrick may not agree with Herbert's emphasis on suffering in fasting, but there is a similar acknowledgment that the rules governing fasting are not completely binding, and that there may be instances when one must eat flesh in order to keep a true Lent. Herrick then is quick to point out the absurdity of proclaiming a fast from meat that still allows fish. Although fish may not have been understood as meat in his time, it is clear that Herrick sees that one can still indulge in great quantities of food even while 'fasting'. And those keeping such a Lent clearly still crave the meat because they 'fill | The platter high with Fish'. They claim to be eating in such a way as to deprive themselves out of devotion, yet they are gorging themselves. Herrick makes sure that his readers realise that abstaining from eating is not a way to worship God, instead they should 'sterve th[eir] sin, | Not Bin; | And that's to keep th[eir] Lent'. It is how one lives one's life, not how one eats, that constitutes worship and devotion, or 'that ritual practices are valuable only where the spirit gives life to the literal observance'.[71]

God enjoys the carnivorous, and Herrick shows this again in 'To God' (N-66). Here the reader finds that God of Christianity supplies his people with meat. Herrick states that

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[70] *A Priest to the Temple or, The Country Parson*, in F. E. Hurchinson (ed), *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford: 1941), p. 242.
[71] Achsah Guibbory, 'Temple of *Hesperides* and Anglican-Puritan Controversy', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *"The Muses Commonweale"* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 140.

God gives not onely corne, for need,
But likewise sup'rabundant seed;
Bread for our service, bread for shew;
Meat for our meales, and fragments too:
He gives not poorly, taking some
Between the finger, and the thumb;
But, for our glut, and for our store,
Fine flowre prest down, and running o're.

Here the Christian God is described as having the same traits previously praised of the pagan gods. He gives meat, he is not 'infernall' keeping the food to himself, rather he is a God who not only provides the 'corne' for the everyday meals, but he provides the 'bread for our service' and the 'bread for shew'. He gives the ornamental cakes and the sacramental meal; he provides the flesh given 'in remembrance of [him]'.[72] In addition to all this, he is also a generous God. He is a God who provides the meat for the feast, the food for the carnivorous at the carnival.

The carnival is continued in 'His Noble Numbers' with Herrick including poems to the festivals of Christmas, New Years, and Epiphany. That he would include poems celebrating these holy days (or the festival of Christ's Circumcision) is hardly odd in a collection of sacred verse,[73] but once again, Herrick's treatment of the holidays is unique to him. When writing on the birth of Christ, rather than focusing on the lowly birth, or the miracle of God becoming man, Herrick turns the holiday into another occasion for carnival. In 'A Christmas Caroll, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall' (N-96),

[72] I Corinthians 11.25.
[73] While 17th century poems for Christmas, New Years, and Epiphany abound, it is interesting to note that John Milton and Richard Crashaw, despite holding opposite positions in the Roman Catholic versus Protestant debate, also contributed poems to the celebration of Christ's circumcision.

the supernatural action of Jesus's birth is not the heavenly focus on the work of the Divine, but an entirely earthly action of changing Winter to Spring, or as Roger B. Rollin states, 'the Nativity actually accomplishes what the myth of pastoral has always promised – to create a springtime world'.[74] The poem is a song sung by different singers holding a conversation regarding the miraculous spring-like weather that has appeared in December. They ask 'wherefore all things here | Seem like the Spring-time of the yeere?' and

> Why do's the chilling Winters morne
> Smile, like a field beset with corne?
> Or smell, like to a Meade new-shorne,
> Thus, on the sudden?'

These singers are answered by another singer who states that it is Christ's birth that has brought about the changes in nature. The Chorus then sings that

> We see Him come, and know him ours,
> Who, with His Sun-shine, and His showers,
> Turnes all the patient ground to flowers.

The birth of Jesus brings forth Spring. He causes flowers to grow in the middle of winter. In fact there is more a sense of Christmas resembling Easter, with the celebration of nature reborn; however, earlier in the poem, the reader finds that it is not Easter to which Herrick is referring, rather he hints at the fact that Christ brings forth the carnival of

[74] *Robert Herrick*, p. 142. Leah Marcus also makes this point in 'Herrick's *Noble Numbers* and the Politics of Playfulness, p. 120.

May Day, that 'the saviour's enlivening powers are announced through His effects on external nature'.[75] The first speaker in the poem comments

> Dark and dull the night, flie hence away,
> And give the honour to this Day,
> That sees *December* turn'd to *May*.

The birth of Christ does not look forward to the cross and the resurrection, but to a fertility festival. We are not led to a redemption of the heart, but a redemption of nature from the dead of winter to the life of May.

Again in 'The Star-Song: A Caroll to the King; sung at White-Hall' (N-102) the reader is presented with the birth of Christ being associated with flowers and new growth. The song begins with a search for the 'Babe but lately sprung'. The characters ask if they should search in the 'Lillie-banks' or for an 'Ark of Flowers, | Spangled with deaw-light', and then they call to the 'bright Star', ostensibly the star the wise men followed to find Jesus,

> if [they] shall seek
> Him in the Mornings blushing cheek,
> Or search the beds of Spices through,
> To find him out?

They ask nature, the star, to guide them, and their first inclination is that he will be residing in a pastoral scene. It is assumed that God becoming human will be manifested in

[75] Lisa M. Zeitz, '"What Sweeter Music": The Politics of Praise in Herrick's "Christmas Caroll" and Wesley's "Hymn for Christmas Day"', *English Studies in Canada*, 14.3 (1988), 279.

a setting reminiscent of May. While Christ is not presented as being in a garden-like nativity, the star does tell them where to look, and it says 'No, this ye need not do; | But only come, and see Him rest | A Princely Babe in's Mothers Brest.' So the reader is moved from the festival settings of Spring and May Day to Mary's breast and then back out to the carnival as one character declares after seeing Jesus that they should 'bring | Unto [their] prettie *Twelfth-Tide King*, | Each one his severall offering'. He is declared a king of Twelfth Night, and would then be the reason behind the revelry. To further emphasise this, Herrick then has the Chorus declare that 'when night comes, wee'l give Him wassailing'. In this song, the reader is presented with the idea that the correct response to finding Christ is to then join in the carnival activity of wassailing. The response to the Incarnation is not sombre, it is not to stay and worship, instead the reader is called to revelry and festivities.

But it is not just the birth of Christ that Herrick uses in order to find a return to the Spring, or the carnival of fertility and life. In one of the poems celebrating the festival of the Circumcision of Jesus[76] there is a bizarre image of the life that springs from the act of circumcision. While the importance of the circumcision of Jesus had long been noted by the Church, it takes on new importance with Herrick. Traditionally the importance of the circumcision was that it was the first blood shed by Christ in the redemption of humanity, because if he was to be a perfect sacrifice, then he must be perfectly Jewish in all rites. He must fulfil the law of the Old Testament in order to usher in the redefined relationship between God and humanity found in the New Testament. Jim Ellis has noted that 'the body of Christ in seventeenth-century religious poetry is often a site of both aesthetic and theological difficulty, but perhaps nowhere is this so acute as in poems on the topos of

[76] 'The New-yeeres Gift, or Circumcisions Song, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall' (N-97).

Christ's circumcision'.[77] Herrick has the life-blood spilled from the cut to create life for plants, not souls. The one performing the circumcision is told to

> Touch gently, gently touch; and here
> Spring Tulips up through all the yeere;
> And from His sacred Bloud, here shed,
> May Roses grow, to crown His own deare Head.

So here the reader sees Jesus's penis springing forth tulips, and the blood shed from the cutting of his foreskin is transformed into roses that will crown his head. The image of the roses also foreshadows the crown of thorns he will wear when he hangs on the cross.[78] The first act of redemption of the world looks to the most carnal part of Christ's body, his penis, and finds that the life that flows from it is not immaterial salvation of the soul, but rebirth of the natural world. The carnal of Jesus's body is the source of life for the material, and I believe that Janie Caves McCauley is wrong when declaring that Herrick's circumcision poems 'reflect a sincere, extreme devotion to Christ',[79] because Christ seems often to become conflated with the King of England, and there is always an element of doubt, bargaining, or magic involved in the poems that undermines any declaration of 'sincere, extreme devotion'.

Herrick returns to the circumcision in another poem where he does discuss the idea of a spiritual salvation, but it is still discussed in a very physical and carnal manner. In 'To his Saviour. The New yeers gift' the reader finds Herrick negotiating an exchange with

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[77] Jim Ellis, 'The Wit of Circumcision, the Circumcision of Wit', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (London, 1995), p. 62.
[78] Frances M. Malpezzi, 'The Feast of Circumcision: The Return to Sacred Time in Herrick's "Noble Numbers"', *Notre Dame English Journal* 14.1 (1981), 32.
[79] James Caves McCauley, 'On the "Childhood of the Yeare": Herrick's *Hesperides* New Year's Poems', *George Herbert Journal* 14.1&2 (1991), 72.

Christ for a kind of salvation. The poem begins with a short stanza setting the terms for the exchange:

> THat little prettie bleeding part
>
> Of Foreskin send to me:
>
> And Ile returne a bleeding Heart,
>
> For New-yeers gift to thee.

The very physical imagery of a bleeding foreskin and a bleeding heart, while symbolising the redemption of the soul, also seems to allow for a somewhat literal reading. The second, and final, stanza bears this out when Herrick writes that ,

> Rich is the Jemme that thou did'st send,
>
> Mine's faulty too, and small:
>
> But yet this Gift Thou wilt commend,
>
> Because I send thee *all*.

