

# THE TEMPLE

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THE  
TEMPLE

SACRED POEMS AND PRIVATE  
EJACULATIONS  
BY GEORGE HERBERT

*With an Introduction by John Piper*



# CONTENTS

“WHILE I USE I AM WITH THEE”: THE LIFE AND POETRY OF GEORGE HERBERT, BY JOHN PIPER .....	i
THE PRINTERS TO THE READER.....	1
THE DEDICATION.....	5
<b>THE CHURCH-PORCH</b> .....	7
PERIRRHANTERIUM.....	7
SUPERLIMINARE .....	26
<b>THE CHURCH</b> .....	27
THE ALTAR.....	27
THE SACRIFICE .....	28
THE THANKSGIVING .....	37
THE REPRISAL .....	39
THE AGONY.....	40
THE SINNER .....	41
GOOD FRIDAY.....	41
REDEMPTION .....	43
SEPULCHER.....	43

EASTER-WINGS . . . . .	45
EASTER . . . . .	45
HOLY BAPTISM (1) . . . . .	46
HOLY BAPTISM (2) . . . . .	47
NATURE . . . . .	48
SIN (1) . . . . .	48
AFFLICTION (1) . . . . .	49
REPENTANCE . . . . .	51
FAITH . . . . .	53
PRAYER (1) . . . . .	55
THE HOLY COMMUNION . . . . .	55
ANTIPHON (1) . . . . .	57
LOVE (1) . . . . .	58
LOVE (2) . . . . .	58
THE TEMPER (1) . . . . .	59
THE TEMPER (2) . . . . .	60
JORDAN (1) . . . . .	61
EMPLOYMENT (1) . . . . .	61
THE HOLY SCRIPTURES (1) . . . . .	62
THE HOLY SCRIPTURES (2) . . . . .	63
WHITSUNDAY . . . . .	64
GRACE . . . . .	65
PRAISE (1) . . . . .	66
AFFLICTION (2) . . . . .	67
MATINS . . . . .	67
SIN (2) . . . . .	68

EVENSONG.....	69
CHURCH-MONUMENTS .....	70
CHURCH-MUSIC .....	71
CHURCH-LOCK AND KEY.....	71
THE CHURCH-FLOOR .....	72
THE WINDOWS .....	73
TRINITY SUNDAY.....	73
CONTENT.....	74
THE QUIDDITY.....	75
HUMILITY .....	76
FRAILITY .....	77
CONSTANCY .....	78
AFFLICTION (3).....	79
THE STAR.....	80
SUNDAY.....	81
AVARICE .....	84
ANAGRAM .....	84
TO ALL ANGELS AND SAINTS.....	85
EMPLOYMENT (2) .....	86
DENIAL .....	87
CHRISTMAS.....	88
UNGRATEFULNESS.....	89
SIGHS AND GROANS.....	91
THE WORLD .....	92
COLOSSIANS 3:3 .....	93
VANITY (1).....	93

LENT. ....	94
VIRTUE .....	96
THE PEARL. MATTHEW 13:45 .....	97
AFFLICTION (4). ....	98
MAN .....	99
ANTIPHON (2) .....	101
UNKINDNESS. ....	102
LIFE .....	103
SUBMISSION .....	104
JUSTICE (1) .....	105
CHARMS AND KNOTS .....	105
AFFLICTION (5). ....	106
MORTIFICATION .....	107
DECAY .....	108
MISERY .....	109
JORDAN (2) .....	112
PRAYER (2) .....	113
OBEDIENCE. ....	114
CONSCIENCE .....	116
ZION. ....	117
HOME .....	118
THE BRITISH CHURCH .....	121
THE QUIP .....	122
VANITY (2). ....	123
THE DAWNING. ....	124
JESU .....	124



