*John Donne Journal*
Vol. 3, No. 1 (1984)

# Revision and Revelation in Herbert's "Affliction (I)"

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"God Subdued My Heart to Teachableness"
—Calvin, Preface to *Commentary on the Psalms*

Contemporary critical approaches have profoundly altered the activity of reading George Herbert's poetry. Herbert used to be seen as a duteous Christian poet whose simple, clear poems reflect his ceremonial, orderly faith in the Church. Recently, Herbert's poetry has been acclaimed for quite the opposite: for self-correction, uncertainty, instability, for "the end of narrative, the end of coherence, the end of representational life."[1] "Affliction (I)," for example, was once read as a beautiful, orderly poem extolling the "beauties of formal worship," following "the ritual of the Church of England . . . not merely with obedience but with whole-hearted joy."[2] More recent critics have argued, by contrast, that "Affliction (I)" continually overturns its own resolutions, and "signals the end of coherence . . . the end of representational life."[3] This radical reversal reflects the general shift in contemporary literary theory from order, form, and coherence, to disorder, fragmentation, and unpredictability.

At the same time there has been a countermovement that reads Herbert's poetry in the context of seventeenth-century religious belief. Some recent scholars like Amy Charles and Heather Asals have followed tradition and associated Herbert with the high Anglicanism of Hooker and Laud which "argued the necessity of outward form and assumed the validity of a ceremonious ontology."[4] Other scholars have begun to take a more radical stand and to argue that Herbert can be better understood in the context of the original Protestant reformers. Barbara Lewalski

says that Herbert's "Church" is "Calvinist in theology."[5] A. D. Nuttall argues that Herbert was an "Anglican Puritan" who "embraces radical Calvinism."[6] Richard Strier associates Herbert with Luther, and Calvin when he provides "cogent and apt formulations of views they shared," and with the antimagisterial reformers, the radicals and Puritans, who continued to cite Luther. Strier puts the case for reading Herbert in the context of these Protestant reformers most compellingly: "A purely 'internal' reading of the poems can show *that* they have certain shapes or emphases but cannot show *why*. The poems can be explicated without truly being rendered intelligible. . . . the context into which I am placing the poems brings them into focus in a remarkable way: puzzling or unnoticed details emerge into clarity and distinction; some neglected poems emerge into prominence; and the familiar poems take on new clarity of argument."[7]

Although my sympathies lie with historical or contextual critics like Lewalski and Strier, in this essay I would like to suggest some similarities between Reformation Protestantism and modern literary theory which help to explain why Herbert's poetry has suddenly become so alluring. I will then examine some crucial differences that, I believe, make all the difference in reading a poem like Herbert's "Affliction (I)."

Recent critics feel a genuine affinity with Herbert's readiness to question established truth, to overturn long-standing custom, and to indulge the free play of mind and spirit. Despite the violent modernism of deconstruction, at their core both contemporary literary theory and Reformation theology reenact an age-old fluctuation of the human spirit: from established tradition to radical rebellion, from meaning that is defined and limited to meaning that is indeterminate and unfinished because it is always about to be redefined. During the Renaissance, Catholicism continued to insist that there was one stable, uniform meaning, the one revealed to the Pope and dictated by the hierarchical Church. Although there were, of course, devout Catholics who wanted to reform the Church, loyalists like Ignatius Loyola advised, "If we wish to be sure that we are right in all things, we should always be ready to accept this principle: I will believe that the white that I see is black, if the hierarchical Church so defines it."[8] By contrast, the Protestant Reformers opposed the singular authority of the Church with their fresh and various interpretations of Scripture, because as Calvin explains, "Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their

color."[9] The battle between the uniform, stable, authoritative rule of Catholicism and the various, fluid, unfolding views of the reformers was the Renaissance analogue to the contemporary debate between formalism and deconstruction.

In England Catholicism and separatism were banned by law, but between the two extremes a similar battle was fought between the high Anglicans, who wanted to preserve the established church order and the church-going Puritans who wanted to follow the freedom of the spirit and the free interpretation of the Bible. The major points of controversy were defined most clearly and fought most conspicuously in Hooker's monumental challenge to the Calvinists. In order to preserve "peace and quietnes," Hooker urged uniformity and argued that the "voice of everie intier societie or bodie politique [should] overrule all private."[10] Since Hooker himself thought that "the truth is truth" (10), he offered and demanded "an argument necessary and demonstrative . . . such, as being proposed unto any man and understood, the mind cannot choose but inwardly assent" (33). By contrast, Calvin saw human reason as unreliable, capable of progressive enlightenment, but always imperfect and subject to further disruption and alteration. Such provisional uncertainty earned Hooker's scorn: "When they and their Bibles were alone together, what strange phantasticall opinion soever at any time entred into their heads, their use was to thinke the Spirit taught it them . . . it was no mervaile to see them everie daie broach some new thing, not heard of before. Which restlesse levitie they did interpret to be their growing to spirituall perfection, and a proceeding from faith to faith" (44-45). Because the debate between high Anglicanism and Calvinism was, on one level at least, a debate between order and disorder, stability and fluidity, truth that is the truth and some new thing that remains uncertain and subject to further change, recent criticism has helped us to understand an essential impulse in Herbert's poetry: the excitement, and resistance, and confusion that result from a radical and continuing challenge to established assumptions.

Herbert's poetry appeals more powerfully today than ever since the Restoration, largely because Herbert's beliefs, like ours, are inherently provisional. When Walton wrote his *Life of Herbert* in 1670, he set out to convince his readers that Herbert shared his own dutiful, unquestioning devotion to the established order of high Anglicanism.[11] As David Novarr demonstrates so compellingly, Walton was commissioned to support the restoration of high Anglicanism. He wanted his readers to forget that Herbert wrote

*The Temple* when the Church of England was in a state of greater fluidity and uncertainty than ever before or since—and he succeeded. By the nineteenth century it was generally taken for granted, even by astute readers like Coleridge, that Herbert was "an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church [with] a constitutional predisposition to ceremoniousness."[12] It took modern critics like Vendler, Fish, and Harman to dismiss Walton's testimony, along with the entire question of the poet's beliefs, and thus to rediscover the tension, contradiction, and uncertainty that pervade Herbert's "Church."