The 'prettie bleeding part' is now a 'Jemme', but in the next line the reader is presented with the fact that it is 'faulty too', just like Herrick's heart. A part of the body of God incarnate is 'faulty', and yet it can still be exchanged for salvation. Herrick looks to the one part of Jesus's body that is cut off and cast away, his foreskin, as the proper sacrifice for healing his heart. There is no discussion of Good Friday or Easter, instead the circumcision is enough. And then Herrick ends the stanza with what might be one of the most peculiar endings to a devotional poem, and while it can come across as a 'pleasant

little game',[80] this game is also unsettling because there is a winner in the competition, and it is not God. Herrick has a triumphal ending because he considers his gift to be greater than Christ's. Jesus is only going to give him a part of one organ, just a little tossed away something, whereas Herrick is sending his whole heart, and while Malpezzi argues that the exchange represents a circumcision of the heart,[81] there is the problem that Herrick does not offer a piece or cutting of the heart, but all of it. He does not circumcise his heart; he presents everything, and in doing so he tells Jesus, and his readers, that he is the more generous of the two and this is why God will 'commend' the 'Gift'.

Herrick's incarnational theology is a theology of the physical. And this application of God's redemptive work in nature is not a call to change the order of the world as it exists, such as in Lanyer's retelling of the Passion; instead the incarnate Lord brings forth and incarnates the world just as it is, and through the combination of the carnal, carnival, and carnivorous, the devout are able to create a limited paradise that ensures that every participant receives at least a fleeting taste of heaven while here on earth. Since no living person can know with absolute certainty that there is an afterlife, his poems' 'ostensible concern is with the fate of the body, not the soul. They make no promise of resurrection, only the inevitability and universality of death'.[82] If Herrick cannot guarantee salvation, then he, as priest, can at least give his parishioners the opportunity to partake in a redeemed world, even if that means just one festival at a time.

[80] 'Herrick's *Noble Numbers* and the Politics of Playfulness', p. 118.
[81] 'The Feast of Circumcision', pp. 36-7.
[82] '"*Times trans-shifting*": Herrick in Meditation', p. 103.

VI

‘LOOKE DOWNE TO HEAVEN’: EXPERIENCING THE INCARNATION IN RICHARD CRASHAW’S POETRY

Richard Crashaw is a devotional poet who often inspires more discomfort than appreciation. Although he is often discussed in terms of his mystical and otherworldly imagery, he still spends much of his time dwelling on the pre-resurrected Jesus. And it is this emphasis on the body of Jesus, either before the Passion or hanging on the cross, which creates much of the poetry that he is reviled for writing. This devotional poetry creates an unease in the reader and critic that is unsettling because of how it presents Jesus, and yet I believe that this unease, this anxiety, originates from Crashaw. I do not see him as a naïve, otherworldly mystic who was often unsuccessful in portraying his visions to his readers. I do not believe that the discomfort that arises from reading his verses should be seen as a failure on his part; rather, that it is how we must respond to his verse. While it seems that many of his modern critics are uncomfortable with the images Crashaw gives us to meditate on, I believe that these images are signs of the discomfort Crashaw experienced in his attempts to ensure a communion with the Incarnation. He is not a poet who joins with doubting Thomas asking to put his fingers in the resurrected Christ’s hands and his hands in the resurrected Christ’s side;[1] instead he wants to put his mouth to the body of Jesus hanging dead on the cross, bruised, bloody, and naked. John Donne’s anxiety over the continuation of the flesh after the resurrection led him to attempt to use language that compared salvation to God penetrating him, whereas Crashaw’s anxiety

[1] John 20.27, William Aldis Wright (ed.), *The Authorized Version of the English Bible, 1611*, 5 vols., (Cambridge, 1909), all quotations from the Bible are from this edition.

concerning the physicality of the Saviour leads him to envision penetrating the flesh of God. This penetration is not through fingers and hands but through the fluids of the body. As Paul A. Parrish says of blood and tears and devotion in Crashaw’s poetry, ‘these images depend ultimately on the paradoxical conjunction of blood and water at the climactic event of the Incarnation, the crucifixion’.[2] The Incarnation and crucifixion meet in God’s act of redemption, and so the reader finds that tears and blood and saliva are the commerce of redemption, devotion, and communion in the poetry of Richard Crashaw.

Critical discussion of Crashaw’s poetry almost always begins by attempting to apologise for studying his verses. The anxiety of the critic over the relative merits of this poet tends to be discussed through three approaches. The first is that his poems, especially ‘The Weeper’ and ‘Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked’ and many of the other poems in *Steps to the Temple*, are terrible, are examples of ‘bad taste’[3] (unfortunately this never seems to be a conscious pun), and that if we are to find any worth in studying his poetry, it would be best to look to the ‘more mature’ poems found in *Carmen Deo Nostro*.[4] The second is that the grotesque poetry of Richard Crashaw can be explained by the scant biographical information that we can obtain. This often plays out in the application of psychological theories to the poetry and biography of Crashaw, usually with the emphasis on his Puritan father and the early deaths of his mother and stepmother.[5] The third then allows the ‘bad poems’ to exist and looks at his overall output as a poet, often defending his poetic value through attempting to place the poems in various strains of mediaeval or Roman Catholic devotional traditions[6] or through showing how the poems changed for the

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[2] Paul A. Parrish, *Richard Crashaw* (Boston, 1980), p. 58.
[3] Adams, Robert Martin. ‘Taste and Bad Taste in Metaphysical Poetry: Richard Crashaw and Dylan Thomas’, *The Hudson Review* 8.1 (1955), 61-77.
[4] Elizabeth H. Hageman’s ‘Calendrical Symbolism and the Unity of Crashaw’s “Carmen Deo Nostro”’, *Studies in Philology* 77.2 (1980), 161-179, can be seen doing this.
[5] A form of this can be seen in Susannah B. Mintz’s ‘The Crashavian Mother’, *Studies in English Literature* 39.1 (1999), 111-129.
[6] A. R. Cirillo, ‘Crashaw’s "Epiphany Hymn": The Dawn of Christian Time’, *Studies in Philology* 67.1 (1970), 67-88.

better when they were further edited for *Carmen Deo Nostro*.[7] This chapter will fall somewhere in the third camp. It will largely focus on the poems found in *Steps to the Temple*, especially those considered to have been written in 'bad taste', but it will not try to redeem them through considering mediaeval or Roman Catholic devotional practices, nor will the chapter argue for a maturing taking place between the publication of the *Steps to the Temple* and *Carmen Deo Nostro*; rather I will argue that the value of the poems comes from the fact that they make the reader uncomfortable. This anxiety felt by the readers should be experienced, and the anxiety is used to help contemplate the physical Lord before leading the reader on to a contemplation of the heavens and God's reign in them. Ultimately, the anxiety brought by the reading of Crashaw's verse has two trajectories. There is the anxiety experienced by the reader who is uncomfortable with being forced to meditate on the concept of having to actually consume the body of Christ. Often, this is not an idealised or metaphorised body of Jesus, instead the reader is asked to suck or kiss the very real and very dead body of Jesus hanging on the cross. Then there is the anxiety of the poet who is fearful of an inability to truly commune with and experience the Incarnation in the flesh because of the distance of space and time that separates all those who come after the Passion from the physical Christ. Yet, as one critic argues, for Crashaw, the Incarnation 'was the central fact in the world's history, not that Christ had died for man to satisfy God's justice and redeem his elect, but that God should have come into the world, stooping his glory to the meanness of earth, adding to his ancient cares the littleness of human life',[8] and through 'stooping' God provides a way to experience the divine in natural terms, though Crashaw does not treat the Incarnation with 'a rare tenderness, and an exquisite delicacy',[9] rather he allows the beauty of the birth of God and

[7] For example see Kerby Neill, 'Structure and Symbol in Crashaw's *Hymn in the Nativity*', *PMLA* 63.1 (1948), 101-13.
[8] Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets* (New York, 1956), p. 233.
[9] Constance Spender, 'Richard Crashaw, 1613-1648', *Contemporary Review*, 116 (1919), 212.

the brutality of the execution of the divine to be realised in exceptional language. This also shows what Ellrodt misses when he states that ‘the Nativity or the Crucifixion will take precedence over the paradoxes of the Incarnation and the Redemption’[10] in Crashaw’s poetry. There is no Nativity or Crucifixion to meditate upon without the paradoxes of Incarnation and Redemption. These cannot be separated from each other, because they are all actions that feed into one another, and so writing of one cannot help but speak on the others, whether explicitly or implicitly. Crashaw uses these natural terms, and in particular the most intimate parts of the body, the liquids that fill all flesh, and makes them express themselves from one body onto and into another as a way for the divine and human to flow between and comingle with one another.

