

THE POETIC OF THE COSMIC CHRIST
IN
THOMAS TRAHERNE'S *THE KINGDOM OF GOD*

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY	
1.1. Things Strange yet Common	1
1.2. Traherne and the Recovery of the Cosmic Christ	10
1.3. The Kingdom of God and the Divine Milieu	16
2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD	
2.1. The Omnipresence of Action	
2.1.1. The Most Communicativ and Activ Principle That Is	28
2.1.2. His Delight and His Will are One	32
2.1.3. The Being of God is a Kind of Law to His Working	41
2.1.4. Bounty is the Stream where Love is the Fountain	46
2.2. A Unitive Transformation	
2.2.1. Methinks I should be Infinitely Beloved	52
2.2.2. The Fear of a Pusillanimous Spirit	54
2.2.3. Such Endless Seas of Living Waters in His Works I Find	61
2.3. The Consummation of All Things: The Mysterious Pleroma	
2.3.1. Even Infnit Space is a Consequent of Eternal Wisdom	68
2.3.2. Such Strange Kind of Creatures	77
2.3.3. Why this Earth is the Centre of the Heavens!	84
2.4. The Active Centre	
2.4.1. One Blessedness Throughout the Whole	94
2.4.2. The Soul of the World	113
2.4.3. For the Sun is the Root of Light and Life	140
2.4.4. Life It Self	165
2.4.5. The Phoenix Nest	176
2.5. The Omnipresence of Christification	
2.5.1. Co-heirs with Christ	202
2.5.2. Glorified with Hazzards	204
2.5.3. A Wise Man	216
3. THE WORD INCARNATE: TRAHERNE'S POETIC OF THE COSMIC CHRIST	
3.1. By Their Heavenly Names Doth Call	282
3.2. What Tongue Can Utter, What Pen Describe	292
3.3. I Dare Boldly Say	297
ABBREVIATIONS & NOTES ON REFERENCES	303
BIBLIOGRAPHY	304

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ABSTRACT

The Poetic of the Cosmic Christ in Thomas Traherne's *The Kingdom of God*

In this thesis I examine the poetics of Thomas Traherne's often over-looked Christology through a reading of *The Kingdom of God*. This work, probably written in the early 1670s, was not discovered until 1997, and not published until 2005. To date, no extended studies of the work have been published. It is my argument that Traherne develops an expansive and energetic poetic expressive of the theme of the 'Cosmic Christ' – in which Christ is understood to be the source, the sustaining life, cohesive bond, and redemptive goal, of the universe, and his body to encompass all things. While the term 'Cosmic Christ' is largely of 20th century origin, its application to Traherne is defended on the grounds that it describes not so much a modern theology, as an ancient theology rediscovered in the context of an expanding cosmology. Cosmic Christology lies, according to Joseph Sittler, "tightly enfolded in the Church's innermost heart and memory," and its unfolding in Traherne's *Kingdom of God* is accomplished through the knitting together of an essentially Patristic and Pauline Christology with the discoveries and speculations of seventeenth century science: from the infinity of the universe to the workings of atoms.

Traherne's uncovering of the Cosmic Christ will be discussed in light of the suggestion put forward by A. Hilary Armstrong, William J. Wolf and Graham Dowell, of an affinity between Traherne and Teilhard de Chardin - the twentieth century Jesuit and palaeontologist who forged a radical integration of Christology and evolutionary science. In particular, I wish to follow up Dowell's alignment of Traherne's conception of 'the Kingdom of God' with Teilhard's notion of 'the divine milieu.' It is not my aim to make an exhaustive comparative study, or to suggest that Traherne anachronistically anticipates Teilhard or evolutionary thought, but to draw out the Christology that I feel lies at the heart of Traherne's work by following Teilhard's "step by step" identification of the cosmically incarnate Christ as the active centre of God's Kingdom.[†] Teilhard's argument is used as a heuristic device and to structure the body of the thesis under the following headings: 1. *The Omnipresence of Action*; 2. *Unitive Transformation*; 3. *The Consummation of All Things*; 4. *The Active Centre*; 5. *The Omnipresence of Christification*. Teilhard's framework generally corresponds with the structure of *The Kingdom of God*, which moves from a consideration of the attributes of a restless, desirous God, to a survey of the great pleroma of the material universe. The work culminates in a celebration of humanity as co-heirs with Christ and as the "Means of the World's Glory" in whom all "Visible and Invisible things are united" and enjoyed.

The thesis concludes with a distillation of Traherne's Christic poetic – *The Word Incarnate*. The terms put forward by Cosmic Christology are used to explicate Traherne's intrepid poetic. In his most remarkable passages, Traherne employs language not only as a rhetorical tool at the service of theological reasoning, but to directly body forth his sense of Christ at the centre of world and self. He promises to "rend the Vail" and to reveal "the secrets of the most holy place." Scorning more "Timorous Spirits," he undertakes to communicate and "consider it all."

[†]Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*. 1957. London: Collins, 1960., pp. 110-112.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

1.1. Things Strange yet Common

From the earliest reviews that followed the first publication of his long lost manuscripts in the early twentieth century, to a host of contemporary spiritual and 'new age' internet sites, the seventeenth century priest Thomas Traherne has been hailed by many commentators as a 'nature mystic,' a precursor of Blake, Wordsworth, and Walt Whitman.¹ They delight in Traherne's depiction of an infant stranger saluting a glorious universe,² and his exhortations to "Enjoy the World aright," and to let "the Sea it self Floweth in your Veins."³ The Edwardian nature poet, Edward Thomas, saw Traherne as a kindred spirit with the pantheistic Richard Jefferies who "like Traherne ... saw the corn as 'orient and immortal wheat' ; for as he moved about he felt in the midst of immortal things."⁴ Gladys Wade wrote in 1931 that Traherne "is being proclaimed as one the greatest mystics England has produced, perhaps the greatest Nature-mystic the world has ever seen."⁵

While the subject of Traherne's status as a mystic is largely beyond the scope of this thesis,⁶ what is of concern is the conflict that some critics perceive between this "nature mysticism" and his Christian philosophy. Alison Sherrington, for example, in her thesis *Christian Nature Mysticism in the Poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins and Francis Thompson*, holds that Traherne's poetry "is based not on mystical union with Christ but mystical union with the world, which seems to take his place as the Mediator between God and man"⁷ She concludes that nature mysticism and Christianity are mutually exclusive:

Since nature poetry deals with the material realm, it seems most mystical when

¹ See for example: W. D. MacClintock, "A Re-discovered Poet," *Dial* 34 (1903) ; Anon., "A 'Student of Felicity'," *Spectator* 4 Aug. 1906 ; George Harvey, "A Precursor of Whitman," *North American Review* 185 (1907) ; W. B. Fitzgerald, "A Literary Resurrection," *London Quarterly Review* 107 (1907) ; S. T. H. Parkes, "A Devout Hedonist : The Riches of Thomas Traherne," *To-day* 9 (1922) ; Mike King, *Nature Mysticism in the Writings of Traherne, Whitman, Jefferies and Krishnamurti*, April 1995, Available: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/mr.king/writings/essays>, 13 Sept. 2000.

² Eg.: "The Salutation" ; CM III.1-3.

³ CM I.25-31.

⁴ Edward Thomas and Roland Gant, introd., *Richard Jefferies*, London : Hutchinson, 1909 (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 172. Thomas is referring to CH.3: "The Corn was Orient and Immortal Wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown."

⁵ Gladys I. Wade, "St Thomas Aquinas and Thomas Traherne," *Blackfriars* 12 (1931), p. 666. See also: G. I. Wade, "Traherne and the Spiritual Value of Nature Study," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 159 (1934)

⁶ The subject of Traherne as a 'nature mystic' is returned to in 2.5.3, "What Glory Lurks in All Things."

⁷ Alison J. Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1970), p. 132.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

nature is pictured as transformed by the divine immanence; yet such a vision most invites not only a tendency to vagueness and looseness, but also a tendency to disregard the transcendence of God, and thus to become Romantic rather than Christian.⁸

Peter Kennedy Maitland in *Thomas Traherne's Path to Felicity: The Missing Christ*⁹ also argues for a conflict between Traherne's orthodox Christian views and his personal spiritual experience which he concludes "not only transcends Christianity, but also does not involve Christ." Similarly, Franz Wohrer deduces that it was only in infancy that Traherne experienced a mystical union with the Divine in nature,¹⁰ and that in adulthood his experiences were

'mediated' and shaped by his Christian view of the world. Only the 'religious experience' of nature related in CIII.17 can – with some reservations – be assessed as a poetic transcription of a spontaneous awareness of the sacredness of Creation, since this experience dates from Traherne's irreligious phase.¹¹

Wohrer overlooks the fact that the adult Traherne has written of his infancy in support of his mature vision, and that the *Third Century* contains questions answered and inklings affirmed by Traherne's subsequent education. It is also widely assumed that Traherne is "unorthodox" in his subversion of dualism, and that his mystical writing relates more closely to universal "perennial philosophy" than Christian philosophy. While Sherrington assumes an orthodoxy that precludes a convincing nature mysticism, Maitland and Wohrer describe a mysticism that precludes Christianity. Similarly, Robin Attfield notes of Traherne's styling of himself as the sole heir and possessor of the world that

These and other claims of his are hard to square with the orthodoxy of belief to be expected in a seventeenth century Anglican priest, and might even suggest to the reader that the poet is speaking through the mouth of Christ.

Discounting this interpretation, he overlooks the interesting possibilities raised by such an identification of the speaker with Christ. He considers that Traherne "comes close to

⁸ Alison Sherrington: *Christian Nature Mysticism in the Poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins and Francis Thompson*. Ph.D. Australian National University, 1978, p. 226.

⁹ Peter Kennedy Maitland, "Thomas Traherne's Path to Felicity : the Missing Christ," M.A., Carleton University (Canada), 1994, Abstract.

¹⁰ Franz K. Wohrer, *Thomas Traherne : The Growth of a Mystic's Mind : A Study of the Evolution and the Phenomenology of Traherne's Mystical Consciousness*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik & Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1982), p. 107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

pantheism” and although he concedes that “to write thus is not, perhaps to abandon belief in a transcendent God,” it is, however, “to believe that all nature partakes of God’s divinity, and this in a much stronger sense than orthodoxy normally allowed.”¹² Orthodoxy, however, does allow for just such a participation – a complete conciliation of the transcendent with the immanent, grace and nature, through the mystery of Christ as the incarnate Logos or Word. As a co-heir with Christ of the world, Traherne does, in a sense, see himself as “speaking through the mouth of Christ.”

On the other hand, certain critics have an appreciation of this orthodox Christology but fail to relate it to Traherne. Pat Pinsent, in a comparative study of the image of Christ in Herbert and Traherne, considers Herbert’s Christology to be “integral to the drama of religious experience he presents in his poems,” while

Traherne’s theology and his depiction of Christ ... display a greater degree of separation from his presentation of his own personal religious and mystical experience, even though the theological perspectives appear to be the result of later reflection on his experience.

In Herbert’s poetry Pinsent perceives “God as an undivided subject,” and a Trinitarian identification of God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer, while Traherne, it is argued, “makes explicit the difference”¹³ and makes a somewhat forced attempt to bring Christ to the centre of his mind:

His natural instinct seems to be to perceive God in nature, so that he feels the need consciously to bring himself to concentrate on the explicitly Christocentric element of religion.¹⁴

Pinsent notes that only “7 out of about 100 poems” explicitly allude to the life and Passion of Christ: “Of these ‘The World’ is fairly typical ... a few lines on Adam’s sin and Saviour’s blood and 6 stanzas on God in Creation and childhood experience.”¹⁵ Ponsford similarly argues that there are very few references to Christ in Traherne’s poems, and

¹² Robin Attfield, "Thomas Traherne and the Location of Intrinsic Value," *Religious Traditions* 6 (1983), pp. 66-67.

¹³ Pat Pinsent, "The Image of Christ in the Writings of Two Seventeenth-Century English Country Parsons: George Herbert and Thomas Traherne," *Images of Christ: Ancient and Modern*, Roehampton Institute London Papers; 2 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 229, 230, 231.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

that he displays a Pelagian neglect of the Passion,¹⁶ denying "religious poetry its traditional images."¹⁷

While Traherne's response specifically to the Passion is the subject of a later chapter,¹⁸ it is my central argument that Traherne's work is pervaded with the poetic of Christ as Logos even when Christ is not named or alluded to through traditional symbols. The Christological centre of Traherne's writing has been overlooked, perhaps because it is buried very deeply in the heart of it, informing and suffusing his view of the whole creation. While the rhetoric of Christ the Redeemer is isolated in particular passages, in Traherne's work as a whole it is inextricably linked with the experience of Christ, the creative source and consummator of creation, the sustaining bond of the universe. As A.L. Clements notes of Traherne's poetry, "Though one reads criticism to the contrary, Christ does pervade and inform the poems of the *Dobell Folio*, particularly if we see him as St. Paul did: the last Adam who is a quickening Spirit. Traherne refers to him sometimes overtly, most often subtly or indirectly, as in his major symbols."¹⁹ This presence in Traherne has often been missed, just as "that interior beauty," so "Strange yet Common," so "Incredible, yet Known" that Traherne promises to unfold at the outset of the *Centuries* has not been esteemed:

I will open my Mouth in Parables: I will utter Things that have been Kept Secret from the foundation of the World. Things Strange yet Common; Incredible, yet Known; Most High, yet Plain; infinitely Profitable, but not Esteemed. Is it not a Great Thing, that you should be Heir of the World? Is it not a very Enriching Veritie? In which the fellowship of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the World hath been hid in GOD, lies concealed! The Thing hath been from the Creation of the World, but hath not been so Explained, as that interior beauty should be understood. It is my Design therefore in such a plain maner to unfold it, that my Friendship may appear, in making you Possessor of the Whole World.²⁰

In this elaboration upon Psalm 78²¹ Traherne embeds several scriptural references to Christ

¹⁶ Michael J. Ponsford, "Traherne's Apostasy," *Durham University Journal* 76.2 (1984), p. 185.

¹⁷ Michael Ponsford, "The Poetry of Thomas Traherne in Relation to the Thought and Poetics of his Period," Ph.D., Newcastle Upon Tyne University, 1984, p. 8.

¹⁸ See 2.4.5.

¹⁹ A. L. Clements. *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 185.

²⁰ CM I.3.

²¹ I will open my mouth in a parable : I will utter dark sayings of old : Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and hi wonderful works that he hath done. (Psalm 78: 2-4.)

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

as Logos – the “Word” that was “in the beginning.”²² The attempt to elucidate some principle underlying, or at the core of, the cosmic order, accounts for the many variants of the Logos theory over the millennia. Although only a brief sketch is possible here, the appearance of the Logos in the New Testament has a long and complex antecedence, of which, as we will elaborate in a later chapter,²³ Traherne was cognizant. The Greek noun ‘logos’ has many shades of meaning – ‘discourse’, ‘word,’ ‘reason,’ ‘reasoning power,’ ‘principle,’ ‘plan,’ and derives from the verb ‘legein,’ meaning ‘to say’ something significant and, by extension, to act and to create. *Logos* first appeared as a philosophical term in the 6th century BC when Heraclitus spoke in terms of the “account” through which all things come about - a term that encompasses the senses of explanation, reason, and cause, but also summation, and totality. Heraclitus lamented that this unifying “account” or principle of cosmic order, though ‘common’ or universal, was unrecognised in a deaf and sleepy world marked by social disharmony:

Although this account holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this account, men are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and telling how it is. ... Men forget where the way leads ... And they are at odds with that with which they most commonly associate. And what they meet with every day seems strange to them ... We should not act and speak like men asleep ...²⁴

Since antiquity then, the language of the Logos has been one of concealment, revelation and significant utterance; the uncovering and unfolding of “Enriching Verities” intrinsic to life yet scarcely to be believed.

Following Heraclitus and in opposition to Platonic idealism which posited a divine pattern of Forms shadowed in the material world, the Stoics saw the Logos or ‘world reason’ as a technic fire penetrating all matter. It was seen to be manifest in the harmony and beauty of the universe, and in the good man who lives according to the divine laws of nature. The Jewish scriptures spoke of the Word of God which in the Books of the Prophets seems to take on an identity of its own²⁵ and, in the Books of Proverbs and Wisdom, is personified as Sophia, or Wisdom. Wisdom is possessed by God “in the beginning of his

²² John 1:1.

²³ See 2.4.2 and 2.4.3.

²⁴ Heraclitus and Charles H. Kahn, ed., *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus : An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 31.

²⁵ 1 Sam. 15:10 ; Is. 55:11; Jer. 23:29.

way, before the works of old ... set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was," and is by God at the creation, "daily his delight ... Rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth."²⁶ Wisdom is the "worker of all things" ; she teaches men, as Traherne here promises his friend, the

knowledge of the things that are ... to know how the world was made, and the operation of the elements ... all such things as are either secret or manifest.²⁷

Philo (1st century A.D.) sought a synthesis of Stoic, Jewish and Platonic thought, positing an intermediary power between God and the world through whom the world is created and governed and men come to know God. Whereas for the Stoics and Philo the Logos was an impersonal power or natural law, and for the Platonists a divine pattern, the Logos of the New Testament, as Kelly notes, is more closely aligned with Jewish theology, "where the divine word was understood in more active and concrete terms, and intimately connected to the Spirit or Breath of God, as God acted in history."²⁸ In John's gospel the Word of God becomes manifest in the flesh. The Incarnate Word is not the intermediary power described by Philo, but unites in his living person the divine and the human. This union of the immutable and the material is the crux of the Christian formulation of the Logos theory, which encompasses not only the earthly body of Christ but the entire universe understood as the body of Christ. While the term 'Logos' is only found in the New Testament in the writings of St John,²⁹ the theology of the Logos and the presence of Wisdom or Sophia is also felt in the Pauline epistles (Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews) in the language used of the Son.³⁰ It is to these Sapiential texts that Traherne is drawn in the above meditation. He opens his mouth in parables, with the Psalmist and with Christ, in order to make hidden truths apparent; he joins his voice with the revelatory "I" of pre-existent Wisdom:

That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth.³¹

²⁶ Prov. 8:22-31.

²⁷ Wis. 7: 17-22.

²⁸ Anthony J. Kelly, *An Expanding Theology : Faith in a World of Connections.*, Revised web ed., Nov. 2003, Available: <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/ankelly> ; Also published: Sydney : E.J. Dwyer, 2003., section 3. ; C.f. Genesis 1:3,6,9 ; Ps. 33:6.

²⁹ In the Prologue to his Gospel, his First Epistle, and Revelations.

³⁰ This summary drawn from: Maurice Wiles. *The Christian Fathers.* London : SCM Press, 1977, c1966. ; J. Lebreton "Logos" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 9* c1910 by Robert Appleton Company ; Online Edition c1999 by Kevin Knight.; F.L. Cross, E.A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.* Oxford University Press, 3rd ed., 1997 ; New Encyclopaedia Britannica 15th ed. VI, 302.

³¹ Prov. 8: 21-23.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

The phrase “the Whole World,” which appears innumerable times in Traherne’s prose, has an almost naïve quality, but linked as it nearly always is with the concepts of Inheritance and Possession, takes on a great profundity in the context of his Christology - to inherit or possess the Whole World is to inherit the very substance of Wisdom by whom that world was created and consists:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.³²

The phrase “All Things” also recurs throughout Traherne, encompassing each and every object and order of being. Though such concepts are cosmic in scale, they are yet described as an “interior beauty,” implying an immanent connection between Christ and all things.

The celebration of inheritance, possession and treasure handed on from everlasting resonates throughout the body of Traherne’s writing. Each one is co-heir and co-possessor of the Whole World with Christ as God “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.”³³ The knowledge of this wonderful possession has been hidden, but Christ - the Word that was with God and was God and was in the beginning with God, and through whom all things were made³⁴ - makes all things plain:

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.³⁵

Traherne promises to reveal “The Thing” that has been concealed, yet has always been, and pervades the common things known to us. With St. Paul, he sets out to explain the mystery of Christ hidden from “former generations,” but now revealed to the Gentiles who have “become fellow heirs:”

... to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.³⁶

³² Col. 1:16-17.

³³ Eph. 1:4.

³⁴ John 1:1-3.

³⁵ John 1: 18.

³⁶ Eph. 3: 5-6, 9.

Traherne's emphasis on being the son and heir of God can be seen as an expression of the presence of the Logos at the core of every being. The medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart saw the eternal Logos as being born or incarnate in every soul:

People think God has only become a human being there – in his historical incarnation – but that is not so; for God is here – in this very place – just as much incarnate as in a human being long ago. And this is why God had become a human being: that God might give birth to you as the only begotten Son, and as no less.³⁷

So Traherne encourages his friend to become “Possessor of the Whole World” – and as he elsewhere and repeatedly emphasises, the “*Sole Heir of the whole World.*” For Traherne the joy is paradoxically magnified in the recognition that all others are “evry one Sole Heirs, as well as you.”³⁸ All are heirs and possessors of the Whole World, only Sons of God, participators in the divine account – if they only but knew it. “Wisely doth S. John say,” notes Traherne, “We are the Sons of God; but the world knoweth us not because it knew Him not.”³⁹ Christ, the Logos, is the light that shines in the darkness, though

the darkness comprehended it not ... He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.⁴⁰

There is a note of exasperation in the attempt to get others to come to this recognition: Heraclitus, known as the “The Obscure” and “The Riddler,” and dismissed, according to Merton, “as a crank, a misanthrope, an eccentric kind of beat,”⁴¹ battled the incomprehension of his hearers who are sleepily “at odds with that with which they most commonly associate”; Eckhart argues against those people blind to the presence of God “in this very place”; Traherne is thought mad for espousing an idea too wonderful to be true:

Beacaus it is a new Doctrine, and too great to be believed, that a man upon Earth should be the Heir of All Things, not only on Heaven, but in Earth, in Ages, Kingdoms, Time and Eternitie: and som have been ready to say to me, as Festus said to S. Paul, Much Learning hath made ye Mad ...⁴²

³⁷ Meister Eckhart BR, 66. Cited in Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: the Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance*, (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1989), pp. 121, 122.

³⁸ CM I.29.

³⁹ CM I.99.

⁴⁰ John 1: 5, 10.

⁴¹ Thomas Merton, "Herakleitos the Obscure," *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell (New York: Image Books, 1974), p. 266.

⁴² CH “All Things,” f. 78r.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

Traherne challenges his friend and urges them to see, to understand, to claim and to treasure their inheritance – to uncover the Mystery that has lain hidden - “Is it not a Great Thing, that you should be Heir of the World? Is it not a very Enriching Veritie?”

1.2. Traherne and the Recovery of the Cosmic Christ

Traherne's uncovering of the Christic mystery is also, as will be explicated in the following chapters, an act of *recovery* – the rescue and championing of a tradition that, I would argue, he felt to be under threat. Traherne frequently speaks as though to counter contrary or prevailing views, to placate, or sometimes irritate, mock or shock, the holders of those views. In his upholding of “Holy Antiquity” and “Primitive Devotion” Traherne typifies the temper of the Anglican Church as it sought to re-define itself after the Restoration. In countering the “Superstition” of Roman Catholicism and the “Ignorant Zeal” of radical Protestant sects, champions of the English Church, such as Edmund Sparke and Austin (two of Traherne's sources in his *Church Year Book*) sought to align her with the “Purest and Virgin Piety” of the early church.⁴³ Traherne considered himself something of an expert on the Church Fathers. In his “Advertisement to the Reader” in *Roman Forgeries* the young theologian is anxious to prove his credentials; “I desire the Reader to note that I do not trust other mens information, but mine own eyes; having my self seen the *Collectors of the Councils*, and searched into all their *Compilers* for the purpose.”⁴⁴ Traherne cites numerous Church Fathers in *Roman Forgeries*, and under “Antiquitie” in *Commentaries of Heaven* again enlists the “heavy censures” of Saints Irenaeus, Augustine, Hilary, Theodore, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, and Bernard against “the Church of Rome.”⁴⁵

The Fathers are of primary importance to Traherne, however, not as ammunition against Rome, but for the substance of their deliberations on “the glorious mysteries of the H[oly] Trinity and the Hypostatical Union.”⁴⁶ Traherne's understanding of the Incarnation is clearly shaped by the debates of the Church Fathers and is plainly set out under “Assumption” in *Commentaries of Heaven*. He excerpts from the Athanasian Creed, which he had described under “Antiquity” as a complementary “Explication” of the nature of Christ contained in the Nicene Creed:⁴⁷

being, as Athanasius saith, GOD of the Substance of the Father, begotten before

⁴³ CYB ff. 16r, 46v, 20r. See Carol L. Marks, “Traherne's Church Year-Book,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 60 (1966), pp. 40-43.

⁴⁴ RF sig. B7. *Roman Forgeries or a True Account of False Records Discovering the Impostures and Counterfeit Antiquities of the Church of Rome By a Faithful Son of the Church of England* was not published until 1704 and the only clue to its authorship lay in the dedication to Sir Orlando Bridgeman to whom Traherne had acted as Chaplain shortly before his death in 1674. It may initially have been prepared as a thesis that counted toward the Bachelor of Divinity that Traherne was awarded by Oxford in 1669.

⁴⁵ CH “Antiquitie,” f. 106v-107v ; also “Antichrist.”

⁴⁶ CH f. 106r.

⁴⁷ CH f. 106r.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

the Worlds, and MAN of the Substance of his Mother born in the World. Perfect GOD and perfect Man, of a Reasonable Soul and Human Flesh subsisting ... This Orthodox ancient and learned Father hath in this Creed, embraced by the Catholick Church, declared himself to be an Acute Philosopher. Well distinguishing between the Soul and Body, and clearly discerning that one Person is often times made up of two Natures: Not by the Confusion of two Substances for either remaineth in it self Intire, but by a Personal Union.⁴⁸

The mystery of the hypostatical union described in the Creeds informs the entire structure of the relations Traherne perceives between body and soul, soul and world, world and Christ. As we will expand upon in the course of the thesis, Traherne is drawn to the ancient speculation that the world is God's body, linking it with the hypostatical union and Christ's assumption of a human body.⁴⁹ For Traherne, God, through Christ, contains and links all things:

He is Alpha and Omega, and as the Heavens do by a large Embrace contain the earth, so doth he by his Eternitie contain all Things in Himself, immutably forever.⁵⁰

A.A. Luce describes the Christ of the Pauline and Johannine texts as "the embodiment of the cosmic relation"⁵¹ and Traherne defends this orthodoxy concerning the body of Christ not only against the obvious targets - "the Socinian Arian, &c."⁵² - but against a more pervasive loss of a sense of immanence in the Christian tradition. As David Ranson notes, although the Arian heresy (that Christ is a created intermediary) and other views undermining the unity of the godhead⁵³ were condemned by the Councils of Nicea (325), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), the dualism of the Platonist leaning School of Alexandria has predominated over the Aristotelian leaning School of Antioch. The divinity of Christ has

⁴⁸ CH f. 149v.1.

⁴⁹ See for e.g.: CH f. 150r.

⁵⁰ CH f. 152v.2.

⁵¹ A. A. Luce, *Monophysitism Past and Present* (1920), p. 7 cited in J. A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin: A Comparative Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 34.

⁵² CH f. 151. A third word appears in this passage which has been heavily blacked out. It may be 'Quaker.' The writings of Socinus denying the divinity of Christ were first published in Lyon in 1562, the controversy being kept alive in mid-seventeenth century England by John Biddle and his followers. Traherne is scornful of how "it cannot enter the fine and politick Noddle" of the Socinian "how GOD should become a Man, or how there should be three Persons in the same Divine and Eternal essence." (CH ff. 151-151v.)

⁵³ i.e.: adoptionism (that the human Jesus is the adopted, not true, son of God) ; nestorianism (that the incarnate Christ had two natures - human and divine, rather than a single Person at once human and divine) ; monophysitism (that Christ has only one nature - the divine) ; docetism (that Christ's humanity and sufferings were only apparent, rather than real.)

been emphasised over his corporeality, and the material world has been viewed as corrupt - a hurdle in the race towards the salvation of the rational self.⁵⁴ It is against this broader context that Traherne's incarnational Christology needs to be considered.

Traherne is often characterised as a Platonist but, as I hope to demonstrate, this estimation must be qualified and weighed not only against the more Aristotelian elements of his philosophy, but also against his orthodox Christology. Traherne does not subscribe to what A. Hilary Armstrong describes as "the Platonic representation of a universe on two levels"⁵⁵ which has dominated Augustinian thought. Armstrong contends that Augustine and other Christian Platonists "missed the chance of carrying out a much deeper and more dynamic transformation of Platonism than they in fact effected," overlooking the Plotinian sense of divine presence in the universe and of "kinship with the Soul of the World and membership in the living organic unity of all things."⁵⁶ Augustine, rather than focusing on the "Soul of the World" was preoccupied with the workings of the Word of God in the human soul – the "interior speech of the soul, whereby we may in some measure grasp the Divine mystery."⁵⁷ This inward gaze was to be greatly influential in what many theologians, echoing the sentiments of Armstrong, have seen as a turning away from the divine presence in the cosmos. Peter Brown, a biographer of Augustine, observes:

Lost in the narrow and ever fascinating labyrinth of his preoccupation with the human will ... Augustine turned his back on the *mundus*, on the magical beauty associated with the material universe in later Platonism ... He viewed the Platonic notion of a World Soul, a majestic *anima mundi* that gave life and vividness to the entire realm of nature, as an uninteresting and basically unnecessary speculation.

The rejection of the reputedly idolatrous worship of the World-Soul, but not of the vision of a superior heavenly realm, led to an exaggerated other-worldliness, the loss of a sense of connection to a sacred cosmos, and an accompanying devaluation of the sensual realm. An enchantment with the cosmos was recovered to some extent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the revival of interest in the notion of the *anima mundi*, or Dame Nature, especially marked in the acknowledgment of "the density and significance of the natural

⁵⁴ David Ranson, "The Body as Sacrament : Perspectives from the Christian Tradition," *The Body : Blessing of Burden?*, The Humanita Foundation. Occasional Papers ; no. 3 (Sydney: Humanita Foundation, 2001), p. 25.

⁵⁵ A. Hilary Armstrong, *St. Augustine and Christian Platonism*, The Saint Augustine Lecture ; 1966 (Villanova, Pennsylvania: Villanova University, 1967), p.13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

⁵⁷ J. Lebreton, "The Logos," *The Catholic Encyclopedia. Volume IX* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910)

world" that characterised the Platonist school of Chartres.⁵⁸

Armstrong observes that despite the "rejection of cosmic religion," a "sense of holiness, of an intimate and immediate presence of God in the world, has not been absent"⁵⁹ from the Christian tradition, and in a footnote asserts that "The best expressions of this sense of holiness of the world in Christian literature are to be found in the spiritual writings of the 17th century Anglican clergyman Thomas Traherne." He gives excerpts from the *Centuries*, and *Thanksgivings for the Body*, and notes that Traherne "in some ways anticipates Teilhard de Chardin"⁶⁰ - the 20th century Jesuit and palaeontologist who advocated a radical integration of Christology and evolutionary science. Graham Dowell also describes Traherne and Teilhard de Chardin (and also Thomas Merton) as being among those "notable exceptions" to have not neglected the "cosmic dimensions of the Christian story" and to have formulated "a unified vision of the world."⁶¹ In a similar vein, William J. Wolf observes that Teilhard and Traherne share a "mystical identification" with the created world "based on the principle of the relatedness of all things."⁶² Since Armstrong's article, which appeared in 1966, several new Traherne manuscripts have come to light which only confirm his view of Traherne as a torch-bearer for a transformed cosmic religion that sees "the presence and power of the creative and life-giving Trinity" in the whole universe; "the play of Eternal Wisdom ... in all life."⁶³

Teilhard's vision of immanence and relation culminates in the concept of the "Cosmic Christ." In tracing the development of this term J.A. Lyons notes that it first appeared at the beginning of the 20th century with antecedent terms, such as the "cosmic significance" of Christ, or "Christ as cosmic principle" appearing no earlier than the 1830s. "When the epithet 'cosmic' is used of Christ," observes Lyons,

he is said to be the instrument in God's creative activity, the source and goal of all things, the bond and sustaining power of the whole of creation; he is called the head and ruler of the universe; and his redemptive influence and his body are

⁵⁸ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, New ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), . p. 504 ; See also M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, c1957), pp. 22-23, 69. For further discussion of the World Soul see 2.4.2 and 2.4.4.

⁵⁹ Armstrong, *St. Augustine and Christian Platonism*, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fn 17, p. 48ff.

⁶¹ Graham Dowell, *Enjoying the World: The Rediscovery of Thomas Traherne*, (London: Mowbray, 1990), pp. 5, 9.

⁶² William J. Wolf, "The Spirituality of Thomas Traherne," *Anglican Spirituality*, ed. William J. Wolf (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982), p. 62.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

considered to extend to the limits of the created order.⁶⁴

As a palaeontologist, Teilhard incorporated the concept of the Cosmic Christ into an evolutionary paradigm – the cosmos is seen as undergoing a vast process of “Christogenesis,” evolving through and towards Christ, the Alpha and Omega. While Traherne cannot be said to be operating within the precise same paradigm, in his insistence on the Divine Essence as being all Act, and his focus upon the eternal generation of the Word or Son of God, there is a sympathetic emphasis on the restless activity of divinity in the world, a profound sense of the world as the body of Christ, and of Christ as the active centre of creation.

It is not the aim of this thesis to make a comparative theological study of Traherne and Teilhard, but to utilize certain of Teilhard's terms as a hermeneutic device to draw out the poetic of the Cosmic Christ that lies at the heart of Traherne's writings. It might be objected that to discuss Traherne in such a context, or to associate him with Teilhard, is anachronistic and therefore distorting. The approach might be defended, however, on the grounds that Cosmic Christology is not so much a modern theology, as an ancient and persistent theology that has been recovered and extended. As Lyons observes, Cosmic Christ language has been applied to teachings in the New Testament and awareness of the Cosmic Christ might be attributed to “patristic, medieval and other pre-nineteenth-century theologians.”⁶⁵ Like “The Thing” that “hath been from the Creation of the World, but hath not been so Explained,” and like Traherne's deeply embedded Christology, Cosmic Christology itself lies, according to Joseph Sittler, “still tightly enfolded in the Church's innermost heart and memory.”⁶⁶

The way in which Traherne's Christology, like other Cosmic Christologies, is deeply rooted in such traditions, yet moves creatively forward as it absorbs an expanded cosmology is the central theme of the thesis. “The word ‘tradition,’” writes Lyons, “means something handed on.”