BUSINESS .....	125
DIALOGUE .....	126
DULLNESS .....	128
LOVE-JOY .....	129
PROVIDENCE .....	129
HOPE .....	135
SIN'S ROUND .....	135
TIME .....	136
GRATEFULNESS .....	137
PEACE .....	139
CONFESSION .....	140
GIDDINESS .....	141
THE BUNCH OF GRAPES .....	143
LOVE UNKNOWN .....	144
MAN'S MEDLEY .....	146
THE STORM .....	147
PARADISE .....	148
THE METHOD .....	149
DIVINITY .....	150
EPHESIANS 4:30. GRIEVE NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT .....	151
THE FAMILY .....	153
THE SIZE .....	154
ARTILLERY .....	155
CHURCH-RENTS AND SCHISMS .....	157
JUSTICE (2) .....	158
THE PILGRIMAGE .....	159

THE HOLDFAST .....	160
COMPLAINING .....	161
THE DISCHARGE .....	161
PRAISE (2) .....	164
AN OFFERING .....	165
LONGING .....	166
THE BAG .....	169
THE JEWS .....	171
THE COLLAR .....	172
THE GLIMPSE .....	173
ASSURANCE .....	174
THE CALL .....	176
CLASPING OF HANDS .....	176
PRAISE (3) .....	177
JOSEPH'S COAT .....	179
THE PULLEY .....	179
THE PRIESTHOOD .....	180
THE SEARCH .....	182
GRIEF .....	184
THE CROSS .....	185
THE FLOWER .....	186
DOTAGE .....	188
THE SON .....	189
A TRUE HYMN .....	189
THE ANSWER .....	190
THE DIALOGUE-ANTHEM .....	191

THE WATER-COURSE . . . . .	191
SELF-CONDEMNATION . . . . .	192
BITTER-SWEET . . . . .	193
THE GLANCE . . . . .	193
THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM . . . . .	194
MARY MAGDALENE . . . . .	195
AARON . . . . .	196
THE ODOUR. 2 CORINTHIANS 2 . . . . .	197
THE FOIL . . . . .	198
THE FORERUNNERS . . . . .	198
THE ROSE . . . . .	200
DISCIPLINE . . . . .	201
THE INVITATION . . . . .	202
THE BANQUET . . . . .	204
THE POSY . . . . .	206
A PARODY . . . . .	206
THE ELIXIR . . . . .	208
A WREATH . . . . .	209
DEATH . . . . .	209
DOOMSDAY . . . . .	210
JUDGMENT . . . . .	211
HEAVEN . . . . .	212
LOVE (3) . . . . .	213
<b>THE CHURCH MILITANT . . . . .</b>	<b>215</b>
L'ENVOY . . . . .	224



# “WHILE I USE I AM WITH THEE”: THE LIFE AND POETRY OF GEORGE HERBERT

If you go to the mainstream poetry website *Poetry Foundation* and click on George Herbert’s name, what you read is this: “He is . . . enormously popular, deeply and broadly influential, and arguably the most skillful and important British devotional lyricist of this or any other time.”<sup>1</sup> This is an extraordinary tribute to a man who never published a single poem in English during his lifetime and died as an obscure country pastor when he was 39. But there are reasons for his enduring influence.

## **His Short Life**

George Herbert was born April 3, 1593, in Montgomeryshire, Wales. He was the seventh of ten children born to Richard and Magdalene Herbert, but his father died when he was three, leaving ten children, the oldest of which was 13. This didn’t put them in financial hardship, however, because Richard’s estate, which he left to Magdalene, was sizeable.

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1. “George Herbert,” *Poetry Foundation*, accessed January 9, 2020, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/george-herbert>.

## THE DEDICATION

*Lord! My first fruits present themselves to thee!  
Yet not mine neither; for from thee they came,  
And must return. Accept of them and me,  
And make us strive who shall sing best thy name.  
Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:  
Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.*



# THE CHURCH-PORCH

## PERIRRHANTERIUM

1

Thou, whose sweet youth and early hopes enhance  
Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure;  
Harken unto a verser, who may chance  
Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.  
A verse may find him who a sermon flies,  
And turn delight into a sacrifice.