In deciding to primarily focus on the poems in *Steps to the Temple* rather than those found in *Carmen Deo Nostro*, it should not be understood that this is an attempt to favour one collection over another, nor should this be read as a statement of belief regarding which volume was Crashaw’s authorial collection. Because we know so little concerning the publication of the two versions of *Steps to the Temple* (the 1646 and 1648) and the posthumous publication in 1652 of *Carmen Deo Nostro*, there does not currently appear to be a way to definitively assert the supremacy of one volume over another. The two volumes of *Steps* seem to function as collected works of the poetry of Crashaw, whereas *Carmen*, with its thirty-three poems, mirroring the thirty-three years of Jesus’ life, and heavy emphasis on the more sacred poetry of Crashaw seems to be a volume specifically designed for devotional purposes. All of these could be the design of Crashaw, or of editors, or a mixture of both, but currently there is no way to determine this for certain. Because of the uncertainty of the composition and compilation of the volumes, and that *Steps to the Temple* is both chronologically and thematically a bridge between the first

[10] Robert Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets* (Oxford, 2000), p. 218.

volume of Crashaw’s verse, *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber*, and the final *Carmen Deo Nostro*, there is a richness to be found in the two volumes of *Steps to the Temple*. As an indicator of the centrality of *Steps to the Temple*, many of the epigrams in *Steps to the Temple* are translations by Crashaw of his Latin poems in *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber*. And in the case of poems such as ‘Luc. 11.27. Beatus venter & ubera, &c’, its translation in the form of ‘Blessed be the paps’ is more Incarnational and disturbing in the English. As will be seen, Crashaw heightens rather than lessens the physicality and grotesquery of the image of a son suckling his mother at his bloody breast. Additionally, many of the poems in *Carmen Deo Nostro* first appear in *Steps to the Temple*, and while rewritten, and at times re-titled, they still maintain an emphasis on the body of Christ as a vision for devotion. With this in mind, the chapter will focus on *Steps to the Temple*, particularly the 1648 edition, because little criticism has been devoted to the incarnational theology presented in the volume, and because it is in the two volumes of *Steps to the Temple* that the imagery and importance of the bodily fluids of Jesus are given precedence. This is not to say that *Carmen Deo Nostro* is devoid of the themes of liquid communion between the believer and their Saviour, in fact, the continued presence and rewriting of ‘The Weeper’ in the two volumes of *Steps to the Temple* and *Carmen Deo Nostro* is one of the strongest indicators for the importance of this most liquid of poems, but through the less structured and more varied *Steps to the Temple* the reader is presented with a fuller picture of the devotional focus of Crashaw’s worship of the body and blood of Jesus.

In the literary criticism focussing on the theology presented in Crashaw’s sacred poetry, there has been a significant emphasis on the Incarnational theology contained in the verses, but this criticism has tended to focus largely on the poems found in *Carmen Deo Nostro*. And in the theology of *Carmen Deo Nostro* that is discussed, primary attention has been given to liturgy and the concept of negative theology in relation to the

doctrine of the Incarnation,[11] and while the work done in this area has been of high merit, there has been less attention given to the discussion of how the body of Jesus is presented to the reader, and the expectation of how the reader will then react to this presentation. While some work has discussed the body of Christ in Crashaw’s poetry, such as in Richard Rambuss’s *Closet Devotions*, the emphasis has largely been on the sexual and erotic imagery used in Crashaw’s descriptions. This is certainly a valid area for study, but I hope to show that this obsession with the body of Christ both includes and moves beyond the erotic, and that the eroticism is also a part of the anxiety that comes from trying to physically interact with a physical Saviour who no longer bodily exists for the believer to touch and taste.

The anxiety of Crashaw’s devotional verse is twofold: there is the anxiety of the reader and the anxiety of the poet. The two anxieties serve different, but equally useful, roles in trying to approach God through the poetry of Richard Crashaw. The anxiety of the reader is the anxiety of being invited to touch and taste the body of Jesus. This anxiety appears to be as old as the Passion story itself with the example of Thomas’s demand to touch the body of the resurrected Jesus and then recoiling when being presented with the opportunity to do just this.[12] The continuing discomfort with the Incarnation and the divine made low while still divine – all God and all man – can be found in a more modern example. In the modernist work *Miss Lonelyhearts*, by Nathanael West, there is a character named Shrike who often mockingly uses theological jargon to comment on society, yet his mocking rants are oddly similar to the sincerity found in Crashaw’s verse. In one scene the character of Miss Lonelyhearts is being mocked for his belief in Christianity by Shrike, while Shrike is also attempting to seduce his mistress. The rant reads:

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[11] Jeffrey Johnson, ‘“Til We Mix Wounds”: Liturgical Paradox and Crashaw’s Classicism’, in Helen Wilcox, et al (ed.), *Sacred and Profane* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 251-258.
[12] John 20.26-8.

> "I am a great saint," Shrike cried, "I can walk on my own water. Haven't you ever heard of Shrike's Passion in the Luncheonette, or the Agony in the Soda Fountain? Then I compared the wounds in Christ's body to the mouths of a miraculous purse in which we deposit the small change of our sins. It is indeed an excellent conceit."[13]

It is an excellent conceit indeed, and in Crashaw's case, he is quite happy to focus his readers' attentions on the wounds of Christ's body, but rather than the wounds being 'mouths of a miraculous purse', they are bloody mouths for kissing. The absurdity presented by Shrike is not far removed from Crashaw's earnest devotional emphasis. Likewise, Miss Lonelyhearts later seeks to pray, but can only think of the mocking prayer taught to him by Shrike, and so he quits trying to pray so as not to repeat the words of Shrike. The prayer that he has learned is:

> "Oh, Lord, we are not of those who wash in wine, water, urine, vinegar, fire, oil, bay rum, milk, brandy, or boric acid. Oh, Lord, we are of those who wash solely in the Blood of the Lamb."[14]

This prayer of jest could easily be offered by Crashaw as a prayer of earnest devotion. West perfectly captures these two strains of modern anxiety in *Miss Lonelyhearts*. There is the devout believer who does not want to think of Christ in such human and grotesque ways, and there is the scoffer who believes that an attack on Christianity is to emphasise the humanity of Jesus. But neither of these anxieties is the anxiety of Richard Crashaw.

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[13] Nathanael West, *Miss Lonelyhearts & The Day of the Locust* (New York, 2009), p. 7.
[14] *Miss Lonelyhearts*, p. 9.

The anxiety of Richard Crashaw is located in the very place that the Eucharist is supposed to act as a bridge. The unease expressed in his poetry finds its locus at the place in which the believer, removed from first century Jerusalem and the ability to physically see and touch the Incarnation, must look to signs and wonders to try to achieve communion with God. In order to bridge this gap, Richard Crashaw continuously attempts to imagine and provide the fleshiest of christs so that through the contemplation of the physical, the reader can participate in and understand the Incarnation, thereby bringing the reader through the flesh of God and into the divine and the mystery of the heavens in which Crashaw desires to exist. While it is problematic to use the visual art term ‘baroque’ when referring to poetry, Hart and Stevenson’s description of the purpose of the images in baroque art applies well to the aims of Crashaw’s sacred verse. They state,

> While in the long run the viewer of a religious painting in the baroque style transcends its physicality in his imagination, he does so only after experiencing emotional contact with earthly things. Baroque painting is typically very immediate. The implication of “per sensus ad salvationem” is not that one may view and pass by the physical world on the way to salvation but that ascent is to be achieved by travelling right through the centre of sensory experience.[15]

Crashaw’s anxiety exists in the problem of whether or not his poetry can do just this. And by his attempts to bring the reader, by way of the senses, through the physical Saviour and into a communion with the Divine, he often imagines those who had direct bodily contact with Jesus while on earth. Deneen Senasi has also commented on the desire of Crashaw to bridge the distance between believer and God through his imagery, in this she states:

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[15] Clive Hart and Kay Gilliland Stevenson, *Heaven and the Flesh* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 80.

> Crashaw’s poetry reflects the semiotic sophistication of that admixture of Word and flesh, as he incorporates the body into the Word as an integral part of the sacred ritual of reading. In this way, the body becomes a sign of the Word and the Word a sign of the body, while significance materializes in both directions at once.[16]

Senasi has touched on something that has been largely missing in the discussion of Crashaw, namely, the attempt to make the Word flesh through the use of words, and so we read that she finds that ‘Crashaw’s work embraces this admixture of Word and flesh, insisting that we see as we read and that we read as we see, thereby transcending the boundaries of both’,[17] and furthermore, ‘the matter of words in all its senses, become clear, as this poet of substance and sign transubstantiates the poem itself from word to “flesh” and back again’.[18] Senasi is quite correct in her assertions, and we see them built upon by Nandra Perry when she argues that ‘Crashaw grounds his poetics in the Passion. His goal is not so much to signify as to transfuse the reader with divine love, thereby incorporating him or her into the body of Christ’,[19] but whereas they focus on the flesh and the verses found in *Carmen Deo Nostro*, this chapter will focus on that which flows from the flesh in *The Steps to the Temple*, because it is in the transitive expression of the bodies’ fluids that the movement of devotion can flow from believer to the Divine and back again. The verses more than transubstantiate, they are consumed, and they are more than bodily present, they are flowing and gushing forth from the pages and onto the reader, so it is in these tales of physical contact, Crashaw emphasises experiences that require the exchange

[16] Deneen Sensai, ‘A Matter of Words’, *Religion & Literature* 36.3 (2004), 3.
[17] ‘A Matter of Words’, p. 20.
[18] ‘A Matter of Words’, p. 20.
[19] Nandra Perry, ‘“Tis Heav’n She Speakes”: Lady Religion, Saint Teresa, and the Politics of Ceremony in the Poetry of Richard Crashaw’, *Religion & Literature* 38.2 (2006), 12.