That implies that something has also to be appropriated anew by each generation –

⁶⁴ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., fn. 2, p. 2: “Cosmic-Christ doctrine has been attributed to the following Greek patristic theologians: Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor. Among the Latin patristic theologians, it has been attributed to Ambrose. Among the medievals, it has been attributed above all to Duns Scotus, and also to Bonaventure, Aquinas, Hugh of St Victor, and Eckhart. It has been attributed as well to Jacob Boehme and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger.”

⁶⁶ Joseph A. Sittler, “Called to Unity,” *The Ecumenical Review* 14 (1961-62), p.183.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

indeed by each person that receives it. Appropriation of a tradition involves bringing it into relation with other attitudes and ideas characteristic of that generation or that person.⁶⁷

It is in terms of such an "appropriation" - an entwining of the scriptural and patristic tradition with the revelations of microscopes and telescopes, and the intuitions of personal experience - that we can begin to approach Traherne's unique framing of "The Kingdom of God" and his rapturous celebration of the Earth as "This little Star so Wide and So full of mysteries!"⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 216.

⁶⁸ KG p. 390, ll. 120-121 (f. 261r.)

1.3. The Kingdom of God and the Divine Milieu

The suggestion, put forward by Armstrong, Wolf and Dowell, of an affiliation between Traherne and Teilhard de Chardin is a very rich one. In particular I wish to take up Dowell's counterpointing of Traherne's world view with Teilhard's concept of "the divine milieu." Speaking of Traherne's vision in "Shadows in the Water" of the two worlds – heaven and earth – forming a single reality, he observes: "No one in our day has shared this vision more completely than Teilhard de Chardin, in his *Le Milieu Divin* and perhaps more poignantly in his *Prayer of the Universe*."⁶⁹ Teilhard identified the "divine milieu," which he also referred to as the "universal milieu" or the "mystical milieu," with the "Kingdom of God:"

The mystical milieu *is not a completed zone* in which beings, once they have succeeded in entering it, remain immobilized. It is a *complex* element, made up of *divinized created being*, in which, as time goes on, the immortal distillation of the universe is gradually assembled. We cannot give it precisely the name of God: it is his Kingdom. Nor can we say that it *is*: it is in the process of *becoming*.⁷⁰

Ursula King writes that Teilhard "chose the expression "the divine milieu" to describe the diffuse presence and influence of God at all levels of created reality, in all areas of human experience." "For Teilhard," she continues,

the idea of the "divine milieu" was particularly important in capturing the universal influence of Christ through God's incarnation in the world, in its matter, life, and energy – an extended, cosmic understanding of the incarnation that far transcended the historical limitations of time and place associated with the person of Jesus.⁷¹

Dowell compares passages from *The Divine Milieu* and Traherne's *Second Century* in which, despite the differences in vocabulary, both writers urge their readers to connect with the divine source of each being. Teilhard invites us to "establish ourselves in the divine milieu:"

There we shall find ourselves where the soul is most deep and where matter is most dense. There we shall discover with the confluence of all beauties the ultra-

⁶⁹ Dowell, *Enjoying the World: The Rediscovery of Thomas Traherne*, p. 113.

⁷⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mystical Milieu," trans. René Hague, *Writings in a Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 137.

⁷¹ Ursula King, *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 110.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

vital, the ultra-sensitive, the ultra-active point of the universe. And at the same time, we shall feel the plenitude of our powers of action and adoration effortlessly ordered within our deepest selves.⁷²

Traherne urges his reader

be present now with all the creatures among which you live, and hear them in their beings and operations praising God in a heavenly manner ... You are never what you ought till you go out of yourself and walk among them.⁷³

In a similar vein Teilhard's exhortation to "bathe yourself in the ocean of matter" for "it is that ocean that will raise you up to God"⁷⁴ might be quoted alongside Traherne's statement: "You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins."⁷⁵ Both Teilhard and Traherne emphasise a union of the material and the divine in what Traherne refers to as the "Whole World"; they share a focus on the Incarnation which reveals the Kingdom of God to "be present." In *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne celebrates and probes the vital and the sensitive – creatures, matter and the very atoms they are composed of – surveys the plenitude of the universe, and places Christ at its centre. He also celebrates man's participation in the creative activity of God through the soul's infinite capacity for Enjoyment, Apprehension and Understanding which effortlessly renders the soul "prone to Extasies and praises and Thanksgivings."⁷⁶ The bounty of creation, so richly evoked in both writers, is magnified in "the action and adoration" that is called up from "our deepest selves" when you "enjoy the world aright" and are "what you ought" to be – when the activity of the soul reverberates with the "ultra-active point of the universe." *The Divine Milieu* carries the dedication: *Sic Deus Dilexit Mundum* – For those who love the world – which comfortably encompasses Traherne. To what extent, however, can Traherne be said to share Teilhard's understanding of an all pervasive and dynamic Christic presence as the "ultra-active point of the universe?"

To answer this and to explore Dowell's contention further we will turn to Traherne's fullest exploration of the concept of the "Kingdom of God" in the work of that title which was not available to Dowell in 1990. *The Kingdom of God* is one of five works in

⁷² Dowell cites *Le Milieu Divin* (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 51-3. In Dowell, *Enjoying the World: The Rediscovery of Thomas Traherne*, pp. 113-114.

⁷³ CM II.76.

⁷⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, (London: Collins, 1965), p. 65.

⁷⁵ CM I.29.

⁷⁶ KG p. 270, ll. 35-36 (f. 159r.)

a vellum bound book unearthed by Jeremy Maule in the Lambeth Palace Library in 1997.⁷⁷ Maule considers it to be ‘the master work’ of the volume⁷⁸ and groups it together with *Christian Ethicks* and *Commentaries of Heaven* in its endeavour to encompass and systematise a large a body of knowledge.⁷⁹ It is typically ambitious in scale, comprising some 100-115,000 words divided into 42 chapters.

In answer to our question, it might first be noted that Traherne affirms the religious relevance of the material world itself by making it the subject of the central chapters of *The Kingdom of God*. Maule describes these chapters as an early work of physico-theology (dating somewhere between 1669 and 1674) and “extremely typical of the natural philosophy of Reformed theology.” In studying the sun, the moon and stars, the seas, rivers, trees, herbs, flowers, hills, mountains, rain, hail, snow, clouds, and meteors, the work basically follows, he observes, Melancthon’s re-ordering of Aristotle, and lists from the Benedicite, Psalms, and other doxologies “in which the wisdom and goodness of God are celebrated.” The term “physico-theology” was applied in the eighteenth century to the teleological argument or argument from design and was popularised by John Ray in his series of two Boyle lectures published in 1713 as *Physico-Theology: or, a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, from His Works of Creation*. As Glacken points out, this was an enlargement of William Derham’s *The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691) and both authors were sympathetic to the earlier works of the “Cambridge Platonists” such as Ralph Cudworth’s *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) and More’s *An Antidote Against Atheism* (1652). Such works stressed the wise ordering of a useful and beautiful creation, designed in every point to satisfy and exercise “the Contemplative Property in man.”⁸⁰ Maule also points to Bishop John Wilkins’ *Dialogues of Natural Religion* (1675) and Stillingfleet’s *Origines Sacrae* (1662) as examples of the genre. To this list of we might add sermons such as Isaac Barrow’s *The Being of God*

⁷⁷ The other four works are: *Inducements to Retiredness* (adopted title) ; *A Sober view of Dr Twisse his Considerations, with a Compleat Disquisition of Dr Hammonds letter to Dr Sanderson, and a prospect of all their Opinions concerning GOD’s Decrees* (an academic and technical piece largely concerned with the issue of free will) ; a fragment concerning Love ; *Seeds of Eternity or the nature of the Soul in which Everlasting Powers are Prepared*. For a description of the contents of Lambeth Palace MS 1360 see: Denise Inge and Calum MacFarlane, "Seeds of Eternity: A New Traherne Manuscript," *Times Literary Supplement* 2 June 2000 ; Jan Ross, introd. *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), xiii-xxiv.

⁷⁸ Unlike the other four items, which are in Traherne’s hand, the *Kingdom of God* was written out by a copyist with revisions and insertions by Traherne. It might be considered, therefore, to be a largely complete and polished work.

⁷⁹ The following observations are drawn from: Jeremy Maule, *Traherne and the Restlessness of God : the New Lambeth Discoveries (audiotape)*, Temenos Academy, London, [1998?].

⁸⁰ C. J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press : Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 393-395.

*proved from the Frame of the World.*⁸¹ Such writers were keen to engage with all aspects of natural philosophy, including cosmology and anatomy, and it was characteristic of such works to move, as does Traherne's work, from the contemplation of the smallest elements in creation - newly visible through the microscope - to the greatest; and from the wondrous construction of each part to the intricate relation of each part to the other. The glorious whole was seen to reflect the wisdom of the Creator, and to reveal the magnitude of his gift to man, the observer and beneficiary of all. As Maule notes however, the *Kingdom of God* as a whole cannot be said to categorically belong to any particular genre. The first 18 chapters are in the tradition of commentaries on the Creed, describing the attributes of the Deity such as Unity, Glory, Goodness, and Infinitude which are all reflected in creation. In the final chapters, Traherne moves to consider man - his sensual being and the powers of his soul exercised and deified in the enjoyment of the universe. The material universe for Traherne, therefore, is integral to a cosmic scheme involving God, the world and the self.

The second respect in which *The Kingdom of God* might be said to confirm a particularly Christic presence in the material universe is in Traherne's emphasis upon divine immanence. While a substantial portion of the work might be described as physico-theology, it is not pre-occupied with the argument from design that characterises later works of that genre. As will be enlarged upon in the coming chapters, Traherne does not posit a distant architect or master craftsman, but a living and integral relation between the material and the divine. Traherne defines this immanence against "mechanical" philosophy, delighting instead in the encircling and penetrative powers of "Life it self."

In regard to Traherne's emphasis upon divine immanence, it is noteworthy that he does not dwell in this work on the apocalyptic associations of the "Kingdom of God" that so engaged his age. Prophets and millenarians such as the Fifth Monarchie Men⁸² had hailed the Revolution as issuing in the thousand year Reign of Christ on earth before the final consummation. Some Royalists, on the other hand, perceived the Restoration as the culmination of a grand providential plan that had been unfurling throughout Christian history. Nabil Matar connects Traherne with this Royalist eschatology – claiming that Traherne "unequivocally ... stated that the eschatological promise was realized in 1660."⁸³ I would argue that Matar has overstated his case and considered the Kingdom of God concept

⁸¹ Isaac Barrow, "The Being of God Proved from the Frame of the World," *The Works of the Learned Isaac Barrow*, ed. John Tillotson, vol. 2 (London: 1700) Barrow was tutor to Isaac Newton. Traherne copies extracts from his sermon, "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor" (1671) into his CB.

⁸² This sect initially supported Cromwell, believing the Commonwealth to be a preparation for the theocratic 'Fifth Monarchy' succeeding Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome (see Dan. 2:44.)

too narrowly – in exclusively historical terms.⁸⁴ Traherne does, as Julia Smith notes of the poem “Thy Turtle Doves O Lord to Dragons Turn”⁸⁵ use the apocalyptic imagery of the Old Testament and Revelations, frequently employed by the Royalists, to decry the violence and upheaval of the Commonwealth. The application, however, is moral - as Smith observes, Traherne “sees the salvation of the English Church not in political means, but in the call to repentance.”⁸⁶ Despite his enthusiasm for the monarchy, Traherne, along with his patron Orlando Bridgeman, had qualms about the new incumbent whom he did not see as exempt from this general call to amendment. “Soften our Kings Heart, Teach our Senators Wisdom”⁸⁷ he prays. In the opening chapter of *The Kingdom of God* Traherne pointedly stresses the supremacy of God before whom even “Kings themselves” as his “Deputies and Viceregents ... must render an account” and “to whom they owe the Whole Benefit of their high Advancement.”⁸⁸ There is also a note of sarcasm (which would not be beyond the author of *Roman Forgeries*) in his observation on the ineffability of public affairs:

If it surpasseth the strength of humane Understanding to fathom the Depths of Civil Government, and the Mysteries of Policie exceed the Reach of any one, tho the most Sagacious Judgment in the World; What can we hope to atchiev in the Examination, and Inspection of that which is Eternal.⁸⁹

Though the monarchy be restored, the political scene is as much in need of amendment as the individual soul if the New Jerusalem is to be realised.

More conservative theologians took the Augustinian view, reading the Book of Revelations as a spiritual allegory rather than as literal prophecy, perceiving the Kingdom of God as a purely spiritual entity – a future heavenly state, rather than an earthly paradise. It is

⁸³ Nabil I. Matar, "The Anglican Eschatology of Thomas Traherne," *Anglican Theological Review* 74 (1992), pp. 300, 292.

⁸⁴ Matar points, for example, to the famous “you never Enjoy the World aright ...” meditations in the *First Century* as Traherne’s contribution to the Anglican celebration of the “year of wonders,” concluding that, for Traherne, “the kingdom of Christ was already realized in England” but in “the 1660s, not earlier ...” These passages, however, focus on the (considerably more ancient) Sea, Air, Stars, and Sun ; Traherne asks his reader to “remember how lately you were made” (CM I. 30) and entered into this ready-waiting “Storehous and Treasurie” (CM I. 37) and dates his appreciation of this wonder to childhood - not 1660.

⁸⁵ SM II.17.

⁸⁶ See also Julia Smith’s note, SM, pp. 159-160.

⁸⁷ SM I.2. See also “A Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Nation:” “Ah! Sinful Nation: a people laden with Iniquity, a seed of evil doers, Children that are corrupters ... Rule the heart of thy chosen Servant, our Royal Sovereign, incline his Will to walk in thy way, and make him thankful for evermore. / That in his prosperity we may walk in peace, / Convert him wholly unto thee, O Lord!” II. 98-99, 123-127.

⁸⁸ KG p. 255, ll. 21-26 (f. 148v.)

⁸⁹ KG p. 256, ll. 61-64 (f. 149r-149v.)

this latter view that Michael Ponsford sees Traherne putting forward. Examining the city theme in various meditations and poems he finds that Traherne's glorious cities, bathed with "such a dazzling Lustre ... As made me think 'twas the' New Jerusalem,"⁹⁰ are not actual places but exist only in the "the imaginative apprehension of his childhood,"⁹¹ which was lost in the "inevitable fall from innocence."⁹² The glorious vision might be regained but the "establishment of New Jerusalem ... is a personal experience for Traherne, not a literal bringing down of Heaven to Earth ... an edifice created by thought."⁹³ I cannot agree with Ponsford's implication that Traherne's vision of the New Jerusalem is entirely spiritual and distant from, if not independent of, present experience. Traherne ubiquitously speaks of an earthly paradise consubstantial with the heavenly. "This Life," he asserts, "is the most precious Season in all Eternity, because all Eternity dependeth on it ... So piercing this Life with the life of Heaven, and seeing it as one with all Eternity. A Part of it, a Life within it. Strangely and Stupendiously Blessed in its Place and Season."⁹⁴

However tarnished by "the Dirty Devices of this World" it is possible, reckons Traherne, to "become as it were a little Child again, that I may enter into the Kingdom of GOD."⁹⁵ In order to enter the Kingdom it is first necessary, however, for the Kingdom, comprising heaven and earth and its creatures, to enter you:

... The Kingdom of God (as our Savior saith, this Way) is within you; let us ever think and Meditate on Him, that His conception Nativity Life and Death may always be within us. Let Heaven and Earth Men and Angels, God and his Creatures be always within us.⁹⁶

God "hath set the World in Mans heart," writes Traherne, "that we may Comprehend his Kingdom."⁹⁷ The Kingdom of God is both comprehensible without and exists "within." It is only our distraction and blindness that inhibits its realisation. All Things were in their proper Places," recalls Traherne, "I alone was out of frame and had need to be Mended."⁹⁸

⁹⁰ "Christendom," ll. 69-70.

⁹¹ Michael Ponsford, "Thomas Traherne, the New Jerusalem, and Seventeenth Century Millenarianism," *Durham University Journal* 87.2 (1995), p. 243.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁹⁴ CM IV.93.

⁹⁵ CM III. 3.

⁹⁶ CM I.100.

⁹⁷ KG p. 268, ll. 76-77 (f. 157r.) ; See also CM II.96, 97: "The World is a Pomgranat indeed, which GOD hath put into mans Heart, as Solomon observeth in the Ecclesiastes, because it containeth the Seeds of Grace and the Seeds of Glory ... This visible World is Wonderfully to be Delighted in and Highly to be Esteemed, because it is the Theatre of GODs Righteous Kingdom ... in the Kingdom of Glory it is impossible to fall. No man can sin that clearly seeth the Beauty of Gods face."

⁹⁸ CM III.60.

As expounded throughout Traherne's works and at great length in the final chapters of *The Kingdom of God*, the Estate of Glory is not solely associated with an eternal after life, but might be achieved in the present through experiencing the Estate of Trial in which man, "Glorified with Hazzards,"⁹⁹ chooses to love, enjoy, and uphold the world. In this present "fallen" world, he declares, God has "established a more Glorious Kingdom than the first."¹⁰⁰ Traherne concludes in the *Kingdom of God* that it is "The Enjoyment of God in his Kingdom," rather than the anticipation of it, that "is the Life and Glory of it."¹⁰¹

Traherne thus binds Heaven and Earth together into a seamless whole in a way that is consistent with his orthodox views on the Trinity: distinct but complementary entities forming a unity. In the fourth chapter of *The Kingdom of God* he strings together a selection of verses from Revelations and the Epistle to the Hebrews concerning the adoration of the creator by "evry Creature which is in Heaven, and on the Earth, and under the Earth, and such as are in the Sea, and all that are in them,"

For Heaven also receiveth those things which are upon Earth, and the Earth the things that are in Heaven. For such is the City of GOD having the church of the first born, and the spirits of just men made perfect.¹⁰²

"Heaven and Earth," echoes Traherne in the first chapter, concluding a piece of Thomist theology describing the "One Efficient Cause guiding all things in all Worlds to one End" are "parts of the same Empire."¹⁰³ Citing the Antiochene Father John Chrysostom, Traherne suggests that the Kingdom is present to those "just men" of Christ's church with the vision to see it:

The Celestial City is not as far from us, as Heaven from the Earth, but Infinitely more remote, if we neglect it. As on the other side, it is far nearer if we apply our Minds to Consider it.¹⁰⁴

In Traherne's scheme it is through this application of "our Minds" and the free exercise of the capacity for enjoyment, love and praise that men actively participate in the life of

⁹⁹ KG p. 503, l. 379 (f. 365v.)

¹⁰⁰ KG p. 291, ll. 181-182 (f.176v.)

¹⁰¹ KG p. 480, l. 264 (f. 345v.)

¹⁰² Rev. 4:11 ; 5:13 ; Heb. 12:23 ; KG p. 266 (f. 156r.)

¹⁰³ KG p. 255, l. 17, p. 256, l. 27 (f. 148v.)

¹⁰⁴ KG p. 268, ll. 107-108 (f. 158r.) ; Traherne is quoting from Chrysostom's *Homily on the Gospel of Matthew* 1.6.

infinite and eternally communicated Goodness, and the fulfillment of the Kingdom¹⁰⁵ – “All which shew his Kingdom to be Compleat and perfect.”¹⁰⁶

Traherne's emphasis is not so much on the Restoration of the Crown as on the restoration of the inheritance that belongs to every man:

It is a Kingdom ordained on purpose to be thine Inheritance ... By it thou comest to GOD, and in it is he Enjoyed ... In and by his Kingdom, he communicates himself, and his Essence to us: And thereby we are advanced to the Throne of GOD in which we are to reign for ever and ever. Certainly no Kingdom can be more Divine than that wherein the least of all Subjects is the King, and the poorest in the Realm infinitely Rich and possessor of all.¹⁰⁷

The Kingdom of God, for Traherne, is the Promised Land attainable by all, even the “poorest in the Realm.” The Lambeth manuscript, like Traherne's numerous other writings that speak of inheritance and possession, is written from the perspective of one who has heeded the words of Moses before crossing the Jordan into the “land that floweth with milk and honey:” “...when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an Inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein ... thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee ...”¹⁰⁸ More than a beautiful gift, the Kingdom is the *means* of coming to God and it is “In and by his Kingdom, [that] he communicates himself, and his Essence to us.”

This emphasis on the essence of God - inextricably bound up with the creation - is the subject of an extended discussion in the following sections,¹⁰⁹ but is relevant at this point for it highlights a significant difference between Traherne and the millenarians of his generation who focused on the transcendent will of God. Margaret C. Jacob has identified a widespread acceptance in the late seventeenth century of millenarian convictions amongst latitudinarian Anglican churchmen with an interest in the new science. While fascinated by the new science, Traherne's application of this knowledge (or his physico-theology) is, as I will elaborate, markedly different from those espousing the emerging mechanical philosophy - many of whom, including Newton, were “convinced that the ordered and mathematically regulated universe ... would at an appointed time, physically disintegrate,

¹⁰⁵ For an expanded discussion of this point 2.5.3.

¹⁰⁶ KG p. 270 (f. 158v.), title chapter 5.

¹⁰⁷ KG p. 429, ll. 61-71 (f.298r.)

¹⁰⁸ Deut. 26:1-11.

¹⁰⁹ See especially 2.1, “The Omnipresence of Action,” concerning Traherne's antipathy to voluntarist theology.

destroyed by an act of God foretold by Scriptural prophecies.”¹¹⁰ In his use of such prophetic texts as Revelations Traherne is, as Ponsford suggests, closer to Augustinian readings in taking an allegorical approach. He differs, however, in the substance of that interpretation from both the Augustinians and the millenarians as the following paraphrase from Revelations illustrates:

The World is still as it were a Sea of Glass mingled with fire, and they that hav gotten the Victory over the Beast, and over his Image, and over his Mark, and over the Number of his Name, may Stand on that Sea, with the Harps of God in their hands ...¹¹¹

Traherne amends the initial phrase from “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire.” The voice of visionary prophecy is altered to describe a present, rather than apocalyptic victory. “The World is still” as it was in Eden. Whereas Traherne is concerned with an essential and continuing purity and Wisdom in the ordering of the “Glorious Kingdom” of this world - the millenarians held that the same Divine providence that orders the current political and material world might also, according to its supreme will, destroy and re-order it as the Kingdom of God. We do not find in Traherne the vision of Christ quitting his heavenly abode to destroy the old earth and rule over “an earthly, but new kingdom.”¹¹² The universe described by Traherne in *The Kingdom of God* is ordered, but not by a remote God who operates by decree.

For Traherne, the Kingdom of God is not so much imminent as immanent. He espouses what C. H. Dodd describes as ‘realized eschatology’¹¹³ – the conviction that the Kingdom of God has been realized in the Incarnation. When Traherne asks at the outset of the *Centuries* “Do you not feel yourself Drawn with the Expectation and Desire of some Great Thing?”¹¹⁴ he is alluding not, as Matar implies, to the New Jerusalem of the Restoration,¹¹⁵ or to a heavenly realm beyond this one, or to a new world issued in by apocalypse, but to “Things that have been Kept Secret from the foundation of the World” – Things “Strange yet Common” and connected with Christ as the eternally incarnating Word of God.¹¹⁶ Again in *The Kingdom of God* Traherne bids his readers to heed the mystery of “Infinit Goodness” manifest in the “common,” the “known” and the “plain.”

¹¹⁰ Margaret C. Jacob, "Millenarianism and Science in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37.2 (1976), p. 335.

¹¹¹ Rev. 15:2 ; KG p. 291, ll. 185-189 (f.176v.)

¹¹² Jacob, "Millenarianism and Science in the Late Seventeenth Century," p. 339.

¹¹³ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, (London: Nisbet, 1953)

¹¹⁴ CM I.2.

¹¹⁵ Matar, "The Anglican Eschatology of Thomas Traherne," p. 292.

1. UNCOVERING TRAHERNE'S CHRISTOLOGY

... Its Glory shineth in the Creatures and is the Life and Perfection of them. It is a pitty we should be so little acquainted with that which is Infinit, and Eternal, universal, Omnipresent, remote and yet near at hand within us and without us, in evry thing, apparent, and compassing us about on evry side ... It is horrid folly, Blindness, and Miserie to skip over all the Works of God wherein it dwelleth, and seek his Goodness in I know not what vacuities that are existent beyond the Heavens.¹¹⁷

This theme is also found in the *Fourth Century* where Traherne declares that he will “once more ... distinguish of Christians,” and marks off those who would “place and desire all their happiness in another Life” from those that seek

the real Joy and Glory of the Blessed: which Consisteth in the Enjoyment of the Whole World in Communion with God, not this only, but the Invisible and Eternal: which they earnestly covet to Enjoy immediately: for which reason they daily Pray Thy Kingdom come; and travail towards it by learning Wisdom as fast as they can.

The “horrid folly” described in the Lambeth manuscript is here described as unchristian:

Whether the first sort be Christians indeed, look you to that. They hav much to say for themselvs. Yet certainly they that put of[f] felicity with long delays, are much to be suspected. for it is against the Nature of Lov and desire to defer ... Those Christians that can defer their felicity may be contented with their Ignorance.¹¹⁸

Teilhard observes a similar division:

The struggle we are witnessing is not between believers and non-believers, but between two sorts of believers, two ideals, two conceptions of the Divine, are confronting one another ... A religion of the earth is being mobilized against the religion of heaven.¹¹⁹

Although the terminology differs, there is in Traherne a similar sense of embattlement. *The Kingdom of God* is not simply a devotional or celebratory piece – it earnestly seeks to win

¹¹⁶ CM I.3 ; See 1.1.

¹¹⁷ KG p. 287, ll. 7-15 (f. 173v.)

¹¹⁸ CM IV.9.

¹¹⁹ “Some Reflections on the Conversion of the World” cited in King, *Spirit of Fire*, p. 170.

its reader away from competing points of view.

The Kingdom of God for Traherne then, like Teilhard's divine milieu, is immanent and "formed by the divine omnipresence." "The immensity of God," writes Teilhard, "is the essential attribute which allows us to seize Him everywhere, within us and around us." "Under what form," he asks "does the divine immensity manifest itself to, and become relevant to mankind?" It is felt as the "the true sap of the world" – the "sanctifying grace" of the divine and immense omnipresence; the "charity" or love that is promised to be "the only stable principle of natures and powers" ; and the "wonderful and substantial divine will, whose marrow is everywhere present and constitutes the true food of our lives."

What is, when all is said and done, the concrete link which binds all these universal entities together and confers on them a final power of gaining hold of us?

"The essence of Christianity," he continues, "consists in asking oneself that question, and in answering: 'The Word Incarnate, Our Lord Jesus Christ.'"¹²⁰ In the coming chapters I propose to put this question to Traherne – to explore the Christic dimension in the *Kingdom of God* by undertaking Teilhard's "step by step" examination of "how we can validate to ourselves this prodigious identification of the Son of Man and the divine *milieu*" under the following headings:

1. *The Omnipresence of Action*: The divine milieu is characterised as *an omnipresence of action* with God permeating and sustaining all things.
2. *A Unitive Transformation*: Man has the 'gift of participated being' through his aspiration towards union with the divine and creative omnipresence.
3. *The Consummation of All Things*: The "supreme and complex reality for which the divine operation moulds us" is the consummation of all things revealed in St. Paul and St. John. It "is the mysterious Pleroma, in which the substantial *one* and the created *many* fuse without confusion in a *whole*" in a "triumph and generalisation of being."
4. *The Active Centre*: the "living link, the organising soul of the Pleroma" is Christ.

¹²⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, 1957 (London: Collins, 1960), p. 110.

5. *The Omnipresence of Christification*: Linking “the first and last terms of this series of identities” we see that through the Incarnation, “the divine immensity has transformed itself for us into *the omnipresence of christification*.” All that humanity experiences serves to make it “an integral part of His mystical body. Quite specifically it is *Christ whom we make or whom we undergo in all things*.”¹²¹

Teilhard's framework loosely corresponds with the structure of *The Kingdom of God*, which moves from a consideration of the attributes of an “incomprehensible” yet ceaselessly active God manifest in creation to a consideration of the material universe and the metaphysics of “Life.” Traherne argues that Love and its communication “is the essential form of Gods Kingdom” and that humanity's corresponding and insatiable enjoyments and desires are the perfection and end of creation. The final chapters celebrate humanity's creation in God's image, participating, in the sensual process of their material existence and in the exercise of free will, in the Christic mystery of the Hypostatical Union. Where Traherne's exposition ranges widely and is often circular and reiterative, Teilhard's clear line of investigation provides a means of highlighting and crystallising the incarnational focus of his Christology.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 110-112.

2. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Let us examine step by step how we can validate to ourselves this prodigious identification of the Son of Man and the divine *milieu*.

A first step, unquestionably, is to see the divine omnipresence in which we find ourselves plunged as *an omnipresence of action*. God enfolds us and penetrates us by creating and sustaining us.

Le Milieu Divin

2.1.1. The Most Communicative and Active Principle That Is

Traherne's purpose in *The Kingdom of God* is just such a plunging into the divine omnipresence – he immerses his reader in every aspect of God's Kingdom by attempting, on a similar scale to the encyclopaedic *Commentaries of Heaven*, an inventory of all things contained in it and an explication of the divine action that sustains them. *The Kingdom of God* is permeated by a sense of what Maule refers to as “the restlessness of God,” the unceasing activity of God, conceived of as “Pure Act” – whose very nature is to communicate life and goodness his creation. Traherne takes great pains in *Commentaries of Heaven* to emphasise how “innumerable Questions of infinite concernment” depend on a full appreciation of the word “Act.”¹ The entry for “Act” as he apologetically acknowledges, is a weighty condensation of Scholastic thought. Like many of his contemporaries, Traherne expresses a great impatience with the cumbersome “Placits and Doctrines of the Scholes,”² and describes himself as turning “from the Scholes, having there heard them dispute De Ente, De forma materiali, D[e] Quid-ditate, and Such like Drie and Empty Theames” to the “Living waters” that “Refresh a Droughty Soul.”³ Traherne's criticisms, however, are not as harsh as those of many contemporaries. In the *Commonplace Book* he notes Gale's historical observations on the origins of scholastic theology⁴ but does not follow him in then styling the Scholemen as corrupters of Aristotle and the “cunning contrivers of the Antichristian Religion.”⁵ He also retains a respect for Aristotle⁶ and does not share the extreme revulsion felt by those such as Thomas Vaughan for the “Vomit of

¹ CH f.30r.

² CM III.20.

³ SM III.30.

⁴ CB f. 86v.2 ; Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles. Part II. Of Philosophie*, (Oxford: Will. Hall for Tho. Gilbert, 1670), pp. 373-74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, The Preface.

⁶ See CH “Aristotle.”

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Aristotle, which his *followers* with so much diligence *lick up and swallow*.”⁷ Traherne is, however, very much aware of such opinions. It is with deference to those such as his overseer, Herbert Croft, Bishop of Hereford, who believed that “There hath not been a greater plague to Christian religion than School-Divinity,” as well as to the uninitiated, that Traherne writes:

I confess this Discours to be Extremely Obscure to vulgar understandings, as to those also that perhaps in a generous maner, hav shund the Termes of Act received from the Scholes. And I might seem a Barbarian to those who are not Aquainted with such Expressions.⁸

At the risk of being counted amongst those who risk heresy by posing, in Bishop Croft’s words, “new Questions” and making “nice distinctions” regarding “Divine matters, tossing them up and down with their Tongues like tennis-Balls,”⁹ Traherne charmingly insists on the necessity of his rigorous investigation:

There are innumerable Questions of infinite concernment depending upon the Explication of this Word. For which caus I shall crave the Libertie to look narrowly into it; and promise faithfully that all I design is the Glory of God, and Mans Happiness.¹⁰

He proceeds to give a detailed survey of the Scholastic terms defining various forms of Act: “You see they distinguish between Pure and Compounded Acts, between Absolute and Relativ; between Formal and Accidental, between Actuating and Entitive, between First and Second ...” and then distills for his readers the crux of the matter:

If by all that has been said, you Discern only this, that the Word Act signifies more among Philosophers than a [Barren] and Shady Action, it is sufficient. For my Desire is to Ennoble your Apprehension of the Term.¹¹

In many places Traherne confirms that God is pure act whose perfection lies in the exertion of his power and the creation of his image. “Upon this,” writes Traherne in the *Third*

⁷ Thomas Vaughan, *Anima Magica Abscondita : Or A Discourse of the universall Spirit of Nature, With his strange, miraculous Ascent, and descent By Eugenius Philalethes*, (London: Printed by T.W. for H.B., 1650), sig. B4., p. 22.

⁸ CH f.30v.

⁹ Herbert Croft, *Naked Truth : the First Part, ot the True State of the Primitive Church by an Humble Moderator*, (1680), p. 3.

¹⁰ CH f.30r.

¹¹ CH f.30v.

Century, “I began to believe that all other Creatures were such that GOD was Himself, in their Creation. that is *Almighty Power wholly exerted*:¹² “GOD,” he continues in a Thomistic vein

... is All Act, Pure Act, a Simple Being. Whose Essence is to be, Whose Being is to be Perfect, so that He is most Perfect towards all in all ... Neither is it Possible to be otherwise. All his Power being turned into Act, it is all Exerted: infinitely, and wholly. ... So that we may expect most Angelical and Heavenly Rarities in all the Creatures. ... Being therefore GOD is all Act, He is a GOD in this, that Himself is Power Exerted.¹³

Traherne understands the dynamic of the Trinity to be rooted in this exertion; in the motion and the speech of an “infinitely and Eternally Communicative” God who, as he finds Gregory Nazianzen affirming, could not remain in himself but “became what was GOOD to be Diffused and propagated.”¹⁴ In *The Kingdom of God* the classical attributes of the Deity discussed by Traherne in the initial chapters – Goodness, Wisdom, Blessedness, Righteousness, and Holiness - are all perfected in the act of communication. Two entire chapters (9 and 10) are given to the theme of the active communication of “Infinite Goodness.” At the most elemental level, God the creator communicates being:

God gives us our Beings together with his Gifts ... we owe our Bodies and Souls unto him. As he gives us the Elements of the World it self, or as the Apostle phraseth it, Life and Breath, and all things, we owe our Bodies and Souls unto him, and are his obliged Vassals. We are indebted for the most great and Necessary things, the Sun, and Stars, the Light, the Air, the Glory of the Day, the Skies, the Heavens. And while he giveth us all these, he doth not diminish his Estate in any respect: but Every Way Increaseth and addeth therunto.¹⁵

The paradox of *giving* being the means of *increasing* the divine estate indicates that this communication is not simply a matter of bestowal and divine command, but of manifestation. “God,” writes Traherne, “being Infinite in Goodness, and Wisdom, was infinitely prone to communicate himself for Others Blessedness:”¹⁶ Traherne highlights and delights in the inexhaustible free flowing aliveness of God:

¹² CM III.62.

