

Open the Bones: Lyric, Liturgy and Revelation in George Herbert

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It is well established that George Herbert was, at his core, a sacramental poet. It was C.A. Patrides who famously said in his 1974 edition of *The English Poems* that “[t]he Eucharist is the marrow of Herbert’s sensibility” (17), and scholars have since fleshed out various ways in which this claim might ring true. In her 2008 book *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, Regina Schwartz argues that, for Herbert, “sacramental poetics not only offers a vehicle for conversation with his God but also a mode of expressing gratitude for that conversation” (137). The mechanism whereby Herbert achieves such divine communication, Schwartz argues, is the cultural displacement of the traditional theology of the Eucharist—transubstantiation—onto the literary function of poetry. As she claims in her introduction to *Toward a Sacramental Poetics*: Herbert “concluded his architectural anthology of lyrics, *The Temple*, with his version of transubstantiation” (9). On such an account, the idea of the host functioning as a sign of God’s presence and grace—where “[m]eaning both participates in the sign...and is wholly other than it” such that the “[s]ubstance of the signs is changed” (*Sacramental Poetics* 123)—is taken up by Herbert and others as a device for inflecting poetry toward serving residual sacramental impulses left largely unattended (if not vilified) by Reformed theology. Absence of the medieval system of sacramentality loomed large in the wake of the Reformation, and Schwartz argues that poetry was one of the culture’s inventive solutions for “holding fast to the sacred” (*Companion* 470).

In her 2014 book *Made Flesh*, Kimberly Johnson takes a slightly different approach than Schwartz, casting early modern poetics generally as having made an “antiabsorptive turn” which she claims Herbert’s poetry embodies:

The poetry of Donne, Herbert, and other writers of the period exhibits a strange fixation on the lineaments of structure, prosody, and sound even as it probes the capacity of

language to function symbolically. The effect of these strategies in concert is to arrest readerly absorption—that is, to prevent the dissolution of the sign into the signified, the word into content. (28)

Johnson does not read Herbert as engaging the doctrine of transubstantiation to construe sacramental poetics as a matter of signs containing what they signify—nor does she read Herbert through a memorialist lens that sees sacramental signs as mediatory representations of transcendent meaning. Instead, Johnson argues that Herbert’s poetry was “radically invested in promoting its own surface, asserting the *sign as such* as an object rather than treating the text as a transparent conduit to content” (43). On this account, a sacramental lyric is distinct from what it signifies but refuses merely to stand in as its container or its “bare sign.” Instead, a sacramental lyric foregrounds its own surface qualities as its substantial significance, thereby rendering its physical text on the page a “site of immanence” (44).

Though distinct in their expository claims and approaches, these scholars share a fundamental assumption about Herbert’s “eucharistic sensibility”: namely, that it is primarily informed by and preoccupied with the semiotics of traditional sacramental theology. Herbert scholars have largely taken for granted that grasping the ways in which his poetry engages sacramentality is foremost a matter of understanding how he conceived of the work of signs in communicating God’s Real Presence in the Eucharist. My aim in this essay, however, is to proffer and justify an alternate reading of sacramentality in Herbert, one that: a) foregrounds the role of the Anglican *via media* and its emphasis on liturgical performance of the Eucharist in shaping the eucharistic sensibility Herbert brings to bear on his lyrics; and b) that registers his lyrical mobilization of sacramentality as a function of tuning readers’ attentions, perceptions, and imaginations to a more immediate experience of divinity in and through concrete things, rather

than mere apprehension of things as divine signs of one kind or another. More specifically, in opposition to both Schwartz and Johnson, I argue Herbert composes many of his lyrics to perform their referents as signs but in liturgical ways designed to merge readers' perception of them into what the lyric itself imagines them as being—thereby revealing in such objects, as well as in the text itself, their distinctive ways of *reflecting* rather than cryptically representing or containing divinity.

This essay is divided into two main sections, the first of which aims to articulate Herbert's *ars poetica* as running counter to preoccupations with theological semiotics. I begin by analyzing a pair of his early lyrics commonly referred to as the "New Year Sonnets." I highlight how these lyrics articulate his vision for a divine mode of sonneteering that applies the conventions of Petrarchan lyric tradition to love and praise of God, and in a way that aims to *discover* God in and through mundane things. Not only is this a poetic critique of the carnal preoccupations of traditional sonneteers, but it is also a rhetorical response to contemporary Puritan-iconoclastic impulses to reject the spiritual value of representational art altogether. Highlighting the important role of scripture in Herbert's lyrics, I argue that Saint Paul's mirror-glass simile in the third chapter of 2 Corinthians provides the best key for understanding the rhetorical foundation of Herbert's poetics. On such an understanding, it becomes clear that Herbert envisioned a literary art that shifts aesthetic significance away from figural language as such, and toward the manners in which figural language can be used to plainly copy or reflect divinity with the aid of the Spirit. I argue that Herbert's poetics therefore amounts to lyrical expression of the Anglican *via media* he inherited from the Elizabethan Settlement, and also that it marks a poetic turn away from signification as the hinge of Real Presence in sacraments.

In the second section, I aim to exfoliate a more positive connection between Herbert's poetics in *The Temple* and the Anglican emphasis—as expressed by such divines as Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker—on liturgical performance of the Eucharist. Using Herbert's own church, St. Andrew's in Bemerton, as a means of grounding *The Temple's* rhetoric materially and historically, I first look at how “The Church-porch” functions in relation to “The Church” to build a sense of *ductus* or ceremonial movement into the work as a whole. Moving into “The Church,” I focus on “The Altar” as the key to understanding the eucharistic sensibility of the lyrics that follow—and I exposit “The Church-floor” as exemplifying that sensibility. Leveraging the work of Lucy Alford in her book *Forms of Poetic Attention*, I take up her theory of attention as an artistic medium as a lens through which to analyze how Herbert's lyrics aim to shape and tune the attentions of their readers. I further argue that *The Temple* strives in this way to attune readers' perceptions toward perceiving the world as a reflection of divinity, and that such a poetics, as a matter of revelation rather than sign-apprehension, mobilizes the contemporary Anglican conception of the Eucharist. Ultimately, I aim to show that Herbert's “eucharistic sensibility” is best registered as mobilizing and extending the Anglican conception of Real Presence as a positive theory, rather than registering it as a pseudo-Catholic reaction to a mere negative—and therefore unsatisfactory—theory of Real Presence.

“Whose Fire is Wild and Doth Not Upward Go”: Herbert's *Ars Poetica*

Herbert chose, quite conscientiously, to engage with the same literary tradition the likes of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare had famously worked within—one that owed much to Petrarch in terms of both form and subject matter. But where other seminal Renaissance and early modern poets tended to focus on forms of carnal love and desire—consciously sculpting idiosyncratic versions of Petrarch's Laura—Herbert conducted this seemingly inherent lyrical

impulse toward love and desire for God (Wilcox xxiii). A pair of early lyrics commonly titled “New Year Sonnets” clearly expresses a young Herbert’s attitude toward popular sonnet sequences of his day:

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee,
 Wherewith whole showls of *Martyrs* once did burn,
 Besides their other flames. Doth Poetry
 Wear *Venus* Livery? only serve her turn?
 Why are not *Sonnets* made of thee? And layes¹
 Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
 Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
 As well as any she? Cannot thy *Dove*
 Out-strip their *Cupid* easily in flight?² (lines 1-9)

First published in Izaak Walton’s *Life of Mr. George Herbert* in 1670, the “New Year Sonnets” were originally part of a letter Herbert wrote to his mother, Magdalene Herbert, in 1610—just one year after Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* were published. They constitute a brilliant piece of rhetoric, in that Herbert approximates Shakespeare’s sonnet form, no doubt fresh in the English mind, subversively to critique the carnal preoccupations of sonneteers—while at the very same moment demonstrating the possibility of mobilizing the affective virtues of the sonnet form toward praise of God. As he writes to his mother: “But I fear the heat of my late *Ague* hath dried up those springs, by which Scholars say, the Muses use to take up their habitations. However, I need not their help, to reprove the vanity of those many Love-poems, that are daily writ and

¹ “A short lyric or narrative poem intended to be sung” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1a).

² Both “New Year Sonnets” are cited from Helen Wilcox’s edition of *The English Poems of George Herbert*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 4-6.

consecrated to *Venus*” (Hutchinson ed. 363). The “New Year Sonnets” are themselves apostrophes to God, questioning him directly as to whether poetry can only don “Venus Livery” in service to her, the pagan goddess of love and sexual desire.³ Herbert baldly asks: “*Why are not Sonnets made of thee?*” (Walton 28, original emphasis). There is a generative ambiguity in this question. Does he mean: “why are sonnets not written to or about you?” or “why are sonnets themselves not made *of you?*” The former merely asks why sonneteers do not make divinity their subject matter; the latter asks why sonneteers do not make their sonnets out of divinity—why divinity is not, in some sense, their medium. The volta and conclusion of “New Year Sonnet (I)” suggests Herbert means to ask both questions:

Or, since thy wayes are deep, and still the same,

Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name!

Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might

Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose

Than that, which one day, Worms, may chance refuse. (Lines 10-14)

Not only does Herbert envision a “smooth” verse that “bears [God’s] name” but he also more deeply envisions poetry forged out of the fire each breast feels—the very same fire, presumably, that forges poetry in service to Venus—but whose flame is fueled by God’s perfect and eternal source. In casting the difference between carnal and divine poetry as a difference of fuel rather than flame, Herbert displaces moral culpability for engendering carnal preoccupations away from poetry itself and onto poets and their choices; this also suggests divine poetry can be forged from the same passion inflamed by that “braver fuel” such that “worms may chance refuse” to consume it. With divinity as both the stuff out of which a sonnet is made and the subject matter

³ The sense of the word “livery” used here is “[s]omething assumed or bestowed as a distinguishing feature; a characteristic garb or covering; a distinctive guise” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 10).

about which it is written, Herbert envisions such a sonnet as participating more fully, albeit still imperfectly, in God's incorruptible nature. Susceptibility of one's poetry and its subject matter to the ravages (or "worms") of Nature and Time which so vexed Shakespeare's speaker in the *Sonnets* is attenuated, Herbert suggests, by making one's poetry of God.

