

## The Procession of Allusions to God In British Poetry From The Beginning: God's Acts And The Response Of Poets

Rob Blain, Professor of English, Houston Community College Southeast

### Abstract

The human heart enjoys this glorious world and all wonders of nature and mankind and the mind thinks, "The scope of it is beyond me." "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high for me, I cannot attain unto it." We sense what is beyond us. We are reminded, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp / Or what's a heaven for?"

It is no surprise, then, that references to God in English prose and poetry are abundant from the earliest times. "Caedmon's Hymn" recorded by The Venerable Bede in 731 A.D. and "The Dream of the Rood" were typical early expressions. These early references to God go from "Beowulf," to "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," "The Canterbury Tales" and beyond. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Layamon and Mallory set Arthurian legends in deeply Christian society. For many scholars, devotional poetry reached its zenith in the poetry of John Donne and George Herbert. Donne is more and widely celebrated because of his brilliance and wit, for example, in "The Ecstasy" and "Holy Sonnet 14," but Herbert's poetry is even more sublime, inspiring imitators and admirers for centuries. The procession of allusions to God in British poetry elevates the reader and hearer and goes on through the modern era.

*"Let all the world in every corner sing 'My God and King!'  
George Herbert*

The human heart enjoys this glorious world and all wonders of nature and mankind, and the mind thinks, "The scope of it is beyond me." "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."<sup>1</sup> We sense what is beyond us and are reminded, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp/Or what's a heaven for?"<sup>2</sup> Expressions of wonder at and devotion to God have always and will always pervade English literature. In fact, writers in every generation give new, creative expressions of their own experience and faith which show a continuing development of ingenuity but which also accurately display the revelation of biblical experience and authenticity.

The revelation of God and His life-changing, redeeming love and power is revealed in the writings of those whose lives are changed and who sing the praises of Him who, alone, is capable of redeeming life. The variety of expressions of his life, goodness and power is astounding. Early British literature's many references to God intervening in the lives of men and women and giving the gift of poetry, song, praise and revelation to God's greatness include "Caedmon's Hymn," (the best known) which tells of Caedmon being gifted with poetry and song which he was incapable of producing before a visitation by "a being," or "a certain person," or "One," who bid him sing even though Caedmon, a laborer, protests that he could not. In fact, three related early English references to the gift of God to compose poetry (and song) are recorded in "Caedmon's Hymn," "The Dream of the Rood," and Cynewulf's "Elene."

The critical moment for Caedmon comes, of course, unexpectedly:

But on an evening when he had the care of the cattle he fell asleep in the stable; and One stood by him, and saluting him, said, 'Caedmon, sing me something.' And he answered, 'I know not how to sing, and for this reason I left the feast.' Then the

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 139:6 KJV. (King James Version of the Bible).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Browning, "Andrea del Sarto," *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning*. (New York: MacMillan, 1925), Line 60, page 452.

other said, 'Nevertheless, you will have to sing to me.' 'What shall I sing?' Caedmon replied. 'Sing,' said the other, 'the beginning of things created.' Whereupon he immediately began to sing in praise of God, the [Creator], verses which he had not heard before.' <sup>3</sup>

The next morning, Caedmon tells his foreman, the reeve, who takes him to the abbess and an examination of his gift is done before "the most learned men and scholars" to determine what the gift was and from whence it came. "Then it was seen by all even as it was, that to him from God Himself a heavenly gift had been given."<sup>4</sup>

Caedmon is then continuously able to produce verse for perhaps ten to twenty years encompassing the whole story of Creation, the Fall, the Redemption of man and the coming Judgment, and, says Bede, "Others after him tried to make religious poems in the English nation, but none could compare with him and no vain or trivial song came from his lips."<sup>5</sup> The text of Caedmon's original hymn is true to scripture and as one translation puts it simply Caedmon sang:

[P]raise the Guardian of the kingdom of heaven, the might of God and the wisdom of his spirit, the work of the Father of Glory, in that he, the eternal Lord, ordained the beginning of everything that is wonderful. <sup>6</sup>

Caedmon's being included in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is evidence in itself that the Venerable Bede, a scholar, historian, and dedicated monk who lived his life in a community of pious dedication and study, valued Caedmon and his work, only a sliver of which survives.