¹³ CM III.63, 64.

¹⁴ CM III.65.

¹⁵ KG p. 322, ll. 39-46 (f. 199r - 199v.)

¹⁶ KG p. 258, ll. 31-31 (f. 150r-150v.)

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Divine Goodness is an Active and Eternal Principle stirring up it self without Obligation or Reward, to doe the Best and Most Excellent things. It is proper only to God ... It is a Living and Eternal Act, of free and undeserved Love, an Indeficient and undreainable Ocean of Bounty, which can never be fathomed, or by finit Degrees be perfectly received. It is Invisible in its Essence, but apparent in its effects. Incomprehensible but Manifest Enough to be believed and Adored. This Goodness is the first perfection and Efficient Cause of the Worlds creation. Which of necessity derives an Immediate Excellency into all the Creatures, because it is the most Communicativ and Activ Principle that is.¹⁷

Traherne seems to be reflecting, as Christopher Armstrong observes, “the age-old Platonic Christian axiom, *bonum est diffusivum sui*: Is He not Infinitely communicativ? Is He not the more Good the more He is communicativ?” But as Cefalu notes, Traherne uses the word *act* in “the now obsolete sense of both Reality and Active Principle”¹⁸ which contrasts with the Neo-platonic conception of the divine as the source of being which is itself beyond being. In the Thomist scheme, God’s operations and laws cannot be divorced from the essence of God which is simply ‘to be.’ So far from being beyond being, Traherne’s God commands an “estate” which can even be added to, the more active he is in the world.¹⁹

¹⁷ KG p. 295, ll. 144-155 (f. 179v.)

¹⁸ Paul Cefalu, "Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne," *Literature and Theology* 16.3 (2002), p. 252.

¹⁹ For further discussion of this concept see 2.1.4.

2.1.2. His Delight, and His Will are One

In *Select Meditations* Traherne describes his encounter with a question that cuts to the core of this understanding of an immanent, stirring, active principle:

It was a marvellous Question, and the very Asking of which satisfied my soul with abundant Delight, because it touched the Ground of my Nature, Which plato [sic] moved: a Question worthy of so Divine a Philosopher, Whether Things were Holy because they were commanded or therefore Commanded because they were Holy.²⁰

Traherne is only one of many, of course, to have pondered this “marvellous Question” over the centuries. Most often posed in terms of whether God wills things because they are good or whether things are good because God wills them, it is a question of the immanence of divinity in reality: a matter of seeing the world as an expression of the divine essence, or, as contingent upon an entirely transcendent divine will; of understanding God to be acting *in* or *upon* the world. It is a Trinitarian orthodoxy to assert, as Traherne does, that God is both immanent and transcendent, but the question is not simply tautological –the angle of approach is significant. Although, as Greene and MacCallum point out, “a simple distinction ... between assertions of the primacy of God’s intellect or will is entirely inadequate to express the subtleties of scholastic dialectic on this topic, or to define the consequences of adopting either position in the seventeenth century,”²¹ the various emphases given to the puzzle are a useful starting point for exploring the status of Logos Christology in this period. For what is at stake is the acceptance, or refusal of the essential and inherent goodness of created things, a “holy” reason, principle, account, or utterance alive and active at the heart of existence.

In response to the “marvellous Question” Traherne concludes that because God is purely and essentially Goodness and Love, he only commands “the most Excellent Things”²² – things most perfect and delightful. Traherne’s emphasis is not so much upon the command of God, but upon the perfection and delightfulness of God overflowing into

²⁰ SM II.49 ; The source is Plato’s *Euthyphro* 12A: whether that which is holy is loved by the gods because it is holy, or whether it is holy because it is loved by the gods.

C.f.: CB “Perfection” from Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 332, citing Platos Timaeus: ‘God would, that all things should be good, and nothing evil : For ‘twas never, neither is it now lawfull for him, who is the *best Good*, to make any thing but what is most beautiful, and perfect.’ ... Again he saie ... he *shaped, configured, or conformed the Universe, i.e.* made it conformable to the Eternal, and most perfect *Exemplar* of his own Decrees: whence we read I. Cor. 7.31. of ... the *Scene, Figure, or Forme* of this World.

²¹ Nathaniel Culverwell, Robert A. Greene, ed. and Hugh MacCallum, ed., *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, University of Toronto Dept. of English Studies and Texts ; 17 1652 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. xxv.

²² SM II.5.

the very life of all things as a natural, almost gravitational, law. Such a view leads to the Thomist affirmation of a rational and ethical principle, a “holiness” or goodness informing the whole of creation and existence itself – “For all things, to be and to be good are the same.”²³ – for God is the source of all actuality and the sustaining presence of that actuality that fills all creatures and places.²⁴ Both Traherne and Aquinas see an integral relation between Nature’s laws and Holy laws because both are manifestations of divine reason.²⁵ In this Traherne concurs with such seventeenth century “rational” theologians as John Smith:

The primitive rules of God’s Oeconomy in the World [are] not the sole Results of an Absolute Will, but the sacred Decrees of Reason and Goodness. We should hold, not that what God decrees is right, but that God decrees what *is* right.

As Wiley observes, Smith is arguing that “if it was already right ‘in the nature of things’ ... what need of God’s decree? The concept ‘right’ has in effect been deified, made antecedent to ‘God’”²⁶ Green demonstrates that in this, contrary to much critical comment, some of those labelled “Cambridge Platonists” were heavily influenced by the Thomist tradition.²⁷ Cefalu notes that Traherne’s contemporary, Richard Culverwell in his *Discourse of the Light of Nature*, defines the divine Essence as pure act and states his “respect for Thomistic metaphysics.”²⁸ Patrides also points out that while the Cambridge Platonists favoured the Platonist Origen, they equally drew upon Aquinas “who supplied them with the most advanced formulation of the Graeco-Roman theory of natural law.”²⁹

According to the classical theory of natural law, as R.S. White summarises, “a law

²³ Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius’s De Hebdomadibus*, 3 cited in Matthew Fox, *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 95.

²⁴ C.f. ST I 8.2 regarding “The Existence of God in Things.” All references to the *Summa* are drawn from: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947)

²⁵ This argument runs throughout Traherne’s works. See “Thanksgivings for the Blessedness of His LAWS:” Thy Laws, O God, / Are the perfect Laws of Right Reason, / Nature speaks them, / Eternity rewards them, / Reason asserts them, / Wisdom suggests them, / Interest and self love doth prompt them, / Thy benefits oblige us to them. (ll. 256-263)

²⁶ Basil Wiley, *The Seventeenth Century Background : Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1953), p. 143. Wiley cites John Smith’s *Concerning the Nature and Existence of God* (1673), heading of chapter viii.

²⁷ Greene and MacCallum, for example, have argued that the “popular designation ‘Cambridge Platonist’ has served to obscure the fact that the sources of the humanism of both Culverwell and Whichcote, and of their dedication to reason ... are more Stoic, Aristotelian and scholastic than Platonic.” Culverwell, Greene and MacCallum, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, p. xlvi.

²⁸ Cefalu, "Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne," p. 256.

²⁹ C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 5.

cannot *be* unless it is what it *ought to be*.”³⁰ Although few in the seventeenth century would have denied the existence of natural law in one form or another, Traherne’s implication of a necessary connection between God and the world is at odds with several contemporaneous strains of thought. At the opposite extreme Thomas Hobbes (who Traherne elsewhere describes as “that arrogant *Leviathan*,”³¹) maintained that natural law exists only in the mind of God and is entirely extraneous to this fallen world.³² Traherne’s most consistent target for derision, however, is the Calvinist privileging of an entirely transcendent divine will and attendant limitation upon humanity’s free will. Such voluntarist theology, stressing the power and will of God, was on the rise in the seventeenth century and was not limited to the Calvinists. Eugene M. Klaaren has described as a “quiet Reformation” the gradual but radical shift in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from an ontological concern with the essence and being of God and his creation which presupposed a “rational participation in the divine Logos”³³ to a teleological concern with the power of God evident in the design of creation. He traces the beginnings of this shift to William of Ockham and the late medieval emphasis on the freedom and omnipotence of God which undermined the sense of a necessary and integral connection, or communication, between the divine Being and the cosmos.

Another strain of voluntarism displaced the Logos with the workings of a transcendent, and highly selective, Providence. Whereas Aquinas defined Providence as in and of God and one with his essence, disposing creatures to act according to their God given nature³⁴, the doctrine of particular Providence saw nature continually dependent on God’s will.³⁵ The order of creation, observes Klaaren,

... was conceived in terms of law, and entities subject to law, rather than in terms of symbols with varying degrees of mind and soul which participated in the divine Logos. Fully developed, this shift from *logos* to law acquired epoch-forming proportions, for law in this tradition had its own character. In principle, law was

³⁰ R. S. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 13.

³¹ CE p. 261.

³² See White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, p. 12.

³³ Eugene M. Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science: Belief in Creation in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 86, 90.

³⁴ see Aquinas, ST I 22.3-4.

³⁵ As Christopher B. Kaiser observes, the medieval distinction between *potentia Dei ordinata* (the ordinary course of nature) and *potentia Dei absoluta* (the absolute freedom of God in establishing the ordinary course and intervening through miracles on occasion), was maintained but weakened as the the conception of “Nature” as a “virtually autonomous entity” controlled by secondary causes was sidelined in the Reformation. Christopher B. Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science*, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1991), p. 131.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

dependent chiefly on God's will rather than His reason ...³⁶

Although divine reason was not neglected, the rational order of creation was something the Creator freely committed himself to, and might just as freely reverse or abolish altogether. This contingency of creation upon the Creator's will contrasts with concepts of natural law predicated upon an understanding of the creation as a rational expression or communication of God's essence.

The voluntarist tradition continued, argues Klaaren, in English universities, particularly Oxford, "and in the work of many Anglican divines who nurtured the succession of English Protestantism and Medieval thought."³⁷ Traherne, however, was not among them. In *The Kingdom of God*, in the typically spirited language reserved for theological opponents, Traherne attacks the voluntarist position and defends his conception of a universally and infinitely giving God, intimately present to his creation, whose "interest" and that of "his Creatures is united inseparably:"

They are highly Mistaken, that think it dangerous for goodness to be Infinit. Some there are that like Pusillanimous Niggards (who think they shall be undone by Liberalitie) fear least God also should over Act himself in Bounty ... When Men once pin their base, and Pernicious Excuses upon Gods shoulders and think him such an one as themselvs, their horrid Maximes and Covetous Providences may pass then for good Divinitie, they having gotten Sanctuary for their Servile and selfish practises ... Some fancy him to be like a weak King, that is fain to crush his Nobles when they grow great, lest they should be too potent for him. And Some look upon his Creatures like Strangers to himself. Whereas God Knoweth they are his very Bowels, the Works of his own Hands, and the Pleasures of his Goodness...³⁸

The shift toward a voluntarist orientation in theology was concomitant with the rise of "mechanical" philosophy in the seventeenth century. English figures such as Kenelm Digby, Walter Charleton and Boyle responded in various ways to the ideas of their French contemporaries, René Descartes, Marin Mersenne, and Pierre Gassendi. They commonly

³⁶ Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, pp. 36-37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁸ KG p. 296, ll. 207-210 ; p. 297, ll. 217-220, 224-228 (f. 180v -181r.) ; C.f.: CB "Force" (f. 45v.2) where Traherne extracts from Thomas Jackson: "But God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraydeth no man ; as he esteemes no gifts (however given) so he alwayes detects the niggardly backwardnesse, and loves the cheerfulness of the giver." Thomas Jackson, *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes*, (London: Printed by M[iles] F[lesher] for John Clarke, 1628-1629), Part 1, p. 193.

rejected Aristotelian metaphysics and emphasised the passivity of matter which was seen to be subject to the laws of a transcendent God.³⁹ Traherne refers to all these figures, among others, in *The Kingdom of God*,⁴⁰ and was eager to engage with the discoveries of the new science, including the findings of “the Incomparable Mr Robert Boyle.” The concomitant voluntarism of many of its proponents, however, was alien to his vision. While he shared their awe of the extent and magnificence of the created order, his theological response is fundamentally at variance with what Klaaren describes as their “creation piety.” For thinkers such as Bacon, Boyle, and Descartes the study of nature might reveal the mechanisms employed by the divine Law Giver, but no longer supported what Klaaren terms “a theology of Being in all things.” Both the Augustinian and Thomist traditions presupposed, he argues, “the logos of being, a knowledge of implicit rational structures of being.”⁴¹ The rigorous demands of the experimental and empirical method seemed to demand a relegation of any presuppositions regarding the nature of God to an exclusively spiritual realm. Despite this separation and disjunction between science and theology, nature and divinity, the new science provided fresh reason to praise a mighty Creator; Boyle marvels at the “traces” of God’s power, wisdom and “exuberant goodness” that have been revealed to him through telescopes and microscopes “as may justly ravish us to an amazement at them.”⁴² As in Traherne, God is pictured as the “first original and fountain of blessing,” but in contrast to Traherne, Boyle does not relate divine love to the intimate structure of the things of creation for, however awe-inducing, they are but “arbitrary pictures of the great creator:”

...The distance betwixt the infinite creator and the creatures, which are but the limited and arbitrary productions of his power and will, is so vast, that all the divine attributes or perfections do by unmeasurable intervals transcend those faint resemblances of them, that he has pleased to impress either upon other creatures, or upon us men.

A sense of divine enfolding and penetration is absent. Along with the traditional appellations for the transcendent God as Lord, King, and Ruler, Boyle and other

³⁹ Thomas Hobbes was also associated with the mechanical philosophy although his radical materialism was the cause of much controversy and contested by thinkers of every persuasion, including Boyle and Charleton.

⁴⁰ Concerning the issue of whether the sun is composed of fire, Traherne observes: “Among Modern Divines and Philosophers there are many that follow the Ancients, Copernicus, Vossius, Grotius, Ametius, Descartes, Gassendus, Hevelius, Serranus, Stobæus, Dr Charleton, Dr Willis, the learned Gale, and Mr Richardson our countrey Man. Thomas ab Angelis, my Lord Bacon, Sr Kenelm Digby and the Incomparable Mr. Robert Boyl are not far from the opinion: Whose names I mention as a Topick of Authoritie in so doubtfull a matter ...” (KG p. 377, ll. 52-58 (f. 248v.))

⁴¹ Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, p. 124.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

“mechanical philosophers” favoured those of Author, and Architect, with Boyle describing the wisdom of God as “architectonic.”⁴³

Traherne also uses such epithets, but in quite a different spirit. For Traherne God is not simply the artificer of all things, but indwells all things - even “the smallest existence” is exalted and “partakes of his perfection ... As the Effect to the Cause, the Image to the Person, Son to the Father.” In contrast to Boyle’s “arbitrary picture,” “This Image,” says Traherne, “is no Ordinary, but a Great and Living picture.”⁴⁴ His aim in *The Kingdom of God* is to elaborate upon how God’s “Unapproachable essence is made Manifest.” In a sacramental and eucharistic spirit he contemplates these “perfections one by one” – “We will receive them quietly, and chew them Gently, that we may perfectly digest them.” The difference is marked in the varying treatments given to the traditional image of the world as God’s Temple.⁴⁵ Whereas Boyle considers the Temple of the world and is filled with reverential awe at the power and skill of its distant Architect, Traherne, preferring more organic metaphors, understands the Creator to

... dwelleth in his Kingdom, not as in other Temples, where he is the object of the Adorers Thoughts and Affections only. But as the Skill of an Architect dwelles in his Work and the Face of a Spectator in the Mirror he beholds. As the Vertu of the Sun dwels in the Trees and Herbs it inspireth, and a Fountain in the stream, so does the fullness of the Godhead ~~Bodily~~ lodg in all his Kingdom.⁴⁶

Traherne’s creator leaves more than a trace of his passing; he inhabits, fills, and possesses his creation. Although, as Maule observes, the *Kingdom of God* might be described as a work of “physico-theology” and “extremely typical of the natural philosophy of Reformed theology,” Traherne’s strong emphasis upon immanence, fullness, and communication strikes a distinctive note in a genre typically centred on the argument from design. Traherne’s vision is essentially Thomistic:

God’s work wherby God brings things into being must not be taken as the work of a craftsman who makes a box and then leaves it. For God continues to give

⁴² Robert Boyle. *Seraphick Love* (1659) cited in *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴³ Robert Boyle. *Of the High Veneration Man’s Intellect owes to God* (1684-5) IV 351, 352) cited in *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁴⁴ KG p. 337, ll. 27-28 (f. 212r.)

⁴⁵ See Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, pp. 156-157.

⁴⁶ KG p. 337, ll. 32-37 (f. 212v.) Traherne’s deletion of the words “Bodily” and “all” might be seen to indicate a concession to the dominant discourse, but also reveal his impulse toward incarnational thought.

being.⁴⁷

Here also is a sense of the divine omnipresence described by Teilhard, where “God enfolds us and penetrates us by creating and sustaining us.” “Infinit Relations Excellencies and Services lie Concealed in the Smallest Being,” writes Traherne, “and God is there who is all in all.”⁴⁸

... The Act in it self is the Substance, and the effect its Shadow ... the Work produced is one thing, the Act producing it another; But there is a Resemblance, that is fit and absolute between them.⁴⁹

Rather than being an “arbitrary picture,” the creation has a necessary connection to the artist. In fact, having explored the metaphor of artistic production in the *Fifth Century*, Traherne finds it ultimately inadequate – the relationship between God and world is “Living” and glorious and cannot be adequately compared to the “Shadows of a Landscape.”⁵⁰ Boyle sees the creation as being an artefact of God’s “architectonic wisdom,” but for Traherne his “Wisdom is the Art.”⁵¹

Under “Creation” in his *Commonplace Book* Traherne includes an extract from Jackson’s *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* which is supportive of his understanding of the paradox of God’s freedom to act, and the inward necessity for him to do so:

God wee grant could be no Actuall Agent, much less an omnipotent Actuall Agent, without some Act or worke produced by him. As there could be no creature without a creator, so could there be no creator without a creature ... The prime Essence, who alone is absolutely Infinit, did not make all things out of nothing by a necessity of nature, but because it was his will so to make them.⁵²

⁴⁷ Aquinas. *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 14, ad 10 cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 125.

⁴⁸ KG p. 339, ll. 88-90 (f. 213v.)

⁴⁹ KG p. 340, ll. 137-140 (f. 214v.)

⁵⁰ CM V.5.

⁵¹ CM V.5 ; C.f. ST I-II 93.1. Aquinas combines Plato’s metaphor of the Divine Artist with that of a governor: God has in himself the “type” of what creatures are to do to attain their end and purpose. This “type” is divine wisdom, viewed as eternal law. Hence we say “The eternal law is the type of divine wisdom directing all acts and movements.”

As Pina Ford observes, in Aquinas’ scheme the “exemplar, whether considered as na artistic model or as law, does not exist independently of its execution ... the plan and the reality are the same.” (M. Pina Ford, “The Natural Law Context of Thomas More’s *Utopia*,” Ph.D., University of Western Australia, 2001, p. 31.)

⁵² CB. f. 30.2r ; Jackson, *A Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes*, Part 2, pp. 33, 61.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Jackson concedes the maxim of Naturalist philosophers that “Every agent præsupposeth a patient or passive subject to worke upon” but not that “Every thing is made of something.”⁵³ The crux of the matter for Traherne lies in the paradox that while:

God himself being most free, is also the most Necessary Agent in all Worlds. For he so infinitely Delights in all that is Good, that it is Impossible he Should do otherwise then he doth: because his Delight, and his Will are one.⁵⁴

God is like the Sun which is “naturally prone to dispers its Rayes: and so prone that its Freedom becomes its Highest Necessity.”⁵⁵ Traherne is absolutely adamant on this point – finding half a dozen ways of expressing the primal importance of this principle which, as the quotation below makes clear, is based on Aquinas’ fundamental precept of natural law which is the divine imperative of doing good and avoiding evil.⁵⁶

...wheras he is a free Agent ... he would not for all Worlds hav swerved one Hairs Breadth from the Mark of Perfection, or fallen Short, in the least Imaginable degree, of Infinit Excellency. This is κοινον εννοιον,⁵⁷ a Common Apprehension Engraven in evry Soul, a stable Rule, a fixt Principle, an universal Law in the Nature of things, That the Best should be desired, and the Worst refused. It is the Basis and Foundation of all Laws, the Impartial Measure of Integrity; which if it be Shaken, all Wisdom, Justice and Holiness is endangered, if it may be dispensed with, even in God Himself. Nothing is Holy, nothing pure in its Essence: but all is Arbitrary and uncertain.

From this unshakeable foundation flow all the great themes of Traherne’s philosophy: the naturalness and ease of happiness, the joy and rightness of enjoying the world, our “proneness” to love.⁵⁸ If not for this “Principal and Grand Law of Nature ... it had been Indifferent to GOD, whether he had Created or no.” Even if such a God had bothered, “it would not be lovely.”⁵⁹ Traherne is arguing not only that God being most holy and perfect only desires and delights in the creation of holy and perfect things, but that it is of the very essence of God to create, to speak the Word. Again, Traherne speaks with an awareness of opposing view points:

⁵³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁴ KG p. 500, ll. 256-259 (f. 363r.)

⁵⁵ KG p. 360, ll. 179-181 (f. 233r.)

⁵⁶ ST I-II 93.2.

⁵⁷ I.e. εννοιον

⁵⁸ “You are as prone to lov, as the Sun is to shine.” (CM II.65)

⁵⁹ KG pp. 327-328, ll. 57, 61-69, 80, 82 (f. 204r - 204v.)

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Perhaps you will say GODS Essence is independent ... In answer wherunto we affirm, Gods Will and Essence to be one. Suppose he had Willed Nothing? Then Verily he had not been. ... His Will is the Word by which he Commanded all Things to Exist ... Remove his Will, you remov all his Excellency, and among those himself would be quite abolished.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ KG p. 496, ll. 51-60 (f. 359r.)

2.1.3. The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working

At the core, then, Traherne finds that God's "Being is his Happiness,"⁶¹ and "Life it self is his substance: His Life is in the Act and his Act in the Essence."⁶²

Such being the Essence of the Eternal God, we may Justly inquire into the Quidditie of its Existence ... God is Goodness it self, God is Holiness and Glory, God is Lov, God is Light ... God is Life in the Abstract, Life Eternal is the very Essence of the Godhead ... All these things I speak concerning the Nature and Essence of God, becaus Evry one of them implies the perfection of the World.⁶³

For corroboration of this insight into the perfection of the world Traherne looks to the chief apologist for the Elizabethan Settlement, Richard Hooker. In *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker described a universal and absolute natural law, seated "in the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world" and stated his criticism of those "who think that in the will of God to do this or that, there is no reason besides his will."⁶⁴ In *The Kingdom of God* manuscript Traherne inserts a note concerning Hooker at the beginning of Chapter 22 - "Of the Unknown and hidden Secrets in the Moon and the Stars" - which examines the theological significance of recent cosmological discoveries and speculations. It seems that Traherne, in revising this chapter, found sanction in the views of Hooker for his conclusion that an infinite universe is entirely commensurate with an infinite and infinitely communicative Creator⁶⁵ – that the universe is expressive of the "Quidditie"⁶⁶ of God:

The judicious Hooker, that Glorious Beam of the English Church, and the admired Star of all his Nation, wading into the spring and fountain of Laws, and digging neer unto the root of things hath some sage and important Maxims which he casteth up like Sparkling Jewels. Speaking of the first and Eternal Law which is the fountain of all Laws, he saith, The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working; for the Perfection which God is, giveth Perfection to that he doth. Whereupon he observeth, that that, and nothing els is done by God, which to leave undone were not so Good: that there was never sin committed wherein a less Good was not preferred before a greater: and that the Works of Nature do always aim at

⁶¹ KG p. 315, l. 12 (f. 194r.)

⁶² KG p. 359, ll. 171-172 (f. 233r.); C.f. ST I 3.2

⁶³ KG p. 316, ll. 44-45, p. 317, l. 98-101, 113-114 (ff. 194v – 196r.)

⁶⁴ Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, (1593-1597), I, 16.8 ; I, 2.

⁶⁵ For further discussion see 2.3.1.

⁶⁶ Traherne does not shy away from this scholastic term, referring to the essence of a thing that makes it what it is. By the mid-sixteenth century the term had also come to mean a quibble in reference to over-subtle scholastic argument. (OED.)

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

that which cannot be bettered. These Seeds being Scattered so near the root of Perfection, these Principles so closely laid in the foundation, these Ingredients giving a Tincture to the very Well-Head of all Demonstration, must needs be of General Concernment in all the streams, and as fitly applicable to all Particulars. The uses then, and the Services of the Stars may be treasured by these.⁶⁷

For the voluntarists, an infinite universe was indicative of Almighty Power, and did not speak of the nature of divinity itself. As I have outlined, the voluntarist tradition opposed any suggestion of a “necessary” connection between God and the Creation, and stressed what could be seen as an arbitrary connection, dependent solely on the Creator’s will. For such inheritors of the Thomist tradition as Hooker and Traherne, however, “The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working” – divine being and divine will are inseparable - and God is an essentially creative being from whom emanates all life. The world, therefore, cannot be other than what it is: “for the Perfection which God is, giveth perfection to that he doth,” and what “he doth” is evident in the “Works of Nature,” and the very “Life of God:”

What may we think is the Life of God? Is not to Live and to be doing neer akin? ... Sloth and Idleness indeed there was, but no Wisdom in abstaining from the Creation of Good Things ... All Eternal Idleness is an uncouth thing: and the Life of Power is Operation.⁶⁸

In emphasising the restlessness of God, in whom there is no “Idleness,” Traherne engages with the sentiments of Hermes Trismegistus. In the *Commonplace Book* under “Generation” and “God-Beginning” Traherne intersperses extracts from the tenth book of *The Divine Pymander* with rare instances of his own personal observations.

(Extracts from Hermes are underlined)

Without infinit caution Hope & Assurance we dare not make the essence of God to depend upon his Act. For tho it be already demonstrated that Nothing can be idle or Empty, yet it is presumptuous to affirm that GOD dependeth upon his Actions. Howbeit we cannot say that God is Idle for what is idle is imperfect and empty of action, what is empty may be filled. And what is full of Action can be God alone. That of Hermes inference being true. If there be any thing that he doth not do, then is he (if it were lawful to say so) imperfect. Whereas seeing he is not Idle but perfect certainly he doth all Things. He promiseth further to prove that that it is the

⁶⁷ KG p. 369, ll. 1-15 (f. 241v.)

⁶⁸ KG p. 328, ll. 120-121 ; p. 329, ll. 141-144 (f. 205r ; 206r.)

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Necessary Work of God that all things should be made or done. As [--] he saith (this Act) O best beloved, is Life. This [Act of doing all things] (Traherne's brackets) is the Fair. This is the GOOD, & this is GOD.

Traherne is wrestling with the question of how to reconcile God's perfect freedom to act with the conception that it is the very nature, and therefore necessity of God to act. He seems to allow Hermes to persuade him that in effect God is Act, seeing in his reasoning a parallel with the Christian notion of the eternal generation of the Son. Traherne implies that God, the Eternal Act is in his eternally generated Son, and that this synergy moves and quickens all things:

To know that God is an infinit and Eternal Act, is of infinit Importance for therby the Immutabilitie of the GODHEAD which is his Beauty & Glory are made manifest by the Eternal Generation of his Son. His Holiness and Blessedness ... His Wisdom & Goodness also being seated beyond the reach of all contradiction. For as the Author saith, Being himself the onely Workman, he is always in the Work, himself being that which he doth or maketh. Whereupon he further saith, & bringest it in with a Preface emphaticaly concluding, But (saith he) understand this that I say more boldly, for it is more true: As a man cannot live without Life, so neither can God live, not doing Good. The Life and Motion of God is to move all things & quicken them.⁶⁹

As in the Thomist Aristotelian synthesis, there is a symbiotic relationship between the Creator or "Workman" and the creation because it is the very essence of the creator to create,⁷⁰ or as Traherne succinctly puts the matter in *Commentaries of Heaven*, the "Author" "lives to giv." In the particular Christian tradition that I see Traherne working from, and affirmed here for him by Hermes, God is distinct from the cosmos but not separable from it – "he is always in the Work, himself being that which he doth or maketh." The Son is not an intermediary between the workman and the work, but an active principle: the eternal generation of the son is the "Life and Motion" of God omnipresent in the work.

The Act of God is Eternal, an Infinit Fountain of all Good things, filling Eternitie with Living Streams. What is so perfect in its fountain, cannot be mean in its

⁶⁹ CB "God-Beginning," f. 49v.2. ; John Everard, *Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus, his Divine Pymander, in Seventeen Books*, (London: Printed by J.S. for Thomas Brewster at the three Bibles in Pauls Churchyard near the West End, 1657), X.88, 89-90, 92, 93-95 ; 98, 114-115.

⁷⁰ Traherne's gloss linking Hermes' Workman with the God who is eternally acting in the generation of his Son, the manifestation of his "Beauty and Glory," may be building upon an intervening passage: The Image therefore of God, is Eternity, of Eternity the World, of the World the Sun, of the Sun Man. (x. 103)

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

emanations. The Works of God are Wisdom and Goodness embodied as it were in effects. Almighty Power, and Infinit Pleasure invested in their operations, Glory and Blessedness Shining in the fruitions of their Joys and Treasures. Living Streams of Gold and Silver run along in evry Channel, a deluge of Excellencies in their Life and Perfection, enriching, and if not exceeding yet filling and making his Omnipresence an Illimited Ocean of Delight and Pleasure, as Free and Easy as if nothing did fill up the space of Its Existence. It surmounteth and Enjoyeth all. Tis the Air wherin we breathe, the Region of Delights, and the place of Heaven.⁷¹

The traditional metaphors of fountains, rivers and streams,⁷² appearing so liberally in this passage, are employed to express the free-flowing communicative activity of God through the creation. Such metaphors attracted the ire of Calvinists like William Twisse, who criticised Thomas Jackson for his use of them.

The [phrase], *to flow*, savoureth of a natural and necessary emanation, and so much the more when it is resembled by the flowing of waters from a founteyne. But nothing created doth in such sort flow from God.⁷³

Traherne, as we have seen, includes extracts from Jackson's *Commentaries on the Creed* in his *Commonplace Book*, but he takes, however, "A Sober View of Dr. Twisse" taking him to task on the issues of free will and universal salvation in an essay that also appears in the Lambeth manuscript. Twisse's God, as Hutton observes, is an

all-powerful, self-sufficient God who is not bound to do anything and acts not for the good of His creatures, but for His own glory. To allow man free will diminishes God's omnipotence by making salvation dependent upon man. It reduces His efficacious grace, His power to save whom and when He will.⁷⁴

Reciprocally, Twisse would have taken a sober view of Traherne for speaking not only of

⁷¹ KG p. 340, ll. 150-159 (f. 214v – 215r.)

⁷² Aquinas, for example, refers to Creatures as streams running out from the river of God. *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, ch. 69 n. 16 cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 100.

⁷³ William Twisse, *A Discovery of D. Jackson's Vanity* (1631) cited in Sarah Hutton, "Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse, Aristotelian," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39.4 (1978), p. 649.

Hutton argues for a reconsideration of the usual association of Aristotle and scholasticism with the Laudians /anti-Calvinists and Neoplatonism with Puritanism/Calvinism "for in Jackson we have a Neoplatonic Laudian, while Twisse is an Aristotelian Puritan," (pp. 636-7.) However, while Twisse opposed Neoplatonism and was an advocate of Aristotelian logic, his Calvinism was completely at odds with Thomist metaphysics. Although there are points of difference between Thomism and Neoplatonism they are not antithetical in the way that Calvinism and Thomism are.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 651.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

emanations and flowings, but of Living Streams, even, tauntingly, of “Deluges.” Furthermore, Traherne speaks not only of emanations, but the embodiment of divine omnipresence - “Tis the Air wherin we breathe.” There are innumerable such passages in the *Kingdom of God* that might have outraged Twisse, not only for their sensuous talk of emanation and embodiment but also for the suggestion that the being of God might be added to, increased, magnified in the process:

A Vigorous and Activ Principle finds its Ease and delight in Working ... There is no Impediment of its Emanations, because it is Magnified by its overflowings, and Enlarged by its Disbursements ... It is like a Spring that running allways out of it self, Existeth in the River which it maketh by its Streams, and liveth in the moysture that it Communicates to Trees, and herbs. it flourisheth in all the fruits and flowers it produceth, yea in all the Men, and Beasts and Fishes that feed upon them, and are Supported by them, It pleaseth it self, and its Object. The Pleasure of its object is added to its own, and is its own.⁷⁵

To the undoubted outrage of any readers with voluntarist leanings, Traherne holds that

All the Streams with the fountain are more than the fountain alone. All his Works with himself, or himself with all his works, more then him self without them.⁷⁶

He even goes as far to suggest that:

streams are Necessary to the very Fountain; yea so necessary, that without them the Fountain hath no Existence.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ KG p. 298, ll. 1, 8-10, 28-33 (f. 181v-182r.)

⁷⁶ KG p. 334, ll. 166-168 (f. 209v.)

⁷⁷ KG p. 442, ll. 153-154 (f. 311v.)

2.1.4. Bounty is the Stream where Love is the Fountain

In the language of flow and overflow Traherne seeks to describe the quality of that Being which “includes the Fruition of all Delights in its own Existence” and “is a Mine of Infinit Treasures and Pleasures, an Abyesse of infinit Wonders, a World of Mysteries, a boundless Infinity of Illimited Excellencies.” It is “Infinitely Delightfull” and “Eternaly Desirable” for

it is never Weary of it self, nor can its Beauty wax old, nor his Glory decay, as long as there is any Existence Capable of Happiness, or Time wherin Pleasure May be Enjoyed, or Sweetness in Felicitie, or Goodness in making others Happy, or Joy in Advancement, or desire of Perfection in any Thing created or uncreated, Temporal or Eternal. For the Reason why it is Good to be Crowned with Happiness and Glory, Continues allways in its first lustre, and is as fresh and Vigorous after ten thousand Ages Continuance, as it was in the first Moment of its Existence.⁷⁸

This being is also eternally desirous, deriving all its pleasure from “making others Happy.” Its pleasure is evergreen and lustrous for “Bounty is the stream where Love is the fountain.”⁷⁹ As McIntosh observes, “Traherne, following a long tradition in Christian neoplatonism, holds that it is the very nature of such a freely given goodness to diffuse itself to the widest possible extent ... since God is goodness itself, it is a joy for God to be good to others, to pour the divine life out in a way that rejoices all.”⁸⁰ Traherne finds Love to be “the essential form of GODS Kingdom”⁸¹ and speaks not only of the “form” of Love but of its “quiddity” and “working,” its restlessness and its heat. When speaking of this creative force, he describes an infinitely communicative and active God, and also a God consumed with desire. The ongoing act of creation is synonymous with an act of love⁸² and driven by an insatiable divine “want.”