2

Beware of lust; it doth pollute and foul  
Whom God in baptism washed with his own blood;  
It blots the lesson written in thy soul;  
The holy lines cannot be understood.  
How dare those eyes upon a Bible look,  
Much less towards God, whose lust is all their book?

3

Wholly abstain, or wed. Thy bounteous Lord  
Allows thee choice of paths: take no by-ways;



But gladly welcome what he doth afford,  
 Not grudging that thy lust hath bounds and stays.  
     Continnence hath his joy: weigh both, and so  
     If rottenness have more, let heaven go.

## 4

If God had laid all common, certainly  
 Man would have been th' encloser: but since now  
 God hath impaled us, on the contrary  
 Man breaks the fence, and every ground will plough.  
     O, what were man, might he himself misplace!  
     Sure to be cross, he would shift feet and face.

## 5

Drink not the third glass, which thou canst not tame  
 When once it is within thee; but before  
 Mayest rule it as thou list, and pour the shame,  
 Which it would pour on thee, upon the floor.  
     It is most just to throw that on the ground,  
     Which would throw me there if I keep the round.

## 6

He that is drunken, may his mother kill  
 Big with his sister: he hath lost the reins,  
 Is outlawed by himself: all kind of ill  
 Did with his liquor slide into his veins.  
     The drunkard forfeits man, and doth divest  
     All worldly right, save what he hath by beast.

## 7

Shall I, to please another's wine-sprung mind,  
 Lose all mine own? God hath giv'n me a measure

Short of his can and body. Must I find  
A pain in that wherein he finds a pleasure?  
    Stay at the third glass: if thou lose thy hold,  
    Then thou art modest, and the wine grows bold.

## 8

If reason move not gallants, quit the room.  
(All in a shipwreck shift their several way.)  
Let not a common ruin thee entomb;  
Be not a beast in courtesy; but stay,  
    Stay at the third cup, or forego the place.  
    Wine above all things doth God's stamp deface.

## 9

Yet, if thou sin in wine or wantonness,  
Boast not thereof, nor make thy shame thy glory.  
Frailty gets pardon by submissiveness;  
But he that boasts, shuts that out of his story;  
    He makes flat war with God, and doth defy,  
    With his poor clod of earth, the spacious sky.

## 10

Take not his name, who made thy mouth, in vain:  
It gets thee nothing, and hath no excuse.  
Lust and wine plead a pleasure; avarice, gain;  
But the cheap swearer through his open sluice  
    Lets his soul run for naught, as little fearing.  
    Were I an epicure, I could bate swearing.

## 11

When thou dost tell another's jest, therein  
Omit the oaths, which true wit cannot need

Pick out of tales the mirth, but not the sin;  
 He pares his apple, that will cleanly feed.  
     Play not away the virtue of that name,  
     Which is thy best stake when griefs make thee tame.

## 12

The cheapest sins most dearly punished are;  
 Because to shun them also is so cheap:  
 For we have wit to mark them, and to spare.  
 O crumble not away thy soul's fair heap!  
     If thou wilt die, the gates of hell are broad;  
     Pride and full sins have made the way a road.

## 13

Lie not; but let thy heart be true to God,  
 Thy mouth to it, thy actions to them both.  
 Cowards tell lies, and those that fear the rod;  
 The stormy working soul spits lies and froth.  
     Dare to be true. Nothing can need a lie.  
     A fault, which needs it most, grows two thereby.

## 14

Fly idleness; which yet thou canst not fly  
 By dressing, mistressing, and compliment.  
 If those take up thy day, the sun will cry  
 Against thee; for his light was only lent.  
     God gave thy soul brave wings; put not those feathers  
     Into a bed, to sleep out all ill weathers.