of bodily fluids, whether tears, mother’s milk, blood, or saliva, and as Austin Warren points out, the fluids ‘are constantly mixing in ways paradoxical and miraculous’.[20] It must also be noted that the constancy of the imagery of fluids can seem bizarre or excessive, as Mario Praz states, ‘Metaphors drawn from blood, wine, . . . recur in him with an insistence which seems extraordinary even in a Catholic, accustomed to meditate on the eucharistic mystery’;[21] however, as ‘extraordinary’ as the use of such images may be, they are central to Crashaw’s imagery, as George Walton Williams has shown.[22] As he states:

> The symbolic liquids themselves reflect two other symbolic concepts in the poetry. They are susceptible to quantity and to color. The liquids have meaning in tiny drops and in great quantities: in springs, fountains, rills, rivers, torrents, floods, seas, oceans; in dew rain, showers, deluge.[23]

The ability of liquid to be individual drops and floods allows Crashaw to move from the small to the large and back again with a single conceit; also, the ability of fluid to be clear, white, or red means that water, blood, and milk can baptise, purify, and feed. It is symbolism that fits perfectly with his devotional practice of moving from earth to heaven and back, from flesh to divine, and encompassing all the sacraments in one image, and when it comes to the Incarnation, we see that what is inside must come out and be taken in by another for communion to exist, and perhaps through visualising the bodies of those who physically knew Jesus, those of us who are physically removed from Jesus can partake as well. For, as Gerard Meath says,

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[20] Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw* (University, LA, 1939), p. 188.
[21] Mario Praz,*The Flaming Heart* (Garden City, NY, 1958), p. 254.
[22] George Walton Williams, *Image and Symbol in the Sacred Poetry of Richard Crashaw* (Columbia, SC, 1963), pp. 84-104.
[23] *Image and Symbol*, p. 84.

> But the fundamental inspiration of all Crashaw's poetry . . . is the love of God in all its forms, and particularly as it is symbolised in blood, tears, and water. Moreover, and this must be emphasised if we are to understand Crashaw, the traditional theology of the Incarnation and the sacraments shapes and deepens this imagery.[24]

In addition to the physical movement that allows for communion, there is also a chronological movement that takes place, in that Crashaw tries to move the reader through space and time to the place in which these events take place, as Lorraine Roberts has said, 'the major subject and theme of almost all his sacred poetry – the Incarnation and its meaning in human history'.[25] As Robert Ellrodt notes of Crashaw, 'In relating past events he commonly relies on the narrative present, for he is concerned with the immediate impact of the emotion excited',[26] and this 'emotion excited' is often of devotional purpose and moves the religious experience from the contemplation of a past event to the participation in a present occurrence. In speaking of the paradox of the divine descending so that the created can ascend, Parish states, 'The prominence given to paradox suggests how fully Crashaw sees the principle of the Incarnation residing in other circumstances. If the miracle of the Incarnation is true, then nothing is too farfetched or impossible'.[27] In this chapter I will be primarily focussing on how tears, blood, and the mouth in Crashaw's devotional verse express and consume the Incarnation.

The devotional poem 'The Weeper' is perhaps Crashaw's most discussed poem, though few kind words are spent on it.[28] Still, it is an appropriate introduction to the English devotional verses of Crashaw. Whether placed first in *The Steps to the Temple* by

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[24] Gerard Meath, 'The Tumbling Images of Richard Crashaw', *The Listener* 42 (1949), 367.
[25] Lorraine M. Roberts, 'The "Truewit" of Crashaw's Poetry', in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw* (London, 1995), p. 175.
[26] *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, p. 146.
[27] *Richard Crashaw*, p. 58.
[28] As can be seen in 'Taste and Bad Taste', pp. 66-71

Crashaw or an anonymous editor, the reader is quickly able to understand what to expect from what has been called the 'worst of our best poetry.'[29] The poem is effusive in its anatomising Mary Magdalene's tears that she sheds on the feet of Jesus, anointing them so that she can wash them. The imagery of the poem is hyperbolic, and at times absurd, but it points to one thing, the body of Christ. While Mario Praz famously referred to the poem as 'a rosary of epigrams or madrigals clumsily linked together, without progression',[30] there have been some attempts to find a narrative or unifying theme to the poem, such as Marc F. Bertonasco's reading of the poem in the meditation model created by St. Francis de Sales or A. J. Smith's declaration that the poem 'is a *tour de force* of wit' in the Petrarchan tradition.[31] In this study of 'The Weeper', I will be following the work of Paul A. Parish,[32] but where he sees this poem as not being representative of Crashaw as a poet, this chapter will argue that the themes and images contained in the poem are pivotal to one's understanding of Crashaw's view of the relationship between God and his believers. Like Parish, the discussion that follows will trace the movement of the tears as the unifying theme of 'The Weeper'; however, whereas he does recognise the Christological focus of the poem, he does not comment on the incarnational paradox inherent in the movement of Magdalene's tears, which is what this section will focus on and put into context with the rest of Crashaw's devotional verse. The poem in the 1648 version is twenty-three stanzas long, with each stanza consisting of six lines. The poem begins in grand fashion with the overabundance of tears being addressed before the one shedding the tears:

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[29] Richard Rambuss, 'Sacred Subjects and the Aversive Metaphysical Conceit: Crashaw, Serrano, Ofili', *ELH* 71.2 (2004), 501.
[30] *The Flaming Heart*, p. 218.
[31] Marc F. Bertonasco, *Crashaw and the Baroque* (University, AL, 1971), pp. 94-117; A. J. Smith, *Metaphysical Wit* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 176.
[32] *Richard Crashaw*, pp. 109-117.

HAile *Sister Springs*
Parents of Silver-forded rills!
Ever bubling things!
Thawing Christall! Snowy Hills!
Still spending, never spent; I meane
Thy faire Eyes sweet *Magdalene*. (1-6)[33]

The exuberance, the exclamation marks, the 'still spending, never spent' imagery, the over-the-top conceits he is often derided for are all there in the first stanza, and this continues until the very last line of the poem. When critics complain of Crashaw's baroque, or foreign, or Catholic, or grotesque imagery, it is often to this poem that they turn for support of their rants, and Crashaw does seem to supply everything needed to question his abilities to control his poetry. The verses move from Magdalene's eyes (stanzas 1-3), up to the heavens (stanzas 4-6), are breakfasted upon by the cherubim (stanza 4), return to earth where they water and refresh an Edenic land (stanzas 7-8), become personified as various attributes and gods where they live in an other-worldly paradise above the earth (stanzas 9-18), then move between space and time in a struggle to find their proper dwelling (stanzas 19-21), and then something very interesting takes place. The final two stanzas argue with each other, and the final two lines subvert all that has come before. In the end, this poem is not actually about the overflowing of the tears and their mystic or other worldly properties, instead, the whole purpose of the tears is to land on the very human, the very fleshly, and the very dirty feet of Jesus.

As the summary in the previous paragraph indicates, there is a struggle taking place in the poem. The tears, the devotion to Jesus, are fighting between the earth and the

[33] All quotes from Crashaw's poetry are from L. C. Martin (ed.), *The Poems English Latin and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, 2nd edn., (Oxford, 1957), unless otherwise noted.

heavens, between the idealised and the real. The imagery is continuously trying to overcome the reality of their existence as saltwater falling from the eyes of a prostitute. Crashaw begins in an overwhelming excitement. The first stanza sets the tone that this ‘Weeper’ is no ordinary mortal. As we continue we find the poet stating that ‘Heavens thy faire Eyes bee, | Heavens of ever-falling stars’. (7-8) And as they are ‘Heavens’, the poet quickly realises his mistake in associating them with a fallen woman, so she begins to be forgotten, and her eyes of heaven shed their tears up to their rightful place:

> It is not for our Earth and us,
> To shine in things so pretious.
>
> Upwards thou dost weepe,
> Heavens bosome drinks the gentle streame.
> Where th’ milky rivers meet,
> Thine Crawles above and is the Creame.
> Heaven, of such faire floods as this,
> Heaven the Christall Ocean is. (17-24)

The tears of Magdalene are too good for this world, in fact they are not even temporal matter issued from her eyes. They are transfigured into divine materials. And in this, though the person of Magdalene begins to drop away, there are indicators that she too is being transfigured along with her tears. Her eyes have already been declared ‘Heavens’, but with her fallen body, her profession as a prostitute, we see her breasts, and their issuance being redeemed in a subtle manner. Her tears become the ‘Creame’ that ‘Crawles above’ ‘Where th’ milky rivers meet’. And these are consumed by ‘Heavens bosome’, in

fact, in the next stanza this image is expanded as we are told that ‘Every morne’ (25) a ‘briske Cherub something sips’ (26) from the river, and that the drink of milk for breakfast sates him through the day. The use of the imagery of liquid, milk, the Milky Way, and breasts cannot help but bring erotic imagery to mind. Robert Herrick even has an epigram that is erotic and uses the same imagery. Herrick’s ‘Upon Julia’s breasts’ (H-230) reads:

> DIsplay thy breasts, my *Julia*, there let me
> Behold that circummortall purity:
> Betweene whose glories, there my lips Ile lay,
> Ravisht, in that faire *Via Lactea*.[34]

The breasts and their association with the heavenly stars clearly had an erotic connection, so with Magdalene’s tears becoming heavenly milk in the ‘bosome’ of heaven, we see the poet trying to also move our minds from the fallness of the sinful prostitute to a redeemed woman whose eyes weep tears that become mother’s milk, and transcend the body of ‘The Weeper’. Her eyes and breasts have been transformed. Her sight and her works are made holy as they rise from the earth in which they have been trapped, and from here, we leave terra firma, not to return to a true earth until the end of the poem.