The fervor of his Lov, and the Extreme Ardor of his desire, wherwith he is carried to Infinit Perfection is his real puritie ... So much of the Life of God may be Esteemed Wanting, as there is Wanting in his Action of Infinit Perfection. Nothing

⁷⁸ KG f. p. 315, ll. 14-32 (f. 194r – 194v.)

⁷⁹ KG p. 308, l. 165 (f. 189r.)

⁸⁰ Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2005), p. 245.

⁸¹ KG p. 433 (f. 301r.), title chapter 32.

⁸² See also, for example, the *Third Century* which reprises much of the argument given here in relation to God as being All Act present in all creatures through the working of Almighty Power

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

can tempt him to diminish a Syllable from the Perfection of his Work, but all things allure him to make them, and to make them perfect ... All that he Saw his Omnipresence and Eternitie Capable of, Invited him unto them. His own Wisdom and power allured him: So did the Hallelujahs, and praises of all his Creatures. His own Goodness pricked him on.⁸³

Having satisfied this desire and reached the “utmost Heights,” he “contemplates the Perfection of the Eternal Act, which he hath Exerted, and rests in the Beauty of it with Joy and Complacency.”⁸⁴

This cosmic love-making is described as “the Original of Things.”⁸⁵ “God by the force of his Desire,” writes Traherne, “Created all.”⁸⁶ The Glory of Love is “its Wisdom and Eternal Violence” which in its “Infinite Measure is our Blessedness; and that the Consummation of desires.”⁸⁷ It is the very nature of Love to simultaneously seek its own pleasure as it seeks to please others. Such seeking, though violent in its grasping passion, takes all its pleasure in giving – and in the active enjoyment of another’s happiness.⁸⁸

That Love was the Original of things is Manifest by their Beauty: but more clearly proved by the Nature of Working ... Either for its own Sake, or for others Sakes, it must begin to Create Lov to it self... It can Enjoy Nothing, but by giving away, yet by giving them away it receiveth all things ... It altogether mindeth its own satisfaction, but its own is to be the Happiness of other Persons. ...⁸⁹

It is in the “Working” of this paradoxical scheme – where Infinite Love “receiveth and Imparteth” - that “Those seeming Repugnances are Reconciled in its nature with Infinit Sweetness” and that the life of the Universe is conceived. The Divine Lover and the created other unite in “Simple Unitie:”

The Unitie is Indivisible, yet includeth diversities innumerable. And evry diversity

wholy and eternally exerted, and where Traherne concludes: “With this we are Delighted because it is absolutely impossible that any Power Dwelling with Lov should continu Idle.” (CM III.65)

⁸³ KG pp. 328-329, ll. 115-149 (f. 205r - 206r.)

⁸⁴ KG p. 329, ll. 148-151 (f. 205v.)

⁸⁵ KG p. 310 (f. 189v), title chapter 12.

⁸⁶ KG p. 300, ll. 85-86 (f. 183r.)

⁸⁷ KG p. 310, ll. 2-3 (f. 190r.) ; See also on Goodness: The Violence of its desire maketh it delight to Magnify Infinit Wisdom, and Power, and to crowd up Infinit Treasures in the smallest thing by filling it with Innumerable uses, and Innumerable Ends, and Services, and beauties. (KG p. 286, ll. 229-232 (f. 173r.))

⁸⁸ On the theme of self-love see: N. Matar, "Thomas Traherne and St. Bernard of Clairvaux," *Notes & Queries* 32.2 (1985)

⁸⁹ KG p. 310, l. 20-24, p. 312, ll. 97-100 (f. 190r, 191v.)

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

is a Several face, or Appearance of Beauty. and evry Appearance an Infinit Realitie, and Evry Realitie a Glorious delight to all Spectators. And evry delight in all the Creatures, its own Enjoyment, both as it is their delight, and the Mirror, wherin it discernes its own Realitie.⁹⁰

Again, we find Traherne tapping into Thomist natural law theory in which, as Pina Ford writes, “there can be no distinction between the idea in the mind of God and its execution, and so the plan and the reality are the same ... real and ideal interpenetrating each other.”⁹¹ Love, therefore, is the “Original of things” not the remote originator of things – it creates not “the Shadows of a landscape” but in the delight of the Creatures becomes manifest, embodied, incarnate, it “discernes its own Realitie.” The word “Appearance” in this context comes to function not simply as an abstract noun, but as a Trinitarian verb of relation, outpouring and communication. The most powerful verb in this Trinitarian language is Love for “Either for its own Sake, or for others Sakes, it must begin to Create Lov to it self”⁹² ; it is generative of the Son who is creative of the world:

The Glory and the Efficient Cause of the World is Love ... God so Loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have Everlasting Life ... In him and by him ... we can com to contemplat that Lov, which is the Light of all our Comfort, the Fountain of all our Wisdom and the Sun of all our Consolation, whose Rays Spreading abroad throughout the univers, produce the Day of Glory, In the Light of which we see the Excellency of all his Creatures, the face of God and the End of our Creation, Our Happiness and the Measure of it, the first Original, and Spring of things ...⁹³

Traherne proceeds from this point to body forth his incarnational theology in a catalogue of creation. There are numerous such catalogues in Traherne’s works,⁹⁴ and many, like this one, are structured around verbs as Traherne demonstrates how Living things are the means by which “we might be sensible of a Deity. They Breathe, they see, they feel, they Grow, they flourish, they know, they lov. O What a World of Evidences. We are lost in Abysses, we are absorpt in Wonders, and Swallowed up of Demonstrations.”⁹⁵ The present tense is also important in stressing liveliness and ongoing activity. Verbs in the present tense, then, form the living links between the elements of the world. Traherne’s often repeated inventory

⁹⁰ KG p. 312, ll. 105-110 (f. 191v-192r.)

⁹¹ Ford, "The Natural Law Context of Thomas More's *Utopia*," p. 31.

⁹² KG p. 310, l. 23 (f. 190r.)

⁹³ KG p. 310, l. 23 (f.190r.)

⁹⁴ See Carl M. Selkin, "The Language of Vision: Traherne's Cataloguing Style," *English Literary Renaissance* 6 (1976)

⁹⁵ CM II.22.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

of Earth, Sun, Stars, Moon, Flowers and Spires of Grass (the repetition of which is in itself expressive of eternal generation and an unceasing flow of communication) is enlivened with tramlings, shakings, and flourishings, and is ushered in by the whispering wind:

Infinet Lov ... It whispers in evry Gale of Wind and Speaks aloud in Thunder. It is trampled on the Earth and Crowns us in the Heavens. It burnes in the Sun, and Shines in the Stars. It is Constant in the Moon, and guides her changes to Wonderfull Ends. It breaths in the Air and communicates the Light. It Shades like a Banner in Evry Cloud, and drops down upon us in Evry Shower. It is hidden in Evry Root, and Sowen in Evry Seed. It flourishes in Evry Flower, and in Evry Spire of Grass; aspires to our Happiness, in Evry Tree brings forth fruit for our Contentment. It melts Seas, and Springs, and Fountaines, flowes in the Streams of Living Water in Evry River, Lives in Beasts Flies in Fowles of the Air, paints the Peacocks plumes, and sings in the Nitingale. It Swims and playes in the Fishes of the Sea, it Sees us Men, and makes us to See them. It is apparant in its Laws, in all its Ways, and in all its Works throughout the Universe. It Ministers to us in the Holy Angels, it Beautifies all Ages with Miracles and Visions, and Filles the Face of the Earth with Cities and Kingdoms. Even Dunghills, and Wildernesses disclose its Sweetness, Evry Creature being made so usefull in its place and order.⁹⁶

The word of God here “whispers” and “Speaks” in the elements; the whole of creation, as Traherne describes in “Dumnesse,” calls out to the innocent soul – “evry Stone, and Evry Star a Tongue, / And evry Gale of Wind a Curious Song ... All things did com / With Voices and Instructions.”⁹⁷ Infinet Love is also repeatedly described as a stirring movement acting “in” and upon the elements of the universe. But a further degree of immanence is suggested, for while it “drops down upon us in evry Shower” it is also “trampled on the Earth.” In a later chapter Traherne describes “Men that trample the Earth under feet” as being the “Creatures” for whom the whole cosmic “Marriage” of Heaven and Earth has taken place.⁹⁸ The violent abandon suggested by trampling suggests not only the privilege of dominion enjoyed by humanity over the other offspring of this marriage, but also humanity’s participation in the “Eternal Violence” that is the cause of our “Blessedness” and “the Consummation of Desires” - our exultant enjoyment of the “Delights of the Marriage Bed.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ KG f. p. 313, ll. 143-161 (f. 192v-193r.)

⁹⁷ “Dumnesse,” ll. 61-67.

⁹⁸ Traherne may have had in mind Hebrews 2: 7-8 where man is described as being made “a little lower than the angels” and God as having “put all things in subjection under his feet.” For further discussion of Traherne’s use of the word “trample” see 2.3.3 and 2.5.2.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

The catalogue continues, intensifying this sense of immanence and the omnipresence of virile activity by focusing in on the human body:

It inspires us with Life and approacheth neerer. It incorporates ~~it~~ self in our Bodies, and dwelleth in our Souls. It lays hold on our Hands, and Strengthneth our Ankle Bones; It warms our Heart with its Vital Heat, and fanneth our Lungs with Air. It speaketh in our Tongues, is hid in the Labyrinth of our Ears, and seen in the Sight of our Ey, in the Beauty of our Cheeks, in the light of understanding. It lieth down with us when we Sleep, and walketh with us when we goe along, it bears us company when we Sit down, and meets us in Evry turning, it talks with us in the Way. It feeds us at the Table, and protects us in the House, and covers us in the Bed, and teaches us in the Temple.¹⁰⁰

Traherne immediately moves into Psalm 139 where David addresses praises to his intimately present creator: “thou hast covered me in my Mothers Womb ... My Substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in Secret, and Curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the Earth.”¹⁰¹ He has already, however, drawn upon the spirit of earlier lines from this Psalm where David speaks of the Lord who “hast searched me, and known me,” who “knowest my downsitting and mine uprising” and “compasseth my path and my lying down.”¹⁰² Traherne’s psalm of thanksgiving goes into greater anatomical detail and presents a creator that not only encompasses, knows, and indwells humanity, but who “approacheth neerer” and “incorporates in our Bodies.” Traherne has corrected the line from “It incorporates it self in our Bodies,” removing the words “it self.” This might have appeared too close to pantheism; as it stands the sentiment is panentheist – the creator is not narcissistically identical with the creation, but is incorporated into it. There is a loving, nurturing, companionable, even playful relationship between the creator who hides in the “Labyrinth” of the created’s ears which recalls the rejoicing of Wisdom in the “habitable part of his earth” and her “delights” that “were with the sons of men.”¹⁰³ There is also an emphasis on touch – Infinite Love “lays hold on our Hands,” “warms our Heart,” “covers us in the Bed” ; and on the sensory organs - tongues, ears and eyes. The domesticity of Traherne’s “Infinite Love” - who strolls along with us, keeps us company, and (reportedly one of Traherne’s favourite pastimes) talks with us - only serves to underscore the sense of an “omnipresence of action” ; of an an enfolding, penetrating, and sustaining presence. As Traherne notes from Hermes, “the Good ... will everywhere meet thee ... Waking, Sleeping,

⁹⁹ KG f. p. 392, ll. 200-203 (f. 262r – 263v.)

¹⁰⁰ KG p. 313, ll. 161-169 (f. 193r.)

¹⁰¹ KG p. 314, ll. 174-178 (f. 193r.) ; Psalm 139, ll. 13-15.

¹⁰² Psalm 139, ll. 1-5.

2.1. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF ACTION

Sailing, Travailing by Night, by Day, when thou Speakest, and when thou keepest Silence.” Nothing concludes Hermes “is not the image of God” for although he is invisible he is most manifest – “therefore he hath made all things, that thou by all things mayest See him.”¹⁰⁴ Infinite Love is seen and heard in all places and at all levels of being – from the sublime spectacles of the universe, the gales and thunderbolts that opened the catalogue, to the beds, houses and tables that close it. The final image is of “Infinite Love” teaching us in the Temple, and as Traherne will later affirm, “the whole univers is the Temple of Almighty power”¹⁰⁵ within which “all the creatures” may be heard praising God in their very “beings and operations.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Prov. 8:31.

¹⁰⁴ KG p. 464, ll. 164-171 (f. 332v-333r.) ; Everard, *Divine Pymander*, X. 133-136.

¹⁰⁵ “Let it be Engraven in our Mind, that the whole univers is the Temple of Almighty power.” (KG p. 283, ll. 89-90 (f. 170r.)

¹⁰⁶ CM II.76.

2.2. A UNITIVE TRANSFORMATION

Now let us go a little further. Under what form, and with what end in view, has the Creator given us, and still preserves in us, the gift of participated being? Under the form of an essential aspiration towards Him – and with a view to the unhopd-for cleaving which is to make us one and the same complex thing with Him. The action by which God maintains us in the field of His presence is *a unitive transformation*.

Le Milieu Divin

2.2.1. Methinks I should be Infinitely Beloved

The “fervor” of “Infinet Goodness” and the violence and “Mightiness of its Desires”¹ is reciprocated in the soul’s aspiration toward God. “Created Nature desires Lov no where more Severely, then in GOD.”² In describing this love after God, Traherne finds “Courtiers are fitter Judges here, than Scholemen and Divines. Love teacheth more in one day then Books can in a thousand years.”³ The language of courtship employed by Traherne is of the type found in much mystical writing – a language that speaks not only of “Irrestistible Charm” but paradoxically of the “Sweet and Eternal Violence” and “healing fire”⁴ of extreme passion. In a chapter whose title begins “Of all that may be spared, an Abatement of Lov is least to be Endured,”⁵ Traherne expands upon the traditional analogy between sexual love and the love between Christ, the soul and the Church.⁶ He examines, perhaps drawing upon his experience in the Bishop of Hereford’s Ecclesiastical Court which routinely dealt with such domestic issues,⁷ the pain and injury caused to a husband by his wife’s adultery:

His Heart, his House, his Familie is bereaved of his Greatest Treasure ... he that loves Violently, and desires to be Beloved is displeased with any flatness or Deadness he perceives in a Withering Affection. Any decay is an Irreparable Injury, any Want of that vigor and sweetness that was seen before is a bitter Wound and a deep Affliction.⁸

¹ KG pp. 299-300, ll. 83-84 (f. 183r.)

² KG p. 277 (f. 164r.), title chapter 6.

³ KG p. 306, ll. 54-55 (f. 187r.)

⁴ KG p. 306, l. 62 (f. 187r.)

⁵ KG p. 277 (f. 164r.), title chapter 6.

⁶ See KG p. 279 (f. 166r.)

⁷ The records of these proceedings can be viewed in the Hereford Cathedral Library.

⁸ KG pp. 277-278, ll. 30-56 (f. 165v.)

So also, God is bereaved by any withdrawal of human desire; he is, therefore, “the most Jealous God, because his Lov is Infnit.”⁹ In a happy marriage his intense love is met by a correspondingly covetous desire on the part of humanity.

Traherne speaks of the “Secret Right and Privat Estate of evry person” that is felt by a “tacite Instinct” and when thwarted is felt by its absence - those “Grudges of Nature, which are no other than Secret Repinings at its open Wrong.” In the *Third Century* he also speaks of “so strong a Desire of felicity in the Soul, that we might be excited to labor after it, tho we know it not, the very force wherwith we covet it supplying the place of our Understanding.”¹⁰ The soul instinctively yearns after, and covets, the love of God:

Methinks I should be Infnitly beloved, saith the Conscience in itself. And that the God of Lov should manifest himself in Goodness; that I should be Caressed and Exalted and honored, and magnified and made Supremely Blessed and that his Wisdom should provide a glorious Kingdom, and his Goodness make it mine by his Bounty. My Spirit tells me there should be infinit Objects of Delight and Pleasure; and that the Divine essence should prepare most Bright and Blessed realities within and beneath and beside it self, and make all mine, and magnifie it self in me, and in it self, and do all for me, and before me.

In voicing the clamouring of the “Conscience” we see Traherne making a rhetorical virtue of self centredness. The repetition of “I,” “mine,” and “me” creates a sense of demand that images the “Extreme Ardor” of God’s desire and the burning aspiration to amass to oneself all the “Bounty” of the Kingdom. The desire of the Conscience to be “Infnitly beloved” is the desire to be magnified or filled with God and is justified by the conviction that it is the nature of the “Divine essence” to love infinitely - to gather into itself and pour out from itself the “ most Bright and Blessed realities.” In claiming or accepting this bounty – taking all to dwell in me as “mine,” the reality of the Divine Essence is made all the more “Bright and Blessed.” The soul, so endowed and magnified, reciprocally magnifies and dwells within the Divine Essence. All that is done “before me” is done “within and beneath and beside it self.”

⁹ KG p. 277, ll. 35-36 (f. 165r.)

¹⁰ CM III.56.

2.2.2. The Fear of a Pusillanimous Spirit

There are, however, impediments to the union that is so instinctively desired. Desire can be thwarted by trepidation:

Our Hopes are nipt in the Bud for fear of presumption, our Desires Crusht in the Growth with pretended Pietie. A Modesty prejudicial to nature is affected by us, we gag our Disatisfactions and suppress their Clamours, we renounce our Libertie and giv up our selvs to an implicit Bondage, we see not the root of our Discontents and yet in the midst of all this Corruption we are as Confident and Dogmatical, as if we had all the Light of the Holy Angels.¹¹

Traherne makes the “fear of Presumption” a sin against nature. In Traherne’s rhetoric, presumption almost becomes a virtue – the risk of presuming upon the love of God is much to be favoured over the defensiveness of a shy and self-denying philosophy. He speaks of how “that which discourages Timorous Spirits, animates the Couragious” and that any difficulty in comprehending divine mysteries should serve only as an “Allurement, Inviting us to Consider it all.”¹² Unshackled by the fear of presumption, the soul is demanding, outspoken and clamorous. Traherne follows Aquinas for whom “Pusillanimity is a graver sin than presumption, since therby a man withdraws from good things, which is a very great evil.”¹³ He also echoes Aquinas’ observation of an ironical pride in the self-limiting and suppressive pusillanimous spirit:

Even pusillanimity may in some way be the result of pride: when, to wit, a man clings too much to his own opinion, wherby he thinks oneself incompetent for those things for which one is competent.¹⁴

With Aquinas he counterpoints presumption – or over-reaching – with pusillanimity, which makes “a man fall short of what is proportionate to his power, by refusing to tend to that which is commensurate thereto.”¹⁵ For both, the pusillanimous spirit “shrinks from great things out of littleness of soul,” and pusillanimity is regarded as being “directly opposed to magnanimity.”¹⁶ The abstract principles set forward by Aquinas are colourfully brought to life in Traherne’s pointed criticism of his contemporaries. As we noted earlier, he lashes out

¹¹ KG p. 332, ll. 70-75 (f. 208r.)

¹² KG p. 258, ll. 6-7 (f. 149r.)

¹³ ST II-II 133.2 ad 4.

¹⁴ ST II-II 133.1, ad. 3.

¹⁵ ST II-II 133.2

¹⁶ ST II-II 133.1 ad 2.

2.2. A UNITIVE TRANSFORMATION

against those peddling an impoverished conception of God - those “that think it dangerous for Goodness to be Infinit” and “like pusillanimous Niggards (who think they shall be undone by Liberalitie) fear least God also should over Act himself in Bounty.” Such men, Traherne argues, limit God’s magnanimity by creating a God in their own pinched image:

When Men once pin their base and Pernicious Excuses upon Gods shoulders and think him such an one as themselvs, their horrid Maximes and Covetous Providences may pass then for good Divinitie, they having gotten Sanctuary for their Servile and selfish Practises ...¹⁷

The courageous, presumptuous, magnanimous spirit, however, has a “more August and Magnificent Conception of God.” It looks

upon him as without Beginning, the Author and Fountain of all Perfection, the Father of Lights, and the Giver of evry Good, and perfect Gift, independent in him self, and the Lord of all things, by a Primitiv and Original Right, illimited and infinite not by Donation, or by Participation.¹⁸

Traherne here anticipates the arguments of those that “object that nothing can be infinit, only GOD”¹⁹ by noting the contingency of creation upon the creator, but stresses the infinite and magnanimous creativity of God. “I,” he states, “can see no Inconvenience that can possibly arise from the Infinity of his Works but a Aptitude and Convenience as Infinit as themselves.” He discounts his opponent’s “fear, least his Creatures should be too Great and too near, lest they should grow presumptious ... ” “This,” writes Traherne, “is the fear of a pusillanimous Spirit that measures the Godhead by his own Weakness and dares do nothing Eminently Great and Good out of a Dastardly Conceit of the Danger that may arise ... ”²⁰ He describes instead the paradox of a “free subjection” that is the result of a “delightfull ardor, and Zeal for his Glory, a Lov to his Essence.”²¹

Traherne’s scorn of pusillanimity, then, is linked with his conception of the infinite bounty of God. Bounty is the principle underlying the Eternal Generation of the Son and what McIntosh describes as the “sharing trinitarian life of God.” This life is manifested in the “translucent abundance” of creation and “cannot be perceived by those whose hearts are

¹⁷ KG p. 297, ll. 217-220 (f. 180v -181r.)

¹⁸ KG p. 335, ll. 199-203 (f. 210r.)

¹⁹ KG p. 335, l. 178 (f. 209v.)

²⁰ KG pp. 335-336, l. 219-222 (f. 210v.)

²¹ KG p. 336, ll. 235-236 (f. 211r.)

gripped with a mentality of deprivation, suspicion, and scarcity.”²² McIntosh characterises Traherne’s view of creation as essentially “christocentric” – for the passion of Christ “cracks open human rejection of the loving divine bounty by pouring out love in so *communicable* a fashion that it cannot help but transfigure the consciousness of everyone who is united to it.”²³ The mind, cautions Traherne, might become opaque to such “translucent abundance,” deaf to such communications, and immune to any such transfiguration through the vicissitudes and temptations of life and the false valuing of worthless objects:

Little did we think when we cam into the World, to meet with so Sweet a fountain of all Good things. In the midst of the Vanities we see upon Earth, it is as Incredible as unexpected. The Burden of our Corruption presses us down, and we are accustomed so much to Malevolence, and Mishap, that our Experience makes us Blind, Sin makes us acquainted with nothing but Affronts, and abuses, base Treasures that glitter in our Eyes, their litleness and their Scarcity, together with all the Hazzards and Extremities to which we are Exposed makes us Men of Slavish Apprehensions, of low and Narrow Expectations, of no Hope of Despairing, and Sordid Spirits.²⁴

Our Ambition, Curiositie, Desire, Insatiable Avarice ...

In place of such “Slavish Apprehensions” and pusillanimity Traherne advocates “Ambition, Curiositie, Desire and Insatiable Avarice” founded upon the infinite goodness of God and the conviction that such goodness can be accumulated to the individual soul: “His Kingdom is Illimited in Extent and Glory; And it is the peculiar possession of evry Soul.”²⁵ Related to the rhetoric of covetousness is that of “possession” and “inheritance” for the “Centre of our Peace and Union” is not an immaterial Heaven, but the entire Kingdom of God which is

ordained on purpose to be thine Inheritance, not only the place of thy Repose, and the Region of thy Joys, but the Means of thy satisfaction, be thy Ambition and Avarice never so Insatiable. By it thou comest to GOD, and in it is he Enjoyed ... In and by his Kingdom, he communicates himself, and his Essence to us: and

²² McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, p. 10.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11. McIntosh sees Traherne’s view as being “very near to that of such christocentric Neoplatonists as Maximus and Bonaventure.”

²⁴ KG pp. 312-313, ll. 124-135 (f. 192v.)

²⁵ KG p. 331, ll. 13-14 (f. 206v-207r.)

2.2. A UNITIVE TRANSFORMATION

therby we are advanced to the Throne of GOD, in which we are to reign for ever and ever.²⁶

Our desires are insatiable because so are God's and the Kingdom of our inheritance is infinite in extent. The only "place of thy repose" is in the eternity of God:

To enjoy God is to take Complacency, and delight in him, for being what he is, and doing what he does, Loving what he Loves, requiring what he requires. It is to rest in him, as the compleat and Satisfactory Object of all our Desires. Which Since our Soul is So insatiably Ambitious and Covetous, implies a transcendent, and Invincible Perfection in our last Object, and no less a Perfection in the Manner of our Enjoyment.²⁷

The state of perfect "Complacency" and rest is paradoxically, therefore, not one of passivity, but of restless and infinite desire. Just as "So much of the Life of God may be Esteemed Wanting"²⁸ so is the life of humanity fueled by an insatiable want. Had we been immediately "Seated purely and Perfectly in the Throne of God," argues Traherne, "there had been no need of a Visible World, sea, Air, fire, Earth ... Minerals, Meteors, the Sun, and Moon, and Stars had all been unprofitable, and Meat, and Drink superfluous."²⁹ It is better, he says, that these material things exist to

Multiply our Wants, that our Treasures might be Multiplied ... Heaven had not been Heaven, had there been no Desire. And this Desire might Infinitely be Enflamed, and Satisfied in a first Moment of its Conception, yet Delay quickeneth Desire with an Impatience as Delightfull as Eager, and maketh Room for many Longings and Endeavours, which are Sweet and Beautiful to the Ey of Knowledg, yet without this Delay had never been Created, but when they are Created, do put a far Greater Lustre, and Price upon Enjoyments.³⁰

In the *First Century* Traherne relates an anecdote from a Latin life of Socrates in which Socrates wanders through a marketplace exclaiming at what he saw as the proliferation of unnecessary objects: "After he had Gravely Walkt up into the Middle, spreading forth his hands and turning about, *Good Gods*, saith he, *who would hav thought there were so many*

²⁶ KG p. 429, ll. 61-69 (f. 298r.)

²⁷ KG p. 476, ll. 103-108 (f. 342v.)

²⁸ KG p. 329, ll. 135-136 (f. 205r - 206r.)

²⁹ KG p. 498, ll. 142-145 (f. 360v.)

³⁰ KG p. 498, ll. 152-158 (f. 361r.)

*Things in the World which I do not want!*³¹ Socrates, concludes Traherne, “left the Place under the Reproach of Nature.” In Traherne’s lively translation of his source, there is a hint of amusement at Socrates’ grandiose and, Traherne believes, mistaken dismissal of the things surrounding him in the Athenian Exchange. Socrates, he continues “was wont to say, *That Happiness consisted not in Having Many, but in Needing the Fewest Things: for the Gods Needed Nothing at all, and they were most like them that least Needed.*” Traherne’s estimation of Need, however, is rather different:

Socrates perhaps being an Heathen, knew not that all Things proceeded from God to Man, and by Man returned to God: but we that know it: must need All Things as God doth that we may receiv them with Joy, and liv in His Image.³²

It is not, therefore the scarcity, or the transcending of, but the superabundance of material treasures that ignites a desire after heaven – a heaven that is itself created by desire and would not exist without it. The flirtatious delay of pleasure creates the environment in which the creation can flourish and in turn further enflame desire. Driven by a desire that answers the strength of the divine desire in creating the world, the soul acts, through its thoughts, affections, joys and pleasures, in what Traherne frequently calls the “Similitude” of God – it “must need All Things as God doth,” or as he succinctly puts it in the *First Century*, “You must Want like a GOD, that you may be satisfied like GOD.”³³

For Teilhard the “gift of participated being” takes the form of an “essential aspiration” towards the Creator, while for Traherne, wants are the instinctive yearnings of the soul, guiding its aspirations towards God. Comparing the soul to a watch he finds that whereas the “Dead Workmanship” of the watch only appears to be “endued with Understanding” the Soul is “ordained to a Diviner End, the Knowledg of its Creator infusing a Life wherby it is able to guid it self.”

Appetite and Desire are the spring that urge it, the Wheels are the Affections and powers of the Mind; Its Inclination is the Thred, that draws them about, and if they be not Encomberd with Earthy Distractions, opprest with pleasures, and disturbed with Cares, the Index of the Mind will follow the Sun, and its Regular Motions sympathize with the Deitie, so will it point out the Hours of Eternitie, for the

³¹ Marks notes that while Margoliouth (CPT Vol I, p. 244) is correct in giving Diogenes Laertius as the ultimate source for this anecdote, Traherne’s immediate source was the Latin life of Socrates abstracted in the *Ficino Notebook*. Carol Marks Sicherman, “Traherne's Ficino Notebook,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 63 (1969), p. 77.

³² CM I. 40.

³³ CM I.44.

pleasure and Glory of him that wears it.³⁴

The “Index of the Mind” will follow the Son, as naturally as the shadow on a dial follows the Sun. In contrast to the mechanical device, the “Spring” of the soul comprises appetites, desires, and wants. In Traherne’s scheme these are forces of union with the source of all life.

Wants are the Ligatures between God and us. The Sinews that convey Sences from him into us: wherby we liv in Him, and feel his Enjoyments.³⁵

Traherne’s carnal language of “sinews” and “sences,” and springs of desire, is expressive of his incarnational focus. Wants, in his vocabulary, are not purely transcendent yearnings after an unseen God; he speaks of our want of the material elements and creatures of the world for they are the conduits of the divine life sustaining all things. As we explicated in “The Omnipresence of Action,” Traherne characterises God as being consumed by a desire that is “the Original of Things”³⁶ – that issues in the Son being given to, and creating, the world. God is perceived to be “from Eternity full of want” and the satisfaction of that desire is “a tree of Life.”³⁷ To participate fully in that Life humanity must insatiably desire to be bound to God and the whole creation by the ligatures of “senses, Affections and Desires:”

O my GOD, since Life is the End of all thy Works, giv me an abundant life; so vast a Measure of it, that all the Waters in the Sea might be but Drops in Comparison. Give me a life Extensive like thine, since thou delightest in it. And since all thy Creatures Want a Tongue to prais thee, giv me their senses, Affections and Desires, that with all their senses, Affections, and Desires, Apprehensions and Powers, in all Parts of the Earth and sea, the Air, and Heaven, I might Glorify thee. In all these I desire to contemplat thy Wisdom and Delight in thee.³⁸

Traherne’s sentiments are echoed in Teilhard’s prayer:

O God, whose call precedes the very first of our movements, grant me the desire to desire being – that by means of that divine thirst which is Your gift, the access to the great waters may open wide within me. Do not deprive me of the sacred taste

³⁴ KG p. 270, ll. 11-16 (f. 158v.)

³⁵ CM I.51.

³⁶ KG p. 310 (f. 189v.), title chapter 12.

³⁷ CM I. 43.

³⁸ KG p. 418, ll. 415-422.

2.2. A UNITIVE TRANSFORMATION

*for being, that primordial energy, that very first of our points of rest ...*³⁹

³⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 57.

2.2.3. Such Endless Seas of Living Waters in his Works I Find

The bountiful world has quickened the desire of the soul and awakened its thirst for life. It is therefore central to Traherne's philosophy that all things, when perceived "truly," are holy and revelatory of their divine source. "Traherne," writes McIntosh, "senses the crucial link between, on the one hand, a consciousness transformed by sharing in the trinitarian abundance and, on the other hand, the discerning ability to perceive the world truly."⁴⁰ Those who are disappointed in life "are apt to charge God Foolishly" when the "Fault is in our selvs ... We unjustly Prefer things rare, and Scarce ... We see not the Glory of his Kingdom ... We are alienated from the Life of God through the Ignorance that is in us."⁴¹

It is the Sickness of a fastidious Nature to loath Existent and present things, a disease to desire Absent and unmade.⁴²

As outlined in the previous chapter, Traherne maintains that it is the "universal Law in the Nature of things, That the Best should be desired ... which if it be Shaken, all Wisdom, Justice and Holiness is endangered, if it may be dispensed with, even in God Himself Nothing is Holy, nothing pure in its Essence." The very being of God is bound up in this desire from which springs all creation, the manifestation of God's goodness and holiness, from which "he would not for all Worlds hav swerved one Hairs Bredth from the Mark of Perfection."⁴³ In Hooker's pithy phrase, so admired by Traherne, "The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working."⁴⁴ This working, in Traherne's philosophy, is evident in the cosmos and also extends to the make-up and inclinations of the human soul. By contrast, Thomas Hobbes, as we noted, maintained that natural law exists only in the mind of God. Concomitant to this conflicting view, according to R.S. White, is that such rationality is "external to the human mind rather than internal, beyond the capacities of mankind to know,"⁴⁵ In contrast to "that arrogant *Leviathan*,"⁴⁶ Traherne asserts that "those things are

⁴⁰ McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, p. 11.

⁴¹ KG pp. 331-332, ll. 32-54 (f. 207r-207v.)

⁴² KG p. 338, ll. 63-64 (f. 213r.)

⁴³ KG p. 327, ll. 62-68 (f. 204r-204v.)

⁴⁴ KG p. 369, ll. 5-6 (f. 241v.)

⁴⁵ White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ CE p. 261.: It is a great mistake in that arrogant *Leviathan*, so far to imprison our love to our selves, as to make it inconsistent with Charity towards others ... Nature is crippled ... if Self-preservation be made her only concern: ... We feel it first, and must preserve ourselves, that we may continue to enjoy other things: but at the bottom it is the love of other things that is the ground of this principle of Self-preservation." This passage occurs in the chapter entitled "Of Gratitude" which concerns the communication and flow of love between God and humanity. In the image of God "we are to *Enjoy* all Angels and men by communicating our selvs unto them."

most Holy that are agreeable unto both, Him and us”⁴⁷ and that the “Index of the Mind” is geared to “follow the Sun.” Where Hobbes emphasises the necessity of obedience to a divine authority via anointed deputies in a compromised and potentially self-seeking anarchic world, Traherne emphasises knowing, enjoying, and participating in the life of God – an easy and natural obedience because all being flows from God and God is present in all beings. It is for this reason that Traherne says the “marvellous Question” of “Whether Things were Holy because they were commanded or therefore Commanded because they were Holy” had “touched the Ground of my Nature.”⁴⁸ It not only concerns the question of all life, including the author’s, being rooted in God’s being, but moves Traherne who delights in the divine presence in the world and in the core of his own self.