Yet if we completely ignore the terms of Herbert's struggle and replace it with ours, we will in turn overlook other, equally important aspects of Herbert's poetry, including some, like the search for a more satisfying, experiential faith, that inspire his most innovative and challenging poems. To show why Herbert's differences, his old-fashioned historical differences, are still worth studying and preserving, I propose to read Herbert's "Affliction (I)" not in the controversial context of contemporary literary theory but in the equally controversial context of early seventeenth-century Protestantism. Despite the similarities between the two movements, there are even more essential differences, as the very terms, deconstruction and Reformation, imply.

Although one wonders how long deconstruction will be able to stave off the desire for reconstruction, as it is presently constituted, it is only capable of comprehending the first phase of Herbert's poetry, the phase of God's special Providence that, according to Calvin and the Calvinists, was continually overturning the predictable order of things, and throwing man into confusion: "When dense clouds darken the sky, and a violent tempest arises, because a gloomy mist is cast over our eyes, thunder strikes our ears and all our senses are benumbed with fright, everything seems to us to be confused and mixed up" (211). That is precisely the condition, "the utter unintelligibility of the universe,"[13] that recent critics have found in poems like "Affliction (I)." It is also the challenge to stability and duly constituted order that Hooker abhorred and feared. "But," as Calvin goes on to explain, this initial experience of confusion and disorder is the beginning not the end of understanding: "all the while a constant quiet and serenity ever remain in heaven. So must we infer that, while the disturbances in the world deprive us of judgment, God out of the pure light of his justice and wisdom tempers and directs these very movements in the best-conceived order to a right end" (211). Contemporary

criticism quite rightly finds disorder and confusion in Herbert's poetry, but it cannot abide—and thus simply ignores—the next step: the covert order, God's special Providence, that leads out of overwhelming confusion to one "right end." Our modernist sympathies thrive on disorder and relativity, but like Calvin Herbert saw all these contradictions and reversals as the work of God's Providence: "things are not set in such an inevitable order, but that God often changeth it according as he sees fit, either for reward or punishment," Herbert explains in *The Country Parson*. "And it is observeable, that God delights to have men feel, and acknowledg, and reverence his power, and therefore he often overturnes things, when they are thought past danger" (270-71). Like Calvin, Herbert believed that when God overturns the established order of things, thereby demonstrating his divine power and will, man should recognize (even if he cannot understand) God's underlying providential design.[14]

Until Archbishop Laud cut off debate in 1633, the year of Herbert's death, Anglicans enjoyed unprecedented intellectual and religious freedom, and many of the greatest intellectual debates were religious. Although the basic opposition between high Anglicanism and Calvinism predominated, members of the Church of England took up positions all along the spectrum. It is important to remember, therefore, that we are dealing not with two opposing camps, but with a church that was in an extraordinarily fertile, fluid state, and with a group of intellectuals, who (not unlike contemporary literary theorists) were continually developing their ideas, either strengthening or shifting their positions. The issues were widely debated and constantly refined, not only in the plenteous controversial treatises but also in popular devotional manuals, sermons, guides like Herbert's *Country Parson*, and I contend, even in sacred poems and private ejaculations like Herbert's *Temple*.

Unfortunately, little evidence of Herbert's own beliefs has survived. In the interest of clarity and at the risk of simplification, therefore, we will continue to rely on Hooker, the most prominent theorist of high Anglicanism, and Calvin, who was, as Hooker himself acknowledges, the definitive authority for most of the reformers: "amongest the preachers of the reformed Churches," Hooker writes, "the perfectest divines were judged they, which were skilfullest in Calvins writinges. His bookes almost the very canon to judge both doctrine and discipline by" (11).[15] Given the limits of this essay, we cannot hope to survey the full scope of their

complex disagreement. We can, however, see some of its reverberations in Herbert's poetry by taking as touchstones a few central points of controversy: natural reason vs. divine revelation; general providence vs. special providence; formal church ceremony, with all its effort of will and visible stability, vs. inward and spiritual grace, with all its ensuing helplessness and unpredictability.[16]

What we shall discover and "Affliction (I)" will demonstrate is that Herbert's sympathies turned away from Hooker and the high Anglicans toward Calvin and the reformers. While Public Orator at Cambridge, Herbert began his religious career by defending high Anglicanism against the Puritan, Andrew Melville. Subsequently, I believe, he underwent a spiritual crisis and conversion that he dramatizes at the beginning of "The Church,"[17] and recalls with particular clarity in "Affliction (I)." This radical development reflects significant changes in Herbert's own attitude toward the Church, changes that had already made the entire form and structure of the Church "shake / Through th' old sinnes and new doctrines of our land" (as Herbert observes in "The Priesthood").

"Affliction (I)" is a narrative poem that begins by describing an unusually optimistic period, when Herbert joyously worshipped God with all the rich, "fine" ceremoniousness of high Anglicanism. At first, Herbert seems to be reaffirming these past feelings. The tone is exuberant and inviting. The speaker saw himself as part of a coherent order that united personal satisfaction and divine service. To him, the rich beauties of "heav'n and earth," the "glorious" decoration of the Church, and the pleasures of a "fine" worship, seemed to make no distinction between his own "naturall delights" and God's "gracious benefits." Fully satisfied with himself and his lot, he had no doubt that his mind and will reflected God's: "I looked on thy furniture so fine, / And made it fine to me."[18]

These opening stanzas are a remarkably rich and compressed expression of the basic high Anglican worldview, as laid down by Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. For Hooker saw the universe as a beautiful, orderly, stable, unified structure that stretched from "those principall and mother elements of the world" to "the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads," and moved "constantly [after] the lawes of nature," "either alwaies or for the most part after one and the same manner" (65-66). The entire system, running smoothly according to the law of nature, "can have no shew or cullor of mutabilitie" (62) because it expresses "the setled stabilitie of divine understanding," God's general Providence (68). As part of this divine scheme, men,

through the Law of Reason, "resemble . . . in their voluntarie actions, that very maner of working which nature her selfe doth necessarily observe in the course of the whole world" (89-90). Through custom, human reason attains the constancy of divine law: "the generall and perpetuall voyce of men is as the sentence of God him selfe" (84). Thus, as do the opening stanzas of "Affliction (I)," Hooker posits a beautiful, coherent, universal order, connecting heaven and earth, giving human reason and will the order and power of divine law: "the workes of nature are all behoovefull, beautifull, without superfluitie or defect; even so [men's] if they be framed according to that which the law of reason teachest" (90). Finding in this orderly, stable structure visible proof that God is "not the author of confusion but of peace" (31), Hooker argues that the Church should preserve "the orders which are established, sith equitie and reason, the law of nature, God and man, do all favour that which is in being, till orderlie judgement of decision be given against it; it is but justice to exact of you, and perversnes in you should it be to denie thereunto your willing obedience" (33).