## 15

Art thou a magistrate? Then be severe.  
 If studious, copy fair what time hath blurred;

Redeem truth from his jaws. If soldier,  
Chase brave employments with a naked sword  
Throughout the world. Fool not; for all may have,  
If they dare try, a glorious life or grave.

16

O England, full of sin, but most of sloth!  
Spit out thy phlegm, and fill thy breast with glory.  
Thy gentry bleats, as if thy native cloth  
Transfused a sheepishness into thy story.  
Not that they all are so; but that the most  
Are gone to grass, and in the pasture lost.

17

This loss springs chiefly from our education.  
Some till their ground, but let weeds choke their son;  
Some mark a partridge, never their child's fashion;  
Some ship them over, and the thing is done.  
Study this art; make it thy great design:  
And if God's image move thee not, let thine.

18

Some great estates provide, but do not breed  
A mastering mind; so both are lost thereby.  
Or else they breed them tender; make them need  
All that they leave: this is flat poverty.  
For he that needs five thousand pounds to live,  
Is full as poor as he that needs but five.

19

The way to make thy son rich is, to fill  
His mind with rest, before his trunk with riches:

# THE CHURCH

## THE ALTAR

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,  
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears,  
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;  
No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.

A HEART alone  
Is such a stone,  
As nothing but  
Thy power doth cut.  
Wherefore each part  
Of my hard heart  
Meets in this frame,  
To praise thy name:

That, if I chance to hold my peace,  
These stones to praise thee may not cease.  
O, Let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,  
And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine!

## THE SACRIFICE

O all ye who pass by, whose eyes and mind  
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blind;  
To me, who took eyes that I might you find:

*Was ever grief like mine?*

The princes of my people make a head  
Against their Maker; they do wish me dead,  
Who cannot wish, except I give them bread.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

Without me, each one who doth now me brave,  
Had to this day been an Egyptian slave.  
They use that power against me, which I gave.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

Mine own apostle, who the bag did bear,  
Though he had all I had, did not forbear  
To sell me also, and to put me there.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

For thirty pence he did my death devise,  
Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,  
Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

Therefore my soul melts; and my heart's dear treasure  
Drops blood, the only beads my words to measure.  
"Oh, let this cup pass, if it be thy pleasure!"

*Was ever grief like mine?*

These drops, being tempered with a sinner's tears,  
 A balsam are for both the hemispheres,  
 Curing all wounds but mine; all but my fears.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

Yet my disciples sleep. I cannot gain  
 One hour of watching: but their drowsy brain  
 Comforts not me, and doth my doctrine stain.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

Arise, arise! they come. Look, how they run!  
 Alas! what haste they make to be undone!  
 How with their lanterns do they seek the Sun!

*Was ever grief like mine?*

With clubs and staves they seek me, as a thief,  
 Who am the way of Truth, the true Relief;  
 Most true to those who are my greatest grief.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

Judas, dost thou betray me with a kiss?  
 Canst thou find hell about my lips, and miss  
 Of life, just at the gates of life and bliss?

*Was ever grief like mine?*

See, they lay hold on me; not with the hands  
 Of faith, but fury. Yet, at their commands,  
 I suffer binding, who have loosed their bands.

*Was ever grief like mine?*

All my disciples flee; fear put a bar  
 Betwixt my friends and me. They leave the Star

Yet, by confession, will I come  
 Into the conquest. Though I can do naught  
 Against thee, in thee I will overcome  
 The man who once against thee fought.

## THE AGONY

Philosophers have measured mountains,  
 Fathomed the depths of seas, of states and kings,  
 Walked with a staff to heaven, and traced fountains;  
 But there are two vast, spacious things,  
 The which to measure it doth more behove,  
 Yet few there are that sound them: Sin and Love.

Who would know Sin, let him repair  
 Unto mount Olivet; there shall he see  
 A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,  
 His skin, his garments, bloody be.  
 Sin is that press and vice, which forceth pain  
 To hunt his cruel food through every vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay  
 And taste that juice which on the cross a pike  
 Did set again abroad; then let him say,  
 If ever he did taste the like.  
 Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,  
 Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.