This first example of reference to God in British literature is true to biblical understanding of God and the human experience. It is a comparator and tests well with scripture itself which calls for testing and proving the authenticity of what is good: "Every good and perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of change" ... "Test all things, hold on to what is good."<sup>7</sup>

Like the dream or vision by which Caedmon is first instructed to compose verse, "The Dream of the Rood" is perhaps even more remarkable as a composition. The first vision of the tree is wondrous, mystical and recognition of it as "the tree" comes gradually. It is "a most rare tree" which reaches "high aloft," "wound with (in) light," "brightest of beams."<sup>8</sup>

Michael Swanton says,

But...explicit identification of the cross of Christ is postponed. Instead of an immediate recognition of the vision's significance, a gradual revelation is brought about. A complex series of oblique statements erects a sophisticated structural conception of the meaning of this tree in a way not open to straight-forward prose; the theme is a paradoxical complexity which even theologians found difficult. <sup>9</sup>

The tree is a "beacon," covered with gold and gems, five of which were on the crosspiece. The dreamer tells that "many hosts of angels gazed upon it."<sup>10</sup>

Soon, the vision changes, very much like dreams most people experience, mysteriously, and the dreamer sees "that bright beacon change in clothing and color: now it was wet with moisture, drenched

<sup>3</sup> Stopford A. Broke, *English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest*. (London: MacMillan, 1899), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Slade, editor, "Bede's Account of Caedmon." *Beowulf on Steorarume (Beowulf in Cyberspace)*. <<http://www.heorot.dk/bede-caedmon-i.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Brooke, 131.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Swanton, *English Poetry Before Chaucer*. (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 77.

<sup>7</sup> James 1:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 New International Version of the Bible

<sup>8</sup> Abrams, M.H., ed, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Sixth Edition, Volume 1*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) 2-3 .

<sup>9</sup> Swanton, Michael. *English Poetry Before Chaucer*, (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Abrams, 5.

with flowing of blood, now adored with treasure.”<sup>11</sup> This brilliant construction of poetry reveals what American Emily Dickenson says centuries later in her “Poem 1129” also called “Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant,” “The Truth must dazzle gradually/Or every man be blind.”<sup>12</sup> The poet who wrote “The Dream of the Rood” gradually reveals that this is really the cross on which Christ was crucified.

Again, dream-like, the tree now begins to speak to the dreamer (!) and tells its story of being “hewn down at the woods edge, taken from my stump. Strong foes seized me there, hewed me to the shape they wished to see, commanded me to lift their criminals.”<sup>13</sup>

Of old I/became the hardest of torments, most loathed by men, before I opened the/right road of life to those who have voices. Behold, the Lord of Glory honored/me over all the trees of the wood, the Ruler of Heaven, just as also he honored/his mother Mary, Almighty God for all men’s sake, over all woman’s kind . . . There need none be/afraid who bears on his breast the best of tokens, but through the Cross shall/the kingdom be sought by each soul on this earthly journey that thinks to dwell/with the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

This, then, becomes a most sublime representation of beauty and elevated language which lifts and encourages readers and hearers to consider the object of the poem, the Cross, the suffering of Christ for the redemption of mankind, and the promise of everlasting life in heaven for those who choose and honor Christ. The obvious desire of the poet to inspire reverence and piety is communicated deeply.