In "New Year Sonnet (II)," Herbert extends the conceit of the first sonnet, taking direct aim at the carnal poet's use of the blazon:

Sure Lord, there is enough in thee to dry
 Oceans of *Ink*; for, as the Deluge did
 Cover the Earth, so doth thy Majesty:
 Each Cloud distills thy praise, and doth forbid
Poets to turn it to another use.
 Roses and *Lillies* speak thee; and to make
 A pair of Cheeks of them, is thy abuse.

Why should I *Womens eyes* for Chrystal take? (lines 1-8)

Herbert appears, in Augustinian fashion, to conceive "beautiful" as a meaningful predicate only in relation to God as the ultimate standard of beauty.⁴ The stereotypical use in poetry of roses and lilies as similes or metaphors for beautiful aspects of a woman is for him a vain and low use of the beauty perceived in such flowers (and presumably in the feminine aspects such images are used to figure), for their beauty bespeaks God. Equally vain is imagining a woman's eyes as "chrystals," pure and transparent. The potential pun here between "Chrystal" and Christ cannot

⁴ Herbert's rhetoric resonates strongly with a passage from Augustine's commentaries on Genesis: "Every beauty, after all, that consists of parts is much more admirable in the totality than in any of its parts. Take the human body, for example; if we admire the eyes alone or the nose alone, the cheeks alone or the head alone...how much more the whole body on which all its parts, each beautiful by itself, confer their particular beauties?...If the Manichees would only consider this truth, they would praise God the author and founder of the whole universe" (60).

be overlooked; no one's eyes are truly like crystals, just as no one's body or soul is pure save Christ's. Such inventions, Herbert admonishes, are not poor because they project beauty onto things that are not in fact beautiful; they are poor because they settle for mere comparisons of beautiful things rather than apprehending the unitary beauty underlying them—that is, rather than discovering the divine nature of their beauty. As Herbert concludes “New Year Sonnet (II)”:

Such poor invention burns in their low mind
 Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go
 To praise and on thee Lord, some *Ink* bestow.
 Open the bones, and you shall nothing find
 In the best *face* but *filth*, when Lord, in thee
 The *beauty* lies, in the *discovery*. (lines 8-14)

Even the most fine, beautiful, and revered features of the world contain worthless filth when considered apart from God. Beauty lies in God, and things are properly registered as beautiful when God is discovered in and through them.⁵ The same would apply to sonnets themselves; Herbert sees sonnets as specimens of beauty but only insofar as something of divinity is apprehended in and through them. This early pair of sonnets therefore announces and demonstrates the core principle of the *ars poetica* he declared to his mother in 1610: “[f]or my own part, my meaning (dear Mother) is in these Sonnets, to declare my resolution to be, that my poor Abilities in Poetry, shall be all, and ever consecrated to God's glory” (Walton 28). With his poetic acumen consecrated to God, Herbert aims to write poetry that bespeaks the glory of God and through which God can be discovered and experienced. And in the “New Year Sonnets”

⁵ This notion is not without biblical basis. Consider, for example, Paul's reference to Greek philosophers in the book of Acts: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring” (*King James Version* Acts 17:28). In Colossians, too, the writer casts God as the ground of all being: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (*King James Version* Col. 1:17).

themselves we glimpse a notion of what divine poetry minimally amounts to for him: a poetics that avoids courting idolatry in the sense of erecting an image of a carnal beloved as an object of praise and amorous devotion.

Inasmuch as the “New Year Sonnets” are a critique of carnal poets, the mode of sonneteering they recommend and exemplify also serves as a literary tactic for navigating contemporary controversies over sermonic-internal versus ceremonial-external forms of worship. England in 1610 was largely Calvinist in theological orientation.⁶ Emphasis on the preached word over ceremonial and liturgical forms of worship marked the dominant spirit of the times in the wake of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement which, perhaps ironically, had ushered the *Book of Common Prayer* back into practice following the reign of Mary I. Though a thoroughly Protestant book devised to supplant the Mass and other Catholic rites, the new 1559 prayer book had been revised from the original 1549 and 1552 versions to make slight concessions to residual Catholic and traditionally oriented strands of the English Church. Rubrics were either added to or omitted from the 1559 in ways designed to allow, if only by way of ambiguity, a more Catholic-leaning interpretation and implementation of certain rites on the parts of parishioners and priests.⁷ The Elizabethan Settlement and revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer* were envisioned by some as a *via media* compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism, or ceremonialist and Puritan impulses, roughly speaking:

⁶ Patrick Collinson emphasizes the prevalence of Calvinism in England during this period in his *The Religion of the Protestants*: “Calvinism can be regarded as the theological cement of the Jacobean Church...uniting conformists and moderate Puritans. It interlocked with the prevalent anti-Catholic ideology, and it had broad implications for the sustenance of the existing political and social order” (82).

⁷ The Black Rubric, added in 1552 to assure Protestants that kneeling to receive communion implies no adoration of the host, was omitted from the 1559, leaving open the question of Real Presence in the Eucharist. The Ornaments Rubric was added to the 1559 which directed ministers to “use suche ornamentes in the church, as wer in use by authoritie of parliament in the second yere of the reygne of king Edward the .vi” (*Book of Common Prayer* 102). Rather than banning use of vestments and other Eucharistic ornaments outright, this rubric was interpreted as giving some leeway to ministers regarding which ornaments used under the reign of Edward VI it authorized.

[y]et in practice, the *Book of Common Prayer* at times seemed to please almost no one. Many Elizabethans were still Catholic at heart, and conformed only reluctantly to a church now bereft of spiritual comfort and external signs... While Catholics lamented the loss of their religion in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Puritans thought they might as well be ‘papists’ by using it at all. (Cummings xxxvii)

Despite lingering affinities for long established forms and a prayer book seemingly revised to appease such recusant sensibilities in more Protestant fashion, a Calvinist-Puritan elevation of the sermonic word over prescribed rites and sacraments appears to have remained predominant. As porous as the boundaries between “Puritan” and “recusant-conformist” may or may not have been, the perceived threat of a return to “papal idolatry” often manifested in material and sometimes violent ways. As a direct consequence of the 1558 Act of Supremacy which vested ecclesiastical authority back in the English monarch, loyalties of conscience to papal Rome and its religious practices would soon be cast as treasonous:

A sharpening of the law came with the Parliament of 1571... First came a Treasons Act, which made it high treason to write or assert that Elizabeth was not the lawful Queen or to describe her as an heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper. A second Act... made it treason to reconcile anyone to the see of Rome or to receive such absolution or any Bull or writing of the Pope. (Morey 60)

Of course, to be a conformist or ceremonialist in the English style of the *Book of Common Prayer* would not have been seen officially as treasonous. But implementation of any style of liturgy appearing to locate spiritual significance in the rote externals of its rites would have been seen by thoroughgoing Puritans as “Romish” and “pagan”—and therefore idolatrous—by its very nature. Puritans were especially keen to call out over-reliance on the *Book of Common*

Prayer as being at least inconsistent with scripture.⁸ Insofar as a case for such could be made against a parishioner or priest, so could a case be made for their treason against the crown. While Puritans were apt to lobby against the *Book of Common Prayer*, Judith Maltby (1998) shows there were also communities who complained against their ministers to church courts for straying too far from it and innovating their own styles of liturgy, usually centering on the sermon. Prayer and worship was a serious and complicated matter, and the dividing line between non-idolatrous and idolatrous forms was often as ambiguous as it was incisive.

Such was the religio-political environment leading up to Herbert's career. The official Church continued hollowing out a cultural space for its *via media* to take hold, while Puritan iconoclasts still raged against what it perceived as thinly veiled forms of "papal idolatry" in the Church. If the overriding concern of Puritan culture was staving off idolatry, the line between divine and human artifice seems a natural place for Puritans to have staked their claims. Insofar as artifice was met with suspicion in the Protestant-Puritan mind, the role of literature in communal prayer in general—not just in relation to the Prayer Book—was bound to become its own point of contention. As Achsah Guibbory points out in her book *Ceremony and Community*:

Religious controversies about worship made literature itself contested, for they raised the question of the legitimacy of "human invention." The defensiveness about art that we see in seventeenth-century literature grows out of these concerns, as does the preoccupation with art's role in society, which was particularly intense for poets hoping to create a lasting poetic monument in a culture suspicious of idolatry. (7)

⁸ In their 1571 Admonition to the Parliament, for example, Puritan clergymen John Field and Thomas Wilcox take direct aim at the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Then ministers were not so tied to any one form of prayers, but as the spirit moved them...now they are bound of necessity to a prescript order of service, and book of common prayer, in which a great number of things contrary to God's word are contained" (3).

In their concern with the idolatrous use of figural language, the “New Year Sonnets” are a poetic response to both carnal sonneteers and extreme Puritan impulses to eschew the role of art in worship altogether. By revaluing the formal devices emerging out of the Petrarchan lyric tradition as it was taken up in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, a sonnet or sequence of sonnets enacting Herbert’s vision would be ripe for devotional use in ways at once functionally external and theologically internal—at once ritualistic and logocentric. Sonnets are external and ritualistic in the sense that they are physical pages of text to be held, haptically manipulated, and gazed upon while read—often aloud—in a sequence; they are internal and logocentric in that they are constituted by words and concepts aesthetically arranged into a piece of affective rhetoric to be contemplated and interpreted. Such can be said of the *Book of Common Prayer* as a text, but Herbert realized the potential of the sonnet form to engage these two registers while kindling a palpable sense of the spiritual significance underlying both. The coincidence of lyrical structure and divine consecration in Herbert’s envisioned mode of sonneteering therefore paves a “middle way” between Reformed-Puritan and conformist-ceremonialist impulses in the Church of his day.