It is precisely this formal, orderly vision of nature, reason, divine law, and religious worship that once gave Herbert, as he tells us in the opening stanzas of "Affliction (I)," faith that he could depend on his own reason and will to serve God. Yet, we have only to pause and scrutinize Herbert's language, to discover complications and doubts that disturb this whole, beautiful scheme of things. Our first clue to the superfluities and defects is the surprising prevalence of financial language. For someone dedicated to serving God, the speaker seems to have been suspiciously preoccupied with material acquisitions, with "wages," "benefits," "furniture so fine," and "houshold-stuffe," all conspicuously "payd," "counted," and "augmented." In fact, according to the *OED*, all the "glorious," "fine" descriptive words that so "entice" us at "first," had well-established ironic, second meanings which add up to a serious and thorough critique of Herbert's former point of view. He was "entice[d]" lasciviously by his own desires, "entwine[d]" insidiously by his own thoughts. "*I* thought," "*I* writ down for *my* part," *I* looked . . . and made it fine to *me*," "*I* counted *mine*"—the egocentricity so visible here is as much the speaker's emphasis as mine.[19] Enthralled by his own "pleasures," "joyes," and "hopes," Herbert confused God's "gracious benefits" with social graces and physical allures. After raising our suspicions, Herbert pauses at the end of the third stanza to explain what went

awry. His former behavior was not only self-seeking and precipitate, but also quite violent and grasping:

> Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place,
> And made her youth and fiercenesse seek thy face.[20]

If these opening stanzas indeed describe "the beauties of formal worship," and the high Anglican view of man, God, and the world, what are we to make of the resulting aggression, materialism, egotism, and pride?

Once we pause to question the point of view offered at the beginning of "Affliction (I)," the poem's chronology provides an explanation: at the very beginning of the poem Herbert pointedly refers to his "first" thoughts in order to imply second thoughts, a subsequent, critical point of view. As Herbert now looks back at the past, his far-reaching retrospection, his thoughtful, cutting tone, and his carefully chosen, double-edged vocabulary call into question his former vision of himself and his religious service. To a modernist, this may well reveal the uncertainty of truth and the continuing need for self-correction, but I think to George Herbert it had a more pointed and precise meaning that he explains in *The Country Parson*: "Man would sit down at this world, God bids him sell it, and purchase a better" (272).

Herbert deliberately describes his former fascination and his present doubts in the same words in order to show us how easy it is to confuse a self-seeking outward worship with an inner, spiritual devotion. And that is, of course, precisely the reason that Calvin and the English reformers objected so vehemently to ornate church ceremony: "wherever there is great ostentation in ceremonies," Calvin warned, "sincerity of heart is rare indeed" (43). Herbert's lavish, carefree affluence, devoted to a "King" of "pleasures," confused God's heavenly grace with "gracious benefits" offered by the King and "pleasures" offered by fine society. His love of "glorious houshold-stuffe" reduced religious service to ornate worldliness. His sudden, fierce aggressive acts created a mistakenly physical conception of God's "face" and "place."[21] These dangerous self-deceptions illustrate why Calvin thought "the manifestation of God in nature speaks to us in vain" (68); "man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face . . . for we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride is innate in all of us—unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity" (37). That self-confident pride is precisely

the condition that Herbert recalls at the beginning of "Affliction (I)," when, like Hooker, he believed that God was visible in the beautiful, regular law of nature, and thus could be seen by natural reason and "caught at" by human will. Beginning here, and continuing in the following stanzas, Herbert describes the "clear proofs"—the disturbances and overturnings of God's special Providence that convinced him, as it did Calvin, that "we cannot seriously aspire to [God] before we begin to become displeased with ourselves" (37). Because of his innate pride and natural "sluggishness of mind," the resulting uncertainty and disorder will at first seem "fortuitous." Eventually, they teach him that "all events are governed by God's secret plan" (199), which teaches man to throw off the old life of the flesh for a new life of the spirit.

Although Catholics and high Anglicans were of course also capable of experiencing similar crises of conscience, the particular form of the critique Herbert dramatizes in the opening stanzas of "Affliction (I)" shows that he was turning away from Hooker's conservative high Anglicanism toward Calvin and the members of the Church of England who wanted more radical reform. In fact, the reasons behind Herbert's dissatisfaction with his former behavior are the very "dangers of the Puritan movement" that Hooker emphasizes and attacks in his "Preface to them that seek (as they term it) the Reformation of the Laws and Orders Ecclesiastical in the Church of England":

> All their exhortations were to set light of the things in this world, to count riches and honors vanitie, and in token therof not only to seeke neither, but if men were possessors of both, even to cast away the one and resign the other, that al men might see their unfaigned conversion unto Christ. They were sollicitors of men to fasts, to often meditations of heavenly things, and as it were conferences in secret with God by prayers, not framed according to the frosen maner of the world, but expressing such fervent desires as might even force God to hearken unto them. Where they found men in diet, attire, furniture of house, or any other way observers of civility and decent order, such they reprooved as being carnally and earthly minded. Every worde otherwise then severely and sadly uttered, seemed to pearce like a sword thorow

> them. If any man were pleasant, their maner was presently with deepe sighes to repeate those words of our Saviour Christ, Wo be to you which now laugh, for ye shal lament. So great was their delight to be alwaies in trouble, that such as did quietly lead their lives, they judged of all other men to be in most dangerous case. (43)

Before proceeding to see how "Affliction (I)" brings about "this conversion unto Christ," it is important to remember that the poem's chronology puts the confusion and uncertainty of the middle stanzas into perspective. The deliberate echo of the opening line—"When first thou didst entice," "At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnessess"—alerts us to the narrative plan: the speaker is about to tunnel back into the past, into those interim years that destroyed his former buoyancy. Thus in lines 19-22 Herbert pauses to summarize the former religious attitudes, the "brave service," the childish self-assertions, the luxurious lifestyle, which he has recently reexamined and rejected:

> I had my wish and way:
> My dayes were straw'd with flow'rs and happinesse;
> There was no moneth but May.