Humanity, according to Traherne and those of his contemporaries that shared an antipathy to the Hobbesian and Calvinistic view, is restlessly desirous of holiness because of a deeply planted and instinctive awareness of it in all the things of the Kingdom. In Traherne’s scheme, our desire after the gift of participated being is sparked by our instinctive experience of the Life or “manifestation of God” in his Kingdom which “cannot be Seen without a Vision, and a Trance, and a Rapture.”⁴⁹ Things of the world would not excite such zealous and rapturous love were they not intrinsically holy, intrinsically desirable. For Aquinas “everything was brought into being for the reason that it was good for it to be,”⁵⁰ and “The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable.”⁵¹

Love and zeal are caused in us from beauty and goodness, for a thing is not beautiful because we love it, but we love it because it is beautiful and good ... God is called zealous because through God things become objects of zeal, that is, intensely lovable.⁵²

Similarly for Traherne, it is the things which “are in them selves Holy that make us Happy.”⁵³ As Maule observes, the “standard physico-theology” of Traherne’s day “exclaims at the manifold wisdom of creation” and all creatures – flies, ants, worms etc are “imagined in the goodliness of their own being,”⁵⁴ or in Traherne’s terms, considered “as they are.”⁵⁵

⁴⁷ SM II.55.

⁴⁸ SM II.49.

⁴⁹ KG p. 338, ll. 45-47 (f. 212v.) ; C.f. Numbers 24:4.

⁵⁰ ST I 65.2.

⁵¹ ST I 5.1.

⁵² Aquinas, *Commentary on Dionysius’s De divinis nominibus*. Cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, pp. 114-15.

⁵³ SM II.54.

⁵⁴ Maule, *Traherne and the Restlessness of God : the New Lambeth Discoveries (audiotape)*.

⁵⁵ KG p. 439, l. 2 (f. 307v.)

2.2. A UNITIVE TRANSFORMATION

This is in the tradition of earlier thinking, distilled by Aquinas, in which creatures are seen to exist “for their own sake” as “their own account of the divine goodness,” subsisting in their “own nature,” and possessing their own “uniqueness” (*proprietatem*).⁵⁶ Traherne reflects on, what in the seventeenth century was termed the “entitive goodness”⁵⁷ of all things, by bringing together the exhortations of the Psalmist with the scholastic theory of creaturely essences:

Prais him Sun and Moon, Prais him all the Stars of Light ... all Deeps of Fire and Hail, Snow and Vapor, Stormy Wind fulfilling his Word ... The Royal psalmist Beginneth with the Highest and descending to the Lowest, Exhorteth all Creatures to prais GOD; rather out of a Sense of Joy, that in their Essences and orders They are allready doing it, then in nay Way doubting that GOD deserveth by Evry thing to be praised.⁵⁸

In the very fact of material being, writes Traherne, “we Shall hav the intrinsecal perfections of Gods Kingdom.”⁵⁹ In Traherne’s response to the Marvellous question, we can see, as Robin Attfield has demonstrated, Traherne affirming Aristotle’s arguments for intrinsic value:

... if something is extrinsically or instrumentally desirable, then something is intrinsically desirable ... that is, for its own sake and for no reason beyond itself.

It is in this regard that Traherne’s Platonist leanings can be overstated: Hutton concludes that for Traherne “physical objects have value only in so far as they manifest the divine” and that “this vividly suggests a Platonic turning away from the material to the intelligible world.”⁶⁰ Attfield, by contrast, concludes that “it is no part of Traherne’s theology to impute goodness to creation simply because it has been created by God” and that Traherne’s praise

is not based on the assumption that whatever God makes is good just because he makes it. Rather it is based on the contingent goodness of the actual world, and of the actual existence of those who appreciate it and are enabled by it to exercise their powers.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4 cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 122.

⁵⁷ Maule gives the example of poisons such as aloes have their own goodness in medicinal uses.

⁵⁸ KG p. 367, ll. 228, 232-233, 240-243.

⁵⁹ KG f. 203r.

⁶⁰ Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 169.

⁶¹ Attfield, "Thomas Traherne and the Location of Intrinsic Value," pp. 68, 67, 73.

This appreciation of the goodness of the world also hinges upon an awareness of the relationship that each creature bears to another. Traherne, as Maule observes, shares Thomas Jackson's view that "the better everything is in its kind – the more good to others."⁶² In reflecting on the "Mutual Relation" between God and his creatures and between all creatures, Traherne concludes that it is "The Glory of Matter" to be "Capable of all those Formes, which infinit Wisdom is able to devise."⁶³ It is the

office of Infinit Wisdom to make one thing subservient to as many Ends, as it is possible, and to Enrich it with as many uses, to make it as precious and Beautiful and prais worthy, and Delightful as in its Kind it can be capable of ...⁶⁴

We are to see, says Traherne, that all Things are the Treasures of Almighty God" and that "Being made his enjoyments, they are worthy to be ours"⁶⁵ ; we are "to consider things as they are, and to conceive them the Goods or Utensils of his Familie:"

Glory gives us a Divine and Heavenly Apprehension of them. While we so conceive them, we must of necessity discern the Relation, which they bear to Almighty GOD, and believe the Meanest to be full of Incomprehensible Excellency.⁶⁶

In *The Kingdom of God* and elsewhere, Traherne often speaks of the uses of the creatures, "the Goods and Utensils of his Familie," and how all things exist for the use and enjoyment of man. He adopts Socrates' definition of Treasures as "*those things wherby a Man may be Benefitted*" and proceeds in one of his colourful and comprehensive catalogues to suggest the range and texture of those things:

be they within or without, be they for the Body, or for the Soul; for the Increas of Power, or Honor, Authority, of Friendship; Health or Beauty, Security or Pleasure: be they Sweet or Sour, Leight or Heavy, Bright or Obscure, if they are Conducive to his Desires, and Ends, they may be Styled Treasures. Chymical Drugs, and bitter Ingredients, purges and vomits, oyle and playsters, may be a Sick Mans Treasures, perhaps a Physicians, and an Apothecaries; as Swords and Darts and Lances may be the Treasures of a Prince; Implements of Husbandry and Instruments of Labor, the Plougmans Treasures; Flocks of Sheep and Herds of Cattle, the Shepherds, and the Herdsman's: All things in Heaven and in Earth are the Treasures of a Man, that are

⁶² Maule, *Traherne and the Restlessness of God : the New Lambeth Discoveries (audiotape)*.

⁶³ KG p. 428, ll. 4-5 (f. 296v.)

⁶⁴ KG p. 284, ll. 135-138 (f. 171r.)

⁶⁵ KG p. 439 (f. 307v.), title chapter 33.

⁶⁶ KG p. 439, ll. 1-7 (f. 307v.)

conducive to his Felicitie.⁶⁷

He also considers St Augustine's assertion that "*the Means are Used, the End is Enjoyed,*" but finds this "nice distinction" unsatisfactory. "The Essence of God," he argues "is an Act so pure, that to Use and Enjoy in him are one. In using them he enjoyeth the Treasures of his Kingdom. And in Enjoying, he useth them: Which if I may speak my Mind freely, is common unto Men."⁶⁸ Use and Enjoyment, then, alongside "Ambition, Curiositie, Desire" and "Insatiabie Avarice," are also forces of unitive transformation – as through them we participate in the life of God.

Could they, my Soul, unless they him did pleas
The very reason why such Endless Seas
Of Living Waters in his Works I find,
Is 'Caus they Strangely do Delight his Mind. ⁶⁹

A Stranger upon Earth

It is curious that God's own works should "Strangely ... Delight his Mind." While there is a delight in strangeness and discovery, there is also a quality of strangeness in delight. In addition to connoting something unfamiliar or unknown, early meanings of the word "strange" included the quality of being "exceptionally great (in degree, amount, intensity, etc.)" and "unfamiliar, abnormal, or exceptional to a degree that excites wonder or astonishment."⁷⁰ Participating in the divine creator's mind that eternally wonders afresh at the beauty of his own life in the creatures, the soul sees and appreciates the world as though the astonishing sight has been lighted upon for the first time. According to Aquinas:

One who is amazed shrinks at present from forming a judgment of that which amazes them, fearing to fall short of the truth, but inquires afterward. Wherefore amazement is the beginning of philosophical research ⁷¹

The fear of underestimation or misunderstanding in a questing, desirous person is counterpointed with what Traherne refers to as "the fear of a pusillanimous Spirit."⁷² Whereas the wondering, amazed spirit surveys an infinite field of possibility, the

⁶⁷ KG p. 441, ll. 87-98 (f. 309v-310r.)

⁶⁸ KG p. 439, ll. 20-27 (f. 308r.)

⁶⁹ KG p. 444, ll. 232-235 (f. 313v.)

⁷⁰ OED

⁷¹ ST I-II, 41.4 ad 5.

⁷² KG p. 335, ll. 219-220 (f. 210v.)

pusillanimous spirit does not inquire “afterward” but contracts the field of possibility.

Traherne’s work abounds with stories of discovery and arrivals in “this World” – “How like an Angel came I down! How Bright are all Things here!” He repeatedly exhorts his readers to appreciate the world as if they were seeing it for the first or only time and to recapture the fresh vision of the newborn: “Were we to see it only once, that first Appearance would amaze us. But being daily seen, we observ it not.” This is one of Traherne’s most striking themes: the startled and pristine vision of the newly arrived stranger who “finds” himself “plunged”⁷³ into “Endless Seas of Living Waters” and who is as fully alert to the life coursing through the universe as to the blood in his own veins. In “The Salutation,” we find an infant “Stranger here” who “Strange Things doth meet” and to whom not only the world, but his own “little Limmes,” “rosie cheeks,” and “Speaking Tongue” are a delightful discovery. Traherne’s authorship of *Select Meditations* was confirmed when James Osborn, who purchased the manuscript in 1964, showed it to Louis L. Matrz and his eye lit upon a meditation on the world as it appeared to “the little Stranger, when I first came into the world. As sweet every thing as paradise could make it.”⁷⁴ And in the *Third Century*, Traherne makes explicit the point that such an estranged vision constitutes a “unitive transformation” ; for the fresh enjoyment and intuitive knowledge of the true value and holiness of life and the creation, is described as “divine.”

All appeared New, and Strange at the first, inexpressibly rare, and Delightfull, and Beautifull. I was a little Stranger which at my Entrance into the World was Saluted and Surrounded with unnumerable Joys. My Knowledge was Divine.⁷⁵

Again, in *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne employs the perspective of the newly arrived stranger to provoke a fresh vision of the world and inspire praise and thanksgiving. In a central passage (which will be the focus of the next chapter) Traherne imagines the response not of an infant stranger, but of a “Celestial Stranger” beamed down from the vast emptiness of outer space - “let down of a sudden” onto our teeming planet. Such estranged perspectives sharpen the pleasure of each sensory experience, and awaken the capacity to discern the holiness of all things.

The faculty for marvel, finding things “as Incredible as unexpected,” therefore, is

⁷³ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 111.

⁷⁴ SM III.29 ; Julia J. Smith, ed. and Thomas Traherne, *Select Meditations*, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), Preface by Louis L. Matrz, p. vii. ; also see James M. Osborn, "A New Traherne Manuscript," *Times Literary Supplement* (1964), p. 928.

⁷⁵ CM III.2.

2.2. A UNITIVE TRANSFORMATION

preliminary to an understanding and hence union with the source of all things. Traherne follows Aquinas in this, for “from wondering” a person “proceeds to inquire.”

Nor does this inquiry cease until he arrive at a knowledge of the essence of the cause.”⁷⁶

“Wonder,” Aquinas elaborates, “is a kind of desire for knowledge” and “a cause of pleasure, in so far as it includes a hope of getting the knowledge which one desires to have.”⁷⁷ This desire also “strives to gain an intimate knowledge of everything pertaining to the beloved, so as to penetrate into his very soul” and attain a “mutual indwelling.”⁷⁸ This chapter has been concerned with Traherne’s expression of the desire or “essential aspiration” after participation in the being of God, his observation of the obstacles between, and the means towards it. There will be more to say regarding unitive transformation when we come to the final stage of “Christification.” But first we will continue to follow Traherne as he elaborates upon the process of knowing and discovering the pleroma that so excites the wants and desires of an avaricious, ambitious and curious spirit, “so as to penetrate into the very soul” of the World.

⁷⁶ ST I-II 3.8

⁷⁷ ST I-II 32.8

⁷⁸ STI-II 28.1 ; 1 ad 1.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS: THE MYSTERIOUS PLEROMA

Let us go further still. What is the supreme and complex reality for which the divine operation moulds us? It is revealed to us by St. Paul and St. John. It is the quantitative repletion and the qualitative consummation of all things: it is the mysterious Pleroma, in which the substantial *one* and the created *many* fuse without confusion in a *whole* which, without adding anything essential to God, will nevertheless be a sort of triumph and generalisation of being.

Le Milieu Divin

2.3.1. Even Infinit Space is a Consequent of Eternal Wisdom

Teilhard's use of the term *pleroma* (πληρωμα from the Greek *plerose* or *fills*) is drawn from the Epistle to the Colossians in which Christ is described as he in whom all fullness dwells and who reconciles all things, in earth and heaven, to himself.¹ The term was used by the Stoics to describe God's permeation of the world and, as Mooney observes, in Paul the 'fullness' dwelling in Christ indicates

plenitude of being, both fullness of divinity and fullness of the universe, the whole of the cosmos filled with the creative presence of God.²

"Let it be Engraven in our Mind," writes Traherne, "that the whole univers is the Temple of Almighty Power."³

By the mid seventeenth century the conception of what the universe might comprise had undergone considerable expansion, and it is to the "whole of the cosmos" that Traherne turns his attention in *The Kingdom of God*. We have already cited the passage, inserted by Traherne as an introduction to his cosmological theme, that applauds Hooker for "wading into the spring and fountain of Laws, and digging neer unto the root of things:"

Speaking of the first and Eternal Law, he saith, The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working: for the Perfection which God is, giveth perfection to that he doth.⁴

¹ Col. 1:15-20. See also Eph 4:10. These verses are more fully explored in 2.4.1.

² Christopher F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, (London: Collins, 1966), p. 147.

³ KG p. 283, ll. 89-90 (f. 170r.)

⁴ KG p. 369, ll. 1-15 (f. 241v.) ; see 2.1.3.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

It is within the context of these maxims that Traherne then turns to the subject of the cosmos exploring, in Chapter 22, “the unknown, and hidden Secrets in the Moon and Stars.”⁵ He considers theories ranging from the inhabitation of the moon and stars, the infinity of the universe, the centrality of the sun, and, with particular reference to Hevelius’ *Selenographia*, the influence of the moon upon the earth. He initially seems extremely sceptical

Because the Wits of the Age are Atheistically disposed and pretend the Moon and Stars to be Inhabited, to the utter overthrow of Religion, as they design it; And many Terse Ingenuities hav of late furthered the opinion. Because the Genius of the Time is hammering at Such a thing;

but he then suggests that he can turn the arguments of these “Atheists” against themselves:

And because som great thing is promised by Nature it self, and by Instinct Expected in the hidden uses and capacities of these Mighty orbes, there is a Shadow of Reason at least in their Arguments. It Shall not be amiss to shew clearly that if their Discourses were true no Detriment can accrue to Religion therby.⁶

Traherne then proceeds to list the theories and discoveries of the new cosmology in a similar spirit, although as the list proceeds it appears that in some points Traherne is playing devil’s advocate – sounding rhetorical and “timorous”⁷ doubt about things he elsewhere concedes and celebrates in a spirit of amazement, in order to overthrow all doubt that the new discoveries are to the greater glory of God. Rather than constituting proofs against the existence of God, Traherne argues, the discoveries of science are in fact further demonstrations of the veracity of Hooker’s maxims.

First they pretend, that the Fiction of Solid Spheres was a Chimera of Aristotles, introduced into the World against the General Consent of Philosophy in former Ages: ... Then taking courage to sally out of all Bounds and soar higher, they pretend that new stars lately discovered by the Assistance of Telescopes, higher then all the fixed Stars that are Known: so that for ought we can perceive (say they) beyond those there may be other Stars ... and more again beyond those, and So forth onward to everlasting Spaces ...⁸

⁵ KG p. 369 (f. 241v.), title chapter 22.

⁶ KG p. 369, ll. 16-24 (f. 241v.)

⁷ KG p. 258, l. 4 (f. 149r.); See 2.2.2.

⁸ KG p. 369, ll. 25-38 (f. 241v-242r.)

Having dispensed, “together with the solid Spheres,” the outmost heavenly realm – “the Cælum Empyræun” – some, Traherne notes with disingenuous scepticism, seek to make the infinite “WORLD” “the Throne of God, filling his Omnipresence with the Works of his hands.”⁹

But what relation have the “Everlasting Spaces” to ‘the Being of God’? – what perfection had God, the omnipresent communicator of life and fullness, wrought in them? Traherne’s conception of infinite space is most clearly articulated in his response to the views of Henry More. Although, as Carol Marks notes, Traherne and More were “among the first English writers to respond imaginatively to new ideas on space”¹⁰ and they both delight in the vastness, fullness and diversity of an infinite universe as an expression of God,¹¹ Traherne strongly objects to what he sees as More’s correspondence of space with Deity.¹² Traherne’s argument with More is most extensively dealt with in his *Commonplace Book* under “Deitie” where –although the source is not named - he makes extracts from and comments upon More’s *Divine Dialogues* (1668). In introducing his cast of characters, representing various philosophical positions, More describes “The general Character,” of their dialogues as one of tolerance: “All free spirits, mutually permitting one another the liberty of Philosophizing without any breach of Friendship.”¹³ The passionate and combatative Traherne, however, finds their civil arguments highly irritating, describing their attempts to define God as a “Subtile extended Substance” as meeting with “little Success” though argued with “Politeness and Dexteritie.”¹⁴ During the course of the dialogue on the nature of deity and infinite space, Hylobares, “a young, witty, and well-moralized

⁹ KG p. 369, ll. 37-42 (f. 242r.)

¹⁰ Carol L. Marks, introd., comm., George Robert Guffey, ed. and Thomas Traherne, *Christian Ethicks*, Cornell Studies in English ; v. 43 (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 330 (note to p. 67:15.)

¹¹ See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, Rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 162-165.

Nicolson notes that although More initially rejected “ancient heresies” of infinity, in retracting this view he “transferred to Space some twenty adjectives and epithets that had formerly been applied only to deity.”

¹² “The idea for which More is probably best known today is his concept of infinite space, which anticipates Newton’s concept of absolute space ... He first discusses space in his correspondence with Descartes, where he proposes that it is a form of extension distinct from matter, which is contained within space. By virtue of the fact that it is infinite, immaterial extension, space is analogous to God, whom More conceives as an infinitely extended spirit. In *Enchiridion metaphysicum* space is described as ‘an obscure shadow’ of divine extension, since its properties (infinity, immateriality, immobility, etc.) correspond with many of the attributes of God.” Sarah Hutton, “Henry More,” *The Dictionary of Seventeenth Century British Philosophers*, ed. Andrew Pyle (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000)

¹³ Henry More, *Divine Dialogues, Containing Sundry Disquisitions and Instructions Concerning the Attributes and Providence of God. The Three First Dialogues, Treating of The Attributes of God, and his Providence at Large*, (London: Printed by James Flesher, 1668), opp. p. 1.

¹⁴ CB. f. 33r.2

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

Materialist,” finds himself indebted to Philotheus, “a zealous and sincere Lover of God and Christ, and of the whole Creation,”¹⁵ for “freeing” him from the “prejudice” of Descartes’ maxim, “*that whatsoever is extended must be Matter.*”¹⁶ Traherne excerpts from More’s text without distinguishing the participants and provides the following summary:

They finally conclude it must be the Essence of God, whose Omnipresence they affirm this infinit Space to be, which cannot but be Spirit, because it pervades the Matter of the Universe.

Traherne seems to take his source more literally than More intended. Even so, the mere analogy of space and deity offends Traherne. “Thus much for the Politeness and Ingenuity of their Endeavour, the vanity of it followeth.” Traherne seems most affronted by the implication that the “vacuity of Space is a real being.”¹⁷ For Traherne, the omnipresence of God is, as we established in the first phase of Teilhard’s argument, an omnipresence of action and driven by desire. It is, writes Traherne, “a more lively and Sublimar thing, then that desolat vacuity, or dark Imaginary Space” that More equates with God. “Bare Extended Space cannot Think, illuminat or desire,” concludes Traherne – a “pure Incomprehensible Eternal Act, that is never Desolate not idle, but the fountain and the End of all Things, ordering all, and enjoying all, that is God.”¹⁸ The outpouring of being is, paradoxically, the means of increasing the divine estate. The ceaseless manifestation of God in creation is, as we have seen Traherne argue, a building up of God’s own self.¹⁹ As pure Goodness and Wisdom, and Infinitude, Traherne’s God is self-sufficient, but his essence is, nonetheless, to desire the creation and to communicate those attributes to it. The stream of life fills all things as it contains all things, fusing the one and the many in “a sort of triumph and generalisation of being.” Space itself, then, is contained in God; in a later chapter Traherne praises Life itself: for “Thou containest the Centre of the Earth and the Wideness of the Heavens, yea Kingdoms and Ages in a Manner Infinitely better than place or Space.”²⁰

It serves Traherne’s rhetorical purpose to contrast the emptiness and vacuity of space with the fullness of God, but “Even Infinit Space,” he argues “is a consequent of Eternal Wisdom: being prepared to be the Repositorie of its End and Enjoyments.”²¹ In the

¹⁵ More, *Divine Dialogues I-III*, [facing p. 1.]

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

¹⁷ CB. f. 33r.2.

¹⁸ CB. f. 33v.1-2.

¹⁹ See 2.1.1 ; for further discussion of the theme of augmentation see the end of this section, 2.3.2, and 2.5.3 “Prize the Sun, the Stars, the Sky.”

²⁰ KG p. 418, ll. 403-405 (f. 285v.)

²¹ KG p. 284, ll. 132-133 (f. 171r.)

Commonplace Book he disapprovingly recites the opinion of Bathynous - More's "Deeply thoughtfull or profoundly-thinking man" – who finds space, or this "subtile Extension" to be an "obscure shadow or adumbration" of the "*Divine Amplitude*," in which

all things [are] necessarily apprehended *to live and move and have their being*.

"Then," Traherne interjects, "rising to an higher Confidence upon this place" Psalm 90 is quoted by Sophron, "The Sober and wary man:"

*Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations ...*²²

Bathynous, with Traherne following, goes on to note the validity of the titles which the Cabbalists attributed to God - "*Immovable Mover, Receptacle and Sustainer* of all things."²³ For Traherne God is indeed the receptacle of all things, but included under the banner of all things is space itself. And conversely, all things, "even Infinit Space" are repositories, "the Throne," of God, the all in all. The ground in which we "live and move and have our being," "our dwelling-place" is, unlike space, "a Living Substance, endued with Knoweldg and Wisdom, Love and Goodness Power and Dominion."²⁴ To return to a passage in *The Kingdom of God* quoted earlier, "Living Streams of Gold and Silver"

run along in evry Channel ... filling and making his Omnipresence an Illimited Ocean of Delight and Pleasure, as Free and Easy as if nothing did fill up the space of Its Existence. It surmounteth and Enjoyeth all. Tis the Air wherin we breathe, the Region of Delights, and the place of Heaven.²⁵

This living, streaming substance – this *divine milieu* – fills and contains all things. No object contained in space is a barrier to its omnipresence. Nor is it confined to the spaces between objects as it effortlessly fills the "space of its existence." "Tis the Air wherin we breathe"²⁶ – but not in the sense, for example, that Van Helmont identified the Soul of the World with the element of air – but as the entire environment "*wherin* we breathe." This passage continues with the observation that the "vacuitie" of space "is a Delightful Spectacle."

²² Psalm. 90.1.

²³ CB. f. 33r.2 ; More, *Divine Dialogues I-III*, p. 106-107.

²⁴ CB f. 33r.2 ; Klaaren notes from McGuire Boyles unpublished use of the Hebrew word *Makom* and Newton's criticism: "when the Hebrews called God Makom, place, the place in which we live and move and have our being, they did not mean that space is God in a literal sense." (Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, , pp. 157-158, fn. 31.) Traherne might have agreed with Newton in this criticism, but his metaphysics are far more incarnational than Newton's.

²⁵ KG p. 340, ll. 155-160 (f. 215r.) ; See also 2.1.3.

²⁶ KG p. 340, ll. 150-159 (f. 214v – 215r.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

Yet in truth there is no Vacuitie. The Pleasure of God is evry where tho there be nothing else ... All Eternitie and the Amplitude of Illimited Space in all Its Extensions is full of Love ...²⁷

“Nature,” says Traherne in Chapter 22, “abhorres Vacuitie and Sterilitie.”²⁸ His response to infinite space is, therefore, richly paradoxical – contrasting the vacuity of space with the life of God, yet insistent that “in truth there is no vacuitie.”

One of Herbert’s major metaphors for the world, as Colie observes, is a cabinet, fully stocked with the great variety of created things. “His imagination,” she writes, “does not burst out of the world’s confines into an infinite space infinitely filled with an infinite variety of things, as a little later in the century, in their different ways, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Traherne were all to do.”²⁹ In a sequence of passages in *Select Meditations* that cover many of the points made in Chapter 22 of the *Kingdom of God*, Traherne, who evidently read and admired “the divine Poett,”³⁰ enlarges upon the cabinet metaphor, making it encompass, however, evry “Poynt of Space.” “The Heaven of Heavens are not able to contain me,” he writes, “For my Soul exceedeth all Limitations:”

... I can Plainly see infinit Space ... For it is as easy to see Things in a cabinet as the Empty cabinet: and evry Thing contained in every Poynt of Space, as the poynt of Space in it Selfe Empty. This is is my Joy that in every point of Space God wholly is, and wholly there by me to be Enjoyed.”³¹

Freed to explore the universe beyond the cabinet of this world, Traherne then considers in Chapter 22 the existence of other worlds and their inhabitants – again sounding a note of rhetorical scepticism that renders the possibility of such speculations being true all the more marvellous:

... they hav vented Books abroad into the World, proving that the Moon is Habitable, and the Earth a Star and that Many other Stars are Inhabited besides.

²⁷ KG p. 340, ll. 162-164, 168-169 (f. 215r – 215v.)

²⁸ KG p. 371, l. 102 (f. 243v.)

²⁹ Rosalie Littell Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 209-210. See Herbert’s “Providence” ll. 133-36.

³⁰ KG p. 413, ll. 216-217 (f. 281r.) where Traherne quotes from Herbert’s “Longing” – “*Mothers are kind, because Thou art And dost dispose to them their part: Their children them, and they sick thee, more free!*” See also 3.2 for discussion of Traherne’s rejection of “curling Metaphors that gild the Sence” (“The Author to the Critical Peruser”) which echoes Herbert’s “Curling with metaphors, a plain intention ...” (“Jordan (II),” l.5.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

And som of them are of the opinion that the Sun Stands Still, and is the centre of our System ... Without which there are other Suns, at almost infinit Distances Divided from Each other, about which other Opaque Orbes or Bodies move as the Earth and Planets about this Sun ... All of them having their Several Inhabitants to Enjoy the light of the Sun that is neer unto them!³²

The growing acceptance in the seventeenth century of the notion of an infinite universe and the possibility of infinite numbers of worlds³³ challenged the long-held belief in a concentric hierarchy of being, with dead matter at the centre and an empyrean heaven at the periphery. To incarnational thinkers, like Traherne, however, the notion was the cause for rejoicing and confirmation of a true divine omnipresence residing in all places and not confined to a heaven above. In the second half of Chapter 22, Traherne drops any display of doubt regarding the opinions of his contemporaries, and runs with them:

These are the Apparent Objections which they all make, or may make, against the unities³⁴ of the Earth's Existence To which we shall adde som of our own, and proceed to the consequences.

Firstly, championing the inhabitants of this world, Traherne reasons:

The Soul of Man would be Glorified and Praised, and Magnified, and seen, and Beloved, and Admired, and Delighted in, in evry Part of Heaven ... God doth delight in those that bear his Image ... [and] desires Multitudes of these to see his Glory ...

Secondly, however, he argues that:

The Earth is too poor a Cottage, too small a centre, to be the Single, and Solitary Object of his care and Love. For him that is Omnipresent and Eternal, to confine his Contentments to one litle Spot, and leav all the Rest Empty and Desolate is unworthie of his Majestie, and not very answerable to his Infinit Greatness.³⁵

In this Traherne echoes the views of Thomas Digges, who, according to Kaiser, was the “first true Copernican in England” and took the “radical step” in 1576 of describing a God

³¹ SM IV.3.

³² KG p. 370, ll. 45-54 (f. 241v-242r.)

³³ See Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science*, p. 123 ff.

³⁴ i.e. solitariness in the Universe.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

“to whose infinite power and majesty such an infinite place ... only is convenient.’ We can also trace the legacy of Giordano Bruno, who was martyred in Rome in 1600 for beliefs that were seen to be bordering on pantheism. For Bruno an infinite number of worlds was an expression, “a multiple image of God’s simple immensity,”³⁶

Traherne then ponders that:

Neither is it suitable to his Wisdom, that Worlds of such Infinit Magnificence, Bulk, Number, Distance and Varietie should be Created, only for to be, and serv like Sparks of Weak, and Glittering Light, for such a litle Ball, a Point, a Mite as the Earth is, being Capable of so many more uses, if him self pleaseth.³⁷

He asks “What if the Stars should all be Inhabited, what would follow? ... Verily it is more Apparant that there is a God, a Religion, a Blessedness thereby.” An infinity of inhabited worlds “Enriches” and does not “Abolish” Heaven; proves “GOD to be All Act,” ; and “Augments [the] number” not only of visible, but of “Invisible” things.³⁸ Traherne thus maintains a Thomist metaphysic of action while rejecting Aristotelian cosmology, and makes the concept of augmentation central to this resolution. He repeats the term *augments* several times more in the ensuing sentences to convey the notion that Variety and Multiplicity of being augment the glory of God. God is the self-sufficient augmentor; but in an important sense, since all being is in God, and God in all being, God is also augmented - or, in Teilhard’s words - the “substantial *one* and the created *many* fuse without confusion in a *whole* which, without adding anything essential to God, [is] nevertheless ... a sort of triumph and generalisation of being.”

All being the Spectators of one, augment his Glory, and evry one being the lover of all, his delight and Blessedness is therby Enlarged ... It may be Expected that that the Creatures in those remoter Orbes Should be very Strange ... But Still the Varietie Augments the Beautie, let them differ in other things as much as they will, in Knowledg and Lov, they must all agree, that are Divine and Holy. All the Blessed must see all: and GOD communicat the Kingdom thus Gloriously Augmented to evry one.³⁹

³⁵ KG p. 372, ll. 134-147 (f. 244r-244v.) ; See also: The WORLD is not this little Cottage of Heaven and Earth, Tho this be fair, it is too small a Gift ... (CM I.18.)

³⁶ Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science*, p. 124.

³⁷ KG p. 372, ll. 147-151 (f. 244v.)

³⁸ KG p. 372, ll 154-165 (f. 244v.)

³⁹ KG. pp. 372-373, ll. 171-181 (f. 245r-245v.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

This cycle involving the human soul and the universe (a theme to which we will return in “The Omnipresence of Christification”) generates a felicity that flows back into and augments the source of it all – “even GOD” is fed with “all Delights” and in his delight, augmented by ours, lies “the qualitative consummation of all things.”

2.3.2. Such Strange Kind of Creatures

To continue this stage of our progressive examination of the place accorded Christ in Traherne's formulation of the Kingdom of God, we will examine in more detail the poetics of augmentation in a central and most striking chapter of the manuscript. Traherne brings the theological arguments and cosmological speculations of preceding chapters to life in the ecstatic Chapter 25 in which he imaginatively summons one of the "Creatures" from "those remoter Orbes" to witness, "Even with a Ravished, and Transported Sense," how "the Blessed must see all" and to demonstrate how God communicates "the Kingdom thus Gloriously Augmented to Evry one." We discussed under "Unitive Transformation" how desire, curiosity, love, and transformation in Traherne are sparked by amazement, and how he employs the theme of the newly arrived stranger to provoke a fresh and clear vision of the world. He opens Chapter 25 by imagining the response, not of an infant stranger (although he revisits this theme later in the chapter), but of a "Celestial Stranger"⁴⁰ alighting upon Earth. This creature might be "very Strange," but it is through his alien spectatorship that Traherne invites us to experience the world anew. It is interesting to note, in light of Traherne's perception of infinite created variety as an augmentation or enlargement of God's glory, that a relatively new meaning of the term 'augment' in his time was "To raise in estimation or dignity."⁴¹ Through the telescope applied by the Celestial Stranger to the Globe of the Earth Traherne augments the stature of this "base" planet.

The Estranged Vision: Had a Man Been Allways in One of the Stars

Had a Man been allways in one of the Stars, or Confined to the Body of the Flaming Sun, or surrounded with nothing but pure Æther, at vast and prodigious Distances from the Earth, acquainted with nothing but the Azure Skie, and face of Heaven, little could he Dream of any Treasures hidden in that Azure vail afar off. or think the Earth (which perhaps would be Invisible to him, or seem but a Needle's Point, or Sparkle of Light) in any Measure capable of such a World of Mysteries as are comprehended in it.⁴²

In this opening, Traherne builds upon the cosmological speculations put forward in Chapter 22, that there are stars at "vast and prodigious Distances" from the Earth that may be inhabited and that it cannot be "Suitable" to God's Wisdom that they "should be Created, only for to be, and serv like Sparks of Weak, and Glittering Light, for such a little Ball, a

⁴⁰ KG p. 390, l. 124 (f. 261r.)

⁴¹ (1655) OED.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

point, a Mite as the Earth is, being Capable of so many more uses ...”⁴³ He also makes imaginative use of the observation “that the Appearance of the Earth is Bright afarr off, they think apparent by the Reflexion [of the sun]”⁴⁴ in making the first sight of earth as “but a Needle's Point, or Sparkle of Light.” The promise of Traherne’s sparkling star contrasts with the perspective of those who emphasised the relative insignificance of our planet. Thomas Digges (the first astronomer to posit the infinity of space), spoke of the “litle darcke starre wherein we live” as being “but as a poynt in respect of the immensity of that immoueuable heaven.”⁴⁵ Digges was not the first to have taken such a perspective. Dante describes how:

I with my sight returned through one and all
The sevenfold spheres, and I beheld this globe
Such that I smiled at its ignoble semblance⁴⁶

The title of Chapter 25, however, which telescopes from the perceived smallness of the earth to its rich detail:

Of the Globe of the Earth. Its Baseness, Its Liteness, its Dignity, its Glory. Its capacity and Greatness, Its fulness and varietie.