A Plain Intention: Herbert’s Biblical Inspiration for a Lyrical Via Media

Herbert clearly recognized early in his career the soteriological value that lyric as a genre held for the kind of *via media* the Church of England was pursuing in the aftermath of the Reformation. As Barbara Lewalski notes in *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Lyric*: “Herbert was the most articulate of the major seventeenth-century religious poets on the issue of what kind of ‘art’ may be used in presenting religious subject matter” (213). Though he saw much spiritual potential in the formal devices of lyric, he consciously looked outside the Petrarchan tradition for a means of tempering its secular style of ornamentation in a way

appropriate for divine subject matters in a post-Reformation context. His source, as Lewalski shows, was scripture itself: “The art Herbert eschews involves the conventional poetic devices and ornament of secular poetry; and the plainness he embraces is consonant with that ‘sweet art’ embodied in the scriptures” (315-316). Of particular relevance to Herbert’s craft is the Book of Psalms, such that Lewalski presents him as conceiving “his book of lyrics as a book of Christian psalms, and his speaker as a new David, a Christian Psalmist” (300). Hermeneutically speaking, Herbert’s “Christian Psalms” would no doubt have been informed by highly allegorical interpretations of the Hebraic psalms—variously casting their poetic voices, in patristic as well as Protestant fashion, as Christ’s and the Church’s voice obscured by the figural, semiotic veil of Hebrew language and pseudo-conception. Lewalski therefore reads Herbert as structuring his own lyrics in the style of patristic-Protestant treatments which internalize the content of the Psalms, “representing thereby to man the anatomy of his own soul” (300).⁹

While Lewalski is quite right in looking to a patristic-Protestant treatment of the Psalms as a main source of biblical inspiration for Herbert, this alone does not account for his *ars poetica* from its most holistic and principled perspective as expressed in the “New Year Sonnets.” In considering how Herbert conceives of lyric’s key rhetorical function when optimally applied to divine subject matters, Saint Paul’s figure of a reflecting mirror or glass in the third chapter of 2 Corinthians supplies a clearer and more trenchant biblical source:

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious...How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?...Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that

⁹ The metrical interpretations of the psalms in the *Sidney Psalter* also provided Herbert with an example of the kind of art that a Christian psalmist should aspire to. My aim here, however, is to consider his biblical sources and inspiration properly speaking.

the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: . . . But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. . . . But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.¹⁰ (*King James Version* 2 Cor. 3:7-18)

Paul distinguishes here between the “ministry of death” and the “ministry of the Spirit”; the former he uses to refer to the obscuring effect of the letter of Mosaic law—as it is written, engraved—and its typological foreshadowing of new covenant significance.¹¹ The Old Covenant, on Paul’s interpretation, amounted to a system of opaque signs of God’s future incarnation, passion, death, resurrection and establishment of his Church on the foundation of Christ’s final act of atonement. It is in verse six, just before this passage, where Paul famously says: “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (3:6). Rhetorically, Paul needs to draw clear distinctions between old law and new covenant so as to cast those now under the new covenant of Christ as possessing “unveiled faces,” or freed minds unencumbered by the shadowy semiotics of figural language considered apart from the Spirit. In a chapter titled “The Mirror and the Veil: Hermeneutics of Occlusion,” Margaret Mitchell discusses Gregory of Nyssa’s commentary on this passage to draw out the double function of “veil” in Paul’s rhetoric:

When the text affords only “indistinct perception” and knowledge that is “partial,” Gregory noted, Paul terms this “mirror and enigma”; and when one must exchange

¹⁰ Verse 18 is rendered variously as beholding through a glass or mirror, since the original Greek (κατοπτριζόμενοι) can bear either or both meanings. The *New Revised Standard Version*, for example, opts for a mirror: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror.” The verb is also translated differently as “to see” or “to contemplate” (see *New Revised Standard* footnote on page 2065).

¹¹ That Herbert himself operated in this mode of interpretation is glimpsed in Walton’s accounts of Herbert’s time as Rector: “He made them to understand, how happy they be that are freed from the incumbrances of that Law which our Fore-fathers groan’d under: namely, from the *Legal Sacrifices*; and from the many *Ceremonies of the Levitical Law*: freed from *Circumcision*, and from the strict observation of the *Jewish Sabbath*, and the like” (77).

somatic things for noetic ones—i.e. uncoded signification—the apostle gave this the moniker “the turning toward the Lord” and “veil removal”...Paul becomes, simultaneously, the inaugurator (and defender) of a hermeneutics of clarity *and* obscurity.
(59)

It is not as though Paul can attribute to Christians truly direct knowledge of God, so he uses the idea of a mirror or glass to figure the Christian as seeing God truly—that is, in a way unobscured by the mediation, or veil, of representational signs—but still indirectly and imperfectly.¹² On the one hand, a turn toward Christ marks a turn toward uncoded signification; yet on the other, what is perceived uncoded is still partial and indistinct. It is as though, for Paul, the ministry of the Spirit enables the mind to see ways in which an imperfectly polished mirror is angled upward before it so as to reflect God into one’s spiritual vision—or perhaps that one looks directly into a mirror to see the reflection of one’s own *imago dei*—thereby incrementally perfecting one’s own being and perception by the light and virtue of the true reflection of God’s glory.¹³

In *The Temple*, Herbert takes up this Pauline figure of a reflecting mirror or glass—contra representational signs and in relation to lyrical and rhetorical craft—in “Jordan (II)” and “The Windows.” In the first stanza of “Jordan (II)” we see the speaker fretting over precisely the kinds of poetic ornamentation he decries in the “New Year Sonnets,” pondering whether or not his own use of such devices has verged on profane and idolatrous:

When first my verse of heauenly joyes made mention

Such was their lustre, they did so excell,

¹² Paul famously used the figure of a glass or mirror in another passage: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” in the *King James Version*. Also in the *New Revised Standard*: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

¹³ As J.M.F. Heath argues in *Paul’s Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder*: “The kind of seeing that is involved has a spiritual dimension, but a physical object is not to be excluded. The ‘mirror’...may signify a physical sight available to the eyes of the Corinthians, either before them or in their imagination” (225).

That I sought out quaint words & trim invention,
 My thoughts began to burnish, spredd & swell,
 Curling with Metaphors a plaine intention,
 Praising the sense, as if it were to sell.¹⁴ (lines 1-6)

The word “Praising” in the last line of the stanza changes to “Decking” in the Bodleian manuscript, which means “[t]o clothe in rich or ornamental garments; to cover with what beautifies; to array, attire, adorn” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2a). Both renderings shed light on Herbert’s intended meaning, in that “praising the sense” clearly underscores anxieties about the idolatry of human artifice, while “decking the sense” speaks more to the making of such idols. Praising or decking “as if it were to sell” further places “the sense” of the speaker’s “plain intention” in proximity to the vain and low preoccupations of carnal sonneteers. “I often blotted what I had begunn,” the speaker says in line nine of the second stanza: “Nothing could seeme too rich to cloth the sunn, / Much less those joyes which trample on his head” (lines 11-12). The speaker implies having gone through fits and starts in composing his verse, spurred on by swelling thoughts and distorting (“curling”) figures of speech only to be halted by the very same when such proud ornamentation is registered as unbecoming of so plain an intention as genuine worship of God.

In lines 13 and 14 the speaker seems to approximate more closely a decoration oriented upward: “As flames doe worke & wind, when they ascend: / So did I weaue my self into the sense.”¹⁵ But even this, he says, is missing the mark. While he “bustles” in line 15 he hears the

¹⁴ Williams manuscript, *The Digital Temple: A Documentary Edition of George Herbert’s English Verse*. University of Virginia Press, 2012.

¹⁵ Line 14 is quoted here from the Bodleian. There is a substantial change to this line from the older Williams manuscript which reads: “So I bespoke me much insinuation.” I chose the Bodleian since its rendering is more in line with the overall sense of the poem.

whisper of a friend ask: “How wide is all this preparation?”¹⁶ / There is in love a sweetness ready
 pennd / Copy out that: there needs no alteration” (lines 16-18). The speaker is told by this
 whisper that he need not toil in crafting his own words and figures to express his love, since an
 adequate and becoming verse is inherent within divine Love itself—he need only transcribe it
 rather than adorn it. As Mitchell notes regarding Paul’s hermeneutics in 2 Cor. 3: “The essential
 issue *schêmata* (“figures”) raise is whether they clothe meaning or cloak it, express beautifully
 what an author thinks or disguise it” (64). The fact that the speaker is told this only after he
 “weaves himself into the sense” suggests this weaving is a precondition for his verse’s ascension
 toward God—that only after stepping into and embodying his verse can he hear the “sweetness”
 Love is always singing. Though not explicit, there is a kind of reflective relationship alluded to
 in “Jordan (II)” between the speaker and his verse properly aimed and adorned, in that he sees
 himself in such verse ascending toward God—that his very body and soul are an extricable part
 of the very image attempting to grasp something of the divine by virtue of copying it. The
 resonances here with Paul’s mirror simile are therefore subtle but potent. The speaker wrestles
 with, and ultimately spurns, figural language designed merely to decoratively signify Love and
 opts instead for language that “copies” or reflects it.

In “The Windows” we find another point of convergence with this Pauline simile, but one
 that engages its alternate meaning in the original Greek of “glass.” In the first stanza, the
 speaker likens mankind to windows through which God’s grace shines, albeit imperfectly:

Lord how can Man preach thy eternal word?