A second verbal echo provides the final key: in the opening stanzas Herbert presented "a world of mirth" withered with present irony; in these middle stanzas he sets out to describe "the world of strife," the personal setbacks, professional anxieties, and religious controversies that destroyed his former complacency and produced his present reassessment.

As the speaker begins to describe the intervening years, his balanced double perspective disappears. Confused (and confusing) language captures the onset of doubt:

> But with my yeares sorrow did twist and grow,
> And made a partie unawares for wo.

Was this "partie" the speaker's enemy or his partner and ally (both meanings of "partie")? His partner or the partner of wo? Was the speaker's opponent "unawares"? Or was the speaker's own body unaware of its part? These syntactical ambiguities and multiple, contradictory meanings reveal just how devastated and confused the speaker felt when complications first began to mar his earlier self-confidence. The speaker is no longer controlling himself or his situation. Yet beneath the overriding uncertainty, the speaker's words contain an emerging directness and strength, their insistent

triple rhymes compressing and intensifying the new forthrightness of *wo* and *sorrow* which had begun to grow with the inevitable, sure strength of God's particular providence, "perfecting our Redemption no other way, then by sorrow," Herbert explains in *The Country Parson*, "from the Benefit of affliction, which softens, and works the stubborn heart of man" (249). Although *sorrow* and *wo* certainly seem to be the enemy, he will discover that they are actually his ally and God's instrument. After his life of self-indulgent luxury, he must learn to be "very circumspect in avoiding all coveteousnesse, neither being greedy to get, nor nigardly to keep, nor troubled to lose any worldly wealth; but in all his words and actions slighting, and disesteeming it, even to a wondring, that the world should so much value wealth, which in the day of wrath hath not one dramme of comfort for us. Secondly, because Luxury is a very visible sinne, the Parson is very carefull to avoid all the kinds thereof" (CP 227).

In these middle stanzas, therefore, the speaker loses all the worldly luxuries, all the "naturall delights" and "glorious houshold-stuffe" which once gave him so many "joyes" and "pleasures":

> Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce beleeved,
> Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived.
> When I got health, thou took'st away my life,
> And more; for my friends die.

Cut off from the orderly, stable, rich life of the past, the speaker feels as if life itself has been taken from him. He is learning "the two highest points of Life, wherein a Christian is most seen . . . Patience in regard of afflictions, Mortification in regard of lusts and affections, and the stupifying and deading of all clamorous powers of the soul" (CP 227). God has sent the death unto sin that precedes regeneration, the death and rebirth for which the speaker has prayed in the preceding poems, "Easter-wings," "H. Baptisme (I) and (II)," and "Nature":

> O smooth my rugged heart, and there
> Engrave thy rev'rend Law and fear;
> Or make a new one, since the old
> Is saplesse grown,
> And a much fitter stone
> To hide my dust, then thee to hold.

Amidst the fluidity and chaos at the center of "Affliction (I)" is stirring a serious, total reconsideration which will, as we already

know from the opening stanzas, produce a piercing, ironic reassessment of the past. To dramatize this symbolic death, to prove that all former affectations and illusions have withered, Herbert repeatedly alludes to the preceding poems. For example, when he is "blown through with ev'ry storm and winde," he begins to feel the power of God, rather than the "venome" of "Nature" that once made him fear:

> My soul will turn to bubbles straight,
> And thence by kinde
> Vanish into a winde,
> Making thy workmanship deceit.

"Thus thinne and lean without a fence or friend," he now knows that he cannot rely on the personal and institutional structures described in "Sinne (I)," the "rules of reason" and "laws" of the church, "all these fences and their whole aray / One cunning bosome-sinne blows quite away"—just before the beginning of "Affliction (I)." At the center of the poem, therefore, the speaker discovers the Calvinist assumptions underlying this sequence of poems: by Nature man lives in a state of sin, relying on rules and laws and worldly supports that are all finally unreliable.

As the speaker continues to lose control over himself and his situation, his account becomes more emotional and heedless:

> Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
> The way that takes the town;
> Thou didst betray me to a lingring book,
> And wrap me in a gown.
> I was entangled in the world of strife,
> Before I had the power to change my life.
>
> Yet, for I threatned oft the siege to raise,
> Not simpring all mine age,
> Thou often didst with Academick praise
> Melt and dissolve my rage.
> I took thy sweetned pill, till I came where
> I could not go away, nor persevere.

After the hazy, metaphoric landscape of stanzas 4-6, these lines suggest the pressures of a specific and tense concrete situation. The explosive impotence ("not simpring all mine age"), the dire, "lingring book," the "rage" and uncertainty, and, above all, the sinful accusations against God ("thou didst betray me"), make little distinction between past misery and present resentment. Scared

and disoriented, looking for a scapegoat, Herbert strikes out at God: "Thou didst betray me to a lingring book." For the first time in the poem, there is such intense frustration and anger that the speaker sounds obviously unreliable. He is not quite ready to admit that the real betrayal was not God's, but his own preoccupation with the "gracious" superfluities of his position, with "praise" and all the other "rich," "sweetned" rewards satirized in stanzas 1-3.

Angry and resentful because he no longer believes in his former behavior, but stuck in a situation that requires him to defend his former point of view, he feels completely stymied. The mummifying "gown," the unwelcome "Academick praise," the book "lingring" and perpetuating his former opinions, all expose the bankruptcy of his former religious service. As he expresses this new-found frustration with the scholarly life, the speaker sounds more and more like those Calvinists whom Hooker criticizes: "the greatest worldly hopes, which are proposed unto the chiefest kind of learning, ye seeke utterly to extirpate as weedes" (39-40). Trapped by old, unsatisfying words, hovering between reminiscence and dramatic utterance, betraying increasing pressure and incipient neurosis, the narrative has reached a moment of total stasis: "I came where I could not go away, nor persevere." The present is unbearable, the past is oppressive, and the future is inconceivable. Clearly, the speaker would like to summon enough strength "the siege to raise," and flout those who supported him, to "go away" and "change [his] life." But he cannot. Before he can finally, openly repudiate his former conception of religious service, he must be shown an alternative, better way lying open before him.

Happily, just when the speaker is about to admit that his own efforts are useless, a revelation *is* stirring: he will "persevere" because his "birth and spirit" have indeed promised "gracious benefits": not the worldly perquisites promised by his aristocratic birth and ambitious spirit, but the most gracious perquisites of all: first, the rebirth granted by God's grace and conveyed by his spirit; second, the perseverance which, according to Calvin, insured the elect that they would never permanently lapse from grace.[22] This solution, promised by God's grace, conveyed by his Holy Spirit, hidden unbeknownst in the speaker's own words because it is independent of all his fallen, human efforts, is about to complete the speaker's conversion.