There is a reason most of the early literature in Britain made allusions to God. “Before Christianity there had been no books [in Britain]. The impact of Christianity on literacy is evident from the fact that the first extended written specimen of the Old English (Anglo Saxon) language is a code of laws promulgated by Ethelbert, the first English Christian King” . . . Because nothing was written down before the conversion to Christianity, we have only circumstantial evidence of what [Anglo-Saxon] poetry must have been like . . . Literacy was mainly restricted to servants of the church, and so it is natural that the bulk of Old English literature deals with religious subjects and is mostly drawn from Latin sources . . . By far the larger portion of surviving literature in Middle as in Old English is religious.”<sup>15</sup>

Cynewulf’s “Elene,” composed between the mid eighth century and mid tenth century according to Robert E. Bjork in Samantha Zacher’s work, contains a telling experience of God’s visitation:

Thus I, experienced and ready, by means of that fickle carcass [lit. deceitful house] wove in word-crafts and gathered in miracles, for long periods of time pondered and sifted thought in the constraint of the night. I knew not clearly about the true cross before Wisdom, through glorious might, revealed to me in the thought of my mind a more increased understanding. I was stained in deeds, fettered in sins, afflicted with sorrows, bound with bitter things, thronged with afflictions, before the Mighty King bestowed upon me instruction through a light manner, as a help to an old man, he meted out his noble gift and instilled in memory, revealed brightness and at times increased it, unbound my body [lit. bonecoffer], unwound my heart [lit. breast-locker], unlocked the craft of poetry.<sup>16</sup>

This unlocking of the heart, or gifting, is celebrated in many places. “Caedmon’s Hymn,” “The Dream of the Rood” and Cynewulf’s “Elene” being religious representations of both scholarly and

---

<sup>11</sup> Lines 11-12

<sup>12</sup> Emily Dickenson, “Poem 1129” lines 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Lines 17-19

<sup>14</sup> Lines 55-59, 70-73.

<sup>15</sup> Abrams 2,3,7.

<sup>16</sup> Samantha Zacher, “Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality: The Evidence of the Puns in *Elene*.” *Oral Tradition Journal* 17/2 (2002): 346-387.

popular life in Britain, “Beowulf” is still the best known early major English poem and while its subject is of the pre-Christian era of Anglo Saxon heroes, the poet inserts many Christian references and themes. Beow, ancestor of Beowulf, is introduced thus: “a son was born... a young boy..., whom God sent to comfort the people... the Lord of Life, the Ruler of Heaven, gave him honor in the world.”<sup>17</sup> Many other allusions to God occur in Beowulf which, for the sake of brevity, must remain unexamined.

The procession of references to God goes on as Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca 1100), Robert Wace (1110), Layamon (1190) all priests who wrote of King Arthur in the heroic Anglo-Saxon tradition, set their tales in Christian culture. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales” (begun 1386) not only contains many references to God, but many of the characters refer to and are associated with the church, whether comically or not. “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” (written ca. 1375-1400) is also replete with allusions to God. The whole story is set in the Christian calendar and Christian society. By the time Sir Gawain is deep into his adventure, Bercilak de Hautdesert and his household go to prayer “in chapel” morning, noon and evening. Sir Thomas Mallory sets “Morte Darthur” (completed 1469-70) in such Christian society that all the characters speak as Christians.

For many scholars, reference to God and devotional poetry reached its zenith in the poetry of John Donne and George Herbert. Of course, John Milton and his epic “Paradise Lost” is thought by many to be second only to Shakespearean literature among all English compositions. Of the seventeenth century writers, Donne, the foremost-acknowledged “metaphysical poet” is more widely celebrated because of his brilliance and wit, as for example in his “The Ecstasy,” certainly “one of the major poems in the English language.”<sup>18</sup>

The wit with which Donne conceives and displays his conceits is dramatic. Some critics call him flashy, overly showy of his intelligence and, therefore, conceited, not humble. Still, his Holy Sonnet “14” “Batter my heart, three-personed God” is a unique cry to God for His intervention, the like of which the world had not seen before Donne.

Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you/  
As yet but knock; breathe, shine, and  
seek to mend;/That I may rise, and stand,  
o'erthrow me, and bend/Your force, to  
break, blow, burn, and make me new<sup>19</sup>

Beautiful! Glorious! And the ending:  
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me<sup>20</sup>

This is absolutely breathtaking. Outside of scripture, such expression of desperate love and devotion toward God is seldom seen, controversial though his statement is to some women.