He is a brittle crazy glasse:

Yet in thy Temple thou dost him afford

¹⁶ The word “preparation” becomes “long pretence” in the Bodleian, and the phrase is rendered a statement rather than a question—a formulation preserved in the 1633 edition.

This glorious & transcendent place,
 To be a window through thy grace.¹⁷ (lines 1-5)

The speaker first asks God how a human person can possibly preach his divine word, since humanity is too easily chipped and cracked by trial and hardship. As a “crazy glasse,” not only is humanity already too damaged a structure to attest God’s word¹⁸ but it also lacks substantial presence insofar as glass is made to be looked past and through to something else—presumably, to something outside the temple, when a parishioner’s focus should be inside. A glass itself attests to nothing other than what the vicissitudes of nature pass before it on the other side; the only thing a crazy glass attests to is its own failure to do even that faithfully. But what is first presented as a reason why humanity cannot possibly attest God’s word the speaker quickly turns into the very means by which God employs humans to do so; God affords the holy preacher, as an act of grace, a place in his temple as a window. Our brittleness, distortions, and hazy transparency are therefore put to use, but not without divine alteration:

But when thou dost anneale in glasse thy story,
 Making thy life to shine within
 The holy Preachers; then the light & glory
 More reuerend grows, & more doth win:
 Which els shows wattrish bleake, & thin.

God renders his holy preacher a stained glass window through whom shines an illumination of God’s “story”—perhaps Christ’s passion or the entirety of scripture.

¹⁷ Bodleian manuscript, *Digital Temple*.

¹⁸ The sense of “crazy” here most likely means “[f]ull of cracks or flaws; damaged, impaired, unsound; liable to break or fall to pieces” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1).

The operative verb in this stanza (and perhaps the whole lyric) is “anneale,” which means “[t]o fix (pigment, a design) on or into glass, metal, etc., by the application of strong heat,” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2b) as well as “[t]o subject to a process of heating followed by cooling in order to remove internal stresses and make the material less brittle” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2c). In Herbert’s time, glass was not fully infused with color nor was it merely painted onto the surface. Rather, color was burned into the surface, thereby tinting the light passing through and tempering the material structure of the glass. A 1606 manual for making stained glass windows says that once a design has been drawn onto the glass and colors have been made and set onto it accordingly:

Then make a softe fire vnder your glasse, and let it burn til it be sufficiently annealed: it maie haue (you must note) too much or too little of the fire, but to prouide that it shal be wel, you shal doe as followeth...when you think that they are sufficietly annealed with a pair of pliers or tongs, take out the first...and laie it vpon a boord vntill it be cold: then scrape it good and harde with a knife, and if the color goeth off; it hath not enough of the fire, & if it hold it is wel annealed. (Peachum 69)

God’s annealing of humanity’s brittle and crazy glass into a tempered illumination of Himself is also a trial by fire: he will subject us to the fire to sear his glory into our souls and flesh, and will test the depth of it against the blade of his very word which our annealed lives are meant to declare and illuminate. There is something of a meta-pastoral implication here as well, in that God tempers his holy preachers with painful but attentive care—giving them not too much or too little of the trying fire, but just as much as one needs to be well annealed. Herbert concludes the poem by marking the difference between speech colored by the holy preacher’s annealed life, on the one hand, and mere “speech alone” on the other:

Doctrine & life, colors & light, in one

When they combine & mingle, bring

A strong regard & awe: but speach alone

Doth vanish like a flaring thing,

And in the eare, not conscience ring.

As Helen Wilcox notes in her edition of the *The English Poems*, “doctrine and life” is a reference to the prayer in the rite of Holy Communion for the “whole estate of Christes Church militant here in earth...Give grace (O heavenly father) to al Bishopes, Pastours, and Curates, that they may bothe by theyr life and doctrine set forth thy true and lively worde’ (*Book of Common Prayer* 129).” Whereas “colors and life” not only refers to the color and light shining through the annealed window, but “colours or tropes of rhetoric used by the skilled preacher...[and] the ‘light’ of the holy life” (248). But mere speech or rhetoric from a preacher not annealed with God’s colors—passing through watrish, bleak, thin, and crazy glass—vanishes as insubstantially as flares of sunlight glinting in its structural imperfections.

“The Windows” therefore resonates with “Jordan (II)” in that neither lyric altogether rejects rhetorical ornamentation and flourish; they only reject the styles of ornamentation the preacher or poet imposes upon “the sense” which God plainly communicates through his grace, presence, and word. The job of the holy preacher and poet is to weave or meld his own life into God’s word so as to copy, reflect, or let shine through its holy sense—not deck it with his own prideful intentions “as if it were to sell.” Also like “Jordan (II),” “The Windows” activates Paul’s simile in 2 Cor. 3, but in its alternate sense, to demonstrate the distinction between language that distorts by way of watrish, bleak, thin and crazy signification and the true shining of God’s glory through language the plain surface of which God’s “colors” are burned into. Both senses of

beholding in Paul's simile, as through glass or a mirror, seem to be animating the heart of Herbert's poetics, in that he consciously takes inspiration from scripture while spurning the kinds of "curling metaphors" through which a divine poet is tempted to mediate the plain yet sweet sense of God and scripture. To "deck the sense" is to impose one's own human invention, which at best can only beautifully veil one's sense of the divine.

Marrow of the Bones: Relocating Herbert's Eucharistic Sensibility

In *The Temple*, Herbert therefore supplies positive instances of what he had lamented was so lacking in English literary culture circa 1610: that is, a body of songs and sonnets that mobilizes the affective conventions and devices of lyric toward sacrificial praise of God ("layes upon thine altar burnt"), in a way that avoids vain figural distortions of His nature and word.¹⁹ Taken together with Herbert's Christianized, internalized approach to the Psalms as a source text, the resonances between "Jordan (II)," "The Windows," and Paul's mirror-glass simile further suggest suspicion on Herbert's part of the concealing-distorting nature of signifying language. Recall that on Schwartz's account, Herbert's poetics is part and parcel of a larger cultural move to seize upon the semiotics of traditional sacramental theology in response to transubstantiation having been eschewed by the Reformation. With transubstantiation went a general sense of external sacrality, Schwartz argues, and Herbert strove with the likes of Donne and Milton to rehabilitate within the life of the post-Reformation Christian a sense of signs "containing" what they signify. But ascribing to Herbert this residual preoccupation with signs goes against the grain of his poetics as expressed in the lyrics I have analyzed thus far. As he emphasizes in "New Year Sonnet (II)": "Open the bones, and you shall nothing find / In the best

¹⁹ That Herbert so lamented this lack, despite the prevalence of such works as the *Sidney Psalter*, for example, is evident in his letter to his mother: "nor to bewail that so few are writ, that look towards *God and Heaven*" (Hutchinson ed. 363).

face but filth.” There seems to be a dual sense of the word “open” at work here that tracks both the folding back of a covering to see or to read something behind or beneath, as well as cutting open or breaking into.²⁰ The bones in question here most obviously connote the innermost parts of a beautiful woman’s face—that of, say, her cheeks—the rosy surface of which images of flowers might be used to signify. Break open their crypts long after time has drawn back the covers of their flesh, or perhaps even cut open the bones themselves, and you will find, Herbert insists, nothing of their beauty within their material substance—nothing that in itself constitutes or contains their aesthetic significance.

By extension, neither will you find such significance if you slice open a rose petal or stem; the blazon no more contains the beauty of the cheek it signifies than does the cheek or its underlying bone. Herbert unequivocally concludes that the aesthetic significance of things is contained in God, not in objects or their aesthetic signifiers. Neither is there a sense in which he is preoccupied here with the “antiabsorptive” surface of things as signs, to engage Johnson’s framing. Genuine aesthetic significance, which Herbert ultimately equates with divine significance, is *discovered* in the sense of “exposing or revealing something hidden or previously unseen or unknown” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2b): “Lord, in thee / The *beauty* lies, in the *discovery*”. The signified meaning would very much seem to be the ultimate point. But if he is not conceiving of divine poetics as engaging with signified meaning in a transubstantiated sense, nor in a way consistent with a sign-centric approach, then how precisely is Herbert engaging the semiotics of traditional sacramental theology? Given his apparent emphasis on signified meaning, does he amount to some kind of “bare sign” memorialist with regard to the sacramental

²⁰ “To cause to spread out or apart; to unfold...or draw back the coverings...to part the covers of (a book) to read its contents” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 4a); and “To make an opening in; to cut or break into...to break up (ground) by ploughing, digging, etc.” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 5a).

function of signs, and is that the sense in which the Eucharist is the “marrow” of his poetic sensibility?