First, Herbert is frightened by renewed sickness and reduced to immediate, dramatic expression:

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

These lines describe the present—directly, frankly, convincingly, without "rage," "simpring" accusations, or dangerous distortions. Instead of expecting his life and reason to conform to the orderly laws of nature and the stability of God's general Providence, as Hooker recommends, the speaker has begun to observe the disorder and surprises in his own life, looking as Calvin advises for signs of God's special Providence: "in times of adversity believers comfort themselves with the solace that they suffer nothing except by God's ordinance and command, for they are under his hand. . . . Indeed, those as much defraud God of his glory as themselves of a most profitable doctrine who confine God's providence to such narrow limits as though he allowed all things by a free course to be borne along according to a universal law of nature" (200). Thus in admitting that God has taken control of his life and language, the speaker is preparing to place his faith in God:

Thús dŏth/ thy pówer/ crósse-bĭ/ ăs mé,// nŏt máking
Thine ówn/ gift góod,// yĕt mé/ from mý/ wáyes taking.

Earlier, the speaker's regular iambic rhythms were interrupted rarely, either by his own fierce self-assertions or by premonitions of God's chastisement. Now the rhythms of the speaker's life are painfully, relentlessly, disrupted by God's providential overturnings.

This tenuous situation, bereft of all self-confidence and control, has provoked ample empathy and some confusion in recent critics. Helen Vendler concludes that this God, "changeable as the skies," "capricious and arbitrary," must be "reflected from a self proud then craven." Barbara Leah Harman is fascinated by the unsettling arbitrariness, and concludes that: "If God is he who cross-biases, it is not because he has specific plans which counter the plans one has for oneself. . . . If it is man's inclination to fix, and make peace with, experience, it is God's inclination that he shall not."[23] What the speaker must discover, however, is exactly what these modern critics are loathe to acknowledge but Herbert himself fully believed: "God delights to have men feel, and acknowledg, and reverence his power, and therefore he often overturnes things, when they are thought past danger" (CP 271). Despite man's confusion, God has a plan, "and therefore he often overturnes things." As "Nature" implied but failed to acknowledge, all man's unregenerate efforts

are counterproductive, "making [God's] workmanship deceit." Now the rhymes recall in order to renounce all the speaker's most insistent and destructive self-assertions, all his previous *making* and *taking*: "I looked on thy furniture so fine, / And made it fine to me"; "My sudden soul . . . made her youth and fiercenesse seek thy face"; "made a partie unawares for wo"; "My birth and spirit rather took / The way that takes the town"; "I took thy sweetned pill." Alerting us to these former exertions and the absence of faith which they betray, the rhymes now explain that salvation is *not making* but *taking* the rewards and punishments offered by God's Providence. "When that light of divine Providence has once shone upon a godly man," Calvin explains in a formulation which influenced many an English Calvinist and Puritan autobiographer, "he fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by His authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it" (224).

Indeed, the following stanzas seem very close to the inspired state of acquiescent humility that precedes Faith, for as Calvin explains: "Faith rests not upon ignorance, but on knowledge . . . not only of God but of the divine will." "Faith consists in the knowledge of God and Christ, not in reverence for the church" (545); "God bestows actual knowledge of himself upon us only in Scriptures" (69). Instead of fiercely pursuing the active religious service described in stanzas 1-3, the speaker says, "I reade, and sigh, and wish. . . ."[24] The repeated conjunction, the marked caesurae, the attentive record of that plaintive sigh, all show the speaker carefully scrutinizing his feelings and his "books," trying to discover God's will: "what thou wilt do with me, / None of my books will show." Like the Calvinists whom Hooker condemns, the speaker has discovered that humane learning is of little use. Yearning for the consolations of God's Providence and the comforts of God's Word, he seems about ready to turn to the Bible, "the chief and top of his knowledg," the "storehouse and magazene of life and comforts" (CP 228)—for Herbert, Calvin, and the Protestant Reformation in general. For we can already see an important change in the speaker's religious vision: "I reade, and sigh, and wish I were a tree; / For sure then I should grow / To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust / Her houshold to me, and I should be just." This simple, natural "houshold" abjures the "glorious houshold-stuffe," the rich, ceremonial worship of stanzas 1-3. At the same time, the odd choice of legal language reveals a deeper

desire—not simply to "be just" to birds, but to be justified by God: to be freed from the penalty of sin and made righteous by God. Waiting and wishing, the speaker can do nothing, but this is not a failure, as most of us might think today. He simply sits, and reads, and prays, because he has discovered that he *can* do nothing to bring about his own salvation—justification is by faith alone.

This cardinal precept of the Reformation explains the speaker's puzzling choice of images, of trees, and fruit, and "some bird." "Ye shall know them by their fruits," Christ said of the select few who find grace. "A good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:16-18). Contemplating this cherished Reformation text, the speaker has discovered that without regeneration and the Spirit man remains sinful and unable to do good works, like a rotten tree which can only produce rotten fruit.[25] At the same time, the speaker's affectionate, fervent plaint, "at least some bird would trust / Her houshold to me, and I should be just," shows that he is waiting patiently, hoping to be comforted and enlightened by God's Spirit—"some bird," "descending like a dove" (Matt. 3:11)[26]—and fulfilling the promise of his baptism so that he will "bring forth good fruit." This dense cluster of biblical allusions aligns the speaker's present fantasies with a more holy, spiritual way of life. All he needs now is the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is the "author of regeneration," Calvin insists, and "our justification is his work" (138, 139). "The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason," Calvin explains "The Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit" (79). The speaker is about to discover Herbert's own Calvinist view of justification: "that a man presume not to merit, that is, to oblige God, or justify himselfe before God, by any acts or exercises of Religion; but that he ought to pray God affectionately and fervently to send him the light of his spirit" (312) so that he can understand the Holy Scriptures "with the same Spirit that writ them" (228). This stanza is positively brimming with spiritual promise and progress. The story has most certainly not ended in line 55, as Barbara Harman argues.