It is the final three stanzas that create a conversation between the tears and a character that may be the author or reader. The discussion begins with

> Say watry Brothers
> Yee simpering sons of those faire eyes,
> Your fertile Mothers.

[34] J. Max Patrick (ed.). *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick* (New York, 1963).

What hath our world that can entice
You to be borne? what is’t can borrow
You from her eyes swolne wombes of sorrow. (121-6)

The enquiry begins with a desire to find out why these tears, which have been described in such lavish and even gaudy terms, have their being. However, we aren’t given an answer. As the next stanza shows, the questioning of the tears continues with no place for response.

Whither away so fast?
O whither? for the sluttish Earth
Your sweetnesse cannot tast
Nor does the dust deserve your Birth.
Whither hast ye then? o say
Why yee trip so fast away? (127-132)

The questions mount quickly, and we see mentions of the real earth again. It is a ‘sluttish Earth’. While the idealised eyes can be pure and yet ‘swolne wombes’, the earth, the very real ‘dust’, is dirty and promiscuous. This could be a reminder of who is crying the tears, but it is most certainly an argumentative stance that is taken in regards to the heavenly realms in which this devotion seems to be taking place, a world of neo-platonic existence that would be tainted by true flesh, and the actual biblical event of a prostitute crying over a holy man’s feet, and then using her hair to wash the dirt off of him.[35] And in the final stanza, we get the tears’ response to the questions, and the response does not point back to

[35] Luke 7.37-8.

the idealised world. They do not describe themselves in the romantic, mystic, or exuberant manner which the poet has been using. No, the tears point to the ground.

> We goe not too seeke
> The darlings of *Aurora’s* bed,
> The Roses modest cheeke
> Nor the Violets humble head.
> No such thing; we goe to meet
> A worthier object, *Our Lords* feet. (133-8)

Here, the tears reject the rest of the poem. They reject night and an idealised world. They reject the idea of being too good for ‘dust’ and the ‘sluttish Earth’. These images from the rest of the poem, while beautiful, and at times reminiscent of Herrick’s beloved flower poems, are a false conceit. Critics are right to find these images to be absurd, because the tears also see them as such. The point of the poem is not in the preceding lines of the poem; it is in the last two lines, ‘No such thing; we goe to meet | A worthier object, *Our Lords* feet’. And it must be pointed out that this refutation is given greater weight in the version of ‘The Weeper’ found in *Carmen Deo Nostro*. In the *Carmen* version of the poem, the final lines found in *Steps* expands from one stanza to two.

> We goe not to seek,
> The darlings of Auroras bed,
> The rose’s modest Cheek
> Nor the violet’s humble head.
> Though the Feild’s eyes too WEEPERS be

Because they want such TEARES as we.

Much lesse mean we to trace
The Fortune of inferior gemmes,
Preferr’d to some proud face
Or pertch’t upon fear’d Diadems.
Crown’d Heads are toyes. We goe to meet
A worthy object, our lord’s FEET. (175-186)

The tears now explicitly reject all that has come before, and the feet of Jesus are no longer ‘worthier’, they are the only objects in the poem that the tears find to be ‘worthy’. As Parish notes, ‘nowhere else in the poem, except for the very last line, are we aware of Christ’s presence’,[36] and when he does arrive, the focus is on the lowest part of his body; however, more than this, Gary Kuchar points out that

> In what is surely one of the most vividly liturgical moments in the history of English poetry of tears, Crashaw seeks to harness the animating force within prosopopoeia as a way of realizing what we might call a Eucharist effect, a stepping out from representation to reality. By signalling a shift in metrical feet of a verbal commemoration to the real feet of a transubstantiated God, Crashaw offers a highly figural disavowal of figurality, an attempt to poetically re-create the incarnating force of Christ’s real presence within the Eucharist.[37]

[36] *Richard Crashaw*, p. 115.
[37] Gary Kuchar, ‘Marvell’s Anamorphic Tears’, *Studies in Philology* 103.3 (2006), 372.

Kuchar is correct here, but he stops short. The power of rhetoric has been used to try to move the poem beyond the page and into the life of the reader, but it is more than just an example of the Eucharist. A believer can attend church and participate in the communion meal, so there is no need for a poem to try to present to the reader what a priest can do during weekly services; instead this poem allows the reader to participate in something that is not contained in the Eucharist, it allows the reader to participate in the act of a penitential lover of Christ spilling tears upon his feet. The feet of Jesus, dirty from walking, literally the lowest point of his body, are the worthy object discussed in this poem. With this simple and powerful final couplet (in either version of the poem), the reader is forced back to the 'sluttish', or 'sordid',[38] 'Earth' and the 'dust' to experience where God can really be found, where heaven actually exists – there on the ground. They are not the night sky, or the Milky Way, or breakfast for the cherubim. They are not sorrow personified, or pretty adornments for perfect, pastoral flowers. They are the result of a bereft woman crying. And they fall. As Marjorie E. Lange says, 'Nowhere is the core of Crashaw's vision more clearly expressed than in the simple recognition that the wonder of Mary Magdalene's EYES, praised through stanza after stanza is dwarfed by the arrival at the lord's FEET'.[39]

What is interesting to note is that the very next poem in *Steps to the Temple* involves Crashaw using the same conceit. In *Steps to the Temple*, 'The Teare' reads like an attempt to write 'The Weeper' again, and yet stanzas from 'The Teare' are incorporated into the version of 'The Weeper' that appears in *Carmen Deo Nostro*, and this fact has led some to argue that 'The Teare' represents an earlier version of, or unused material from, 'The Weeper'.[40] When reading the poem, one notices that here again the stanzas are comprised of six lines each and follow the same rhyme scheme of a,b,a,b,c,c. But this

[38] As the term is changed in the version found in *Carmen Deo Nostro*.
[39] Marjory E. King, *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance* (New York, 1996), p. 244.
[40] L. C. Martin's 'Page 83' note to the poem, p. 434.

poem is much shorter, comprising of only eight stanzas. What is especially curious is that while ‘The Weeper’ was a struggle between the ideal and the real, ‘The Teare’ is a struggle by the poet to come to terms with the tears’ assertion in ‘The Weeper’. The poet does not want the tear to be a tear. He wants Mary Magdalene to give birth to something supernatural through the devotional weeping. He wants there to be more to the action than just a woman crying, but in the end, he makes a concession, and agrees to leave the tears in the world, tied to the flesh of Magdalene’s eyes and face. It feels begrudging, but the poet does relent.

Crashaw begins ‘The Teare’ with the stanza

> What bright soft thing is this?
> Sweet *Mary* thy faire Eyes expence?
> A moist sparke it is,
> A watry Diamond; from whence
> The very Terme, I think, was found
> The water of a *Diamond*. (1-6)

And Crashaw begins again the process of trying to divorce the physical from the spiritual, and so he next writes

> O ’tis not a Teare,
> ’Tis a starre about to drop
> From thine eye its spheare (7-9)

But this stanza is then followed with the next beginning ‘O ’tis a Teare’. (13) He pulls himself back from the earlier extravagances, but then can’t help himself, and must move what he now acknowledges to indeed be a tear to be more than merely a tear. It may be a physical tear, but it will be the greatest tear ever shed.

Too true a Teare; for no sad eyne,
How sad so e’re
Raine so true a Teare as thine’. (14-16)

The poet is still trying to force the tear to be more than a tear, and he desires that this act of devotion is not just about crying to and on God; rather, he wants it to be a mystical act that moves beyond its mere physical reality and so the tear is made into a ‘Pearle’ (19) ‘Slipt from *Aurora’s* dewy Brest’; (20) it then becomes a ‘Rose’, (21) and then is described as a ‘watry Blossome’. (29) Yet the poet must return to the issue of dust, from dust you have come and to dust you must return, but ‘The Dust shall never bee thy Bed’, (34) and so ‘A pillow’ the poet will bring, ‘Stuft with Downe of Angels wing’. (35-6) The poet has all but lost the lesson the tears tried to tell him in the ‘The Weeper’. The last two stanzas see him try to completely abandon any pretence of reality, but then he relents. He doubts himself, and the tear is returned:

Thus carried up on high,
(For to Heaven thou must goe)
Sweetly shalt thou lye,
And in soft slumbers bath thy woe;
Till the singing Orbes awake thee,

And one of their bright *Chorus* make thee.

There thy selfe shalt bee
An eye, but not a weeping one,
Yet I doubt of thee,
Whither th’hadst rather there have shone
An eye of Heaven; or still shine here
In th’Heaven of *Mary’s* eye, a *Teare*. (37-48)

The tear returns to Mary’s (a real person) eye. He acknowledges that this is where the tear wants to be, and where the tear truly belongs, and so he must return it to its physical setting. With this we see the struggle between the poet’s desire to remove Mary Magdalene’s tears from her physical person, and his admission that this is where they belong. For the act of devotion to be complete, a prostitute must cry tears that fall on the feet of a man who is God incarnate. The devotion, if it is true devotion to Christ, must meet with him in his physical being, and this is one of Crashaw’s great dilemmas, but as has been said of weeping in his poems, ‘these poems do not look toward heaven for release from grief – but to an earth filled with manifestations of God’s presence’.[41] How can he partake in the physical presence of Christ?

It is interesting that these two poems of tears are followed by an epigram on the baptism of Jesus. The poem ‘On the water of our Lords Baptisme’ is a simple four-line epigram that feels refreshing after the two long meditations on crying. And in this simple poem, Crashaw shows why the two poems on the tears fail and what he must do in order to move from the physical to the Divine. The poem reads:

[41] *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance*, p. 227.