Many comments about George Herbert and his poems speak of his integrity and substance which come from what Helen Gardner describes in *The Composition of the Four Quartets* as “depths never to be explicated, which give power from well below the surface.”<sup>21</sup> It is

Something beyond the intellect, which sends down roots below, and  
brings forth fruit above beyond understanding.

(Reference Amos 2:19, Kings 19:30, Isaiah 37:31).

The driving force which captivates readers of Herbert is not only “his [poetic] craftsmanship, his mastery of language, and his poetic and religious subtlety,” but the foundation for the works he produced,

---

<sup>17</sup> Abrams 27.

<sup>18</sup> Harry Frissell, Lecture in “Seventeenth Century Poetry” Class, Fall, 1974, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas.

<sup>19</sup> Lines 1-4

<sup>20</sup> Lines 11-14

<sup>21</sup> Helen Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartet*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 67.

“the profoundness of his spiritual experience” and the integrity which shines translucently throughout his works.<sup>22</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge “effected the revival of interest in Herbert single-handedly” because of Coleridge’s own stature.<sup>23</sup> Current literary criticism typically takes small parts of a writer’s work and carefully dissects or interprets texts in many ways. Coleridge, significantly, is the first to “commend Herbert primarily on literary ground.”<sup>24</sup> Before Coleridge, Herbert the man and Herbert the poet were inseparable. Separating a writer from his work is a problem which modern critics grapple with in many ways, but understanding of the work can be gained from the writer’s life.

While other comments by Coleridge about Herbert show Coleridge’s development in his appreciation of Herbert, W.G.T. Sledd published a complete set of Coleridge’s “Notes on ‘The Temple,’” in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* in 1871. In this work, Coleridge’s most extensive and important comment is found:

G. Herbert is a true poet, but a poet sui generis [of its own kind, genus, or unique in its characteristics], the merits of whose poems will never be felt without a sympathy with the mind and character of the man. To appreciate this volume, it is not enough that the reader possesses a cultivated judgement (sic), classical taste, or even poetic sensibility, unless he be likewise a Christian, and both a zealous and an orthodox, both a devout and a devotional Christian. But even this will not quite suffice. He must be an affectionate and dutiful child of the Church, and from habit, conviction, and a constitutional predisposition to ceremoniousness, in piety and manners, find her forms and ordinances aids of religion, not sources of formality; for religion is the element in which he lives, and the region in which he moves.<sup>25</sup>

Those who are of the mind Coleridge describes might say he means that to appreciate Herbert the reader, too, must “live and move and have [his] being” in Christ (Acts 17:28). It is remarkable that Coleridge limits the deepest understanding of Herbert so significantly but this is what the scriptures imply. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:6-10,

when we are among mature people, we do speak a message of wisdom, but not the wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this world, who are passing off the scene. Instead, we speak about God's wisdom in a hidden secret, which God destined before the world began for our glory. None of the rulers of this world understood it, because if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined the things that God has prepared for those who love him But God has revealed those things to us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the deep things of God.<sup>26</sup>

Herbert and his contemporaries knew the Bible intimately, as Chana Bloch remarks in *Spelling the Word*. Not only did they appreciate the Bible as a “literary” work, but also as the “living Word of God.”<sup>27</sup> This attitude continued in Coleridge’s time and the heart of this is reflected in the 1 Corinthians quote above. Herbert had left the daily pursuit of secular, purely academic and scholarly life, although his classic scholarly training enriched all that he wrote. Classic taste and poetic sensibility can make a rich life, but do not open the deep things of the Spirit.

---

<sup>22</sup> Veith, Gene Edward. *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*. (London: Bucknell University Press, 1985), 20.

<sup>23</sup> C.A. Patrides, ed. *George Herbert: The Critical Heritage*. (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1983), 15, 166.