This is, in one sense, ironic, as Traherne’s post-Copernican understanding of an infinitely expanded universe, exploding through the protective umbrella of the seven spheres, might have served to make the world seem even more tiny and insignificant. Dante’s journey, however, is primarily upward, inward and spiritual, directed toward a divine and still centre, while Traherne’s stranger descends - his impulse is to “draw neer” and journey widely in “this globe of ours” where he discovers that what seemed so little is in fact very dignified, glorious and capacious. As Poulet observes in comparing the poetry of Dante and Traherne:

For Dante ... the divine sphere was marvelous; but it was composed of permanent marvels, marvels which did not reveal themselves to the voyager until precisely the moment when he had finished his journeying to immobilize himself in the contemplation of the eternal beauties. With Traherne it is the very reverse which

⁴² KG p. 388, ll. 1-7 (f. 258r-258v.)

⁴³ KG p. 372, ll. 147-151 (f. 244v.)

⁴⁴ KG p. 371, ll. 123-124 (f. 244r.)

⁴⁵ Thomas Digges, *Perfit Description of the Cælestial Orbes*. (7 eds. 1576-1605.) Cited in John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997)p. 29.

⁴⁶ *Paradiso*, Canto 22 (transl. Charles Eliot Norton)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

happens. He moves in the miraculous sphere; he therefore constantly changes its center, and, at the same time, in his view, causes it constantly to change its aspect.⁴⁷

Traherne's voyager corroborates Poulet's observation: finding each of the innumerable and infinitely varied objects that greet his senses to be a centre of eternity. The sight of this "sparkle of light" allures him, and the discovery of its "Mysteries" is a revelation to him. After an an exhaustive catalogue of some 1,500 words describing the sights and sensations that would greet the stranger from the stars, Traherne has him exclaim:

This litle Star so Wide and so full of mysteries! So capacious, and so full of Territories, containing innumerable Repositories of Delight, when we draw neer!⁴⁸

The popular seventeenth century divine Matthew Hole,⁴⁹ whom Traherne may have counted among those believers he doubts can be called 'Christian' at all as they "place and desire all their happiness in another Life,"⁵⁰ takes a less positive view of our sojourn on the planet:

The Patriarchs look'd upon themselves but as *Pilgrims and Strangers upon earth, and were ever seeking another and better Country*: How much more ought we to do so, when our Saviour hath not only discover'd and purchas'd this Country, but is gone before to take possession of it for us? This should teach us to *set our Affections on the things above, and not on the things on the earth*; to rise and ascend with Christ, *that where our Treasure is, there our Hearts may also be*.⁵¹

Hole is drawing upon Hebrews 11:13-16, in which the author refers to the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, and all those seeking the promised land. In paraphrasing the verse "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Hole has in mind Luke's exhortation to "seek ye the kingdom of God" and to lay up a "treasure in the heavens that faileth not."⁵² Traherne, as we observed in our introductory chapter,⁵³ does not see heaven as a distant country but as being present and near at hand. Indeed, his Celestial

⁴⁷ Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁸ KG p. 390, ll. 120-121 (f. 261r.)

⁴⁹ See also 2.4.1 "The Worlds Were Framed (saith the Apostle) by the Word of God," and "In Him Should All Fullness Dwell."

⁵⁰ CM IV.9.

⁵¹ Matthew Hole, *A Practical Exposition of the Church-Catechism in Several Discourses On all the Parts of it. Useful for all Families*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: Printed for J. Darby in Bartholomew-Close and sold by J. and J. Knapton, 1732), p. 277.

⁵² Luke 12: 34, 31, 33.

⁵³ See 1.3.

Stranger sees the earth “afar off” and finds it a better country than the stark and ethereal place from which he has come.

Should He be Let Down on a Suddain ...

From the silent black and white world of the aether, the stranger is catapulted, in a vertiginous zoom of focus, into a swirling mass of life and colour. Having beamed down this Celestial Stranger, Traherne immediately confronts him with a myriad of experiences – he is bathed in what Teilhard calls “the ocean of matter”⁵⁴ – overwhelmed by the “the divine omnipresence in which we find ourselves plunged,”⁵⁵ and, with the infant stranger, finds all “New, and Strange at the first, inexpressibly rare, and Delightfull, and Beautifull.”⁵⁶

Should he be let down on a Suddain, and see the sea, and the Effects of those Influences he never Dreamd of: such Strange Kind of Creatures; Such Mysteries and Varieties; such distinct Curiosities; Such never heard of Colors; Such a New and Lively Green in the Meadows; Such Odoriferous, and fragrant Flowers; such Reviving and Refreshing Winds; such Innumerable Millions of unexpected Motions; Such Lovely, Delicate, and Shady Trees; So many Brisk, and Beautifull, and melodious Birds; Such Fluent Springs, and silver Streams; Such Lions and Leopards, and foure footed Beasts; such innumerable Companies, and Hosts of Insects; Such an Ocean of Fishes, Whales, and Syrens, surprizing him in the sea; Such Kidneys of Wheat in the Fat: and abundant Valleys; Such Quarries of Stone, and So Many Mines, and Mettals in the Hills: Such Fruits and Spices;⁵⁷

So begins the glorious catalogue that forms the bulk of the chapter. It is in some ways the climax of the work which is itself a vast inventory containing many catalogues: “The Treasures of his Kingdom being scattered in his Territories, we will take them as we pass along their Severall places, and so that they be sprinkled up and down in our Discourse.”⁵⁸ Traherne’s overwhelming sense of the fullness of the pleroma is most evident in these catalogues which, in their effusion and in their very form, embody the principle of augmentation. Of all Traherne’s great catalogues, this is one of the most exhilarating. The prose is free-flowing, oiled with alliteration and repetition and uninterrupted by periods or paragraph breaks. In the catalogue previously discussed in the context of the omnipresence of action, Traherne employed verbs in the present tense to structure his catalogue of the

⁵⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 111.

⁵⁶ CM III.2.

⁵⁷ KG p. 388, ll. 7-19 (f. 258v.)

⁵⁸ KG p. 394, ll. 1-3 (f. 263 r.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

workings of “Infinit Lov’ as it whispers in “evry Gale of Wind.”⁵⁹ Here, the repetition of the exclamatory determiner “Such,” expresses repletion and satisfaction, and together with the plural nouns places the stress upon a tangible, if innumerable, richness. This abundance is perceived with every bodily sense – the sights and smells of the earth delight, revive and promise to provide. The bucolic pastoral is varied with a voyage across the ocean where Traherne fleetingly conjures the vision of the stranger jumping back in surprise as whales and “Syrens” leap out of the deep. The communication and stimulation is incessant, and as Maule observes “generates a theology as well as acclamation.”⁶⁰ Traherne’s poetic of repletion reflects the incarnational fullness of him who fills all in all. The catalogue form also reinforces the Trinitarian principle of unity in difference as it extends to the entire universe; all the various and multiple things that comprise the cosmos are brought into relation with each other and the whole:

Innumerable Millions of Objects, Figures, Colors, Motions and Stations, in all their Variety, Dimension, Greatness, Symmetrie, and Proportion, from all Parts and Quarters of the World, are represented in himself, in evry Point and Centre of his Immensity, without Confusion, Dislocation, Distraction, or Contradiction.⁶¹

The catalogue continues with Traherne moving seamlessly between the world of creatures and the achievements, activities and institutions of the human world: “Such Robes and Attires Such Cities, and villages; Such Multitude of Boyes and Girls in the Streets; Such men, such Beautifull Women upon Earth ...” The pattern is briefly broken and the pace accelerated by a rapid climb up the ladder of life: “Such a Gradual Ascent from Sands to Spires of Grass to Insects, from those to Birds, from Birds to Beasts, from Beasts to men, from Earth to Heaven.” Traherne then continues breathlessly; he seems to be writing on the wing as one subject leads, either by suggestion or contrast, to the next: “Such Bookes, and Universities; Such Colleges and Libraries; Such Trades and Studies; Such Occupations and Professions; Such Retirements and Devotions; Such Altars and Temples...” There is a small eddy in the stream when “Such Holy Days, and Sabbaths” lead, via vows, prayers, Joys, Pleasures, Solemnities, Songs, and Praises, back, in reverse order, to “Such Sabbaths and Holy Days,” before it resumes its course on through sermons, Arts and sciences, Oracles, and Miracles, and so on. All elements are prefaced with the ubiquitous “Such,” which by this stage of the catalogue has come to signify not only repletion but overflow. Traherne then plunges more deeply into the dark waters of life and incorporates some graver topics:

⁵⁹ KG p. 313, ll. 145 ff. (f. 192v-193r.)

⁶⁰ Maule, *Traherne and the Restlessness of God : the New Lambeth Discoveries (audiotope)*.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

Such sufferings and persecutions; Such Deaths and Matyrdoms; Such Lov and fidelity; Such faith, and Hopes, and Desire; Such obligations, such Lawes, such Duties and examples; Such Rewards and Punishments: ⁶²

The catalogue begins with the sea and flows on through many colourful and cosmopolitan images to its conclusion in “Rewards and Punishments,” thus reflecting the multi-facetedness and the light and shade of the Pleroma. The prose is richly patterned with oppositions and, as we have noted, with alliteration and free-flowing word association. Such techniques, which in works such as *The Thanksgivings*, also extend to the use of bracketed or parallel lists, “conspire,” notes Carl M. Selkin, “to induce the reader to seek for some meaning which forges the identity between them.”⁶³ The catalogue form itself reflects the organising force of the Pleroma that, like the logos of Heraclitus, stimulates all life, unites all contraries and justly resolves all imbalances. As Selkin argues:

... catalogues are not merely words aggregated to point beyond themselves, but in addition are structures which have within them an inherent meaning as grammatical units reflecting the eternal and infinite One that underlies the apparent multiplicity of phenomena ... Cataloguing is ... a means of making one sentence out of many – although the many exist only potentially. Basically, Traherne employs an embedded rather than recursive style, catalogues instead of compounded or repeated clauses.⁶⁴

Traherne’s catalogues, then, represent a poetic of augmentation and repletion and also of consummation “in which the substantial *one* and the created *many* fuse without confusion in a *whole*” - an “embedded” poetic of immanence. Sawday notes that while Traherne adopts the taxonomic language of the Royal Society, he does so not with the aim of achieving a rational dominion or mastery over his subject, but to celebrate, praise and incite awe and wonder at the divine cause.⁶⁵

Traherne finally wraps up this sentence of many parts, and pauses for breath. He signals with a full colon the closure of the clause that had unleashed this torrent - “Should he be let down of a suddain, and see ...” - and concludes:

⁶¹ KG p. 355, ll. 324-327 (f. 228v.)

⁶² KG p. 388, ll. 19-36 (ff. 258v-259r.)

⁶³ Selkin, “The Language of Vision: Traherne's Cataloguing Style,” p. 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 261 ff.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

He would think himself fallen into the Paradise of God, a phoenix nest, a Bed of Spices, a Kingdom of Glory.⁶⁶

The sentence is continuous with the preceding catalogue, being in the form of a list, but the pace is slackened and in its relative shortness and the truncation of “fallen,” there is a great sense of relief and abandonment, as though the stranger, after the excitement of his epic journey, has thrown himself onto a mass of exotic cushions – the sensuality of this impression suggested by the echo of the Song of Songs in the “Bed of Spices,”⁶⁷ and in the promise of a peaceful and plentiful haven in the garden of Paradise, the nest, the bed, at the heart of the Kingdom. The phoenix traditionally alludes to the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, and, as we will further consider in the following chapter, it is significant that Traherne has embedded this motif so centrally in his catalogue of creation.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ KG p. 388, ll. 36-38 (f. 259r.)

⁶⁷ Sol. 5:13 ; 6:2.

⁶⁸ The bed of spices is also associated with the phoenix as its nest was made of spices. For further discussion of this motif, see 2.4.5.

2.3.3. Why this Earth is the Centre of the Heavens!

The Celestial Stranger's rest upon the Bed of Spices is brief, however, as he rouses himself to consider the relation or "union" between the heavenly realm he has left and the world he now finds himself in. He delights to find that the seemingly "Solitary, and idle Heavens, that are so many Thousand Millions of Leagues removed," are "so Busy here, and so Divinely Active;"

the Sun applied to proper objects, and all his Beams so Richly usefull; the Moon and stars such Springs of Comfort, expressing their strength, and Beauty where one would have thought their Beams had Ended, and Power failed, Stretching out their Rayes like fingers, and feeling at their fingers ends so many thousand Glorious Objects, the Air, the Clouds, the Rain, the Dew, the Seasons of the year;

Traherne delights in the paradox of the seemingly inert moon and stars exerting such a palpable influence on the weather and seasons of the earth, transforming their cold rays into sensitive fingers. "The Sun also and the stars," he surmised in Chapter 22, "would shine upon all those vast and Desolat Spaces in vain, if there were none to see them."⁶⁹ As it is, "in truth there is no vacuity," nothing is empty, or useless or wasted in the universal scheme. Traherne has turned the old cosmology positing a superior Heavenly realm on its head, and rejected the spiritual orientation toward the beyond: The Celestial Stranger has left his colourless abode in the aether to dwell in the wonder-filled centre of the Universe, and discovers that the Heavens minister to the Earth, "conspiring so fitly together, for the carrying on of one common End, the Happiness of Evry Mortal:"

All this would make Men seem like Incarnate Cherubims; And the Earth, considering its Interior fulness, the very Darling of the World fostered, and surrounded, with the Embraces of the Skies; Ministered to, and served by all its Influences.

The man, who had been "acquainted with nothing but the Azure Skie," and is moved to "cry out" when contemplating the blessings of people on earth:

All their Days are as the Days of Heaven! They are more! far More! Heaven is a barren and empty thing, if measured by its spaces. Those Heavens I was acquainted with, hav brought all their Joys hither, and here they are Enjoyed!⁷⁰

⁶⁹ KG p. 371, ll. 104-105 (f. 243v.)

⁷⁰ KG p. 389, ll. 40-57 (f. 259r-259v.)

Traherne employs the new cosmology, and the rapture of a stranger to our planet, to re-direct our attention earthwards. In speaking of Heaven, he refers not only to the sun, moon, and stars, but to the supposed dwelling-place of God and angels. As he indicated in Chapter 22, some have removed the Empyrean Heaven and with it the “Seat of the Blessed.”⁷¹ Traherne re-establishes that Seat on Earth, enthroning the creator by enthroning “evry Mortal” alive to and grateful for the treasures that surround and serve them. Further still, this “litle star” is “more! far More!” blessed than the heavens. Again, Traherne revels in the cosmic dance of communication, relation, and enjoyment centred on humanity:

The Earth seems to swell with pride, that it bears them; all its Treasures laugh and sing to serv them: The Creatures here sacrifice their essences, and perish to support them; the flowers are Ambitious to pleas them; The Sun and all the Stars dance attendances to them: I wonderd what made them all to run so continually about: And it was, that here they might hav Nights and Days, and Delights in both. Verily this star is a nest of Angels! And far more Beautifull on the Inside, than its splendour promised! More rich in its Contents, than could have been conceived!⁷²

There is a playful extravagance in the notion of “Flowers Ambitious to pleas,” and the evocation of a Dionysian round of sacrifices and celebration at the feet of an adulated king.

The chapter then moves into a second lengthy catalogue that, in the weighty but celebratory cadences of the Old Testament, counts the blessings of the people who are “Blessed in the city, and Blessed in the field; Blessed in the seed of their Body, and in the fruit of their Ground, in the Increas of their cattel, and their flocks of sheep: In the Increas of their kind, in their Basket and Store. They are allwayes Blessed when they goe out, and when they come in.” As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, many of Traherne’s contemporaries employed images of Zion to allegorically or prophetically comment on the state of England. Traherne conflates the two nations through his hybrid language that moves seamlessly between his own exclamations and Biblical language, signifying that the promised land is “neer at hand.” The “dancings” and “Feasts” of Zion mingle with “Coronations,” which in the 1660s would undoubtedly have called to mind the recently restored English monarchy. He describes an exotic “land overflowing with Milk and Honey, Wine and oyle, perfumes and spices; A Land of olives and Vineyards; A Land of Wheat and Barley, and fig trees and pomegranates.” “The precious Sons of Zion,” are - in the imagery

⁷¹ KG pp. 369-370, ll. 38-40 (f. 242r.)

⁷² KG p. 389, ll. 62-69 (f. 259v.)

of the Song of Songs - “purer than the Snow ... Whiter than Milk, more Ruddy in Body than Rubies ... Their Lips like a thread of Scarlet ... and the Smell of their Garments like that of Lebanon.”⁷³ The land is also described more domestically as a place where the inhabitants

are conceived with Pleasure, and come forth of the Womb to Innumerable Blessings; They are dandled in their Infancy upon the knees of Ladies, and are the Delights of their parents; Their Fathers and Mothers minister unto them, they are embraced with kisses, and satisfied with Loves; They drink Honey, and nectar from their Lips in childhood, and grow up to Greater enjoyments;⁷⁴

By placing such observations within the stream of Biblical poetry, Traherne touchingly elevates the common human experience.

The passage concludes by focusing on the return of praise to what the stranger infers is “surely” a “wise God, of Infinit Goodness.” As the creatures have been “ambitious to please” and sing for joy to serve the people of the earth, so “Those Sovereign Creatures, that are like Kings, offer up themselves, their Souls and Bodies as a living sacrifice.” ; “The fruit of all in Heaven above, and here upon Earth is returned with Sweet Incense of praise.”⁷⁵ The men and women in this “Nest of Angels”⁷⁶ are thus like the phoenix, forever on fire with love.

Again, Traherne comes to a brief point of rest, with the final exclamations of the stranger:

This litle Star so Wide and so full of mysteries! So capacious, and so full of Territories, containing innumerable Repositories of Delight, when we draw near! Who would hav expected, who could hav hoped for such enjoyments?⁷⁷

Some 1,500 words, mostly in the form of extended catalogues and raptures have elapsed since the Celestial Stranger first alighted on “this litle Star,” which has revealed a world of infinite capacity and fullness. From this consideration of the Mutitude, the Pleroma, Traherne reflects on what unites it all, and allies the voice of the Stranger with that of the Psalmist to draw the first half of Chapter 25 to a close.

⁷³ KG p. 390, ll. 95-101 (f. 260r-260v.) ; Sol. 4-7.

⁷⁴ KG p. 390, ll. 85-90 (f. 260r.)

⁷⁵ KG p. 390, ll. 116-119 (f. 260v.)

⁷⁶ KG p. 389, l. 67 (f. 259v.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

Thus would a Celestial Stranger be entertained in the World, and to this voyce we ought to reecho, Blessed is the Man whom thou Chusest, and Causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy Courts.⁷⁸

Psalm 65, which Traherne now recites, celebrates the “terrible,” “righteous” and all-powerful “God of our Salvation ... which by his Greatness setteth fast the Mountains, being girded with power, which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their Waves, and the tumult of the people.” It also reprises much of the imagery Traherne has been using in relation to the bounty of the earth – “Thou Crownest the yeer with thy Goodness, and thy paths drop fatness:” – as well as the conceit of the creatures, “in their Essences” singing joyous praises:

... the little Hills rejoyce on evry side: The pastures are Clothed with flocks, the valleys also are covered over with corn, they shout for Joy, they also Sing.⁷⁹

“See how in the 65th Psal,” glosses Traherne in the *Third Century*, David “introduceth the Meditation of Gods visible Works sweetly into the Tabernacle and maketh them to be the fatness of his hous even of his H. Temple. God is seen when his Lov is manifested. God is enjoyed when his Lov is prized.”⁸⁰

More Sublime than Saphires

After elaborating, exhaustively and effusively, upon the impressions that would be made upon the Celestial Stranger, Traherne then turns to what the title of the chapter refers to as “A Corollary shewing that the Earth is the centre of the Heaven.” To demonstrate his point, Traherne calls once again upon his infant stranger as a witness:

The Earth is Generally reputed to be a Globe of Dirt, the very Dregs of Nature, and the basest of all the Elements, yet is it Comparable to the finest Gold, if not a Work incomparably more Divine, and Excellent. I know a Stranger upon Earth in his Infancy, that thought the Heavens more Sublime than Saphires, and the Stones in the Streets more pleasant than fine Gold. The Fields laden with Delights, more Rich than Carbuncles, and the Meadows more Divine than if covered with Emeralds. The universe appeared a Sphere of Joys, and Immortal Glories: the Day an Omnipresent Delight, and all the Creatures his own Enjoyments: Young Men

⁷⁷ KG p. 390, ll. 12—123 (f. 261r.)

⁷⁸ Psalm 65.

⁷⁹ KG p. 391, ll. 142-153 (f. 261r-261v.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

and Maidens, old Men and Children, lively Portraitures of Beauty before him, Moving Engines, and Wonderfull Occasions of Glory: Ornaments of the Earth, and Causes of Delight, Angelical and Heavenly Treasures.⁸¹

In the many such passages in Traherne's works,⁸² David Hawkes (in a similar vein to Attfield⁸³) sees Traherne championing the Aristotelian distinction between nature and custom, and the privileging of an essential, "true, intrinsic, or "proper" use-value" which by the 1670s was being subverted by a "false, or imaginary, exchange [or market] value."⁸⁴ Analysing Traherne's use of terms such as Worth, Value, Use, Prize, Esteem, Possess, Enjoy, Hawkes argues that he critiques the "alienated mode of perception induced by the money economy" in which the "works of God are obscured in our perceptions by the idols of commodity fetishism."⁸⁵ Traherne returns repeatedly to this theme in *The Kingdom of God*, finding it a "horrid folly" not only, as we noted in the introduction to this chapter, "to skip over the World of God wherein we dwelleth," but also to

dote upon Titles of our own Devising, which primitive and pure Nature never intended, nor would ever have needed. The Inventions of Sin are now becom our only Treasures: Houses, and Lands, and Monies, and Cloathes, and Enclosures, a few Crowns and Scepters are all we Admire.⁸⁶

As Traherne summates in Chapter 25, and as the infant stranger is intuitively aware, the signatures of material wealth are entirely worthless when measured against the real treasures of creation:

Happy is the People whose God is the Lord. Gold and Silver are Beggary to their wealth: Melodie, Life, and Health, and Joy, and Thanksgiving are in their Borders.⁸⁷

Hawkes points to "Traherne's constant use of gold as a synecdoche for exchange-value as a whole."⁸⁸ If "All the Sea," he speculates, were "an Abyss of Pearl, or were all the

⁸⁰ CM III.86.

⁸¹ KG p. 391, ll. 142-153 (f. 261v.)

⁸² See, for e.g., CM III.3.

⁸³ See 2.2.3 for discussion of Attfield's view on Traherne's Aristotelian recognition of "intrinsic value."

⁸⁴ David Hawkes, "Thomas Traherne : A Critique of Political Economy," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 62.3 & 4 (1999), p. 377.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 373, 384.

⁸⁶ KG p. 287, ll. 15-18 (f. 173v.)

⁸⁷ KG p. 389, ll. 57-60 (f. 259v.)

⁸⁸ Hawkes, "Thomas Traherne : A Critique of Political Economy," p. 381.

Meadows Coverd with Emeralds, or were all the Earth a Globe of Gold, (tho Fools fancy Gold on Mountains of felicitie in these things,) the univrs would be spoyled, we all should be Starvd.”⁸⁹ Traherne’s speculations on what the world would be like if not the way it is now highlight not only the wisdom and perfection of God’s working but that, paradoxically, it is not the rarest things that are of greatest value, but the most common. Common treasures such as air and water are the most to be enjoyed because they are the most necessary to life. The greater their “use” or “service” or “end” the greater humanity’s need or desire after them.⁹⁰ In this chapter, Traherne strengthens his point by having the uncorrupted infant privilege the dirt and dregs of the earth over the most precious of metals.

A Centre without Period, Limit, or Bound

The infant stranger, like the Celestial Stranger, is “transported,” and “ravished” by the ministrations of heavenly influences and the delights of common things – he cannot view the world “without a Vision, and a Trance, and a Rapture.”⁹¹ The true and inestimable value of the world, that he knows by instinct, is then confirmed for him by science. He, says Traherne again echoing similar passages in the *Third Century*, naively speculated on a range of cosmic questions –

At first he thought the gates of his City, the End of the World: His Inquisitive thoughts and Imaginations troubled him afterwards to know the Bound of all things. Whether the Heaven did any where meet the Earth, or the plains run on everlastingly?

- but, undergoing a Copernican revolution in his own psyche, he is astonished to discover “that the Earth was Round like a Ball ... that the Sun was not Idle, when it hid its Head, but shined on other people: That there were stars also under his feet ... A World of Antipodes beneath.”

So litle a Star, yet appearing infinite to them that dwell upon the earth, pleased him Exceedingly. A Centre without Period, Limit, or Bound: The Similitude of his Endless Nature is impressed upon it, that Created the same! He sitteth upon the Circle of the Earth and the Inhabitants therof are as Grasshoppers; that stretcheth

⁸⁹ KG. p. 398, ll. 201-204 (f. 268v.)

⁹⁰ See also: “It was His Wisdom made you Need the Sun. It was his Goodness made you need the sea. Be sensible of what you need, or Enjoy neither. Consider how much you need them. For thence they Derive their Value.” (CM I.46.)

⁹¹ KG p. 338, ll. 45-47 (f. 212v.) ; Cf: Numbers 24:4

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

out the Heavens as a Curtain; and spreadeth them abroad as a tent to dwell in.⁹²

Why this Earth is the centre of the Heavens!⁹³

In this passage Traherne combines a ‘modern’ vision of an illimited creation, and an ancient one - often depicted in icon paintings - of the Creator sitting atop the closed spheres of creation. In doing so he addresses those that believed that an infinite universe “demolished,” as Nicolson observes, “the Circle of perfection” that characterised the old cosmology.⁹⁴ On the contrary argues Traherne, drawing on another traditional image, the circle is perfected by its expansion. Poulet notes that the notion of a circle with its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere, which first appeared in a twelfth-century pseudohermetic text and was popular with Nicholas of Cusa and “other scholastics of the Middle Ages,” was taken up by (among others) Bruno and Kepler, numerous Neoplatonists and mystics, metaphysical poets, and with particular enthusiasm by Traherne.⁹⁵ It is applied by these writers to God, to the soul and, beginning with Cusa – who in a sense anticipated the new astronomy, to the world. Cusa upset the stasis and hierarchy of the old cosmology by describing a universe in constant motion and the earth as a star, and by speculating on the inhabitation of other stars. “The world cannot be enclosed within a material circumference and centre,” wrote Cusa, “it is unintelligible without God as its centre and circumference.”⁹⁶ God being infinite, the circumference of the world made in his similitude is also nowhere. The image also reiterates Traherne’s conception of the filling of infinite space, for in the tradition of the circle the eternity of the circumference coincides with the centre. As Poulet sums, “in God the immensity of the circumference can be found again in the unity of the central point, or that the totality of His Being is present in whatsoever fraction of time or space one may, arbitrarily, distinguish in Him.”⁹⁷

Earth is the centre of the Heavens, therefore, not according to the old cosmology of the seven spheres, but by virtue of eternity being present to every moment and object on Earth. By extension, Earth is also made the centre of Heaven by Traherne’s inversion of the metaphysical hierarchy that accompanied the old cosmology. Returning to the theme of Earth being ministered to by Heaven, Traherne embarks on an extended rhapsody employing the language of carnal and courtly love. He describes the fertile womb and milk

⁹² Isaiah: 40.22.

⁹³ KG p. 392, ll. 173-179 (f. 262r.)

⁹⁴ Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle: Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, p. 165.

⁹⁵ Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, pp. xi, xxiv.

⁹⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, trans. Fr. Germain Heron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) Book II, chap. iv. cited in Conrad Bonifazi, *The Soul of the World: An Account of the Inwardness of Things*, (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), p. 10.

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

filled breasts of the Earth and her “Joyfull and Numerous Offspring” which are “Begotten by the Heavens.” She is the “Bride of Heaven,” “embraced with the Heavens on evry side!” and “Impregnated” with heavenly “Influences” and “By the stable and Eternal Laws of Nature they are Married together.” The tenderness with which heaven attends to his bride is then juxtaposed with the exultation of men:

Men that trample⁹⁸ the Earth under feet, are the Creatures for whom this Marriage is made, and theirs is the Benefit of all the union. The pleasures and Delights of the Marriage Bed are theirs, and theirs the praises: The truth is, Evry one of them is the Peculiar Bride, not of Heaven, but of GOD. Heaven and Earth being the provided Dowry.⁹⁹

Earth is the centre of Heaven, and “Men that trample the Earth under feet” are the centre-piece of Earth, enjoying the “Offspring” resulting from the “Marriage Bed” of Heaven and Earth. Traherne may have had in mind Hebrews 2: 7-9 where man is described as being made “a little lower than the angels” and God as having “put all things in subjection under his feet” although not completely as yet: “But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the Angels for the suffering of death.” The risen Christ, however, has indeed “all things under his feet.”¹⁰⁰ By having man trample the earth underfoot Traherne ignores the “not yet” clause, claiming his co-heirship with the risen Christ. In the final chapters of the manuscript Traherne places man, in fact, *higher* than the angels by virtue of having a body and free will.¹⁰¹ For Traherne, man is not lower than heaven but the privileged benefactor of the marriage of heaven and earth, and in turn is himself the bride of God. This is a rich enough upturning of the cosmic hierarchy, but Traherne ups the ante further – for the infinite God who has effected this marriage has also effected an infinite number of others, increasing the Dowry beyond measure:

there may be (for ought we know) New Heavens, and other August and Magnificent WORLDS, wherin God delighteth as much as in this, tho he seemeth to delight in this alone.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, pp. xi-xii.

⁹⁸ Earlier Traherne wrote of “Infinit Lov” that “It is trampled on the Earth and Crowns us in the Heavens.” (f. 192v.) See 2.5.1 for further discussion of Traherne’s use of the term ‘trample.’

⁹⁹ KG p. 392, ll. 200-204 (f. 262r – 263v.)

¹⁰⁰ I Cor. 15:27, Eph. 1:22.

¹⁰¹ This estimation of man is found in some Greek Fathers. See Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 19. ; See also 2.5.2.

¹⁰² KG p. 392, ll. 214-216 (f. 263r.)

Multitudes of Kingdoms

In Chapter 22, as we have noted, Traherne finds that while “The Earth is too poor a Cottage, too small a centre, to be the Single, and Solitary Object of [God’s] Care and Love,” the existence of other worlds does not detract from, but augments, the enjoyment experienced in this centre. This point is expanded upon in Chapter 25, where Traherne focuses on the enjoyment of this “little star” as an instance of the goodness that is incarnate in every point of space – the more we enjoy this world, the closer we come to realising our inheritance of all worlds:

Neither would I be mistaken, As if there were no Heaven in another place. My Meaning is, that all is as Delightfull, and Happy here, as if all were intended for this alone: Nay more: for we enjoy the Benefit of that, in like Manner.

Man then, suggests Traherne, is not only at the centre of this particular solar system, but the heir and enjoyer of “Multitudes of Kingdoms:”

Tho there are Innumerable Regions of Bliss and Glory in other places, they withdraw not from this, but adde unto it. All that the Witt of Man hath conceived in Heaven may Still be there, and more than that is truly in his Kingdom of Reward and Glory. Nay Innumerable varieties of Beauty, Joy and Glory, Amazement, Wonder and Delight; innumerable Depths of Lov, and Goodness, and Wisdom and Treasure, and Pleasure, may in all these be prepared, for this alone.¹⁰³

There are “Multitudes of Kingdoms” but one King, so that the “sweet and sacred” works of God “here” will find their equivalent “there:” “Equal Causes of Admiration and Love in themselves, and more Great and Strong, when united together.”¹⁰⁴ Aware of the unease which the subject of infinity and other worlds generated for his contemporaries, Traherne seeks affirmation in scripture as well as in his own estimation of the capacity of the Soul to unite in comprehension these “Multitudes of Kingdoms:”

I should not speak this, did I not know that the Scriptures mentions [sic] a pluralitie of them,¹⁰⁵ and that the Soul takes pleasure to expaciat [sic] infinitely in the Territories of Bliss, and the fields of Glory.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ KG pp. 392-393, ll. 204-219 (f. 262v-263r.)

¹⁰⁴ KG p. 393, ll. 222-224 (f. 263r –263v.)

¹⁰⁵ As we will expand upon in the following section, Traherne is referring to Heb. 2:3: “*the Worlds* were framed (saith the Apostle) by the Word of God.”

¹⁰⁶ KG p. 393, ll. 224-226 (f. 263v.)

2.3. THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS

The infinite capacity of the soul is drawn out by the view of an infinite universe, that not only represents and is commensurate with an immanent and omnipresent God who fills every point of space. Traherne thus follows in the Cusean tradition described by Poulet, expanding his “imagination beyond measure,” and also “ [contracting] it in the extreme ... [transporting] himself simultaneously both toward the circumference and toward the center.”¹⁰⁷ The earth has been described as being like its creator “A centre without period, Limit, or Bound,” as “the centre of the Heavens” and all things in it as so many centres of the divine omnipresence.

Having explored and catalogued the fullness of the pleroma through the eyes of the celestial and infant strangers, Traherne draws Chapter 25 to a close by focusing on what Teilhard, in the next stage of his identification of the divine milieu with the Son of God, terms its “active centre” – the centre that informs all other centres – the simultaneously centralising and radiating, organising, incarnational force through whom all worlds and all eternal and finite things are reconciled and consummated.

¹⁰⁷ Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, p. xiii.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

At last we are nearing our goal. What is the active centre, the living link, the organising soul of the Pleroma? St. Paul, again, proclaims it with all his resounding voice; it is He in whom everything is reunited, and in whom all things are consummated – through whom the whole created edifice receives its consistency – Christ dead and risen *qui replet omnia, in quo omnia constant*.¹

Le Milieu Divin

2.4.1. One Blessedness Throughout the Whole: the Conclusion of Chapter 25

It is in *The Divine Milieu* with its central theme of omnipresence that, according to Mooney, Teilhard “definitively” unites the concept of the Body of Christ with his sense of a universal Centre that is both a physical and a “personal presence.”² That “active centre” is described as “organic”³ and physical but “not a physical agent of *the same order* as organic life or the ether”⁴ but as a personal presence “present to all persons and things which make up the internal and external environment of the faithful. Christ thus becomes ‘physically’ a universal Element, a Milieu and a Centre who controls in and through the extension of his Eucharistic presence the whole movement of the universe.”⁵ Teilhard struggled his entire life to describe the nature of this presence at the Centre, and was eventually silenced by the Order of Jesuits for what was perceived to be the radical nature of his Christology. As Lyons demonstrates, however, and as Teilhard was well aware, his views stemmed from, rather than broke with, the scriptural and Patristic tradition. They were also continuous with a body of theological thought that had been gathering force since the late nineteenth century.⁶ Teilhard realised, however, that he was swimming against the general tide of opinion:

... the universal power of Christ over Creation has been considered by theologians up to now chiefly under an aspect that is extrinsic and juridical ... the organic side of the Incarnation and therefore the physical conditions to be presupposed have been left in the dark, - all the more readily since the recent frightening enlargement of the universe around us (in volume, direction and number) would seem to render quite unimaginable any physical control by the Person of Christ over the totality of

¹ Col. 1:17: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

² Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, p. 80.