Each blest drop, on each blest limme,
Is washt it selfe, in washing him:
Tis a Gemme while it stayes here,
While it falls hence ’tis a Teare.

The key then is that in ‘The Weeper’ and in ‘The Teare’, the poet was trying to move the act of devotion into the realm of the otherworldly and Divine before it had touched the body of Christ. Salvation must come through the body of Jesus, and so the material can only be transfigured once it has come into contact with Jesus. The tears in the ‘The Weeper’ and ‘The Teare’ had yet to do this, and so they were in error, but the water in the baptism of Jesus touches him, and as it does so, it becomes more than itself. As the water hangs on his body ‘Tis a Gemme’, and when it falls, it is no longer water in the River Jordan, but ‘’tis a Teare’. The physical has touched the Incarnation, and so it can partake in the divine. As a reader continues through *Steps*, they will see this happen time and again, but especially in regards to weeping, eating, and drinking.

There are two epigrams that concern the same biblical tale, the feeding of the multitudes, and though these do not directly mention Jesus, the sacramental and transubstantial imagery is unmistakable. The first of the two epigrams, ‘On the miracle of multiplyed loaves’, is a typical epigram with nice turns of phrase and plays on paradoxes.

See here an easie Feast that knowes no wound,
That under Hungers Teeth will needs be sound:
A subtle Harvest of unbounded bread,
What would ye more? Here food it selfe is fed.

The Eucharistic imagery of the poem is seen in the very first line. This feast of bread, unlike the communion meal to be shared by believers after the resurrection, is whole. The host has not been violated yet. Here the reader also gets the first mention of ‘Teeth’ that becomes so important in the next epigram about the feeding of the multitudes, and this epigram ends in the playful line asking what more we would want, because Crashaw has provided us with the image of Jesus eating bread. Here is a miraculous meal of bread that Jesus gives, and partakes in, as a way to feed his followers. Here the reader sees Christ partaking in a sort of communion meal, but with the seemingly rhetorical question of ‘What would ye more?’ there is the reminder that, in fact, more is needed. This feast must know a ‘wound’ before it is complete, and so although the image of ‘food it selfe is fed’ is indeed incomplete, but it does still meet a need of faith. In this first epigram on the feeding of the multitudes, a physical God provides physical sustenance for his followers, and at the same times proves his own physical existence through eating. These are both important incarnational themes that Crashaw presents his readers, but in the second epigram, ‘On the Miracle of Loaves’, the issue of faith for believers and their need for a physical reality to support that faith is the main point.

The epigram ‘On the Miracle of Loaves’ is merely two lines long, but the emphasis upon the mundane aspect of chewing is made to be one of the proofs of Jesus’ divinity.

> Now Lord, or never, they’l beleeve on thee,
> Thou to their Teeth hast prov’d thy Deity.

Proof of deity has come down to the teeth. This miracle of providing food for his followers is presented by Crashaw as one of the greatest proofs of the God-in-man that

exists in the incarnate Jesus. It is not one of the miracles that one would first think of as a proof of divinity, but to Crashaw it is key. There are the clear indications of a real presence in the bread, and then the fact that those gathered to Jesus are able to 'sink their teeth' into his proof of divinity is of utmost importance to understanding why it is through simple substances, bread and wine, that believers can access the Incarnation. Also, because of the biting and tearing of the bread in their mouths, those gathered are wounding the 'Feast', and these epigrams then seem to contradict Ryan Netzley when he states that Crashaw has created a 'communion that revolves around taste, but avoids all of the messy physical objections – mastication, partition, division . . .',[42] but it is always in 'messy physical objections' that Crashaw works, so while it may be problematic from a Thomist perspective to masticate the deity (as Netzley argues) this is what Crashaw is found to do, in that he specifically points to eating and the teeth as proof of the incarnational workings of God. This feast then foreshadows the communion feast, and reminds the reader that they are the ones who are responsible for wounding the 'Feast', and that, even more importantly, God has both provided the meal, and partaken in it. God both provides Jesus through the birth of the Incarnation, and then participates in the wounding by allowing his crucifixion. The bread has been provided, but the wine and blood are to come.

If 'The Weeper' is often complained of by critics, then the epigram 'Luke 11. Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked' is reviled,[43] and although Eugene R. Cunnar has tried to lessen the impact of the shocking content in this poem (as well as in other verses by Crashaw that involve the consumption of Christ's fluid expressions) by pointing to medieval devotional works that also involve such imagery,[44] it is the very fact that such devotional works are bizarre that helps to move believers past complacency and forces

[42] Ryan Netzley, 'Oral Devotion', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44.3 (2002), 257.
[43] An excellent example of this is found in 'Taste and Bad Taste', pp. 68-9.
[44] Eugene R. Cunnar, 'Opening the Religious Lyric', in John R. Roberts (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), pp. 237-267.

them to confront the strangeness that is the Incarnation dying on the cross as well as the sacrament of communion involving the consumption of the dead and risen saviour through the Eucharist. As Lorraine Roberts says of Crashaw’s use of shocking imagery, ‘he intended to force the reader into seeking the fundamental truth about the “conspiracy” of the sacred and profane, of the created and the creator’.[45] So while these vitriolic responses have garnered much discussion, and while Cunnar has tried to counterbalance the disgust, the disgust is important for the poems to serve their function, and in this it can be said that ‘Blessed be the paps’ is an excellent example of Crashaw’s wit, as A. J. Smith also notes.[46] This poem is an epigram that plays with the title and source story. It deftly uses paradox, and it certainly has quite the surprising turn to finish the poem off.

Suppose he had been Tabled at thy Teates,
Thy hunger feeles not what he eates:
Hee’l have his Teat e’re long (a bloody one)
The Mother then must suck the Son.

There should be no denying that this is a surprising piece of poetry, which R. V. Young sees as Crashaw ‘attempting to impart some sense of the truly shocking implications of Holy Communion’,[47] and the poem should make one uncomfortable; however, that does not mean that it is not a brilliant piece of devotional writing.

In order to begin approaching this very short, yet very complex poem, one must have in mind the story from the Gospel of Luke that Crashaw is using as inspiration for his text, and while Cunnar importantly reminds readers of the medieval devotional tradition of

[45] ‘The “Truewit” of Crashaw’s Poetry’, p. 182.
[46] *Metaphysical Wit*, p. 175.
[47] R. V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 156.

focusing on ‘the theology of the wounds and the profound gender reversal’[48] that comes with Christ suckling his believers at his body, it is in scripture that this poem finds its origin. In Scripture one finds the following, brief conversation between Jesus and one of his followers:

> 27 And it came to passe as hee spake these things, a certain woman of the company lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the wombe that bare thee, and the pappes which thou hast sucked.
> 28 But hee said, Yea, rather blessed are they that heare the word of God, and keepe it.[49]

What is interesting to note here is that the scriptural verses do not show Jesus referencing the crucifixion or resurrection in any way, yet this is the very thrust of Crashaw’s poem. Both Jesus and the poem are addressing the woman who has praised Jesus through praising his mother, but they move in very different directions. The scripture shows Jesus moving the worship away from his mother, and even away from himself, and directing the woman to observe that God’s blessings do not come from physical proximity to Jesus, since what can be physically closer than Jesus in Mary’s womb, but that blessings come from listening to God and obeying. In this configuration, nearness to the physical Christ plays no part in communion with God. However, for Crashaw, physically experiencing the Flesh is the necessary route to nearness with God.

Crashaw begins his response to the anonymous woman in the crowd by asking her to imagine what it would have been like for her to ‘table’ Jesus at her ‘Teates’. He then destroys any wonder which may arise with the idea of God feeding from her by telling her

[48] ‘Opening the Religious Lyric’, p. 260.
[49] Luke 11.27-8.

that she cannot truly comprehend what would be happening. Her ‘hunger feeles not what he eates’, and yet, when Jesus feeds, he will feed all. The final couplet in this poem inverts what motherly sacrifice and feeding is about. The male Jesus will have a ‘Teat’ for suckling, and at it his mother will find nourishment. This ‘bloody one’ that will arrive ‘e’re long’ for the woman, and all of Christ’s followers, is a ghastly, yet theologically sound and profound, reminder of just what comes with the belief in a religion that requires God to become incarnate in the flesh, and then to die for them. Further, he dies for humanity, and from him, humanity must find their life. Crashaw is playing with an amazing amount of concepts in these two lines of verse. First, he graphically portrays Christ providing sustenance for his followers. He then shows Mother Mary as indebted to, and inferior to, her son, because she must ultimately be ‘Tabled at [his] Teates’. He is even using the concept of the Galenic view of the body in which mother’s milk was believed to be a form of blood.[50] Mary may have provided the infant Jesus with life through her transformed blood as he sucked at her breasts, but Jesus provides her with a transformed life through having her suck undiluted blood from his body. He offers life eternal through an unmediated access to his life blood as it flows from teats that have been violently created on his body. And finally, the baseness of the language, the ‘paps’ and ‘Teates’ and ‘suck’, force the reader to confront the reality of the beliefs underpinning both salvation and a transubstantiated communion meal with Jesus. While it is very tempting to read a criticism of both Mary and transubstantiation in these verses due to the poems direct and harsh language, I do not believe that this is what Crashaw intends us to do. I believe that these unsettling lines are also calls to celebration. Only one woman could be so blessed as to nurse the Incarnation, but all can, and must, suck the bloody body of the crucified and risen Lord. Mary was truly blessed to have Jesus at her breast, as we see

[50] Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 26.