<sup>24</sup> 166

<sup>25</sup> Patrides, 170.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, New International Version of the Bible

<sup>27</sup> Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1.

T.S. Eliot also came to esteem Herbert highly after immersing himself in *The Temple*. When he began to notice Herbert early in his career in the 1920's, Eliot thought of him only as a devotional poet of minor interest. Ronald Schuchard, in his article, "'I think again of this place:' *Eliot, Herbert and the Way to 'Little Gidding'*" shows the progressive importance of Herbert to Eliot. At the time of Eliot's conversion in 1927, he was not interested in Herbert or any English poet as a major source of inspiration or enlightenment. Within a few years, however, like Cowper and Coleridge, he returned to Herbert. By the time he wrote his last major essay in 1962, one not incidentally about Herbert, he said that "the exquisite variations of form in... the... poems of *The Temple* shows a resourcefulness of invention that seems inexhaustible, and for which I know no parallel in English poetry."<sup>28</sup>

By 1938, Eliot had studied Herbert so extensively that it had changed all his later poetry. Now he knew Herbert to be deep, sensitive and tested, like "season'd timber." He soon referred to Herbert as "A Tough Man in a Tough Age."

Before composing his last three Quartets, he was invited to give a lecture on Herbert at Salisbury at the Cathedral Chapter House where he spoke on May 25, 1938. Eliot told the audience that his own greater maturity of mind and sensibility had led him "to concede to Herbert as a religious poet a pre-eminence among his contemporaries and followers."<sup>29</sup> Eliot also describes Herbert variously as "the most intellectual of all our religious poets," as "a man of his time for whom sin was very real and the promises of death very terrible," and as a man who "happened to be something very near a saint." He affirms Herbert's superiority not only to Donne, in whom "something of the particular and private sinner...remains, as a kind of sediment, even in his most religious verse, "but to Vaughn and Traherne, whose occasional "mystical flashes" cannot stand up to Herbert's "steady intellectual light." Eliot asserts, "the only poetry I can think of which belongs to quite the same class as Herbert—as expressions of intensity of religious feeling, and...for literary excellence—is St. John of the Cross."<sup>30</sup>

The most telling criticism of Eliot comes from his last work *George Herbert* published in 1962. Eliot says,

Whether the religious poems of Donne show greater profundity of thought, and greater intensity of passion, is a question which every reader will answer according to his own feelings. My point here is that *The Temple* is not to be regarded simply as a collection of poems, but (as I have said,) as a record of the spiritual struggles of a man of intellectual power and emotional intensity who gave much toil to perfecting his verses. As such, it should be a document of interest to all those who are curious to understand their fellow men; and as such, I regard it as a more important document than all of Donne's *religious* poems taken together.<sup>31</sup>

Gene Edward Veith says in his *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*, "George Herbert, measured by any standard—his craftsmanship, his mastery of language, his poetic and religious subtlety, the profoundness of his spiritual experience—may well be the greatest of all religious poets."<sup>32</sup>

If references to God in British poetry began with Caedmon and reached their height in George Herbert, the list of faithful witnesses and writers who carry on the in the procession of references to God include John Bunyan, whose "Christian" finally reaches the Celestial City after many struggles as do his wife and family, John Milton whose "Paradise Lost" describes God the Father and Christ the Son in terms

<sup>28</sup> T.S. Eliot, *George Herbert*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1962), 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Schuchard, "'If I think again of this place:' *Eliot, Herbert and the Way to 'Little Gidding.'*" (*Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*, ed, Edward Lobb. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1993), 63.

<sup>30</sup> 63.

<sup>31</sup> T.S. Eliot, *George Herbert*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1962), 6.

<sup>32</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*. (London: Bucknell University Press, 1985), 20.

so loving, gentle, yet strong, that the reader is surprised after the brutal conversation and description of satan and his demon-angels, Sin, his daughter and mistress, and Death, his son.