## THE SINNER

Lord! how am I all ague, when I seek  
    What I have treasured in my memory!  
    Since, if my soul make even with the week,  
Each seventh note by right is due to thee.

I find there quarries of piled vanities;  
    But shreds of holiness, that dare not venture  
    To show their face; since, cross to thy decrees,  
There the circumference earth is, heaven the centre.

In so much dregs the quintessence is small:  
    The spirit and good extract of my heart  
    Comes to about the many hundredth part.  
Yet, Lord, restore thine image; hear my call:  
    And, though my hard heart scarce to thee can groan,  
    Remember that thou once didst write in stone.

## GOOD FRIDAY

O, My Chief Good!  
How shall I measure out thy blood?  
How shall I count what thee befell,  
    And each grief tell?

Shall I thy woes  
Number, according to thy foes?  
Or, since one star showed thy first breath,  
    Shall all thy death?

Or shall each leaf  
Which falls in autumn, score a grief?  
Or cannot leaves, but fruit, be sign  
Of the true vine?

Then let each hour  
Of my whole life one grief devour;  
That thy distress through all may run,  
And be my sun.

Or rather let  
My several sins their sorrows get,  
That, as each beast his cure doth know,  
Each sin may so.

Since blood is fittest, Lord, to write  
Thy sorrows in, and bloody fight;  
My heart hath store, write there; where, in  
One box, doth lie both ink and sin.

That, when Sin spies so many foes,  
Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes,  
All come to lodge there, Sin may say  
“No room for me,” and fly away.

Sin being gone, O fill the place,  
And keep possession with thy grace;  
Lest Sin take courage, and return,  
And all the writings blot or burn.

## REDEMPTION

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,  
 Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,  
 And make a suit unto him, to afford  
 A new small rented lease, and cancel th' old.

In heaven, at his manor, I him sought.  
 They told me there, that he was lately gone  
 About some land, which he had dearly bought  
 Long since on earth, to take possession.

I straight returned; and, knowing his great birth,  
 Sought him accordingly in great resorts,  
 In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts.  
 At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth  
 Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,  
 Who straight, "Your suit is granted," said, and died.

## SEPULCHER

O Blessed body! whither art thou thrown?  
 No lodging for thee, but a cold, hard stone?  
 So many hearts on earth, and yet not one  
 Receive thee?

Sure there is room within our hearts, good store,  
 For they can lodge transgressions by the score;  
 Thousands of toys dwell there; yet out of door  
 They leave thee.

But that which shows them large, shows them unfit.  
Whatever sin did this pure rock commit,  
Which holds thee now? Who hath indicted it  
Of murder?

Where our hard hearts have took up stones to brain thee,  
And, missing this, most falsely did arraign thee;  
Only these stones in quiet entertain thee,  
And order.

And as of old the law by heavenly art  
Was writ in stone, so thou, which also art  
The letter of the word, find'st no fit heart  
To hold thee.

Yet do we still persist as we began;  
And so should perish, but that nothing can,  
Though it be cold, hard, foul, from loving man  
Withhold thee.

## EASTER-WINGS

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,

Though foolishly he lost the same;

Decaying more and more,

Till he became

Most poor;

With thee

O let me rise,

As larks, harmoniously,

And sing this day thy victories.

Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin:

And still with sicknesses and shame,

Thou didst so punish sin,

That I became

Most thin.

With thee

Let me combine,

And feel this day with victory:

For, if I imp my wing on thine,

Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

## EASTER

Rise, heart! thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise

Without delays,

Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise

With him mayst rise;

That, as his death calcined thee to dust,

His life may make thee gold; and, much more, just.

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part

With all thy art.

The cross taught all wood to resound his name,

Who bore the same.

His stretched sinews taught all strings what key

Is best to celebrate this most high day.