³ “Christ is an organic Centre for the whole universe; organic centre, i.e. on whom all development, even what is natural, is suspended finally and physically.” “Note sur le Christ universel” (1920) in *Oeuvres de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin* (Paris: Seuil, 1955-65), vol. 9, p.39. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴ Letter of May 25, 1923, to Father Auguste Valensin. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

⁶ See Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, part 1.

the cosmos.⁷

Traherne, also living at a time of a “frightening enlargement of the universe,” similarly resists an “extrinsic and juridical” Christology. He posits in its place, I would argue, an understanding of Christ integrated with the “totality of the cosmos.” In the conclusion to the extended psalm to the earth and all other worlds that comprises Chapter 25, Traherne focuses on the Person and the Body of the universal Christ, which as Teilhard insists, “must be understood with boldness, as St. John, and St. Paul and the Fathers saw it and loved it.”⁸ These writers, Teilhard urged a friend,

really present the *resurrected* Christ a being as vast as the World of all time. Have you read, for example, the beginning of the Epistle to the Colossians and tried to give it the full organic meaning it requires?⁹

Only “timid minds,” he asserts, “escape the awesome realism of these repeated statements.”¹⁰ We noted in regard to the “fear of a pusillanimous Spirit,” that Traherne also finds that “that which discourages Timorous Spirits, animates the Couragious.”¹¹ He is impelled, rather, to “rend the Vail”¹² which, as he explicates in *The Ceremonial Law*, is “don away in Christ.”¹³ It with such boldness that he turns to the very passages that so moved Teilhard to conclude the great catalogue of creation that comprises Chapter 25:

By faith we understand that the Worlds were framed (saith the Apostle) by the Word of God: so that things which are seen, were not made by things that do

⁷ “Super-humanité, super-Christ, super-charité” (1943) Cited in Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, p. 78.

⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Cosmic Life,” trans. René Hague, *Writings in Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 50.

Teilhard’s concept of a “physical Centre” is primarily inspired by Paul: “The Christ of revelation is quite simply Omega. To demonstrate this fundamental proposition, I need only refer to the long series of Johannine and especially Pauline texts where the physical supremacy of Christ over the universe is affirmed in terms which are magnificent ... They all come down to these two essential affirmations: ‘*In eo omnia constant*’ (Col 1:17) and ‘*Ipse est qui replet omnia*’ (Col 2:10 – cf. Eph 4:[10]), so that ‘*Omnia in omnibus Christus*’ (Col. 3;11). There we have the very definition of Omega.” (“Mon univers” (1924). Cited in Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, p. 89.)

Mooney notes that Teilhard also frequently cites 1 Cor. 15:28 “so that God may be all in all” ; Acts 17:28 “In him we love, move, and have our being” ; Rom 8:22 “The whole of nature has been groaning until now in an agony of birth” ; Eph. 4:10 “he has ascended high above all the heavens in order to fill all things with his presence.” (n.46, p. 233.)

⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Letters to Two Friends 1926-1952*. Cited in Ursula King, *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin*, Bampton Lectures ; 1996 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 72.

¹⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Science and Christ* (1968) Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹¹ KG p. 258, ll. 1-2 (f. 149v.) ; See 2.2.2.

¹² KG p. 258, l. 2 (f. 149v.)

*appear.*¹⁴ And God who at sundry times, and in divers Manners, spake in time past unto us by the prophets hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all things; by whom also he made the Worlds. Who being the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his person, and upholding all things by the Word of his power; When he had by himself purged our Sins, sate down on the Right hand of the Majestie on high.¹⁵ But yet all those will Continually be one Univers: one GOD, one Lord, one Spirit, one Obedience, one End, one Original Cause, one Monarchie, one Blessedness throughout the Whole, and one Glory! One *Image of the Invisible GOD*, existing and Begotten in the Brightness of his Glory: one infinit and Eternal Beginning; the Head of his Church, and *the first Born of Evry Creature!* For by him were all things Created that are in Heaven, and are in Earth, visible, and Invisible; Whether they be Thrones, or Dominions, or Principalities, or Powers: All things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. For it pleased the father that in him should all fullness dwell.¹⁶ (My italics)

It is within the context of this “Christological hymn”¹⁷ that Traherne comprehends the Celestial Stranger’s journey, the richness of the earth and the infinite universe beyond. In the following sections it will be seen that this contextualisation was not presupposed by all of Traherne’s contemporaries and it is by contrasting their readings of these texts that the strength of his feeling for the Cosmic Christ becomes most apparent.

The Worlds Were Framed (Saith the Apostle) by the Word of God

Traherne places Christ at the centre of all worlds: “By faith we understand that *the Worlds* were framed (saith the Apostle) by the Word of God: so that things which are seen, were not made by things that do appear.”¹⁸ He is keen, as we have seen in his celebration of “Multitudes of Kingdoms,” to insist that the reference to *Worlds* be taken in a literal and physical sense, and to refer to worlds rather than simply to ages as the text is sometimes interpreted.¹⁹ It is a sense that Matthew Hole entirely overlooks in his discourse upon the text - ignoring the plurality of *Worlds*, and shifting the emphasis away from Christ as creator

¹³ CL “The Veil” ; transcribed in CL (Smith), p. 28, l. 27. The veil is further discussed in 2.4.5, “In Bloody Characters,” and 3.2.

¹⁴ Heb. 11.3.

¹⁵ Heb. 1:1-3.

¹⁶ Col. 1:15-17, 19 ; KG, p. 393, ll. 229-244 (f. 263v.)

¹⁷ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 68. Col 1:15-19 is often referred to a hymn.

¹⁸ Heb. 1:1-3 ; KG p. 393, ll. 226-233 (f. 263v.)

¹⁹ See for example, Isaac Barrow, "His Onely Son," *The Works of Isaac Barrow, D.D.*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for Brabazon Aylmer, at the Three Pigeons against the Royal-Exchange in Cornhill, 1700), p. 281.

to Christ as redeemer. The three chief lessons he gleans from this article of belief are firstly that God the Father “made me and all the World” (rather than all worlds through the Son); secondly, that God the Son “redeemed me and all mankind” ; and thirdly, that God the Holy Ghost “sanctifieth me and all the Elect People of God.” “’Tis true,” he acknowledges that the making of all things “is sometimes ascribed to the Son, as John 1.3 where *all Things are said to be made by him* ... But still the making of the World is first and principally attributed to God the father, in respect of his Priority of Order and Operation, he being the first Mover, with whom the other Persons are said to concur and work with him.”²⁰ In assigning each person of the Trinity such neatly defined roles, the essential synergy of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Son as Logos is entirely lost. Robert Gell on the other hand, in his consideration of the same text, dwells on Christ as the Word and Wisdom of God, and also as the “eternal *Idea*,” or “pattern ... sufficient for the production of many worlds:”

Even so the *Idea* of the world, and the principle of wisdom and power in God, the great Achitect, and Builder of the worlds, is sufficient without diminution for the Creation of many, yea, infinite worlds: This work the Lord produceth not out of any indigency, or want; but for the manifestation, and communication of his goodness, without any diminution of goodness in himself.²¹

While Gell does not dwell on the issue of an infinite universe, and his definition of the plurality of worlds primarily focuses on the sense of not only a visible but also many kinds of invisible worlds,²² his conception of divine manifestation without exhaustion, leaves the possibility open. As we explored in the first stages of Teilhard’s scheme, Traherne is also attuned to the theology of the infinitely manifesting and communicating, but never diminishing, Word or Wisdom of God, which he here marries explicitly to the possibility of other physical worlds beyond the reach of the telescope.

But yet all those will Continually be one Univerſ: one GOD, one Lord, one Spirit, one Obedience, one End, one Original Cause, one Monarchie ...

Traherne seamlessly links the underlying unity of the universe with the unity of God – “one

²⁰ Hole, *A Practical Exposition of the Church-Catechism*, pp. 338, 341.

²¹ Robert Gell, *Gell's Remaines : Or, Several Select Scriptures of the New Testament Opened and Explained : Wherein Jesus Christ, As Yesterday, ToDay, and the same for Ever, is Illustrated, in Sundry Pious and Learned Notes and Observations thereupon. By the Learned and Judicious Dr. Robert Gell, late Rector of St. Mary Alder-mary, London. Collected and set in Order by R. Bacon, Ph.*, (London: Printed for Nath. Brooke, at the Sign of the Angel in Cornhil, near the Royal Exchange, 1676), pp. 457-8.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 454-5.

Blessedness throughout the whole, and one Glory!”²³

The First Born of Evry Creature

Within this context of cosmic omnipresence Traherne turns to the consideration of Christ found in Colossians 1:15:

One Image of the Invisible GOD, existing and Begotten in the Brightness of his
Glory: one infinit and Eternal Beginning; the Head of his Church, and the first
Born of Evry Creature!²⁴

Traherne’s elaboration upon the basic text – “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature” – is a reiteration of Hebrews 1:3 (above)²⁵ and also echoes images found in Colossians,²⁶ John,²⁷ Proverbs,²⁸ and Ephesians²⁹ which reinforce the association of Christ with the pre-existent and eternally acting creative word, the wisdom, brightness and glory of God. In the context of this elaboration and in the wider context of the whole colourful and vibrant pageant that these verses bring to a close, the phrase “The first born of Evry Creature” takes on a far more zestful and positive connotation than that ascribed by other commentators who highlight a legalistic analogy. Nicholas Lockyer, for example, in his “severall Lectures painfully [and with great pusillanimity!] preached upon Colossians I,” sees Christ privileged over the creatures as the firstborn. Men, he concedes, may be counted as brethren or younger sons in a spiritual sense, but not in a physical sense for their bodily inheritance, as we shall see below, is something of a torture to be endured before heavenly reward.³⁰ According to the non-conformist Thomas Manton, “first-born ... noteth a precedency, not only in point of Antiquity, but Dignity; and is as much as to say,

²³ KG p. 393, ll. 234-237 (f. 263v.)

²⁴ Col. 1:15 ; KG p. 393, ll. 237-239 (f. 263v.)

²⁵ I.e. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person ...

²⁶ Col. 1:18: “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have preeminence.”

²⁷ I.e. John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word ; 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father ; Rev. 3: 14 ... These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God ; Rev 22:13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

²⁸ I.e. Proverbs 8: 22-23 [Wisdom says] The Lord possessed me in ther beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

²⁹ I.e. Eph. 3: 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.

³⁰ Nicholas Lockyer, *England Faithfully watcht with, In her Wounds: Or, Christ as a Father sitting up with his Children in their swooning state: Which is the summe of severall Lectures painfully preached upon Colossians I.*, (London: Printed by M.S. for John Rothwell, at the Sun and Fountain in Pauls Church-yard, and Ben. Allen, at the Crown in Popes-head Alley, 1645), p. 76.

Lord of every creature.”³¹ Christ is Lord over all things by virtue of having created them and being “the Efficient and final cause of all the creatures,”³² but has also had the privilege accorded the first-born granted to him “as a part of his Reward, and recompense for the sorrows of his Humiliation.”³³ In corroboration of such views Tobias Crispe writes “Christ hath purchased this preheminance, and he payd the father the uttermost farthing ... and therefore he ought to have it.”³⁴ This legalistic interpretation was not limited to non-conformists; Robert Mossom, later Bishop of Derry, describes the triumphant arrival of Christ in Heaven, after the victory of the cross and having paid mankind’s ransom, beholding “the Father entertaining him, with a plenary grant of his Petition” granting him the “pre-eminence”³⁵ of the “first-born.”³⁶ Traherne, by contrast, omits the term “preeminence” in his selection of terms from Col 1:18 – not because he would have objected to the notion in its simplest sense, but because in this particular context he is emphasising Christ’s immanence and perhaps avoiding the common association of the term with a legalistic transcendence. The term “First Born” for Traherne, then, indicates a more intimate relationship to the creation than simply that of lordship. Christ, says Traherne in an earlier chapter, is the “First Born, and Beginning of evry Creature,” “a Being ... in which are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom, and Knowledge, all the Perfections of God, and all possible Creatures.”³⁷ He continues with further selections from Colossians 1 that continue the theme of immanence and posit Christ as the source of being:

All Things in Heaven and in Earth

For by him were all things Created that are in Heaven, and are in Earth, visible, and Invisible; Whether they be Thrones, or Dominions, or Principalities, or Powers: All things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. For it pleased the father that in him should all fullness dwell.³⁸

³¹ Thomas Manton, *Christs Eternal Existence and the Dignity of his Person Asserted and Proved in Opposition To the Doctrine of the Socinians In several Sermons on Col. I. 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. verses: By the Reverend Tho. Manton, D.D.*, (London: 1685), p. 49.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁴ Tobias Crispe, "Christs Preheminance : Collos. I Ver. 18 That in all things hee might have the preheminance," *Christ Alone Exalted In fourteene Sermons preached in, and neare London, by the late Reverend Tobias Crispe* (London: Printed by Richard Bishop, at the Charge of M.C., 1643), p. 140.

³⁵ Col. 1:18. See note below.

³⁶ Robert Mossom, "The Second Sermon Upon Coloss. I v. 18, 19," *The Preacher's Tripartite* (London: Printed by Thomas Newcomb, and are to be sold in St. Pauls Church-yard, at the sign of the Bible on Ludgate-hill, and in Fleet-street, 1657), p. 131.

³⁷ KG p. 333, ll. 112-117 (f. 208v.) This passage is further discussed below.

³⁸ K G. p. 393, ll. 239-244 (f. 263v.) ; Col. 1:16, 17, 19. Traherne omits verse 18 (And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might

As Chapter 25 has made abundantly clear, Traherne celebrates every order of creation and his entire emphasis is upon the marriage of heaven and earth – “one Blessedness throughout the whole.” The journey of the stranger, who is a man and not an angel, from the outer heavens to earth, serves to highlight Traherne’s oft-stated belief that the spiritual heaven is everywhere and everywhere married to the material – that “from the Centre to the utmost Bounds of the Everlasting Hills, all is Heaven before God, and full of Treasure. And he that walks like God in the midst of them, Blessed”³⁹; and that the greatest felicity lies in both “The Possession of Heaven in this Life, and the Greatness of Glory in the Life to come.”⁴⁰ Traherne’s “little stranger” comes to realise that “the Light of Heaven was in this World ... the Delights of Paradise were around me, Heaven and Earth were open to me ...”⁴¹ For many other seventeenth century theologians, however, life’s journey was entirely orientated from Earth to Heaven. Lockyer again provides us with a stark contrast to Traherne’s vision. “From one room to another,” he writes of the same text from Colossians, “from Earth to Heaven is a Christians journey quite home, and lies all along in this text for us to travell.”⁴² Whereas Traherne has undertaken to increase our delight in our earthly journey by showing that the Earth is the delightful centre of the Heavens, Lockyer sets himself quite a different task:

What kind of room we live in here these words command me to set unto you, and then to ask you how you like it. ‘Tis a low room we are in here ... In this lower room wherein we are, here is nothing to be done but kitchen work, washing and scouring, killing, stripping and fleasing that which is fat: Earth is the slaughter house that belongeth to hell; hearts that are made fat are killed on earth, and rosted in hell. We dwell in Gods kitchen and the devils slaughter-house, *in earth*: this is low, and this is the first thing: earth speaketh a lower room.⁴³

Traherne seems to have such dark thoughts in mind when he declared earlier in the chapter that “The Earth is Generally reputed to be a Globe of Dirt, the very Dregs of Nature, and the basest of all the Elements, yet is it comparable to the finest Gold, if not a Work incomparably more Divine, and excellent.”⁴⁴ For theologians such as Lockyer, Christ’s earthly work is chiefly that of redemption. While Lockyer states that “being and disposition

have preeminence) as he has incorporated elements of it into his elaboration upon Col 1:15 above – although the term “preeminence” is not used.

³⁹ CM IV.37.

⁴⁰ SM III.59.

⁴¹ CM III.35.

⁴² Lockyer, *England Faithfully watcht with, In her Wounds*, p. 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁴ KG p. 391, ll. 142-144 (f. 261v.)

of being are from Christ,” he goes on to describe how “he suiteth place to person; pure persons are placed in Heaven, and impure in earth.”⁴⁵ Thomas Jackson in a reflection not selected by Traherne for his *Commonplace Book*, argues against the Lutheran belief that Christ’s human nature is everywhere, stating that the Body of Christ must be looked for only in his heavenly sanctuary.⁴⁶ Jackson’s argument is tied to a refusal of consubstantiation, and while this position on the mass does not necessarily imply a refusal of the full implications of the Incarnation, in Jackson’s case it tends to preclude that more incarnational view that we see Traherne leaning toward. On this point, Traherne was more in tune with thinkers such as Isaac Barrow, who in reference to the text from Colossians, writes that Christ “was not only (as some heterodox Interpreters would expound it) to create a new moral, and figurative world; he should not only restore and reform mankind, but he of old did truly and properly give being to all things.”⁴⁷ Traherne’s placing of the Christ hymn at the conclusion of a catalogue of earthly delights indicates a movement toward the further and ultimate conclusion of such a view – that, as Blondel and Teilhard express it, Christ is the bond that “makes substantiation possible.”⁴⁸

In Him All Things Consist

It is with this sense of Christ as the immanent giver of substance, that I feel Traherne understands the statement that “*In him all things consist.*” Lockyer, by contrast, speaks only of “supportation,”⁴⁹ “disposition”⁵⁰ or ordering, and the “special providence”⁵¹ that upholds all things in Christ.⁵² Christ is cast as the prop and tamer of a fallen creation – the restorer of consistency. He paints a grisly picture of

the inconsistencie in the creation by the curse, one thing cannot live by another, one thing bites and devours another, great ones eat up little ones; the whole world is a great body gnawing out it self, it hath gnawed it self to skinne and bones now, ‘tis so old and torn, as is very sad to look upon, or live in, and it would have gnawed it self to nothing long ere this, if Christ had not upheld; in him hath the whole creation ... a reconciliation of consistency;

⁴⁵ Lockyer, *England Faithfully watcht with, In her Wounds*, pp. 94-5.

⁴⁶ Thomas Jackson, *Maran atha or Dominus Veniet : Christs Session at the Right Hand of God, and Exultation therby. Commentaries Upon these Articles of the Creed*, (London: Printed by S. Maxey for Timothy Garthwait, at the little North Door of S. Pauls, 1657), pp. 3317ff esp 3319 ; p3325. The only section Traherne selects from this work for the CB is on the theme of “Dominion” - worldly powers and authorities not having ultimate dominion over men.

⁴⁷ Barrow, "His Onely Son," p. 281.

⁴⁸ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maurice Blondel and Henry de Lubac, ed., *Correspondence : Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maurice Blondel*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967)p.23.

⁴⁹ Lockyer, *England Faithfully watcht with, In her Wounds*, p. 117.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

father would kill sonne else, and the stones in the street would rise against you all, but in him these all consist.”⁵³

There is a sense of the creation being at war with itself, requiring Christ to step in as an arbiter and peacemaker. With a greater sense of Christic immanence, other theologians, such as Manton more positively interpreted the consisting of all things in Christ as connoting “Conservation and Providence,”⁵⁴ sustainence and supportation - “all things subsist by him” in the act of “continued creation, or a continuance of being which God hath caused.”⁵⁵ This understanding of the verse is also found in Barrow for whom Christ’s divine work is “to create ... to sustain, and conserve things in being.”⁵⁶ Traherne is clearly attuned to such interpretations. We might question, however, whether in Traherne we find an additional level of meaning at least hinted at. It seems orthodox for these seventeenth century commentators to prefer to speak of how in Christ all things *subsist* rather than *consist*. The two words, both current in the seventeenth century, have very similar meanings and in the sense of ‘having existence’ may be used interchangeably. *Subsist* has the additional connotation of existing *in* something else, and of being provided with support. *Consist*, however, in the sense of ‘hold together’ implies less of dependency and more of inherency. It is the latter meaning that is favoured in the Revised Standard Version translation: “in him all things hold together.” It is this sense that J. B. Lightfoot highlights in his influential commentary upon Colossians (1875.) Verse 1:17, he argues, puts forward a Logos doctrine complementary to John’s Prologue and the Epistle to the Hebrews, positing Christ as the bond and goal of the universe:

He [Christ] is the principle of cohesion in the universe. He impresses upon creation that unity and solidarity which makes it a cosmos instead of a chaos. Thus (to take one instance) the action of gravitation, which keeps in their places things fixed and regulates the motions of things moving, is an expression of His mind.⁵⁷

Here is the real testing point of the hypothesis, put forward by Armstrong, Wolf and Dowell that Traherne anticipates Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard has the Christic “universal Centre” say “It is I who am the true bond that holds the World together. Without me, even though beings may seem to make contact with one another, they are divided by an abyss. In me,

⁵² Ibid., p. 121.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 117.

⁵⁴ Manton, *Christ's Eternal Existence*, p. 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

⁵⁶ Barrow, "His Onely Son," p. 285.

⁵⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 1875 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1957), p. 154.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

they meet, in spite of the chaos of time and space.”⁵⁸ For Teilhard, as Lyons sums, Christ is the “substantial bond of the universe (he in whom all things hold together)” who “unites everything without submerging either his own or any other beings individuality.”⁵⁹ Teilhard addresses Christ in *The Heart of Matter*, as

Lord of consistence and union, you whose *distinguishing mark* and *essence* is the power indefinitely to grow greater, without distortion or loss of continuity, to the measure of the mysterious Matter whose Heart you fill and all whose movements you ultimately control.⁶⁰

For Teilhard, Christ by his Incarnation

entered not only into mankind but also into the universe that bears mankind – and this he did, not simply in the capacity of an element associated with it, but with the dignity and function of directive principle, of centre upon which every form of love and every affinity converge.⁶¹

Teilhard, following his associates Maurice Blondel and Auguste Valensin, referred to this vision as “pan-Christism”⁶² and it is a useful light in which to consider Traherne’s Christology. Traherne certainly speaks in general, and not necessarily physical terms of such a unifying principle:

Infinit Goodness ... is a Sweet and Delightful Mystery curiously tying all the Interests in all Worlds fast together in the Band of Amitie.⁶³

But the point can be pressed further, for while many commentators might style Christ as a “Celestial Stranger,” resident for a short and trying time on earth, Traherne makes Christ an integral part of the wonders that the man from the stars has come to marvel at. Blondel in his correspondence (via Valensin) with Teilhard finds an essential congruence in their thought regarding the conception of Christ “as the bond of all creation which makes substantiation possible, the vivifying agent for all creation: *vinculum perfectionis*.” In words that might stimulatingly be applied to a reading of Traherne, he continues:

⁵⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mystical Milieu," p. 142.

⁵⁹ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter*, 1950 (London: Collins, 1978), p. 57.

⁶¹ Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life," p. 58.

⁶² See Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, pp. 41-2. ; and Teilhard de Chardin, Blondel and Lubac, *Correspondence : Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maurice Blondel*, p. 22 and fn. 1, p. 58. de Lubac observes that Blondel “was to become more cautious, or possibly more timorous” in his use of the term.

Our world has expanded through the social and natural sciences. One cannot remain true to Catholicism and be content with a mediocre explanation, a limited outlook which represents Christ as an accident of history, isolating Him in the Cosmos as if He were an episode without proper time and place. One cannot represent Him as an intruder, an alien in the crushing and hostile immensity of the universe.

He sees two options: “either to fall back into a murderous symbolism, or go forward towards a realism which is self-consistent throughout, towards a total reality which puts the metaphysics of Christianity in accord with the mystical theology lived by the saints and even by the faithful following.”⁶⁴ It is this latter path that Traherne, stimulated by his love of the world and curiosity in the natural sciences, explores in *The Kingdom of God*.

In Him Should All Fullness Dwell

It is significant in this regard that Traherne skips verse 18 at this juncture. This is partly because he incorporates elements of it into his preceding elaboration upon Col 1:15. As we noted above, however, his omission of the term “preeminence” there served to stress an immanent creative wisdom. Here, the omission of verse 18 enables him to directly connect the theme of consistency with that of fullness. “*For it pleased the father that in him should all fullness dwell.*” The fullness of Christ is connected in Traherne’s text with the most tangible treasure filled splendour of this “little star,” and the infinity of worlds. The placing of Paul’s text at the conclusion to the great celebration of the *pleroma* that makes up Chapter 25 – as well as the context of this chapter amid others concerning the material universe – suggests more than the simply allegorical and spiritual sense of cohesion and fullness that pervades much commentary. Crispe, who in this regard might be taken as fairly typical of a broad range of seventeenth century opinion, describes the preeminent Christ as a “head of Fullness, the fullness of the Godhead” which “is not a niggard; what fullness the head hath, it communicates to every part.” He also describes Christ as that “Spring” through whom “all love is defused to the creature,” a “foundation to beare up all things,” a “loadstone” that “drawes all to it, and communicates of his own vertue.” All of which sounds amenable to Traherne’s thought, except that all the emphasis is upon a purely

⁶³ KG p. 286, ll. 202-205 (f. 172v.)

⁶⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, Blondel and Lubac, *Correspondence : Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maurice Blondel*, p. 23.

analogical and spiritual import.⁶⁵

Donne also might be said to illustrate “the murderous symbolism” of a not only analogical, but a juridicial reading of the text. In a sermon preached on Christmas day upon this verse, he takes the fullness of Christ to mean “a full capacity to all purposes” – the chief purpose being our redemption:

... in the person that redeems us we find fulness. And there had need been so; for he found our measure full of sin toward God, and God’s measure full of anger towards us.

Donne employs the images of flowing rivers and seas, overflowings and deluges, not to describe, as Traherne does, a plenitude of being, but “channels of concupiscencies”:

... as water runs naturally in the veins and bowels of the earth, so run concupiscencies naturally in our bowels ...

Donne catalogues the bodily channels of sin – “it hath found an issue at the ear,” in the tongue and hands and feet. Traherne, however, describes the bodily organs as vessels of felicity, enabling us to receive the wisdom of a playful God that “is hid in the Labyrinth of our Ears” and “Strengtheneth our Ankle Bones.”⁶⁶ For Donne, however,

This is our fulness, original sin filled us, actual sin presses down the measure, and habitual sins heap it up ... when man’s measure was full of sin, and God’s measure full of wrath, then was the *fulness of time*; and yet then *complacuit*, it pleased the Father that there should be another fulness to overflow all these in Christ Jesus.

Donne then speaks of a fullness of spirit, grace and wisdom, stressing that only Christ “hath an infinite content and capacity, an infinite room and receipt, and then an infinite fulness.”⁶⁷ Employing the juridicial language rejected by Teilhard, and largely avoided by Traherne,⁶⁸ Donne speaks of Christ paying the debt of our sin in full, the fullness of God’s satisfaction in the fullness of Christ’s sorrow, and the fullness of “the distribution of his mercies and merits to us” through the “fullness of the Church which is his body,” in the sense of being

⁶⁵ Crispe, "Christ's Preheminence," pp. 119, 124, 130, 137. For similar sentiments see also Mossom, "Second Sermon Upon Coloss. I v. 18, 19," p. 141.

⁶⁶ KG p. 313, ll. 161-169 (f. 193r.)

⁶⁷ John Donne, "Sermons Preached on Christmas Day. Sermon I Preached at St. Paul's, 1622 : Col. i. 19, 20," *The Works of John Donne, D. D. : With a Memoir of his Life*, ed. Henry Alford, vol. 1 (London: John W. Parker, 1839), pp. 2-5.

“all fullness, all means of salvation.” In the hypostatical union of God and man in the body of Christ, however, there was for Donne “not a dram of glory ... This was a strange fulness, for it was a fulness of emptiness; it was all humiliation, all exinanition, all evacuation of himself by his obedience to the death of the cross.” Christ’s fullness in this regard is a measure of the fulsome greatness of God’s gift and not due to “a propenseness, a disposition to goodness” in man.⁶⁹ Traherne by contrast, and as we will explore in subsequent chapters, rejoices in the infinite capacity of the soul which participates in the fullness of Christ, and acts as the centre-point of creation as well as the means of its redemption.

There is also, throughout *The Kingdom of God*, a strong sense of Christ’s communication of fullness to the universe – a profound understanding that “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.”⁷⁰ That Traherne’s emphasis upon Christ filling the material universe is pointedly “organic” is again made clear when we compare his understanding of fullness - the absence of vacuity in any point of space; the capaciousness of “This litle Star so Wide,” yet “so full of mysteries,” “so full of Territories,” and “containing innumerable Repositories of Delight;⁷¹ an infinite richness in “Multitudes of Kingdoms” - with that of several contemporaries. Robert Gell observed of the word *fill* that “according to the judgement of our Translators, and the harmony of the Reformed Churches, the word may be rendered, either to *fill*, as it is in the Text, or to *fulfill*, as in the Margin.”⁷² William Nicholson, for example, preferred to deal with the marginal meaning, focusing exclusively on the the sense of Christ *fulfilling* the law and prophecy of the written word, with no reference to the creative Word.

He that descended, is the same which ascended, that he might (without his ascent he would not) fill all the hearts of his Elect people with the gifts of his Spirit. By his ascension above all the heavens he hath fill’d up all the Texts, every Title that was written of him; he hath fulfill’d all his Offices, he hath fully shew’d his Merit and Victory in all places; he hath fill’d the hearts of the Saints with all necessary graces; in one world, *Implevit Omnia*, He hath fill’d all things.⁷³

Matthew Hole, in a sermon on Ephesians 4:10, ignores the phrase “that he might fill all

⁶⁸ For further discussion of juridical, and other views of the atonement see 2.4.5.

⁶⁹ Donne, "Sermon Preached on Christmas Day 1622 : Col. i. 19, 20," pp. 6-9.

⁷⁰ Eph. 4:10.

⁷¹ KG p. 390, ll. 120-121 (f. 261r.)

⁷² Gell, *Gell's Remaines*, , pp. 261-262.

things” altogether, preferring the lesson that Christ’s ascension teaches us to “raise our Hearts and Affections to things above.”

... We should scorn to be taken up with everything here below, when our Saviour is above; or be groveling upon earth, when we should be thinking and preparing for Heaven.”⁷⁴

Returning to Robert Gell, who was tutor to Henry More and inclined to a Cabalistic frame of mind, we find both senses - *fill* and *fulfill* considered. As with Nicholson, Gell addresses Christ as fulfilling the “Judgements, Prophecies, Promises and Types” of “Holy Scripture,” but also the filling of all things and “How largely *all things* are here to be understood.” He affirms the statement made in the Book of Wisdom, that “*Gods Spirit filleth the earth.*”⁷⁵ Gell goes on, however, to speak of how Christ fills man’s body, but of how much more gloriously he fills the soul and the Church. The outspoken Robert South, whose popular sermons Traherne may well have encountered in Oxford, is more forthcoming. While also accepting that Christ fulfills prophecies and fills the Church with gifts and grace, he argues that Christ, most importantly, fills the universe through the

omnipresence of his nature and universal diffusion of his Godhead. The Schools ... make God to be in all things by repletion: that is, he is so *in them*, that they are rather *in him*; spreading such an immense fulness over all things, as in a manner swallows and folds them up within himself. Such a fulness has Christ as God, by which he fills, or rather overflows the universe, *et ad omnia praesentialiter se habet.*⁷⁶

Furthermore, South argues, this “omnipresential filling of all things” – or in Teilhard’s phrase, this “quantitative repletion” - “always agreed to him.” Here he refers to the Word that was in the beginning with God and through whom all things were made. South then makes the somewhat contradictory distinction of another meaning of *filling all things* that only “accrued to him upon and after his ascension, not before.” This refers to Christ’s universal rule and government of all things which he takes to refer not only to Christ’s

⁷³ William Nicholson, Arch-deacon of Brecon, "Of Christs Descent to Hell : Ephesians 4. 9, 10," *Exthesis pisteos, or, Exposition of the Apostles Creed Delivered in Several Sermons* (London: Printed by William Leake, 1661), p. 273.

⁷⁴ Hole, *A Practical Exposition of the Church-Catechism*, , Vol. 1, p. 277.

⁷⁵ Wisd. 1:17.

⁷⁶ *and he is present in all things.* Robert South, "Ephesians 4: 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended that he might fill all things (Sermon I)," *Five Additional Volumes of Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions. by Robert South, DD. Late Prebendary of Westminster, and Canon of*

office (as the Socinians would have it) but also to his nature:

All the elements, the whole train and retinue of nature are subservient to his pleasure, and instruments of his purposes. The stars fight in their courses under his banner, and subordinate their powers to the dictates of his will. The heavens rule all below them by their influences, but themselves are governed by his. He can command nature out of its course, and reverse the great ordinances of creation ...⁷⁷

Traherne, as we shall illustrate,⁷⁸ also speaks of such victorious cosmic power in relation to the risen Christ, although the suggestion of voluntarism in Christ subverting the course of nature, and the perception of an historically dated rather than eternal governance of the universe, is largely absent in him. In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne applies with force what Gell refers to as the “latitude”⁷⁹ of the term *all things* – a latitude that marks the Ascension as an eternal filling of all things, and as the consummation of the Incarnation and the perfection of the Creation.

Christ and All Things

Traherne, then, relates the fullness of Christ in whom all things consist to the infinite and most concrete plenitude encountered by the Celestial Stranger, seeing in an “organic” sense, as does Teilhard, “Christ in all things and all things in Christ.”⁸⁰ This is the import of Traherne’s incorporation of Paul’s Christ hymn into the exhaustive survey of all worlds that comprises Chapter 25. Paul’s Christ hymn is the focal text of what several commentators on the history of the Cosmic Christ doctrine have regarded as a landmark address, given by Joseph Sittler in 1961.⁸¹ “These verses,” said Sittler

sing out their triumphant and alluring music between two huge and steady poles – “Christ,” and “all things.” ... it is here declared that the sweep of God’s restorative action in Christ is no smaller than the six-times repeated *Ta panta*. Redemption is the name for this will, this action, and this concrete Man who is God with us and God for us – and all things are permeable to his cosmic redemption because all

Christ-Church, Oxon. Now first Printed from the Authors Manuscripts (London: Printed for Charles Bathurst, 1744), Vol. 7, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁷⁸ See 2.4.5.