It is my contention that he cannot possibly be a memorialist, in the sense of treating the Eucharist as a ceremony of sheer symbolic commemoration, for the same reason his sense of poetic sacramentality resists being registered as transubstantive or antiabsorptive: namely, because his poetics does not center theological semiotics as the primary mechanism for engendering sacramental grace and presence. To insist that Herbert must be engaging sacramentality through one kind of semiotics or another not only runs counter to his own demonstrations of his *ars poetica* but it also puts him at an unlikely distance to contemporary Anglican conceptions of sacramental presence. As part and parcel of the Church of England’s strive to walk a “middle way,” the official Church rejected both the doctrine of transubstantiation and “bare sign” memorialism while maintaining the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Such seminal theologians as Richard Hooker embraced the “mystery” of Real Presence, opting to reach further back to the Greek sense which the Latin word “sacramentum” originally referred to, and making reception of Real Presence primarily a matter of the communicant’s faith.²¹ As I argue in the next section, there was a distinct lack of theological concern in the Elizabethan and Jacobean *via media* with the precise metaphysico-linguistic operations of the Eucharist; emphasis instead was placed on *performance* of sacrament as an act of faith. As I argue in the next section, Real Presence hinged not on the host’s metaphysical status as a sign made by liturgical performance to contain what it signifies, but on liturgical performance of the host *as* a sign containing what it signifies. The weight of eucharistic efficacy shifted from the sign to what

²¹ “The Latin term *sacramentum* originally meant a ‘sacred thing’ or an initiation confirmed by a sacred oath...It never had a corresponding synonym in Greek, but was increasingly used by the Latins to convey the meaning of the Greek term ‘mystery’ (*mysterion*)” (McGuckin 301).

is done with the sign as an act embodying faith in the Real Presence within the sign and the ritual at large—the rest is mystery. If the “New Year Sonnets” articulate Herbert’s central *ars poetica*, and if “Jordan (II)” and “The Windows” recursively implement it, then there is little reason to think that he held views of sacramental efficacy that widely diverged from those of his *via media* contemporaries. It seems to me that Herbert shares with other Anglican divines of his time a wariness of placing undue theological weight on the role of signifying language in the administration and reception of sacraments.

Real Presence in *The Temple*: Revelation through Liturgy and the Medium of Attention

The lyrics comprising *The Temple* are famously ordered and compiled in a way that appropriates the ceremonial structure and rhetoric of traditional church architecture. Excluding “The Dedication,” its 166 lyrics of various forms and lengths are grouped into three sections: 1) “The Church-porch,” 2) “The Church,” and 3) “The Church Militant,” with the overwhelming majority collected under the middle title. A progression of overarching themes is clearly intended that first positions the reader at the entry way to a church edifice—its “porch”—just before one would embark upon its inner sanctuary. Only two poems comprise “The Church-porch,” the first of which is the *Temple*’s longest poem titled

“Perirrhaterium.” As Wilcox notes: “The title [‘The Church-porch’] highlights the poem’s role...*Perirrhaterium*, the poem’s subtitle, is the Greek term for a sprinkling brush used in ritual cleansing before a ceremony” (63). After



Fig. 1. South Exterior of St. Andrew’s, June 2022

“Perirrhaterium” the reader is met with a much pithier poem, “Superluminare,” whose title is “Latin for a lintel, the wooden beam or block of stone above a doorway or entrance...The term occurs in the Latin (Vulgate) version of *Exodus xii*” (Wilcox 85).²² The title is a direct reference to the Passover when Israelites were instructed to mark the lintels and side posts of their doorways with blood as a cleansing sign of protection. Herbert’s “Superluminare” is therefore the “lintel” of *The Temple* on which the proverbial blood of cleansing is sprinkled by the reader’s enactment of the “Perirrhaterium” as a means of self-consecration.²³ By way of careful titling Herbert imparts a clear sense of ceremonial and architectural structure to his body of lyrics. The medieval rhetorical device referred to as *ductus* feels very much at work in this structure:

The notion of *ductus*, of ‘conducting’ oneself through the spaces of architecture, guided along the way by sacred images or objects, is essential to any experience of a thirteenth-century cathedral. Every great church had its own sacred topography, its ‘cognitive map’...The golden principle of this cathedral *ductus* is that the imagery on the exterior of the church, in the sculpture of the porches and portals, acts as a preparation for the imagery, the sacred places, and in some cases the ritual, inside the church. (Crossley 216)



Fig. 2. Church Porch of St. Andrew's, June 2022

²² “Fasciculumque hyssopi tingite in sanguine qui est limine, et aspergite ex eo superliminare, et utrumque postem” (*Vulgate Ex. 12:22*).

²³ Comparing the use of hyssop in Exodus 12 with Psalm 50 (in the *Vulgate*) licenses interpretation of Herbert’s “Perirrhaterium” as an act of cleansing and preparation for both the church edifice and the edifice of the worshiper’s own body and spirit: “Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor” (*Vulgate Ps. 50*).

The rhetorical function of “The Church-porch” is therefore ductile and preparatory—to prepare and sanctify those who have come to worship and partake in the presence of God by way of *The Temple*. From the very beginning of the work, readers are made cognizant of how the text is conducting them into and through “the temple” of Herbert’s poetry; readers also, presumably, carry a memory of the poems with them as they are conducted through the material church porch to partake in communion and other holy services. The poetry and the church’s material edifice therefore reinforce each other to engage the process of rekindling the experience of divine presence within the church and its liturgy, as well as in the absence of such materials.²⁴ One does not dwell on “The Church-porch,” however; modern readers and scholars alike have instead dwelled on select lyrics within “The Church.” But that is just how Herbert designed it—to lyrically reflect, and liturgically map onto, the ceremony of proceeding into the church to partake in holy services.

The Hidden Altar: Eucharistic Vision in “The Church”

As one turns the page on “Superluminare” and enters “The Church,” they first encounter “The Altar”—Herbert’s famous hieroglyph poem in which the text is set in the visible shape of an altar. As trite as it may seem to modern readers, understood in the context of religious controversies still raging in post-Elizabethan England, Herbert’s choice to shape the poem according to its theme of one’s heart made into a stone altar is anything but trite. In the churches of Herbert’s England, stone altars were conspicuously absent—forcibly replaced by the free-standing wooden “communion table” on account of the iconic nature and sacrificial overtones of

²⁴ In *The Country Parson*, for example, Herbert admonishes pastors to make their houses legible representations of how parishioners should conduct their own in light of scripture: “The Parson is very exact in the governing of his house, making it a copy and modell for his Parish...Even the wals are not idle, but something is written, or painted there, which may excite the reader to a thought of piety” (*Country Parson*, Hutchinson ed. 239-240).

the stone altar's Catholic and Jewish usages:²⁵ “[t]he Latin rite was replaced by the English prayer book services of 1549 and 1552, and the altars themselves were prohibited in 1550” (Whiting 25). Reformers saw in the fixed stone altar what they saw in most sacred images and objects used in ceremonial worship: they saw a potential source of idolatry. As Robert Whiting notes in his book *The Reformation of the English Parish Church*: “By January 1560 it was possible for Thomas Sampson to report that ‘the altars indeed are removed...throughout the kingdom’” (28). The practice of using wooden tables was thought more fitting for the Anglican rite of the Lord’s Supper as it was ordained by Christ in scripture, in light of which reformers sought to attenuate the sacrificial overtones through which the Latin rite and its attendant theology had conceived the Eucharist.²⁶

Although scholars disagree as to where Herbert’s doctrinal allegiances may have truly lain—whether he was a crypto-Catholic ceremonialist or a Reformed Calvinist-Puritan at heart²⁷—“The Altar” clearly harkens back, in its own way, to traditional pre-Reformation liturgy. By positioning readers of “The Church” immediately in front of a word-image central to an old and now much eschewed style of worship, Herbert artfully seizes upon the lingering power of the

²⁵ The 1549 version of the *Book of Common Prayer* had replaced stone altars with wooden tables: “The removal of altars was official policy in London in 1550, and there were instances of sanctioned removals as early as 1549” (Turrell 277).

²⁶ As Dom Anscar Vonier explains the Roman Catholic position: “Sacramental significance, then, is the only door through which we approach the nature of Christ’s sacrifice on the altar...The whole question, then, is whether the Eucharistic rite...does signify Christ’s death on the cross in its literal reality. The Catholic Church has always maintained that such is the case” (83). Compare this expression of Catholic doctrine with the remarks of Reformed Bishop Nicholas Ridley, for example, in defense of the table: “For the use of an altar is to make sacrifice upon it; the use of a table is to serve for men to eat upon. Now, when we come unto the Lord’s board, what do we come for? to sacrifice Christ again, and to crucify him again, or to feed upon him that was once only crucified and offered up for us?...we come to feed upon him, spiritually to eat his body” (Ridley 322).

²⁷ For arguments in favor of Herbert’s Protestantism, see Lewalski’s *Protestant Poetics*, Richard Strier’s *Love Known* (also “‘To All Angels and Saints’: Herbert’s Puritan Poem.” *Modern Philology*), and Christopher Hodgkins’s *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert*. Scholars like John Wall (*Transformations of the Word*), Rosemond Tuve (*A Reading of George Herbert*), and Stanley Stewart (*George Herbert*) have argued for an externalized or Catholic Herbert of one stripe or another.

altar's sacrificial rhetoric, but in a way appropriate for a Reformed context.²⁸ On the one hand, “The Altar” makes present, in a poetic sense, the altar as an implement of liturgical worship despite its physical absence in the material lives of its would-be Reformed readers. To borrow from Johnson on this point: “the shape of the poem on the page approximates the site of the encounter for which it yearns” (44). It is, on the other hand, a broken altar made of the worshiper’s own heart-stones cut by the hand of God (see fig. 3 and 4):