Crashaw state in his poem ‘On the Blessed Virgins bashfulnesse’. Here Mother Mary is nursing the infant Jesus, and the blessing she receives in the act comes through Crashaw’s playing with the incarnational paradox. He states

> ’Tis Heav’n ’tis Heaven she sees, Heavens God there lyes
> She can see heaven, and ne’re lift up her eyes:
> This new Guest to her Eyes new Lawes hath given,
> ’Twas once *looke up*, ’tis now *looke downe* to Heaven. (5-8)

In ‘Blessed be the paps’, the reader is invited to join in the incarnational paradox, and to ‘*looke downe* to Heaven’, and we are able to do so with the blessed Virgin, though now none blush. Ellrodt misses the religious importance of this last line when he states that ‘This is a bad conceit . . . for want of a serious meaning’,[51] for how can divinity and eternity contained in the womb of a woman help but be serious? Through the contemplation of this conceit we are all able to approach the body of Jesus, and we can be tabled at the teats of Christ right next to his mother as we too drink of his bloody death and resurrection. Our teeth are given proof of divinity, and our lips suck, as our tongues taste the undiluted ‘milk’ from God as man, and man made mother of all. It is a deeply unsettling epigram, and yet it is beautiful in its willingness to embrace, without reservation, the image of the drinking of the blood and, by inference, the eating of the flesh, but it is also more than this because, as Kimberly Johnson points out regarding the terms ‘suck’ and ‘teat’, ‘Like “suck,” and especially in conjunction with “suck,” “Teat” is a term inescapably tied to the body, not easily assimilable into the sacramental system’.[52] Johnson here hits on a problem that exists when we stop at a Eucharistic understanding of

[51] *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, p. 219.
[52] Kimberly Johnson, ‘Crashaw’s Indigestible Poetics’, *Modern Philology* 107.1 (2009), 36.

Crashaw’s poetry, because, while this element certainly exists, there is more than just the Eucharist. Crashaw is seeking to provide his readers with an experience that cannot be provided within the current ecclesiastical worship, and he does this by trying to not simply provide worshipers with the body and blood of Jesus in the bread and wine, but with the body and blood of Jesus in bodily form. It is not food and drink transfigured, but ‘teat’s and ‘feet’ and ‘eyes’ and ‘mouths’, so that the communicant in reading the poetry is not given elements of Christ, but Christ himself.

While the weeping and biting and sucking have so far been separated by pages in the text, there is a five poem cluster in *Steps to the Temple* in which the bloody suffering of Jesus is given prominence, and in these five poems, we see a summation of the conceits of blood and tears and mouths and gems until, in the final of the five poems, the blood of Christ itself leaves the body and becomes a supernatural deluge of redemption rather than the water flood of destruction. In the end, even a physical element of Jesus is able to take on attributes of the Divine after it moves out from him. His own blood is able to be transformed when it bursts out and is miraculously multiplied so that it may feed the souls of the multitudes.

The grouping of five poems concerning the harming of Jesus’s body begins with the odd and unsettling ‘Our Lord in his Circumcision to his Father’. While many have balked at the image of Mary sucking Jesus, not nearly enough seem disturbed by the image of God sucking the blood from the infant Jesus after his circumcision. As was discussed in the Herrick chapter, the circumcision of Jesus was of utmost importance in the theology of Jesus as the redeeming sacrifice for humanity. In order to be the perfect Paschal Lamb, he had to be perfect and unblemished, which meant no foreskin, and as there is a shedding of blood in this act of obedience for the salvation of the world, so to does Christianity recognise this as the first saving act of the Incarnation on earth. What is not described is

God the Father being told by Jesus to ‘Tast this’ (3) blood spilt from his penis. There is a very combative tone in Jesus’ words as he talks to the Father, and Helen White has even said that ‘The audacity with which these lines treat the wrath of God would be blasphemous if represented as uttered by any but divine lips’.[53] He says to God, ‘Tast this, and as thou lik’st this lesser flood | Expect a Sea, my heart shall make it good’. (3-4) This is clearly not a request, but a demand, and three lines later, the directions that Jesus gives to God become oddly impersonal, they feel angrier, and he states, ‘Then let him drinke, and drinke, and doe his worst, | To drowne the wantonnesse of his wild thirst’. (7-8) Here Crashaw is not just making Mary or Magdalene experience the physicality of the Incarnation, but the first member of the Trinity is also being forced to partake of the blood. Furthermore, the Father is shown as having a ‘wild thirst’. It is ‘wanton’. And there is a rebelliousness, an affront to the Father in the line ‘let him drinke, and drinke, and doe his worst’. In this poem, Crashaw is not allowing any aspect of the sacrificial Incarnation be a pleasant concept to dwell on. There is a need with Crashaw to force the basest aspects of Jesus’ existence upon the Father and upon his readers. He must force the reader to move through space and time in order that they too can see Jesus as he was. Crashaw works through exuberance, or extravagance, or grotesqueness to create images portraying what is an unsettling theology, that of the Incarnate God brutally suffering and dying, and through this a reader cannot help but focus on the God made flesh. No one is free, not Mary, not the Trinity, and not believers coming centuries after the fact, from having to face the horrors of what it meant for Jesus to die. Perhaps through making those who walked with Christ face the terrifying concept of a bloody Lord, Crashaw and his readers may also be able to participate. Crashaw’s identity in Christ does not come from meditation on things that are higher, but on a broken and bloody Lord that must be tasted, chewed, and drunk.

[53] *The Metaphysical Poets*, p. 232.

And so even in his most vulnerable age, when he was an infant, he is not free from violence inflicted on him from above, as he must be cut and pierced to bleed the saving blood that the Father requires, and he must suffer violence from below, as humans enact the violence that causes him pain and death. And those who come after wound him with their teeth through eating the Eucharist. The bleeding penis of the infant Incarnation becomes the cross on which he must die, and the knife that cuts his foreskin becomes the spear that is thrust into him to prove that he has indeed died.

> These purple buds of blooming death may bee,
> Erst the full stature of a fatall tree.
> And till my riper woes to age are come,
> This knife may be the speares *Praeludium*.

Crashaw ties together the circumcision and the crucifixion in this poem, and so too does he do it on the page, as the poem that follows is entitled ‘On the wounds of our crucified Lord’. This is a poem that incorporates much of the stock imagery that Crashaw has come to use: there is the bleeding Christ, sexual (or at least romantic) interaction with his body, and there is blood as rubies and tears as pearls; however, whereas the ‘Mother must suck the Son’ in ‘Blessed be the paps’, here the wounds are mouths and eyes. They bleed, they see, they kiss, and they are legion, for ‘Each bleeding part some one supplies’. (4) These ‘blood-shot eye[s]’ (7) allow Christ’s body to observe everyone who comes to kiss the wounds. He is both looking out and taking in. His body cries and drools blood that his followers are called to kiss. As Vera J. Camden states,

> The wounds here become openings both to flood and to consume: the aim of union with the suffering Christ through the opening of his wounds is metaphorically achieved through encompassing tears and incorporating kisses.[54]

And this Lord that is crucified is a Lord that his followers must still show deference to through the kissing of his feet.

> O thou that on this foot hast laid
> Many a kisse, and many a Teare,
> Now thou shal’t have all repaid,
> Whatsoe’re thy charges were.
>
> This foot hath got a Mouth and lippes,
> To pay the sweet summe of thy kisses:
> To pay thy Teares, an Eye that weeps
> In stead of Teares such Gems as this is. (9-16)

This Lord that is dead and crucified on a cross, covered with bleeding wounds that have transformed into eyes and mouths must be approached as a great Lord or King. Although, as his subjects kiss his feet, his feet have a bloody mouth that can kiss back, and as they weep over his feet, his mouth can drink the tears. Also, at the end of the two stanzas the reader is presented with the imagery of gems again, this then is elaborated on in the final stanza of the poem as the tears of the followers become exchanged for the tears of the ‘blood-shot eye[s]’.

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[54] Vera J. Camden, ‘Richard Crashaw’s Poetry’, *American Imago* 40.3 (1983), p. 265.

The difference onely this appeares,
(Nor can the change offend)
The debt is paid in *Ruby*-Teares,
Which thou in Pearles did’st lend. (17-20)

The weeping, which represents repentance, produces pearls, and these then fall at the feet of Jesus, but in response, the crucified Lord’s eyes bleed rubies. There is an exchange taking place in the redemption, but the petitioners are not able to buy their salvation, they may only give pearls to him for his sacrifice, and they may lay them at his feet, but his feet too produce gems, and they are returned to the believer. The white pearl is made clean through becoming the red ruby, which as Crashaw points out ‘Nor can the change offend’, because in this scenario, the white pearl, though seeming pure in its whiteness and its originating from Jesus, is actually purified when bled upon and made into the red ruby. Once again, it is only after interacting with the physical Jesus that human physicality can take on attributes of the divine, so while the poem does end in tears and blood transformed into gems, this does not lead the reader away from the body of Christ, but back to it. The rubies originate from his eyes, as do the pearls which are returned to him by the readers, and both lead back to the exchange that must happen on the cross as Crashaw has this first meditation on Christ’s body on the cross.