Underneath this holy attentiveness, however, the speaker's language betrays a nagging, growing uneasiness which shows that it is as difficult for him to accept the virtue of passivity as it is for us: "Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek; / In weaknesse must be stout." Straining to maintain a submissive vigilance, the speaker tries to imitate Paul who was told by God, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"

(II Cor. 12:9). But the double opposition of "yet though," the repeated obligation of "must," "must," the need to be at once meek, weak, and stout, all these obvious verbal strains and emotional tensions soon break forth, loud and bold: "Well, I will change the service, and go seek / Some other master out." If we recall all that the speaker has lost since then—health, wealth, friends, professional hopes, public praise, God's approval—and all that he has felt—pain, terror, death, rage, frustration, failure—then we will appreciate his powerful, human wish to escape, to "seek some other master out." Yet God's Providence will not let the speaker simply go to the Devil. Overcome by this audible, undeniable proof of his own sinfulness, the speaker realizes that he must trust in God alone: "thus, from the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and—what is more—depravity and corruption," Calvin explains, "we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone" (36).

Thus, suddenly but predictably, he turns back to God with an impassioned plea, filled with great tenderness and yearning:

> Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot,
> Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.

To recent critics, these lines have seemed irretrievably ambiguous. The subordinate clause can be read either as a final criticism of God (though I have been completely forgotten and betrayed by you) or as a final confession (though I completely forgot myself, when I rebelled against you). The conditional, "though" seems to promise a clarification, but the final line is widely considered even more baffling and paradoxical. Thus Helen Vendler concludes there is no conclusion: "Herbert has not so much resolved as ended his poem." Bill Smithson is even more insistent: "regardless of how one interprets this couplet, one essential fact still remains—there is no final resolution." And Barbara Harman resolutely glorifies the lack of resolution: "The double negatives register, at last, the speaker's willingness to avoid generating the conclusion of an experience which is, in fact, not conclusive. . . . The speaker's willingness to accept a life which guarantees neither adequate presence nor adequate representation is the great manifestation of devotion with which the poem concludes."[27] But is it?

Despite the apparent ambiguity, if we review all that the speaker has felt and learned in "Affliction (I)," all the simplifications and pretences he has purged, all the religious discoveries and

theological consolations he has been granted, we will see that these lines are the most trustworthy assertion yet: the speaker has never been forgotten by God's Providence, and he knows it. The exclamation of love, "Ah my deare God," shows that God is present in the speaker's life, more powerfully and immanently present than ever before in "The Church." By trying to reject God, the speaker has discovered just how much he relies on God. Inspired by this divine resonance, the speaker's language expresses an immediate revulsion for his inherent weaknesses and a sincere gratitude for his powerful, intimate dependence on God: "though I am clean forgot," though I have completely forgotten myself, you remain "my deare God." These lines contain the first true repentance and real faith in "The Church," for as Calvin explains, "repentance not only follows faith, but is also born out of faith" (224). My rebellion was dastardly, he admits, but even when I forgot myself you remembered me; but I cannot bear the way I feel when my love makes me regret my behavior, so please, let me not love thee if I am going to act as if I love thee not.

The conditional formulation of this plea proves just how far the speaker has progressed since the opening stanzas, for it acknowledges the difference between an external show of love, and an inner, heart-felt feeling of love, and that difference, as Calvin explains, makes all the difference: "Now he who merely performs all the duties of love does not fulfill them, even though he overlooks none; but he, rather, fulfills them who does this from a sincere feeling of love. For it can happen that one who indeed discharges to the full all his obligations as far as outward duties are concerned is still all the while far away from the true way of discharging them" (697). By professing his love in language that acknowledges its own weakness the speaker faces his own, inevitable human imperfection. In so doing, he avows his faith in God, "for it is faith alone that first engenders love in us," Calvin says (589). Herbert knows that there will always be moments when he will sin and wonder "if I love thee," but he also knows that God will always inspire fresh regrets and even greater love. And so, inspired with a true faith which faces and transcends human limitations, the speaker places himself completely in God's hands showing just how far he has progressed since the complacency and self-pride described in the opening stanzas: "So we see that the mind, illumined by the knowledge of God, is at first wrapped up in much ignorance, which is gradually dispelled. Yet, by being ignorant of certain things, or by rather obscurely discerning what it

does discern, the mind is not hindred from enjoying a clear knowledge of the divine will toward itself" (565).

As a result, divinity informs the poem's mundane language, conveying faith even as it corrects inevitable human error. Embracing and explaining all the ironies inherent in its imperfect, mortal language, the end of "Affliction (I)" reaches an inspired vision which transmutes duality into a divine, paradoxical simplicity. The conclusion even explains the poem's disjointed narrative structure: the movement from balanced reassessment to remembrance of things past to dramatic immediacy makes the poem a revelation—for us, for the speaker, and perhaps for Herbert himself, as he discovers the complex, inspired truth of his own poetic formulation.[28]

The ambiguity of the final lines is expressive and deliberate. It makes the final revelation as hidden and exclusive as is God's gift of grace, as inward and spiritual as the "glorious houshold-stuffe" was external and worldly. Moreover, the speaker's repentance and faith are confirmed beyond a doubt by the following poems. "Repentance," "Faith," "Prayer (I)," "The H. Communion," the very titles expound the complex, boundless revelation of "Affliction (I)."[29] In these poems the speaker is hopeful, charitable, steadfast. He acknowledges sins and limitations openly. His language is unimpeachable, clear, direct, and emotionally forthright. Anxious that "life be told / From what life feeleth," he describes truths proved in the heart and felt by the body: "Bitternesse fills our bowels; all our hearts / Pine, and decay, / And drop away." Having come face to face with his own foulness, folly, unrighteousness, and impurity, Herbert (like Calvin) realizes that to know God, "man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself" (559). For this reason Herbert turns away from his former academic pursuits, from the gown and the "lingring book" of "Affliction (I)," and places all his faith "in the sacred storie":

> 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.

No wonder Hooker observed, "Neither is it altogether without cause that so many doe feare the overthrow of all learning as a threatned sequele of this your intended discipline" (39). For Herbert as for Calvin, faith is a revelation:

> That which before was darkned clean
> With bushie groves, pricking the lookers eie,

Vanisht away, when Faith did change the scene:
And then appear'd a glorious skie.

As Helen Vendler justly notes, these poems contain very little "personal urgency"; but after all the searing anxieties and failures we have seen, the conviction of "something understood" is itself a dramatic, personal testimony. The sequence culminates in "The H. Communion," which resolves any remaining doubts about the "furniture so fine" and "glorious houshold-stuffe" described in "Affliction (I)":

Not in rich furniture, or fine aray,
Nor in a wedge of gold,
Thou, who for me wast sold,
To me dost now thy self convey.