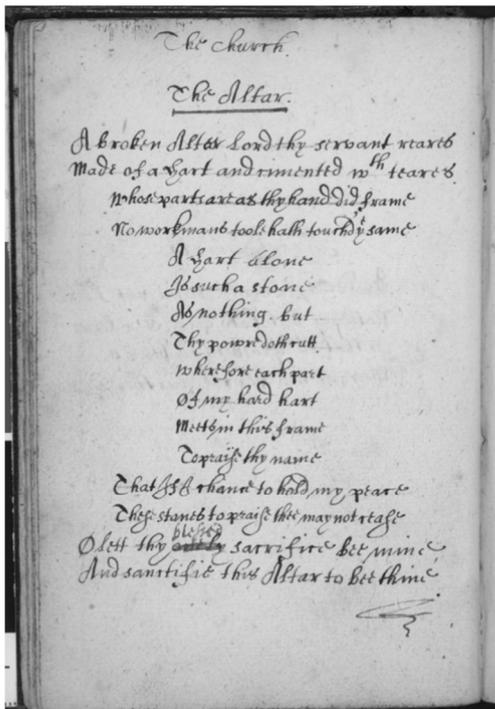


Fig. 3. “The Altar,” Williams Manuscript,
Digital Temple

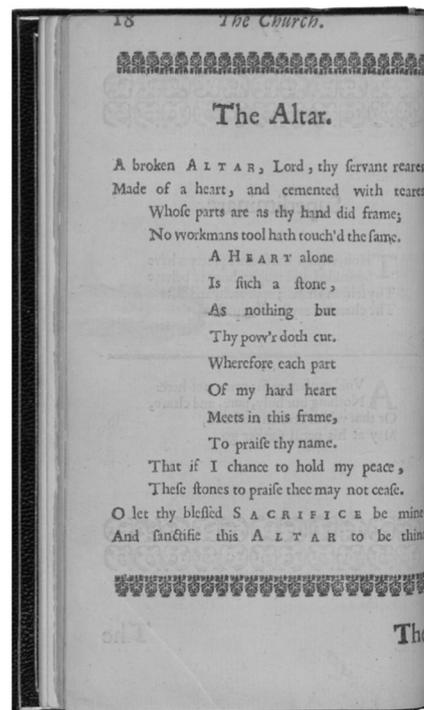


Fig. 4. “The Altar,” 1633 Edition,
Digital Temple

Wilcox draws astute connections between this poem and two passages of the Bible: “there shalt thou build an altar unto the Lord thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them” (*King James Version* Deut. 27:5); and “[t]he sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (*King James Version* Ps. 51:17).

²⁸ On this point I am in agreement with Hodgkins’s assessment: “[I]n a sense, we must agree with Rosemund Tuve, Louis L. Martz, Stanley Stewart, and others who argue that Herbert cannot be understood apart from medieval and counter-Reformation modes of devotion. . . . But appropriation is not assent; these “Catholic” materials are usually present to be questioned, challenged, undermined, even overthrown” (5).

Herbert identifies the controlling image of the poem, “A broken Altar,” with the speaker’s own broken and contrite heart as a locus of sacrificial praise. But “‘Broken’ recalls not only the individual ‘sacrifice’ in the psalm but also the broken body of Christ offered in the eucharistic bread” (Wilcox 92). The altar’s use in Catholic tradition as the site of Holy Eucharist intentionally capitalizes on the altar’s ancient function as a site of sacrifice, rendering the site of Christ’s self-sacrifice and the individual Christian’s as ritually and spiritually one and the same. The “frame” in which each part of the speaker’s broken and stony heart meets on the page of “The Altar” is itself, too, rendered a site where eucharistic sacrifice is encountered:

To view the poem’s presence on the page as if it merely served a referential function, as if it were simply a vehicle by which we understand the “real meaning” of the poem, is to undercut the poem’s powerful emphasis on textual embodiment. . . . Moreover, the language of “The Altar” explicitly reflects upon the poem’s textuality as a site of immanence. . . . For the frame of the poem—its graphic presence on the page—and the artifact of the book each embody the cries of the heart, making them both permanent and materially apprehensible. (Johnson 44-46)

Although Johnson’s assessment of the “The Altar” as a reflection—if not insistence—upon its own material and textual embodiment of “the encounter for which it yearns” is astute and illuminating, granting the observation does not entail assent to the more general notion that Herbert is preoccupied with the textual surface of a lyric’s figural and material embodiment. “The Altar” is concerned, after all, with the state of the *heart* as broken and reframed by God—not the poet—into an interiorized site of sacrifice: “A broken Altar Lord thy servant reares / Made of a heart, and cemented with teares. / Whose parts are as thy hand did frame” (lines 1-3). Moreover, reading Herbert as preoccupied with textual surface overlooks ways in which “The

Altar” responds to and augments the Reformed liturgical experience of its would-be devotional readers. It was Thomas Cranmer himself, the architect of the original 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, who cast the sacramental efficacy of the Eucharist in terms of its ability to manifest Christ, but by way of putting Him *into* our senses:

And for this consideration our Sauour Christe hath not only sette forth these thynges most plainly in his holy word, that we may heare them with our eares, but he hath also ordeyened one visible sacrament of spiritual regeneration in water, and an other visyble sacrament of spiritual nourishment in bread and wyne, to the intent, that as mucche as is possible for man, we may see Christe with our eies, smell hym at our nose, taste hym with our mouths, grope hym with oure handes, and perceauie him with al our senses. For as the word of god preached, putteth Christe into our eares, so likewise these elementes of water, breade and wyne, ioyned to Goddes woorde, doo after a sacramentall maner, put Christe into our eies, mouthes, handes, and all our senses. (42)

The language of Cranmer’s account emphasizes that sacraments place Christ into the senses themselves, rather than merely making him a thing to be apprehended by them—something only external to them. But Cranmer clearly does not cast the significance of sacraments as purely internal or spiritual. Sacraments are the means of “weaving Christ and God’s word into one’s senses,” as it were, so that the communicant’s senses are made an active means of apprehending “that Christ is verily present with us, and that by hym we be...grafted in the stocke of Christes own body, and be apparailled, clothed, and harnessed with hym...to the confirmation of the inward fayth, whyche we haue in hym” (42). To use Herbert’s window metaphor, the communicant’s life and body become like annealed windows through which the inner light of the soul shines outward through God’s “colors,” thereby tinting his or her perception of the world in

a way that is more reflective of divinity. As a poem whose textuality strives to function as a site of immanence, “The Altar” is working in a similar vein to Cranmer’s account of sacramental presence. As a visible, touchable thing “approximating the site of the encounter for which it yearns,”—that is, the speaker’s and reader’s heart broken and reframed into a site of sacrificial and sacramental praise—it calls for the reader to “weave himself into the sense” of it, making it an active part of how the reader perceives sacramental significance in the Eucharist.

According to pre-Reformation church design and orientation, the altar would be fixed at the furthest east end and oriented north-south, the church itself having been oriented east-to-west. The 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* retained the placement of the communion table at the east end, generally speaking, but opted to move the free-standing table as needed for use in Holy Communion, when it may have been oriented lengthwise east-to-west: “The communion table was to be placed against the east wall of the chancel, except at the time of celebration when it could be moved further into the chancel or even into the nave” (Yates 73).²⁹ Certainly in Herbert’s small parish church, St.

Andrew’s, in the village of Bemerton, the place from which the Eucharist was administered would most likely have been the chancel, which would also be the natural direction of acknowledgment from parishioners as they enter from the south and immediately pass the small baptismal



Fig. 5. Nave of St. Andrew's, June 2022

²⁹ See also Turrell: “The new tables were placed in the midst of the chancel and oriented on an east-west axis. Situating the minister on the north side therefore put him in the middle of the long side of a conventional dining table” (277).

font (see fig. 5 and 6). Though a table would have stood unfixed in this space in the years Herbert was Rector, 1630 to 1633, extensive renovations to the church, led by C.E. Ponting in the 1890s, uncovered a stone altar top hidden underneath the chancel floor. As reported



Fig. 6. Chancel and Altar of St. Andrew's, June 2022

in an 1896 article of the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* detailing the restoration: “The medieval stone altar slab, with its incised crosses, was discovered by Mr. Ponting under the altar, but hidden by modern tiles; it has now been brought to view and retained *in situ*.” (8). During the Reformation’s purge of religious iconography, “many altars were retained by their parishes—at Cratfield, for instance, in the vicarage barn. Many others, however, were sold away” (Whiting 25). At times the top slabs were used as grave markers, to pave roads, or build chimneys—but “some parishes and individuals sought to defend the sacred structures from official assault. Deposed altars and reredoses might be hidden at least temporarily by a parochial community” (Whiting 34). It seems the parish of St. Andrew’s opted, at some point, for the latter.

Though precise details are unknown regarding how the altar top came to be hidden under the chancel floor of St. Andrew’s and who placed it there, the fact that it is a medieval slab leaves little question as to why. Since “[t]he idea that communion could be celebrated at temporary or moveable tables... was an idea that would have horrified any devout Anglican in the eighteenth century” (Yates 78), and since the slab was found in the 1890s underneath a newer altar installed on “modern tiles,” it must have been hidden in response to the altar purge—hidden and either forgotten or intentionally left tiled over once fixed altars made a comeback. If so, it

would have been in place when Herbert became Rector in 1630. Although we cannot know for certain that he knew about it, he did oversee extensive renovations to both the rectory and the church of St. Andrew's to get them into serviceable condition. It is therefore at least plausible—verging on probable—that he knew about it.³⁰ Though much of *The Temple* likely dates to years prior to his short and no doubt busy time as Rector in Bemerton, he would have retained his lyrics in manuscript and likely continued editing until he passed the work onto Nicholas Ferrar shortly before his death.³¹ Scholars assess the Bodleian manuscript as drafted from a precursor—possibly the very manuscript Herbert gave to Ferrar. Since “The Altar” is first in “The Church” in both the Bodleian and the older Williams manuscripts, it is likely this placement in the overall compilation was intended by Herbert himself.³² Registering this likelihood—along with the strong possibility that he knew of a stone altar top hidden under his chancel floor—adds a layer of significance to reading “The Altar” as a lyrical augmentation to the *Book of Common Prayer's* liturgy of the Lord's Supper. Herbert's choice to present a “stone altar” upon entering “The Church” primes and conducts his readers to apprehend the table of their Reformed liturgical experience accordingly—to read and experience the communion table as a site of sacrifice inasmuch and in the same manner as the first page of “The Church” is read and experienced as one. The sacrificial overtones of the traditional Catholic Mass are made *undertones* when “The

³⁰ See Walton's biography: “It was not many dayes before he return'd back to Bemerton, to view the Church, and repair the Chancel...he hasted to get the Parish-Church repair'd; then to beautifie the Chapel (which stands near his house) and that at his own great charge” (66-68).