The poem which follows is an epigram continuing the same theme of a bloody Christ, ‘On our crucified Lord Naked, and bloody’. Once again, the epigram is replete with contradictions and paradoxes. The first line is one that contradicts itself as Crashaw presents the reader with the horror of Jesus, God in man, hanging bloody and naked on the cross. In many ways there could be no greater sign of the shame that came with the cross

than God’s naked suffering. The horror shocks the poet, but he quickly recovers and turns the shame on its head.

> Th’ have left thee naked Lord, O that they had’;
> This Garment too I would they had deny’d.
> Thee with thy selfe they have too richly clad,
> Opening the purple wardrobe of thy side.
> O never could bee found Garments too good
> For thee to weare, but these, of thine own blood.

The Lord is not naked, because he is clothed in his own blood. The shame of hanging dead and naked for all to see is transformed into the realisation that he could not be more beautifully clothed, because he is completely covered in his own blood. His wardrobe is the hole in his side created when he was stabbed to ensure that he was indeed dead. He is clothed in death, but paradoxically he is also clothed in his life-giving blood. His spilled blood marks his death, but it is also his life that has flowed out and given life to all. After his dead body draped in blood hangs in this poem, it is moved in the next poem to the tomb, and the tomb then becomes a throne.

‘Easter day’ breaks up the meditation on the bleeding Jesus as it is a poem that does not directly mention Jesus, instead it looks at his tomb. The tomb is transformed from the cold stone to flesh. It becomes a ‘Virgin Tombe’ (2) and ‘Natures new wombe’. (5) It is the new mother of Jesus. Just as his life had to come from a virgin woman, so to does his rebirth come from virgin earth. And here Crashaw plays with the ‘death dying’ trope also seen in Donne’s ‘Holy Sonnet XIV: Death be not proud’, but here death is seen as defeated, and in the defeat, victor.

Death onely by this Dayes just Doome is forc’t to Dye;
Nor is Death forc’t; for may hee ly
Thron’d in thy Grave;
Death will on this condition be content to Dy. (15-18)

Death is seen as a wonderful thing, because through Christ’s death, it was defeated, but in being defeated it was able to participate in the giving of life to all. This short divergence in the five poem sequence does much to remind the reader that while we must look at and physically experience the naked, bloody Lord on the cross, there will be a transformation through his death. Only through the physical Jesus can the Divine be experienced. In Jesus’ resurrection the world can be transformed into Eden. The earth can be a virgin, and Death can be personified and celebrated. God cannot be approached through the mystical, but he can lead to it through his suffering. The following poem is yet another poem on Jesus bleeding, and it acts as a reminder that although we can celebrate ‘Easter day’ we cannot move past the crucifixion yet. We must meet Christ there, and so, once more, we must meditate ‘On the bleeding wounds of our crucified Lord’.

‘On the bleeding wounds’, as has become expected of Crashaw’s verses on Jesus, is gory. This truly is an amazing meditation about how Jesus’s blood is able to save the world through covering sin, but instead of a figurative and poetic covering this is a literal covering. The world was destroyed through the deluge of water, but it is redeemed through a deluge of blood. The first stanza sums up the poem when it states

Jesu, no more, it is full tide
From thy hands and from thy feet,

From thy head, and from thy side,

All thy *Purple Rivers* meet.

And it is from this conceit, the Lord bleeding rivers of blood, that the rest of the poem flows. The wounds are effusive, as is the imagery, until it becomes an ocean, and this ocean is a deluge.

This thy Bloods deluge (a dire chance

Deare Lord to thee) to us is found

A deluge of deliverance,

A deluge least we should be drown’d. (37-40)

It is a deluge of life, and as the waters recede, the reader finds that ‘Nere was’t thou in a sence so sadly true, | The well of living Waters, Lord, till now’. (41-2) With this ending then, the reader is brought back to drinking. If Jesus gives the ‘living water’ that makes one thirst no more,[55] and the living waters are his blood that has saved the world through a deluge, then when we drink of the waters of life, we drink in his blood, and take part in his death and conquering of death.

Crashaw in these poems is desperately trying to bring his readers into contact with the saving blood of Christ, and he has done so through depictions of people interacting with Jesus when he was physically on earth. However, Crashaw himself has not been able to join in with the acts of devotion. He, like his readers, is an outsider. In *Carmen Deo Nostro* we see that he too strives to be there with Jesus and experience his physical presence. In his poem ‘Sancta Maria Dolorum’, he pleads to Mother Mary to be a conduit

[55] John 4.10.

between himself and the historical Jesus she knew and held, so that through the presence of one who was with Christ, he may have access to Christ, thus he cries out

Come wounds! come darts!
Nail’d hands! & peirced hearts!
Come your whole selves, sorrow’s great son & mother!
Nor grudge a younger-Brother
Of greifes his portion, who (had all their due)
One single wound should not have left for you. (75-80)

He calls upon his status as a Child of God, ‘a younger-Brother’, to be able to be one with God, to touch the Incarnation. He wants to share in the wounds, and as he states later in the poem, he wants to share in the blood.

Which these torn hands transcrib’d on thy true heart
O teach mine too the art
To study him so, till we mix
Wounds; and become one crucifix.

O let me suck the wine
So long of this chast vine
Till drunk of the dear wounds, I be
A lost Thing to the world, as it to me. (97-104)

He cries out to Mary to teach him how to become one with Jesus. He wants the same access to the physical Christ that she once had. And when he is able to ‘mix / Wounds’ and ‘suck the wine’, he too will be able to ‘become one crucifix’ with Jesus. He will experience him on the cross. He will become ‘A lost Thing to the world, as it is to [him]’. He will move, by way of the senses, through the physical Jesus and into the Divine other world.

In ‘Sancta Maria Dolorum’, we see that it is indeed through gaining access to the Incarnation as it was on earth that we can know God, and that it is through the times when his physical fluids can interact with ours, through blood, saliva, or tears, that we can become one with him. In her discussion of ‘The Weeper’, Lorraine Roberts most helpfully sums up this phenomenon. Of the poem she states:

> The up-and-down movement throughout the poem establishes a congress between heaven and earth, and that movement is paradoxically reflected in the last lines. Are these the feet of Christ on earth, at the moment of Crucifixion? Or are these the feet of the risen Christ, who has ascended to heaven and is followed by the Queen of Sorrow? Of course they are both, uniting time and space in a manner dear to the heart of all baroque artists, and no less so to Crashaw.[56]

Crashaw, the poet, tries with his words to give the reader this experience, and Crashaw the believer calls on one who knew Jesus in the most intimate of ways, his mother, to do the same for him.

[56] ‘The “Truewit” of Crashaw’s Poetry’, p. 181.

POSTSCRIPT

The paradox of Jesus Christ being fully God and fully human is the centre of the Incarnation and Christianity. As history has shown, to emphasise the divine nature of Jesus (so that he is a spiritual being who only appears to be human), or to emphasise the human nature of Jesus (so that he is a wise man rather than divine), is easier than accepting this paradox, yet Christianity embraced this difficult doctrine. Moreover, not only have they accepted the paradox of the Incarnation, as the discussion of the creeds, *theotokos*, and the 'communication of attributes' demonstrates, there has been no attempt to lessen the shock of a doctrine that promotes God in the flesh. This then gives believers a God who has experienced birth, being nursed, hunger, exhaustion, suffering, and death, and rather than being shocked and embarrassed by the divine humanity of Jesus, John Donne, Aemilia Lanyer, George Herbert, Robert Herrick, and Richard Crashaw relish and delight in the flesh of God. It is God as human that they find to be the great liberator, whether for Donne and the assurance of physical resurrection, Lanyer and the promise of an equal society, Herbert and the ability to approach God conversationally, Herrick and the redemption of the festival, or Crashaw and the over-abundant outpouring of God's inner-being, all have found the Incarnation to be a doctrine of life.

In the writing of this dissertation I have chosen to arrange the chapters as chronologically as possible, but in this I also found a symmetry appropriately resulting in the central chapter of this work being the one on George Herbert, the poet who best embodies the poetic acceptance of all aspects of the Incarnation. John Donne and Richard Crashaw are the beginning and the end of my discussion, which creates a bookending as Donne converted from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism and Crashaw converted from

Protestantism to Roman Catholicism, but more than this both poets emphasise the body in their poetry. For Donne the emphasis is on his and his lovers' bodies, while Crashaw emphasises the body of Jesus. Both Aemilia Lanyer and Robert Herrick place great importance on the social applications available through the belief that God lived on this earth as a human, and so Lanyer can use this to redeem women from subjection and Herrick can redeem the festival as a celebration of physical existence. But it is in the devotional poetry of George Herbert that one finds all of these elements of the Incarnation celebrated. Herbert writes of the flesh of humanity and the flesh of God, recognises that God existing as a human redeems all people and gives them equal access to the Divine, and he realises that this gives humanity the right to celebrate. He knows that the end of the Incarnation for God and humanity is a heavenly feast in which all are welcome and all will be fed with God.

The Incarnation is a rigidly held doctrine of Christianity that allows for diverse personal application while still maintaining religious orthodoxy. It is a destabilising force that does not allow for the preference of the soul over the body or the material over the immaterial or one person over another; furthermore, it does not solely belong to Roman Catholicism, the Church of England, or the Puritans; rather, it is the property of all. The problem of the Incarnation for seventeenth-century Britain was that as it tried to define its ecclesiastical identity it was left with a central tenet of faith that favoured no denomination and could not be used to order society conclusively, and so it was only the accidental aspects of Christianity that Britain could use to create its distinct church.

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