Shakespeare's King Henry V says after the victory at Agincourt, "Praised be God, and not our strength, for it...Do we all holy rites. Let there be sung Non nobis and Te Deum," that is, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your Name be glory" (Psalm 115:1 KJV) and "We praise thee, O God/ we acknowledge thee to be the Lord / All the earth doth worship thee / the Father everlasting. / To thee all the angels cry aloud / the heavens and all the powers therein...."<sup>33</sup>

"The Collar" is one of Herbert's best known poems, telling of the depth of both his frustration in the service of God (see also his poems "Discipline" and "Dialogue") and love for God.

### The Collar

I struck the board, and cried, "No more!  
I will abroad.  
What! shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free; free as the road,  
Loose as the wind, as large as store.  
Shall I be still in suit?  
Have I no harvest but a thorn  
To let me blood, and not restore  
What I have lost with cordial fruit?  
Sure there was wine  
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn  
Before my tears did drown it.  
Is the year only lost to me?  
Have I no bays to crown it?  
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?  
All wasted?  
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.  
Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
On double pleasures; leave thy cold dispute  
Of what is fit and not; forsake thy cage,  
Thy rope of sands,  
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee  
Good cable, to enforce and draw,  
And be thy law,  
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
Away! take heed;  
I will abroad.  
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;  
He that forbears  
To suit and serve his need  
Deserves his load."  
But as I rav'd, and grew more fierce and wild  
At every word,

---

<sup>33</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*. Charles Mortimer Gilbert, Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer. New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 52-53.

Me thoughts I heard one calling, "Child";  
And I replied, "My Lord." <sup>34</sup>

The raving and obvious annoyance at being “caged” in his devotion to God and the startling turn at the end when a simple call from his Master melts his heart is like the quieting of a child throwing a tantrum who finally hushes in the arms of his mother. Many paradoxes are apparent: He complains that he is “free; free as the road/Loose as the wind” even though his being in the thrall of the Master Lover has produced aggravation in his human feelings; “Have I no harvest but a thorn/...(no) cordial fruit?” ...“all blasted/All wasted?” And he answers that “there is fruit” and he has hands with which he can “Recover all [his] sigh-blown age/ On double pleasures;/leave [his] cold dispute/Of what is fit and not; forsake [his] cage, [his] rope of sands” and he rebels and threatens to leave it all, “Away! take heed;/ I will abroad.”(!) (emphasis mine). The remarkable ending, “But as I rav'd, and grew more fierce and wild/At every word,/ Me thoughts I heard one calling, "Child";/And I replied, "My Lord.”” amazes, quiets and even brings tears to readers and listeners. Herbert captures deep emotion in ways that reach, communicate and astound.

Herbert was a musician and musical arrangements of Herbert’s texts have become standards in Christendom. His best known poems to become hymns are “Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life,” “The God of Love My Shepherd Is,” “King of Glory, King of Peace,” “Let All the World in Every Corner Sing,” and “Teach Me, My God and King.”

Studies of the faithful include Amy Carmichael in the nineteenth and twentieth century, who not only sang God’s praises in her poetry, but also, like Herbert, spoke to and praised God in her affliction:

No Scar?  
Hast thou no scar?  
No hidden scar on foot, or side or hand?  
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,  
I hear them hail thy bright ascendent star  
Hast thou no scar?  
  
Hast thou no wound?  
Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,  
Leaned me against a tree to die; and rent  
By ravening beasts that encompassed me, I swooned;  
Hast thou no wound?  
  
No wound? No scar?  
Yet, as the master shall the servant be  
And pierced are the feet that follow Me;  
But thine are whole: can he have followed far  
Who has nor wound nor scar? <sup>35</sup>

The pain and experience of suffering are evident here and in much of Carmichael’s writing. Of course, all of Herbert’s poetry and much of other saint’s poetry, is not just of the glories of God. They also exalt His faithfulness and His strengthening Spirit in their suffering and the extremes of life.