³¹ As Amy M. Charles reports in her biography of Herbert's life: “Between Cambridge and Bemerton Herbert composed probably almost half the poems we now find *The Temple*...Dauntesey House, where Herbert was to find the last uninterrupted leisure he would know, is the most likely place for the greater part of the concentrated literary effort that altered and fleshed out the ground Herbert laid in *W* [Williams]” (138).

³² The Williams manuscript “sheds light on H.'s methods of revision...and the revisions to the sequence of poems within ‘The Church.’ The date of the manuscript is difficult to determine...but the poems it contains were probably written in the period from 1615 to 1625.” As Wilcox also explains of the Bodleian: “It is clear that *B* was intended to be used for licensing the poems prior to their publication” (xxxvii).

Altar” is read with cognizance of the Anglican adaptation of the rite; undertones in the key of reformed, interiorized notions of self-sacrificial praise.³³ Herbert, it seems, would have his reader-parishioner experience the *Book of Common Prayer’s* liturgy of the Lord’s Supper through the lyrical perspective of “The Altar” which, in its own textually embodied way, shapes the communicant’s perception in ways sympathetic to that which is, as it were, underlying the rite.

The fact that Herbert likely administered the Eucharist from a table freely standing over a hidden stone altar top is, at the very least, delightfully serendipitous. It bespeaks, moreover, a thoroughly Herbertian approach to the Anglican *via media* regarding sacraments: an embracing of Reformed sacramental theology and liturgy that nevertheless registers the spiritual value of traditional forms and implements in ways faithful to the broader system of Reformed insights animating the Church of England. The Church had begun to reconceptualize its inherited theology of the Eucharist as far back as Henry VIII’s Church and its *Ten Articles* of 1536. These articles affirmed substantial presence in the host, but did not expressly affirm transubstantiation:

[U]nder the form and figure of bread and wine, which we there presently do see and perceive by outward senses, is verily, substantially and really contained and comprehended the very selfsame body and blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ...and that under the same form and figure of bread and wine the very selfsame body and blood of Christ is corporally, really and in the very substance exhibited, distributed and received unto and of all them which receive the said sacrament. (Bray 170)

³³ Walton’s account of Herbert’s homiletics at Bemerton further underscores this reading: “And he made them know, that having receiv’d so many, and so great blessings, by being born since the dayes of our Saviour, it must be an acceptable Sacrifice to Almighty God, for them to acknowledge those blessings, and stand up and worship” (77).

In the *Thirty-nine Articles* of 1571, corporeal language describing Christ's presence is dropped and communication of Christ's presence to the communicant is rendered a matter of faith: "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" (*Book of Common Prayer* 681). Such was the official doctrine of the Church of England by the time Herbert arrived on the scene. "Faith" and "manner" become the central mechanisms of Real Presence in the Eucharist in the wake of the Elizabethan Settlement, as opposed to the traditional doctrine which focused theologically on the metaphysical status of the host materials.

Ever skeptical of ceremonial worship, many Puritans were bent on memorialist theologies of the Eucharist, "whose view of the sacraments portrayed them as little more than visual sermons" (Turrell 151). Conformists, on the other hand, remained unsatisfied with such eucharistic theologies that rendered the host a "bare sign," opting instead for more robust and instrumental approaches that emphasized the communicant's true participation in the body of Christ by way of faith in divine mystery. Richard Hooker, for example, expressed such a view in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*:

This sacrament is a true and reall participation of Christ, who thereby imparteth him selfe even his whole intire person as a mysticall head unto everie soule that receiveth him, and that everie such receiver doth thereby incorporate or unite him selfe unto Christ as a mysticall member of him...when some others did so conceive of eatinge his flesh, our Saviour to abate that error in them gave them directlie to understand how his flesh so eaten could profit them nothinge, because the words he spake were spirit, that is to say they had a mysticall participation. (335-337)

For conformists like Hooker, representation is the means by which Real Presence is manifest in the Eucharist, but the host is neither a bare sign nor is its substance made metaphysically divine by virtue of its being made into a container of divine grace. Instead, it is the very act itself of earnestly partaking in and performing the sign that manifests Christ's presence to the communicant:

Seinge therefore that grace is a consequent of Sacramentes, a thinge which accompanieth them as their ende...the manner of their necessities to life supernaturall is not in all respectes as foode unto naturall life, because they containe in them selves no vitall force or efficacie, they are not physicall but morall instruments of salvation, duties of service and worship, which unlesse wee performe...they are unprofitable.³⁴ (246)

In both Hooker and Cranmer one discerns no robust distinction between God's presence in the sacraments by virtue of his omnipresence, on the one hand, and His "sacramental presence," on the other, as though the latter is a distinct kind of presence.³⁵ Since the bread and wine of the rite "contains in themselves no vital force or efficacy" and are "but moral instruments," God's presence would seem to be uniform and continuous across the consecrated host and the rest of creation—neither the eucharistic host nor the rite would qualify His presence in some special way. There is strong resonance here with Herbert's "The H. Communion," where he clearly locates eucharistic efficacy away from the materials of the rite and declares, nevertheless, that

³⁴ Hooker's account seems to invert the traditional Catholic conception of the instrumentality of sacraments. As Vonier explains: "This is the profound Thomistic concept of the Sacraments, that they are the *instrumenta Dei* for bringing about supernatural effects, so that they may be truly called containers of grace" (24). Whereas, for Hooker, sacraments contain nothing in themselves; they are not instruments by virtue of being containers, they function as containers by virtue of their instrumentality.

³⁵ Vonier's account of the Thomistic distinction between presence-in-person and sacramental presence runs counter to the ways Cranmer and Hooker conceived the role of sacraments in engendering Real Presence: "If we were met by Christ in Person in our churches, such gracious encounters would have nothing in common with what is called sacramental Presence...One is justified in saying that it is the very condition of the sacramental Presence to transcend all vision and all experience even of the highest order" (27).

God's grace comes with them: "Not in rich furniture, or fine array, / Nor in a wedge of gold, / ...Onely thy grace, which with these elements comes" (lines 1-2, 19).³⁶ As Robert Whalen notes: "Hooker provided Herbert and others with a model of behavior suitable for approaching Holy Communion" ("Herbert's Sacramental Puritanism" 1284). Dutiful and earnest performance of the Eucharist reveals God's uniform presence as focused and intensified through the host. The difference the communicant experiences between God's presence in the host versus the rest of creation at the moment of reception is real but occurs, albeit mysteriously, in a phenomenological register, rather than an ontological one.

The Anglican sacramental rite is therefore an instrument of *discovery* or revelation rather than transubstantiation, and in the discovery of Real Presence the communicant "incorporates or unites himself unto Christ as a mystical member." There is a call back in this notion to certain patristic conceptions of the Eucharist, in that:

celebration of the eucharistic mysteries was approached *eschatologically*: the consecratory power of the *Holy Spirit* who once again made present the Lord of Glory in the eucharistic forms opened up a timeless window within the timebound earthly church whereby believers...were caught up into the single redemptive work of Christ.

(McGuckin 126)

The idea of the Eucharist opening a "window" to the eternal evokes familiar tropes of glass and beholding. Recall that in Paul's writings to the Corinthians we behold God's glory through a glass or mirror and are thereby perfected by one degree of glory after another. Through beholding we are redeemed, and redemption is made tantamount to revelation: "Revelation became a generic word for the entire *economy* of God's salvation, including the 'preparatory

³⁶ Bodleian, *Digital Temple*.

teachings’ of the whole nexus of the Old Testament” (McGuckin 295). We see this functional connection between beholding, redemption, revelation, and “preparatory teachings” operating in *The Temple*. “The Church-porch” poetically conveys moral teachings to readers, enabling them to discover preparatory significance in the porch and lintel of their material church experience. So too the “The Altar,” upon entering “The Church,” enables its devotional readers to discover in the materials of their Reformed liturgy of the Eucharist a mirror or window through which Real Presence is revealed so as to enrapture the communicant into the redemptive work of Christ’s sacrifice. The mode of sacramentality Herbert engages in his poetics is therefore different from the kinds Schwartz and Johnson interpret him as engaging. It is distinctly Anglican in the way it leans into liturgical performance of sacrament—rather than theological semiotics—as the fundamental basis of Real Presence.

Extending the Vision: A Eucharistic Reading of “The Church-floor”

The importance of titles extends to the over 150 lyrics comprising the rest of “The Church.” Some, such as “The Church Floor,” “The Windows,” “The Pulley,” and “The Church-lock and Key” serve to locate the reader within liturgical space, calling attention to a specific feature of that space so as to unfurl spiritual significance. Although a comprehensive analysis of the various ways in which Herbert unfurls revelation and meaning from his titles is beyond the scope of this essay, analysis of one lyric in particular will shed light on how his eucharistic sensibility extends from “The Altar” to comprise the “marrow” of *The Temple* as a whole. In “The Church-floor” one finds a lyric immediately adjacent to “The Altar,” both in terms of the poetic space *The Temple* constructs for readers and the liturgical space of the material church—an aspect of church architecture Herbert consciously exploits. Consider its introductory stanzas:

Mark you the floore? That square & speckled stone,

Which looks so firm and strong,

Is Patience:

And th'other black and grave, wherewith each one

Is Checker'd all along,

Humilitie:

The gentle rising, which on either hand

Leads to the Quire above,

Is Confidence:

But the sweet cement, which in one sure band

Ties the whole frame, is *Love*

And *Charitie*.³⁷

The floor in question must be that of the chancel, since it has a “gentle rising” leading to the “choir above.” Herbert sees something as seemingly mundane as the checkered marble floor commonly laid as stone or tile underneath a church’s altar or communion table as embodying a poetic conceit regarding Christian virtues.