God's grace has finally fulfilled the promises of the speaker's "birth and spirit": he has indeed experienced a radical reformation, a drastic purgation, and a powerful regeneration.[30]

Thus "Affliction (I)" stands as an important first prelude to faith, both in the larger story of the speaker's religious life, "The Church," and in the miniature story of his initial regeneration which has been the subject of this essay. Although "Affliction (I)" may look like a collection of "uneasy phrasings," "irreconcilable metaphors for divinity," and "equally unsettling versions of the self,"[31] it is actually a coherent reassessment clinched by a dramatic revelation—a crucial transition in the spiritual vision of *The Temple*, a notable turning point in Herbert's complicated, shifting relationship with his poems, a dramatic account of Herbert's own religious reappraisal.[32] Although we must be wary of reducing *The Temple* to theological controversy, we should begin to give more attention to the speaker's dramatic progress and to Herbert's underlying religious purpose, for only then will we appreciate the remarkable story which emerges from Herbert's Calvinist ontology. In "The Church" "where sinne placeth me in Adams fall" and "Faith sets me higher in his glorie," man is by nature fallen, but by grace, capable of regeneration. Confusion, pretense, self-deception, simplification —these conceptual failures are the natural condition of man in Herbert's "Church." Precision, nuance, loving clarity, visionary insight, "something understood,"[33] these moments of poetic triumph are the exception, the direct result of divine inspiration and faith. When Herbert's poetry captures his divine faith

or corrects his human imagination, then Herbert's dramatic utterance merges harmoniously with his divine spirit, transcends all revisions, pretences, and simplifications, and creates the poem as revelation—the moment of verbal, emotional, and spiritual discovery, intermittent but recurring, which gives meaning to the dramatic struggles of *The Temple*.

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Notes

1 See above all, Helen Vendler, *The Poetry of George Herbert* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975) and Stanley Fish, *The Living Temple: George Herbert and Catechizing* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978). Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1981). Arnold Stein, *George Herbert's Lyrics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972), and Coburn Freer, *Music For a King: George Herbert's Style and the Metrical Psalms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972), also made important contributions to this more dramatic, provisional reading of Herbert's poetry. Quoted from Barbara Leah Harman, *Costly Monuments: Representations of the Self in George Herbert's Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), p. 99.

2 Margaret Bottrall, *George Herbert* (London: John Murray, 1954), p. 10; Marchette Chute, *Two Gentle Men: The Lives of George Herbert and Robert Herrick* (New York: Dutton, 1959), p. 30.

3 Bill Smithson, "Herbert's 'Affliction' Poems," *SEL*, 15 (1975), 130; Harman, p. 272. Daniel W. Doerksen, "'Growing and Groning': Herbert's 'Affliction (I),'" *English Studies in Canada*, 8, No. 1 (March, 1982), 6-7, agrees "there is no resolution in 'Affliction (I),'" although he argues that "affirmations are surely present in *The Temple* as a whole." Daniel Rubey, "The Poet and the Christian Community: Herbert's Affliction Poems and the Structure of *The Temple*," *SEL*, 20 (1980), 106, suggests that "this inconclusiveness should impel us to look to the other Affliction poems for the resolution missing in 'Affliction (I)'"; he finds the missing resolution in "Affliction (V)."

4 Amy Charles, *A Life of George Herbert* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977) and Heather Asals, *Equivocal Predication: George Herbert's Way to God* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 5.

5 Barbara Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), p. 286.

6 A. D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, Dante and St. John* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 59, 53. Robert B. Shaw, *The Call of God: The Theme of Vocation in the Poetry of Donne and Herbert* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1981), also places Herbert in the context of Calvinism.

7 Richard Strier, *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), p. xiv, xi. I read both Strier and Nuttall after this essay was completed, but I have tried to point out some assumptions we share, as well as some differences, in the footnotes.

8 *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Anthony Mottola (New York: Image, 1974), pp. 140-41.

9 Jean Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 76.

10 Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 3 vols., ed. Georges Edelen (Cambridge: Belknap, 1977), p. 34.

11 See David Novarr, *The Making of Walton's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958). Novarr finds most evidence of Walton's unreliability in "The Judicious Life of Mr. Hooker." Novarr does not question Herbert's allegiance to high Anglicanism, although

one might well do so, on the basis of the polemical distortions he documents throughout *The Lives*. The liberties Walton took were typical of the time: "Both sides hoped to demonstrate a continuity of tradition and to ground their argument in authority, and both sides looked for support from past champions of the Church, even from those whose position was not precisely theirs. The Laudian Church was relying on every proponent, living or dead, regardless of previous sectarian preference, in its fight for supremacy of the King, the high place of Episcopacy, the retention of traditional ceremony, and respect for the rights of the church" (p. 207).

12 Coleridge's notes on Herbert are first collected in, and quoted here from, *The Works of George Herbert in Prose and Verse*, ed. and pub. by William Pickering (London, 1835), p. 345. As Joseph Summers explains, "Coleridge's remarks were continually parroted during the nineteenth century. In the editorial prefaces to the countless editions of *The Temple* . . . appreciation of Herbert often seems confined to well-bred members of the Church of England" (p. 21).

13 The remark is Vendler's (p. 44).

14 Nuttall completely overlooks this more positive side of Calvinism, which may explain why he is so anxious to show the "intellectual impasses of Herbert's poetry [that] at last compose a fundamental if largely unconscious critique of Calvinism" (p. 75). I cannot see that Herbert undermines Calvinism in any of the ways that Nuttall suggests.

15 For a discussion of Calvin's powerful influence on Anglican theology see Charles Davis Cremeans, *The Reception of Calvinist Thought in England* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1949). As Nuttall notes, "The *Short Title Catalogue* (1475-1640) lists no fewer than 96 editions of Calvin's writings and 50 of Beza. These easily head the list (Luther and Bullinger come next with 38 each). Each of the years between 1548 and 1634 saw the publication of one work or more by Calvin. Between 1578 and 1581 there were six to eight every year. Calvin's record of publications in English was not overtaken until the early seventeenth century, and then it was by William Perkins and Henry Smith, both Calvinists" (p. 21).

16 In Chapter 2 Strier provides an extremely useful account of the dangers of natural reason, although he pays less attention to the importance of revelation. In Chapter 6 he argues that Herbert rejected outward ceremony for "Inwardness and Individualism." The question of providential design lies outside the scope of his study. He mentions "Affliction (I)" only a couple of times in passing.

