

George Herbert's Christianity

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George Herbert was an English poet who, despite of his aristocratic lineage and early ambition for the court, dedicated his later life to serving as a parson in a small parish, Bemerton. Contemporary biographer, Izaak Walton's *The Life of Mr. George Herbert* depicts the exemplariness of Herbert as an ideal churchman. However, Herbert did not leave his court career to pursue divinity on purpose, but he left with no choice but to take a step into the sacred world and settle down. He might have regarded this career transition not as a good opportunity but as a reversal.

Officially, he wrote "The Temple" to save "any dejected poor soul" (*George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* 311). This thesis will reveal his more private and real desire to once again attain his secular ambition by writing poems. Through "The Temple" the ideal church for Herbert gradually shifts from the Church of England of those times to his own church, "The Temple". This thesis will examine how the church which Herbert relied upon changes along with his poems, life, and social circumstances. Chapter I clarifies Herbert's religious ambiguity. His belief heavily depended upon James I mainly because of his pacific policy. Therefore, Herbert accepted all Christian denominations, namely Anglicanism, Catholicism, and Protestantism at the same time. However, in some of his poems, it is obvious that Herbert declares the superiority of the Church of England to the churches of Catholicism and Protestantism. He puts the Church of England in the highest position in a secular world. Chapter II shows Herbert's parting from the Church of England, through the first church, finally to the universal church. King James' death left Herbert alone in the court. Moreover, his patrons were defeated by their political opponents. Without their supports, Herbert could not stay at the court any more. He also became disgusted with the next King, Charles I's pro-war policy, religious controversies in the secular church, and shady political corruptions. These frustrations made him search for the purer church in the history. He followed the origin of the church and sin, their journey all over the world until Herbert's time, and their prospect in the future. Chapter III examines Herbert's persistence and ambition for secular glory. It is obvious

that young Herbert was eager to be of high social standing. Even after his downfall, he could not abandon it. He expresses his discontent about the career reversal in some poems. Chapter IV clarifies Herbert's strategy to use his art to lure the impious Christians. He skillfully conceals his own handwritings and pretends just to copy the ready-made poems which were written by the God to give his own works sublime authority. When the beauty of "The Temple" catches the readers who disliked a boring sermon and mends their ways, Herbert will be remembered as a true saint forever.