In eucharistic fashion, he points to its various features and says “This is...,” compelling the reader to imagine the very floor from which the Eucharist is administered and to identify its features as Patience, Humility, Confidence, Love and



Fig. 7. Chancel Floor, June 2022

³⁷ 1633 edition, *Digital Temple*.

Charity accordingly; not, it would seem, as bare signs of them, but as in some sense the very bodies of the virtues themselves. Just as Christ bids his followers to read the bread he breaks at the Last Supper as his body, Herbert bids readers to read the material floor from which the Eucharist is received—



Fig. 8. Marble Tile in Chancel, June 2022

and possibly in the case of Herbert's own church, the floor laid over the sacrificial significance of the rite (see fig. 7 and 8)—as the very virtues upon which its administration and reception are based, both materially and spiritually speaking. Also like "The Altar," the floor is interiorized and made an aspect of the heart with "The Church-floor's" final two lines: "Blest be the *Architect*, whose art / Could build so strong in a weak heart." The poem itself is what renders the floor legible as such by virtue of the form of attention through which it conducts its reader—the aspects of the floor it spotlights and its manner of doing so.

In her book *Forms of Poetic Attention*, Lucy Alford develops a theory of poetics centering on attention as an artistic medium. In Alford's view, a poet's ability to form sensory language into physical embodiments of selected subject matters—poems on the page—enables him to conduct readers' attentions toward relevant aspects of the material world in ways that imbue such aspects with bespoke meaning. As she says regarding poetry and the senses: "In its formation as physical, embodied structure, poetry places language most pressingly in the senses, grounding the 'movement of the mind' in the sensing body and thus in physical presence. This presence is at once spatial, sensorial, and temporal" (270). Herbert, too, is preoccupied with manners of attention in the sensing body in both *The Temple* and his pastoral manual, *The*

Country Parson, especially regarding sacraments. As he laments in “The Parson Catechizing”: “for many say the Catechisme by rote, as parrots, without ever piercing into the sense of it” (256). The difference between “parroting” and “piercing” rites and their various material implements, for Herbert, is maintaining a proper spiritual perception of their significance. As he also makes clear in “The Parson in Sacraments”: “The time of every ones first receiving is not so much by yeers, as by understanding: particularly, the rule may be this: When any one can distinguish the Sacramentall from common bread, knowing the Institution, and the difference, hee ought to receive” (*Country Parson*, Hutchinson 258). The institution of the Eucharist—its liturgical setting, prayers of consecration, authorities vested in the priest and ecclesial hierarchy—plays an active role in the communicant’s discernment of sacramental status. Such structures govern the manner of the Eucharist’s performance in ways analogous to the “spotlighting” work of poetry which Alford discusses and that Herbert, in his own way, mobilized:

[T]he process of selection, or the moving spotlight, reveals the “intentionality of the text, whose reality comes about through the loss of reality by those empirical elements that have been torn away from their original function by being transposed into the text.”³⁸ In this way, selection itself, the dynamic operation of focalization, constitutes the literariness of literary experience...as an event combining imagination and perception within the medium of attention. (Alford 13-14)

Alford’s idea of imagination and perception combining in the way a poet shapes attention as an artistic medium provides a useful lens through which to analyze Herbert’s eucharistic sensibility. Insofar as lyrics like “The Church-floor” “tear away” empirical elements from their original

³⁸ Alford quotes here from Wolfgang Iser’s *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

functions by spotlighting and transposing their sensory aspects into their text, the means whereby they perform in a eucharistic manner is by shaping the kinds and ways of attention the reader pays to such elements.

Another way of expressing the Cranmerian and Hookerian view of the Eucharist in poetic terms, by way of Alford, is to cast Real Presence as genuinely apprehended when the words of Jesus in scripture, the Prayer of Consecration, the overall liturgical setting and so on—all of which poetically “spotlights” the bread and wine—cause the communicant’s *imagination* of what he or she desires the host materials to be, namely the body and blood of Christ, to be “annealed” or “weaved” into his or her *perception* of them. “The Church-floor” engages this process when it spotlights the “square and speckled stone,” “black and grave checkered stone,” “the rising,” and “the cement” and identifies them respectively as “Patience,” “Humility,” “Confidence,” “Love and Charity.” One can therefore read such lyrics as “The Church-floor” as enlisting their material referents into a kind of liturgical performance analogous to the ways in which the Anglican eucharistic rite enlists the host. “The Church-floor” is therefore a prime example of how Herbert extends his eucharistic poetics, so tangibly emblemized in “The Altar,” to other lyrics in “The Church” so as to anneal into his reader’s perception the spiritual aspects each poem imagines its material referents as being—thereby revealing something of divinity in the experience.

Opening the Bones: The Poetics of Sacrament as Revealing the Sacred

George Herbert died as Rector at Bemerton in 1633, just three years after his appointment. Although he is reported to have been buried under the chancel in St. Andrew’s, renovations to its floor in the 1890s uncovered nothing of his remains. As another article in *The Salisbury and Winchester Journal* reports the week prior to the church’s reopening in 1896:

We learn from Canon Warre that, though every endeavour has been made during the progress of the work in the chancel to identify George Herbert's grave, all such efforts have failed. There are two old brick graves in the chancel, both of which have been opened in times past; but it does not appear that either of them is George Herbert's tomb. (5)

True to his *ars poetica* in the "New Year Sonnets," the aesthetic significance sought after in his own bones has remained elusive even to those who have pried open the places where they are supposedly buried. Graves were opened and nothing but filth was found; the same would be true, as far as Herbert seems to have been concerned, even if they happened to have found his grave but mistaken it. After all, it is altogether unclear how reliably anyone could have made positive identifications either way, since over 260 years had passed, and no great care was taken at the time of his burial to mark the precise place: "[t]he grave was not marked, and the exact location is not certain: it is either beneath or to the north of the altar" (Charles 175).³⁹ As the writer of the 17 October article in the *Journal* concludes: "The visitor to St. Andrew's Church cannot stand by the grave of the sweet singer of 'The Temple,' and say, in the words of his own epitaph on Lord Danby":

Sacred Marble, safely keepe
 His dvst who vnder thee must sleepe
 Vntill the graues again restore
 Their dead, and Time shalbe no more:⁴⁰ (lines 1-4)

What a visitor can do, however, is stand by the medieval altar top that remains *in situ* under the church's modern altar and, perhaps, partake in Holy Communion. If his dust remains underneath

³⁹ If Herbert was buried to the north of the altar that would further underscore a liturgical significance, since the *Book of Common Prayer* placed the minister on the north side of the communion table.

⁴⁰ Hutchinson's edition of *The Works of George Herbert*, Oxford University Press, p. 208.

or beside it, it is through the altar's rhetoric—activated by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anglican approach to the Eucharist—that Herbert would bid us register such material, like that of any other, as spiritually significant: “for his Fame, / His Vertues, and his Worth shalbee / Another Monvment for Thee” (lines 8-10). Through the eschatological window of the sacrament, he would have us glimpse something of eternal significance in the place where his dust lies—the “doctrine and life, colors and light” of an exemplary mode of being and perceiving. As Whalen remarks in the conclusion to his book *The Poetry of Immanence*:

The otherwise idiosyncratic voices of such poets as Donne and Herbert shared a concern deliberately to articulate an institutional individual... The Eucharist became an appropriate topos on which to explore this juncture of imagined and ‘real’ worlds, the sacramental intersection of the divine with the religious poet’s daily bread, the human rendered *sub specie aeternitatis*. (Whalen 176-177)

Indeed, it is through a liturgical approach to lyric, of the kind Herbert builds in *The Temple*, that the manners in which mere earthen things reflect divinity are discovered. Material objects in themselves, sans such forms of attention, are just filth—but opened in spirit, their material surface is peeled away like thin tears of foil to reveal the divine mirror gilding their contours. It is in this sense that Herbert is a sacramental poet, lyrically extending the eucharistic topos to other aspects of religious life to make our interactions with them a liturgy for worship and revelation.

My primary aim in this essay has been to challenge ways in which Schwartz, Johnson and others have read Herbert as a sacramental poet. In particular, I have aimed to offer an alternative to reading Herbert as preoccupied with a lost sense of sacredness built into the material world on account of the Reformation’s rejection of transubstantiation. To that end I have shown: a) that

Herbert's own demonstrations of his *ars poetica* do not comport with the theological semiotics underpinning the doctrine of transubstantiation; and b) that Herbert is best understood as giving positive voice to a distinctly Anglican doctrine that hinges Real Presence on liturgical performance and faith. My arguments therefore resonate with the Bishop of Salisbury's remarks at the reopening of St. Andrew's in 1896: "What was the secret of his originality, what new element did he introduce into English literature? It was, I believe, this, that he was the first to discern and make popular the poetic character of the reformed Church of England" ("Re-opening" 1896). As a confluence of Petrarchan and psalmodic tradition centering a Pauline treatment of figural language, Herbert's poetics aims to lyricize the whole of Christian life into a songbook of praise—to make life itself into a liturgy for discovering and inhabiting the Real Presence of God. Such a poetics does not grope for a lost sense of sacramentality in a desacralized world. Rather, it reimagines sacrament as performance of sacrality in the world; performance that reveals ways in which the phenomenological surface of things truly, but spiritually, reflects the divine. To read Herbert as merely romancing the sacramentality of a bygone era of English religiosity is to miss the positive contributions to Christian conceptions of sacramentality his poetry offers—the ways in which he bids us spiritually to "open the bones" and perceive "Heaven in ordinary."⁴¹

⁴¹ Line 11 of "Prayer (I)," Williams manuscript, *Digital Temple*.

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