17 For a fuller discussion of this point, see my essay, "'Setting Foot into Divinity': George Herbert and the English Reformation," *MLQ*, 38, No. 3 (1977), 219-41, reprinted in *Essential Articles for the Study of George Herbert's Poetry*, ed. John R. Roberts (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1979). My conception of Herbert's religious development argues against Amy Charles' speculation in *A Life of George Herbert* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 84-87, that "Affliction (I)" was written in 1617. In Chapter 5 Strier discusses "The New Life." He assumes that the speaker is already a regenerate Christian at the outset of "The Church," whereas I argue that his regeneration begins in "Affliction (I)" and develops in the following poems.

18 Herbert's writings are quoted from *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941). Nuttall acknowledges the underlying ironies when he says, these "lines look like the purest piety" (p. 46).

19 Daniel Doerksen also notes a "rather childish egocentricity" (p. 3).

20 I can see no way to reconcile the "fierce" aggressiveness of these lines with Vendler's assertion that "Herbert is passive in both torment and delight" (p. 43).

21 As Calvin explains, pp. 114-15, the word "face" was often used in Protestant and Catholic arguments about church images. Calvin is, of course, vehemently opposed to these "blasphemous and shocking claims for images." As *Certaine Sermons or Homilies, Appointed to be Read in Churches, in the Time of Elizabeth I*, ed. Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup (Gainesville, FL: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), illustrate, in England the particular debate over images was intricately tied to the larger debate over the richness of religious worship: "The Corruption of these latter days hath brought into the Church infinite multitudes of images, and have . . . decked with gold and siluer, painted with colours, set them with stone and pearle, clothed them with silkes and precious vestures . . . occasioning . . . thereby the most horrible idolatrie" (II, 12).

22 See Calvin, Bk. III, Ch. III, "Our Regeneration by Faith: Repentance," and Bk. III, Ch. XXIV, p. 6. "Christ bestows upon us his own certainty that their election is irrevocable and lasting." Lewalski says, "the first group of poems, beginning with 'The Altar' and culminating with two adjacent poems 'Repentance' and 'Faith,' explores the speaker's conversion . . . to the fundamental ground of salvation, justification through Christ's sacrifice" (p. 286).

23 Vendler, pp. 43, 44, 43; Harman, p. 95.

24 Vendler's conclusion, p. 45, that "he withdraws dangerously into abstraction, apathy, and loss of ego," disregards the basic Christian truth that the speaker must transcend the ego to find God.

25 This was a favorite Protestant text. It is cited by the Catechism of the Church of Geneva, *Calvin Theological Treatises*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); XXII, p. 105, to prove that good works must follow faith:

> Minister: But are all men's works so despicable and worthless that they are unable to obtain favour with God?
>
> Child: First, whatever works proceed from us properly to be called our own are vicious; then further, they can do nothing but displease God and be rejected by him.
>
> Minister: You say then that, before we are reborn and remade by the Spirit of God, we are able to do nothing but sin, just as the bad tree produces only bad fruit.
>
> Child: Precisely so.

Citing an Old Testament type, Jeremiah 17:8, the English Homily on Faith, I, p. 23, uses the same imagery of fruit and trees: "The iust man doeth liue by his faith. . . . For he is like a tree set by the water side, and spreadeth his roots abroad . . . and feareth not heate when it commeth, his leafe will be greene, and will not cease to bring foorth his fruit."

26 Herbert uses this biblical image in "Whitsunday" which commemorates the descent of the Spirit: "Listen sweet Dove unto my song, / And spread thy golden wings in me; / Hatching my tender heart so long, / Till it get wing, and flie away with thee." In poems like "Easter-wings" and "Church-musick" Herbert repeatedly uses the image of wings to describe the elevation of the spirit.

27 Vendler, p. 46; Smithson, p. 130; Harman, pp. 101-02. Stein, pp. 126 and 143, Freer, p. 217, and L. C. Knights, *Explorations* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), p. 126, offer more convincing and positive readings, though their discussions are too cursory to be conclusive. I am myself more sympathetic with Hutchinson, *Works*, p. 492, who says, "the passionate return to the first and only allegiance possible to him takes the form of a paradox," and Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 270-71, who cites Sidney's poems, Empson's interpretation, and allusions to the psalms to explain why we are "prepared to accept the sudden submission at the end."

28 I think the speaker's union with God makes him a better critic of himself and his language. By contrast, Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 157, sees (though not in reference to "Affliction (I)"): "a self-diminishing action in the course of which the individual lets go, one by one, of all the ways of thinking, seeing, and saying that sustain the illusion of his independence, until finally he is absorbed into the deity whose omnipresence he has acknowledged."

29 While Rubey turns to "Affliction (V)" for an explanation he feels "Affliction (I)" does not provide, I believe that the speaker makes a discovery at the end of "Affliction (I)" that is immediately explained and dramatized in the following poems. Martz, pp. 296-98, offers a brief but useful commentary on the interconnections and developments within this sequence of poems.

30 For a helpful and balanced discussion of the "process of internalization or spiritualization" in Herbert's poetry, see Judy Z. Kronenfeld, "Probing the Relation between Poetry and Ideology: Herbert's 'The Windows,'" *John Donne Journal*, 2 (1983), 55-80.

31 Vendler, p. 46.

32 Ever since Izaak Walton, *The Life of Mr. George Herbert* (London: printed by T. Newcomb for Richard Marriot, 1670), and Barnabas Oley, "A Prefatory View of the Life of Mr. George Herbert," in *Herbert's Remains* (London: printed for Garthwait, 1652),

"Affliction (I)" has been read repeatedly as autobiography. The most compelling biographical interpretation is still Knights'. Given the unprecedented outpouring of Puritan autobiographies and diaries in the early seventeenth century, I can see no justification for Harman's conclusion, p. 105, that "the autobiographical impulse–and its manifestations–are here; what is not present is the sanction for them." The sanction is the belief in God's Providence, as Perry Miller has explained so brilliantly in several places. *The American Puritans* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1956), p. 225, summarizes the argument: "In recounting the history of an individual, whether of another or of himself, the Puritan ... had to tell everything, for who could say, since whatever happens from day to day comes out of the providence of God, that the slightest event was with portentous significance?"

33 "Faith," "Prayer (I)."