---

<sup>34</sup> George Herbert, “The Collar.” *The Works of George Herbert*. (Ed. F.E. Hutchison. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967.) 153.

<sup>35</sup> Carmichael, Amy. “No Scar?” *Toward Jerusalem*. (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: CLC Publications, 1989), 85.



Since Herbert, the centerpiece of this study, was a musician, it is sensible to end with current British writer and song master Matt Redman's "God of Our Yesterdays."

God of Our Yesterdays

When we were in the darkest night  
And wondered if our eyes would ever see the light  
You were there Lord.

When we were in the stormy gale  
And wondered if we'd ever live in peace again  
You were there Lord

You were there in the struggle  
You were there in the fight  
You were there all the time.

We praise You, the God of our yesterdays  
We praise You, the God who is here today  
We praise You - our God as tomorrow comes.

And whatever lies ahead  
Whatever roads our grateful hearts will come to tread  
You'll be there Lord

We will fix our eyes on You,  
And know that there is grace enough to see us through  
You'll be there Lord.

You'll be there in the struggle  
You'll be there in the fight  
You'll be there all the time

We praise You, the God of our yesterdays  
We praise You, the God who is here today  
We praise You - our God as tomorrow comes  
We thank You - for grace in our yesterdays  
We thank You - for peace in our hearts today  
We thank You - our joy, as tomorrow comes.  
We will trust God.

You're always closer than we know  
Always more involved and in control  
We will trust our lives to You -  
The One who was and is and is to come <sup>36</sup>

The faithful procession of allusions to God in British, American and all English-speaking countries remains strong and true, even in the face of persecution, mistrust, and every negative element that comes against knowing and understanding God. The scripture says, "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31). The praise of God goes on and elevates the reader and hearer in all

---

<sup>36</sup> Redman, Matt. "God of Our Yesterdays." (Thankyou Music, 2008. 7 July 8, 2008.)  
<<http://mattredman.com>>.

circumstances and will go on forever. Writers in English continue the faithful representation of the faithful God who brings goodness, life, power and redemption to all mankind.

## References

- Abrams, M.H., ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Sixth Edition, Volume 1*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993.
- Bjork, Robert E. *Cynewulf: Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Broke, Stopford A. *English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest*. London: MacMillan, 1899.
- Browning, Robert. "Andrea del Sarto." *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning*. New York: MacMillan, 1925.
- Bloch, Chana. *Spelling the Word*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Carmichael, Amy. "No Scar?" *Toward Jerusalem*. Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: CLC Publications, 1989. 85.
- Eliot, T.S. *George Herbert*. London: Longmans, Green, 1962.
- . "A Tough Man In A Tough Age." *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*. 27 May 1938,12. ed, Edward Lobb. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1993. 52-83.
- Frissell, Harry. Lecture in "Seventeenth Century Poetry" Class, Fall, 1974, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas.
- Gardner, Helen. *The Composition of Four Quartets*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1978.)
- King James Version. *The Holy Bible*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958.)
- New International Version Study Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.)
- Redman, Matt. "God of Our Yesterdays." (Thankyou Music, 2008. 7 July 8, 2008.) <<http://mattredman.com>>.
- Schuchard, Ronald. "'If I think again of this place:' Eliot, Herbert and the Way to 'Little Gidding.'" *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*, ed, Edward Lobb. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1993. 52-83.
- Slade, Benjamin, editor. "Bede's Account of Caedmon." *Beowulf on Steorarume*  
Beowulf in Cyberspace. <<http://www.heorot.dk/bede-caedmon-i.html>>.
- Swanton, Michael. *English Poetry Before Chaucer*. Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press. 2002.
- The Book of Common Prayer*. Charles Mortimer Gilbert, Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.
- Patrides, C.A., ed. *George Herbert: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1983.
- Veith, Gene Edward. *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert*. London: Bucknell University Press, 1985.
- Zacher, Samantha. "Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality: The Evidence of the Puns in *Elene*." *Oral Tradition Journal* 17/2 (2002): 346-387.