⁷⁹ Gell, *Gell's Remaines*, p. 261.

⁸⁰ King sees this as touching “the heart of Teilhard’s vision.” King, *Christ in All Things*, p. 58, 70.

⁸¹ J.A. Sittler, “Called to Unity”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 14, 1961-62, pp. 184-6. Joseph Sittler, Lutheran professor in the University of Chicago Divinity School, delivered this address to the Faith and Order Movement at New Delhi in 1961. See comments by J.A. Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ in*

things subsist in him.

Chapter 25 might be seen as structured around these two poles. On one hand Traherne's device of the "Celestial Stranger" makes us wonder at the beauty and variety of "all things," and on the other hand, Christ, as Traherne reveals in the final paragraph, is the element in whom all these things consist. As we have noted, it is significant that Traherne does not make Christ the "Celestial Stranger," or as Blondel describes, "an intruder, an alien," but integral to all the things that so startle the visitor from the stars. So too, Sittler argues:

He comes to all things, not as a stranger, for he is the first-born of all creation, and in him all things were created. He is not only the matrix and *prius* of all things; he is the intention, the fullness, and the integrity of all things: for all things were created through him and for him. Nor are all things a tumbled multitude of facts in an unrelated mass, for in him all things hold together. ⁸²

Sittler's image of the two poles echoes Teilhard's belief that "the mutually supporting passion for Christ and passion for the world ... are now emerging as the twin poles of the religion of the future."⁸³ With such a far ranging vision, Traherne, as evidenced in the vast output of his short life, attempts to embrace and encompass the "Whole World" and "All Things." He makes something of a Christic mantra of the phrases "All Things," and "All in All" which derive from the Christ hymn and other Pauline passages⁸⁴ and to which he dedicates two entries in *Commentaries of Heaven*. The enormous scale of his overall vision is most clearly set forth in that work "WHEREIN," as the title page boldly sets forth:

The Mysteries of Felicitie are Opened and ALL THINGS Discovered to be Objects of Happiness. EVERY BEING Created and Increated being Alphabetically Represented (As it will appeareth) In the Light of GLORY

Although the manuscript contains around 350,000 words over 400 pages, Traherne had only exhausted the letter 'A' and made small start on 'B' when, as Anne Ridler speculates, "the

Origen and Teilhard de Chardin : A Comparative Study. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1982., pp. 59-60 ; and Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, pp. 77, 83, 90, 221.

⁸² Sittler, "Called to Unity," pp. 177-78.

⁸³ Teilhard. *Phenomenon of Man*. (1930) Cited in King, *Spirit of Fire*, pp. 123-124.

⁸⁴ And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15: 28)
And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Eph. 1: 22-23)

work was cut short by Traherne's death, rather than by any discouragement at the size of the task he had set himself."⁸⁵ *The Kingdom of God* covers much of the same ground and is similarly encyclopaedic in scope and ambition. The task Traherne had embarked upon, most explicitly in these works, was no less than a reckoning of "All Things." The rationale for this enterprise is set forth under the entry for "Account" in *Commentaries of Heaven* where Traherne undertakes to "rescue" the word 'account' from its commercial application and explicate its greater meaning, insisting that:

He that would liv in Communion with GOD must keep the Book of His Accounts ... He is to Number the Multitud of Angels and the Thoughts of Men, the Excellencies of all Creatures, their faculties and Actions, their Dignities and Offices, their Places and Honors. He is to Number the Sun and Moon and Stars, all Inanimat Creatures, the Worth wherwith they are inspired, their Properties and Uses, with all their Several Originals Ends and Services.⁸⁶

As a survey of the chapter headings demonstrates, it is just such an account that Traherne aims to give in *The Kingdom of God*. In giving his detailed survey, encompassing with equal weight both Heaven and Earth, Traherne links into one of the most ancient shades of meaning associated with the term *logos*. Heraclitus referred to the *logos* or "account," as both the means and the sum total of all that comes into being. Traherne, like Heraclitus, deplored the indifference and blindness of the world to this account⁸⁷ - mocking those Christians (if they "be Christians indeed") that defer all their enjoyments to the hereafter - rejecting the world and the gift of life.⁸⁸

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself :That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him. (Eph. 1: 9-10:)

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. (Eph. 4:10.)

⁸⁵ The manuscript contains eighty-two entries under A and eight under B.. It seems that Traherne had every intention of filling the remaining 140 pages of the large folio (12.5" x 8") and presumably other folios. The comprehensiveness of Traherne's effort is only hinted at by the titles of entries such as Human Abilitie, Abundance, Accident, Action, Ages, Air, Angel, Ant, Arithmetick, Astrologie, Atom, Awake, Babe, for Traherne uses each subject as an opportunity to explore not only the subject in hand in great depth but to relate it to the greater cosmic picture. Even the most unpromising of subjects, such as Abhorrence, Barrenness, and Amisse, are found by this relation to be subjects of felicity. As Alan Pritchard has observed, the incompleteness of the work is "by no means a fatal limitation" as "Traherne devised means of introducing under the letter A most kinds of topics that interested him."

See: Anne Ridler, introd., Julia Smith, ed. and Thomas Traherne, "Thomas Traherne (1637? - 1674): Some extracts from *Commentaries of Heaven*," *PN Review* 18.6 (1992), p. 14 ; Allan Pritchard and Thomas Traherne, "Traherne's Commentaries of Heaven (With Selections from the Manuscript)," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53.1 (1983), p. 3.

⁸⁶ CH "Account" ; CH (Smith), p. 17.

⁸⁷ See 1.1.

⁸⁸ CM IV.9. See 1.3.

In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne is concerned with the sum total of the material universe, with taking “All Things” into “account:”

All the Territories, and Treasures are palpable Matter in any Kingdom: So are the commodities and Fruits of the Land upon which account all things in nature are the Matter of Gods Kingdom.⁸⁹

In the Christ hymn that concludes Chapter 25, it is also apparent that, for Traherne, the sum of all accounts is Christ – in whom, according to the Epistle to the Ephesians, God is to “gather together” or “sum up” all things:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.⁹⁰

As Origen comments

The term ‘totalling up’ (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) is used with reference to bankers and the like, when they reckon up accounts and combine gifts and expenses or takings into the one total ... the ‘totalling-up’ is in Christ. This is because, in the Logos and Wisdom of God, there are not only the subdivisions of the things that are managed and the individual principles of the things that are administered, but also the totalling-up and (as one might say) the totalling-together of all things.⁹¹

Where Origen, as Lyons notes, employs both a juridical and organic sense in describing Christ’s role in the cosmos,⁹² the observations and catalogues of Traherne’s celestial and infant strangers lead to a primarily organic “summing up” of All Things in all “Worlds.”

Traherne then, in company with some of his fellow Anglican divines, but in opposition to others, distinctly tends to a material and cosmic as well as a spiritual understanding of Christ filling, summing, and consummating all things. The perfection or consummation of all things for Teilhard occurs in the form of a spiralling, evolutionary movement or process, the building up and perfecting of spirit through matter with total consummation in Christ as its end point. On the other hand, Traherne sees the world as complete - matter and spirit and the one and the many already a perfect whole – a perpetual

⁸⁹ KG p. 341, ll. 5-8 (f. 136v.)

⁹⁰ Eph. 1:10.

⁹¹ Origen. *Frag. in Eph.* 6, 11. 2-11. Cited in Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 144.

cycle of descension, ascension, and filling. Paradoxically, however, as we have seen, Traherne also holds that this perfection may be augmented – made infinitely more and more glorious, and so in this sense, also suggests a spiralling process of perfection and an ever more complete consummation. For both, the soul’s avaricious desire for a unitive transformation, to be filled with the life of God, is sparked by encountering the equally avaricious desire of divine Goodness manifest in all things of creation:

The Violence of its desire maketh it delight to Magnify Infnit Wisdom, and Power, and to Crowd up Infnit Treasures in the Smallest things by filling it with Innumerable uses, and Innumerable Ends and Services, and beauties. ... It gives them their Being, and it gives them all, and it gives them to all. It Enjoyes them all, nay it Enjoyes them all in all, and Continues for ever.⁹³

All things in the universe, even the “Smallest things,” are crowded with promise. Traherne here speaks to Teilhard’s notion of a “quantitative repletion” of all things. A grain of sand, an atom, or spire of grass – to mention several of Traherne’s favourite images – are not only full of the fullness of being, but replete – “Crowd[ed] up” - and in their “Innumerable Ends and Services and beauties” find their “qualitative consummation” in the whole. No matter how infinite the soul’s desire, it will meet with, enjoy, and rejoice in the insatiable creativity and communicativity of God, birthing and sustaining the universe through his Word - the incarnate fullness of Christ in all things.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 144-145.

⁹³ KG p. 286, l. 229-236 (f. 173r.) ; In the margin Traherne notes: “A Correllary. It was the observation of Clement of Alexandrinus, that God is the measure of all things. And if so, they might be answerable in Excellency to their Efficient Cause.”

2.4.2. The Soul of the World

At the outset of this chapter we noted Teilhard's exhortation to his friend to read "the beginning of the Epistle to the Colossians" and "to give it the full organic meaning it requires." "Here," he concludes, "Christ appears as a true soul of the World."⁹⁴ I would argue that what King writes of Teilhard might be applied to Traherne:

The cosmic hymns of St. Paul, especially in Colossians, resonated strongly in him ... Was all creation not like a continuous stream of living matter, energy and spirit, a cosmic web animated by divine life itself? It was the occasion for an incarnate presence that took on everywhere the figure and face of Jesus Christ as "the soul of the world."⁹⁵

The following words of Teilhard might also be used to articulate Traherne's purpose in writing the Pauline coda to the Celestial Stranger's journey:

To those who are seduced by the treasure-house of the Real and overcome by its immediacy – to these I would show the life of the Lord Jesus flowing through all things – the true soul of the world.⁹⁶

Teilhard and Traherne are both attracted to the ancient notion of the Soul of the World, the Universal Spirit, the Anima Mundi. Teilhard conceived of the Soul of the World as "an immanent "synthesizing and directing energy"⁹⁷ and linked this soul to "a cosmic element divinized by Christ."⁹⁸ Although his definition of the Soul of the World may be somewhat elusive, it is rooted in an intuition of a "principle of unity"⁹⁹ which he identifies with the Cosmic Christ, the Omega Point of the universe in evolution. The Soul of the World, as Bonifazi describes, is the Word becoming incarnate - the central and unifying principle of the unfolding universe, immanent in its processes and transcendent as its end point. Teilhard not only understands Christ as the bond of nature, but understands matter to be the very flesh of Christ. Christ is not pantheistically identified with matter, but panentheistically contains all matter:

⁹⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Letters to two Friends 1926-1952* (London: Collins Fontana, 1972), p. 48. Cited in King, *Christ in All Things*, p. 72.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁹⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," trans. René Hague, *Writings in a Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 220.

⁹⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Soul of the World," trans. René Hague, *Writings in Time of War* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 182.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁹⁹ Introduction to "Soul of the World" in *Ibid.*, p. 177.

I bless you, matter, and you I acclaim: not as the pontiffs of science or the moralizing preachers depict you, debased, disfigured – a mass of brute forces and base appetites – but as you reveal yourself to me today, *in your totality and your true nature* ... the flesh of Christ.¹⁰⁰

Teilhard's bold terms and evolutionary paradigm may seem quite foreign to Traherne and his period. What I hope to show, however, is how Traherne catches after and explores the connection between "this globe of dirt" and Christ. As we have been explicating, his impulse is to hypostatically unite Christ with "All Things." Both Teilhard and Traherne address contemporary threats to a theologically cohesive world view by searching the Logos tradition and the implications of Paul's Christology. As Bonifazi argues,

Teilhard dared to remythologize the incarnate Logos of the ancient world and to bestow upon him, and acknowledge in him, the paradigmatic qualities of a cosmic figure who can penetrate and encompass an evolutive world. In "Christ" he expressed a concept of the actuality of the world in which spirit and matter were interwoven, and all matter was henceforth "incarnate."¹⁰¹

This section will explore to what extent Traherne can be said to have dared such an interweaving of spirit and matter and to have evoked a Christic Soul of the World.

Ancient Philosophers have thought God to be the Soul of the World

In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne draws heavily upon Gale's account of ancient beliefs in a fiery creative principle at the heart of the world which he had earlier recorded in his *Commonplace Book* under "Fire" and "Sun." Acknowledging "Gale in his Court of the Gentiles,"¹⁰² he observes:

The Pythagorean Maxim was, that Fire is the principle of all things, which they called *διὸς φυλακὴ*, Jupiters Custodie; placing fire in the Middle of the World, as that which is the most excellent principle, and preservative of all things ... Which being the most Activ and Noble principle of Things, diffuseth it self through the universe, as the Heart in Man's Body sheds abroad its Natural and Vivivick Heat

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 69. Cited in Bonifazi, *The Soul of the World*, p. 218.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁰² KG p. 377, ll. 59-60 (f. 249r.)

into all the members.¹⁰³

Citing Laertius, Gale also informs Traherne that:

... the *Stoicks* held ‘*God* to be the *first Cause* of all things, and as the *foetus* is contained in the *Seed* ... ‘So also *God* was the *Spermatick Word* of the *Universe* ... They *affirme* also (addes *Laertius*) ... ‘That the *Universe* was framed according to infinite *Wisdom*e, *prevision*, or *Providence* over the *World*, the *Stoicks* assert (as *Plutarch*, *Placit. Philos.*) ‘That *God* is an operative artificial fire, *Methodically* ordering, and effecting the generation of all things ...¹⁰⁴

The *Logos spermatikos*, the seed of all life – was also the *pyr technikon*, the technic fire that suffused matter and was seen to animate the world as the soul moves the body.¹⁰⁵ For the Pythagoreans, Heraclitus and the Stoics the *Logos* is an immanent and active principle of coming to be, of perpetual becoming. This Creative Reason which, as W.C. Curry describes, directly melds matter and spirit, might be contrasted with the idealist Neoplatonist scheme in which true Being exists only in the transcendent One or the Good, from which emanates Nous or Mind which imparts divine thoughts to the World Soul.¹⁰⁶ The *logoi spermatikoi* are the lowest of the spiritual emanations, the instrumental thoughts or creative powers transmitted from the governing, over-arching World Soul. They operate in the world of matter, which is seen as a reflection or shadow of divine reality.

Under the entry for “Creation,” Traherne includes Gale’s summary of the correspondences that might be made between the Platonic World Soul or Soul of the Universe, the Stoic Seminal Word, the creative spirit or breath of God, the figure of Wisdom, and Christ as the Word or Logos.¹⁰⁷ Gale is not concerned here with the many inherent differences between these formulations, but in proving their common source in the

¹⁰³ KG p. 376, ll. 19-29 (f. 248r.) ; based on Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 163-4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 430-431 copied into CB f. 89.1.

¹⁰⁵ See E. Thamiry. “Immanence” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, *ibid.*, Vol. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Clyde Curry, "Tumbling Nature's Germens," *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937)

¹⁰⁷ “As for Gods *Executive*, or *Productive Efficiencie* ; according to *Plato*’s Philosophizing, he is in general stiled *the Supreme Fabricator*, *Perfecter*, and *Essentializer* of things. The notions by which *Plato* sets forth this *Divine Efficiencie*, are these, *He adorned*, *ordered*, *figured*, *constituted*, *framed all things*, &c. And more particularly as to the mode, or manner how *God* framed all things, we are told *ev’ry thing* was *Essentialized* by *certain Prolifick*, or *Efformative words*. This seems exactly to answer to that of the *Psalmist*, *Psalm 33.6*. *By the word of the Lord were the Heavens made*, and *all the Host of them by the breath of his Mouth* ; which the *Author* to the *Hebrews*, *chap. 11.3*. the more fully explains [*The worlds were framed by the Word of God*] *i.e.* Gods *Fiat*, or word was the *Seminal prolifick* principle of all beings, as *Gen. 1.3*. So the *Stoicks* reducing the whole of the *Universe* to two principles, *the efficient*, and *the matter* : as to the former, they say ... this being the *Spermatick*, or *Seminal Word* of the *Universe*, which formes, and shapes it, as the *Seed* the *Fætus*. Which suits well with the *Scripture* account hereof:” CB f. 30r ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp. 318-319.

Hebrew texts.

... we may reduce this λογος σπερματικος *Spermatick Word*, which the *Platonists*, and *Stoicks* speak so much of, to *Christ*, who is by *Solomon* stiled *Wisdom*, Prov. 8. 27, 28. and by *John 1.1.* λογος *The Essential word*, and made *Coeffector* with *God the Father* in the Creation of the Universe, though the former seems more adequate to the *Platonick mind*.

We may reduce also to the foregoing, *Divine Efficiencie*, that which *Plato* stiles ψυχη του κοσμου *the Soul of the Universe*, or the *Universal Spirit*, which is so much spoken of, but as little understood in the *Scholes*.

Traherne's interest, as subsequent entries and speculations indicate, lies in the concept of the Soul of the World as it is united to the matter or body of the universe. Gale, with Traherne following, goes on to discuss Plato's formulation of the Universe as "a living, and intelligent creature, composed of *bodie, and soul*." While the body can be understood as "visible, and tractable matter," "All the difficultie," says Gale, "lies in stating what he intends by the *Soul of the World*." Gale defends Plato's "Allegorick mode of Philosophizing" against "Aristotle, and his Adherents" who overlook Plato's "Symbolick, and Metaphorick Notions ... as if he did indeed make the Universe a Monstre."¹⁰⁸ Traherne's extract from Gale breaks off here, but Gale concludes that Plato "proves that God is the Soul of the World, from the Analogie, or Proportion he bears to the living Soul:"

... Plato's *Universal Spirit*, or *Spirit of the Universe*, though it be precedent to, and independent on the said Universe, yet is it the *Efformative*, and *perfective principle* therof.¹⁰⁹

Traherne refrains from copying Gale's further commentary in which he inelegantly likens the "motion or agitation" of the Spirit of God as it moved over the waters to "a *Broodie Hen*, fomenting her *Egges*; The *Spirit of God* as it were (to speake with Reverence) set abroad upon the Waters, till it be Hatched, and brought forth the *Universe*. To which *Plato's Spermatick, Efformative Spirit of the Universe* exactly answers ..." Traherne does not, then, seem to be drawn to the notion most "adequate to the Platonick mind" – that of a Soul of the World which is not melded or "commixed" with the world but, as Michael J.B. Allen

¹⁰⁸ CB 'Creation' f. 30r.1-2 ; Ibid., p. 318-19.

This point is also clarified under "Perfection" where Gale cites the "*Timaeus, fol. 92*" which describes the "commixing" of the "mortal animal," and the "immortal animal," or animal soul, in the "Visible Animal comprehending things Visible." This Visible Animal is distinguished as "a Sensible image of the Intelligible God the greatest, and best, and most beautiful, and most perfect, &c." (CB 75v ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p.333.)

¹⁰⁹ CB f. 30r.2 ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 320.

observes, “operates upon the Cosmos, not by sinking into it, but ... by brooding over it.”¹¹⁰

The *Commonplace Book* also has lengthy excerpts under the headings “Grove” and “Paganisme,” from Thomas Jackson’s *Treatise Containing the Originall of Unbelieve* (1625) including some lines from the fourth book of Virgil’s *Georgics* alluding to an animating deity:

*Some by the signes and these examples thereto drawne have taught
The soules of Bees to be divine, of heavenly spirits a draught;
For God say they, as find they may, who Natures workes peruse,
Through earth, through seas, through heavens profound live goodnesse doth diffuse.
From his presence, Cattle, men, birds, sucke the spirit of life
From him all springs, in him all ends : though death be n’ere so rife,
Yet nothing dies : what earth forsakes findes place in starry skie,
What we thinke into nothing flits, above the heavens doth flie*

While Traherne notes Jackson’s critique of pantheism,¹¹¹ he does not note Jackson’s commentary on this work of “the Poet.” Although a “plausible Philosophicall opinion,” Jackson finds it “was worse construed by some, than either the Author, or Commentator meant”:

many, the most auncient especially, agree in this; That *Deus* was *Anima mundi*,
That the world was animated by God, as our bodies are by our soules. Whence
they concluded, as some later *Romanists* doe; That all or most visible bodies might
be religiously worshipped, or adored, with reference to Gods residence in them.¹¹²

Jackson then goes on to cite Augustine’s attack on such pagan practices in his *De Civitate Dei* where Virgil is particularly singled out for criticism. “To thinke God is in the World as the Soule is in the bodie,” runs the page header, “is a grand Seminarie of Idolatrie and Sorcerie.” Nor does Traherne record these comments under the heading “Idolatrie.” While Jackson is skeptical of making the ancient notion of the *Anima Mundi* or *World Soul* an adequate antecedent to the Christian conception of a God who is both transcendent and immanent, Traherne seems intrigued. Speaking in the *Third Century* of the “infinite Wisdom

¹¹⁰ Plotinus *Enneads* 4.8.2 quoting from Plato *Phaedrus* 246C1-2. Cited in Michael J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino : a Study of his Phaedrus Commentary, its Sources and Genesis*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 240.

¹¹¹ “The invisible power, which filleth every place with his presence, comprehended by none was confined within the circumference of that peculiar roome, wherein it had bene sensibly manifested.” (CB “Paganisme”f. 74v.1 ; Thomas Jackson, *A Treatise Containing the Originall of Unbelieve, Misbelieve, or Misperswasions concerning the Veritie, Unitie, and Attributes of the Deitie*, (London: Printed by I. D. for John Clarke, 1625), p.160.)

of God, that did implant by Instinct so strong a Desire of felicity in the Soul, that we might be excited to labor after it, tho we know it not,” Traherne affirms, “I was very much animated by the Desires of Philosophers, which I saw in Heathen Books aspiring after it. But the misery is *It was unknown*. An altar was erected to it like that in Athens with this inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.”¹¹³ Traherne alludes here to Paul’s address to the men of Athens, in which he acknowledges the innate wisdom of certain Epicurian and Stoic poets:

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; 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.¹¹⁴

The spirit of Virgil’s “profound live goodness” diffused through earth and sea and heaven, surfaces frequently in Traherne’s rhapsodic prose. We have already noted, for example, his reflection on “Infinite love” whispering in every gale of wind and hiding in the “labyrinth of our ears,” and it is a theme to which we will shortly return. The point to made here is that Traherne is drawn, as a Christian panentheist, to the notion of the animating, all pervasive World Soul but not to the Platonic formulation of it.

In the *Second Century*, Traherne recalls a story from Plutarch’s *Sapientum Convivium* in which seven wise men of Greece gather together for dinner, and consider the question “what is most beautiful.”¹¹⁵

When Amasis the King of Egypt sent to the Wise Men of Greece, to Know, Quid Pulcherrimum? upon due and Mature Consideration, they answered, The WORLD.

¹¹² Ibid., p.167-169.

¹¹³ CM III.56.

¹¹⁴ Acts 17:27-28.

¹¹⁵ Plutarch, "The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men," trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1928), p. 389.

Traherne refers to Plutarch’s *Sapientum Convivium* (VII, viii) in which seven wise men discuss over dinner a letter from Amasis to Bias, one of their number. Amasis explains that he is engaged in a contest in wisdom with the king of Ethiopia and has proposed a series of questions to test his opponent. Two of these are: ‘Quid Pulcherrimum? (What is the most beautiful?)’ to which the Ethiopian King has answered ‘Lux’ (Light), and ‘Quid maximum?’ (What is the greatest?) to which he has answered ‘Mundus’ (The universe). In his editorial note on CM II.21 H.M. Margoliouth incorrectly notes that Traherne misremembers the story, transposing the answer to the second in response to the first question. (CPT, I, p. 258) Amasis, however, is dissatisfied with these answers and is seeking advice from the wise men on how best to retort. Traherne, in fact correctly, gives the answer devised by Thales to the question ‘Quid Pulcherrimum?’ As Marks observes of another story from Plutarch that appears in the CYB, however, it cannot be assumed that Traherne was working directly from Plutarch and not from a second-hand source. See Marks, "Traherne's Church Year-Book," p. 64-5, 44.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

The World certainly being so Beautiful that nothing visible is capable of more. Were we to see it only once, that first Appearance would amaze us. But being daily seen, we observ it not. Ancient Philosophers hav thought GOD to be the *Soul of the World*. Since therefore this visible World is the Body of GOD, not his Natural Body, but which He hath assumed; let us see how Glorious His Wisdom is, in Manifesting Himself therby. It hath not only represented His infinity and Eternity which we thought impossible to be represented by a Body, but His Beauty also. His Wisdom, Goodness, Power, Life and Glory, His Righteousness, Lov, and Blessedness: all which as out of a plentifull Treasurie, may be taken and collected out of this World.¹¹⁶

Traherne moves directly from the beauty of the world and the familiar theme of the estranged and amazed vision of it to the observation that “Ancient Philosophers hav thought GOD to be the *Soul of the World*.” It is significant that he here employs the language of accountancy – “this World” is a “plentifull Treasurie” out of which the divine attributes “may be taken and collected.” As Heraclitus noted the blindness of humanity to the *logos* or ‘account’ undergirding the world, Traherne here relates his theme of amazement to that of accountancy – when amazement is blunted, so are the skills of a treasurer – “being daily seen, we observ it not.”¹¹⁷ He also describes the divine attributes as being not simply *represented*, but *manifested* in “this World.” Similarly, in *The Kingdom of God* Traherne writes “Of Hills and Mountaines, Rain and Hail, of Snow, Clouds, Meteors, &c.” and “How apparently the Wisdom, and Goodness, and Power of God do Shine in these.”¹¹⁸ “The World,” he concludes,

is the Glorious Body, which [God] hath assumed to make himself Famous. Nor only to make it Known, that he is: but to make it Known, what he is.¹¹⁹

The key words at play here are “manifestation” and “assumption.” The manifest essence, the ‘what’ of God is wrapped up in the substance of the “Glorious Body” of the world. The implication is that God assumes the world for his body just as Christ assumes a human body. The further implication is that the hypostatical union is a cosmic principle, informing the whole creation. The world becomes the body of Christ.

In “Assumption” in *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne emphasises the difference between his own views and those of the ancient philosophers regarding the manner of this

¹¹⁶ CM II.21.

¹¹⁷ On amazement see 2.2.3, “A Stranger Upon Earth”; on accountancy see 2.4.1, “Christ and All Things.”

¹¹⁸ KG p. 400 (f. 269r.), title chapter 27.

union, relating the mystery of the hypostatical union to the notion of the World Soul.

We may therefore suppose a Soul to praexist after Platos Concept [sic], and to be endued with Power to assume a Body to it self when it pleaseth ... two distinct Natures, yet one Person ... And this I the rather speak because of the exact similitude between our Saviors Assumption, and this which is supposed. Some hav thought the World to be the Body of GOD, and GOD to be the Soul of the World; and that this WORLD was the Body which GOD Assumed to make himself visible in, to our fleshly Eys.

It was this opinion, says Traherne “Which made Mercurius Trismegistus to say that GOD was all Things. Plato Savors som thing of this Mistake.¹²⁰ The offending operative word in Traherne’e quotation of Hermes, appears to be “was” – “GOD was all Things,” whereas for Traherne God, through Christ, contains all things. As he goes on to reprise:

He is Alpha and Omega, and as the Heavens do by a large Embrace contain the earth, so doth he by his Eternitie contain all Things in Himself, immutably forever.¹²¹

Traherne’s meaning is made clearer under “All in All” where he demonstrates how God is “Alone” or transcendent yet immanently “All in all.” All God’s Wisdom, Goodness and Power, he argues, are “not only in all things, but in evry particular whatsoever.” He contends

That GOD and THINGS ... being All in all are by an Union so Divine and Eternal together, that it is impossible to sever one from the other.

Traherne makes the distinction between the notion of God as pure Act whose nature is to be eternally communicative and what he sees as Herme’s identification of the Act with God.

He is in all alone as the Life and Substance of all his Creatures, and as the Sole Object of all Eys, to pleas them with Eternal Beauty, as he is in all alone to inspire them as a Soul with fulness and Incorruption. Upon which Account som of the Ancient Philosophers hav thought GOD to be the Soul of the World. Falsly, not as if he did not animate it; but because indeed he is no part of it. Thus he is Alone and thus he is All ...¹²²

¹¹⁹ KG p. 400, ll. 31-33 (f. 270r.)

¹²⁰ CH f.150r.2

¹²¹ CH f.152v.2.

¹²² CH f. 84r.1

The Ancient Philosophers have erred, he implies, not because they have rightly said that God animates the world, but because they have inferred from this activity that he is “part of it.” In *Select Meditations* Traherne explains that “God in Assuming the world for His Body ... Hath told us Plainly it is non of his, and yet it Exhibiteth Him, more then it is Possible any other should do.”¹²³ In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne rehearses the argument found in several of his works - how it would be impossible for the divine attributes to be manifested ubiquitously in the world if God was a “part of it” and possessed an “inconvenient” material body.¹²⁴

Were GOD Corporeal, Either he must be Finit, or fill infinit Spaces with his Corporeal Substance or Being. That GOD should be finit, is Infinitely Inconvenient: So is it that he should have a Body infinitely Great. For the Body would be an Encumbrance to it self, and make the Existence of all other Bodies impossible. Being a pure Spirit therefore (infinit and Eternal) his Essence includes all Magnitudes and Dimensions without filling them; or so filles them, while it Exceeds them, it does not Exclude the coexistence of other things.¹²⁵

God must be bodily nowhere if he is to manifest his Love and Wisdom everywhere. The Being of God, therefore, lies in this act of ubiquitous manifestation - in his “motion” and his “Speech.” That is, by the action of his Word or Logos, God enlivens the world, as the soul enlivens the body.

Traherne’s understanding of the divine presence in the cosmos then, steers clear both of pantheistic Stoic monism and the dualism of High Platonism [and also of the ‘nullibism’ of Descartes and Hobbes where, as Crocker observes, “spirit was said to be in effect ‘nowhere.’¹²⁶] Traherne’s compass in navigating between these extremes is, I think, to be found primarily in the patristic formulation of the Trinity, modeled on the principles of consubstantiality and incarnation; the triune God is differentiated but incarnate and never separated from the World – simultaneously transcendent and immanent. Traherne is also heavily influenced in this regard by the strand of Christian orthodoxy represented by Aquinas and his Aristotelian synthesis. As opposed to Plato’s positing of the Idea of the Good as the only reality and his conception of the soul seeking flight from the body into union with this ultimate reality, Aristotle held that reality consisted of the union of the idea

¹²³ SM IV.34.

¹²⁴ E.g. SM IV.34.

¹²⁵ KG p. 400, ll. 4-11 (f. 269r.)

¹²⁶ Robert Crocker, *Henry More, 1614-1687 : A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist*, International Archives of the History of Ideas ; 185 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), p. 167.

or form with matter. An idea could not exist apart from its expression in an object. In the Thomist tradition, the relationship between God and cosmos is analagous to that between body and soul, but hinges upon a nuanced understanding of the body. The distinction between body and soul is in some degree a false one, for the body is not understood to be simply matter, but matter informed by spirit. The body does not exist in any degree of separation from the soul, and the soul is reliant upon the bodily senses. For Aquinas they form, according to Bonifazi, an “immediate existential unity.”¹²⁷

As Lyons observes of Origen, the “recourse to body-soul relationships and organic similes to express Christ’s union with the Church and the world” indicates an impulse, inspired by Scripture, to find “a relationship between the Christian Logos and creation as intimate as any which the Stoics were able to conceive between their Logos and the world.”¹²⁸ Whereas Origen, as a “Platonizing Christian” can also distance God from the material world and employ the juridicial image of Christ as ruling over his kingdom, Traherne more consistently employs the organic simile of the body, and also, as we shall explicate, of fire and the sun.

Our Chymists

Traherne’s response to the ancient question of whether God might be thought the soul of the world is one aspect of his engagement with the raging debates, centred on the speculations and discoveries of the new science, regarding the relationship between spirit and matter. Descartes proposed the bifurcation of body and soul, and as Jonathan Sawday observes,

From that profound division, flowed the larger division of discourse which took place at some point in the seventeenth century. It was just not possible to assert the underlying unity of all things once the central principle of the cosmos, the human subject, had been so radically bisected. If the subject was, at best, a fragile unity which collapsed under the pressure of Cartesian analysis, then what else was stable in the universe?¹²⁹

William B. Hunter describes the dilemma many faced:

¹²⁷Conrad Bonifazi, *A Theology of Things: a Study of Man in his Physical Environment*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967) p. 42.

¹²⁸ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 144.

¹²⁹ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, p. 146.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

As early scientists the orthodox could not deny the importance of matter; as Christians they dared not separate it from spirit. In their endeavour to steer between this Scylla and Charybdis, seventeenth century intellectuals produced a surprising variety of solutions to the problem of this relationship; sometimes a single writer combined several.¹³⁰

Traherne might be said to be such a writer, as his unique response to the questions of spiritual governance over matter and atomism illustrates. He refers to the “Incomparable Mr. Robert Boyle” and to Descartes,¹³¹ but decidedly rejected the mechanical philosophy according to which nature was seen to function in obedience to secondary laws set in motion by a distant God:

They that would by meer Mechanical Operations solv all the Phænomena of Life are all as absurd in their Attempts as it is possible for Men to be.¹³²

Boyle’s rejection of the notion of God as the soul of world was shared by Charleton and other English “mechanists” of the seventeenth century,¹³³ culminating in Newton’s statement:

This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all; and on account of this dominion he is wont to be called *Lord God* ...or *Universal Ruler*; for God is a relative word, and has a respect to servants; and Deity is the dominion of God not over his own body, as those imagine who fancy God to be the soul of the world, but over servants.¹³⁴

This clearly juridicial rather than organic view of the relation between the world and the creator might explain what Richard S. Westfall describes as the “striking” “scarcity of references to Christ in the many pages of Boyle’s disquisitions on religion.”¹³⁵ As noted in the introductory chapter, similar observations have been made about the “missing Christ” in Traherne, but while (as this thesis argues) Traherne finds an inherent connection between Christ and creation, Boyle, it would seem, exclusively associates Christ with the revealed

¹³⁰ William B. Hunter, Jr., “The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of Plastic Nature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 43.3 (1950), p. 198.

¹³¹ KG p. 377, ll. 52-56 (f. 248v.) – The reference is to the argument put forward by many philosophers, ancient and modern, listed by Traherne who hold the sun to be fire. Boyle’s notes on the nature of “Cold” also appear in the *Commonplace Book*.

¹³² KG p. 409, ll. 15-17 (f. 276v.)

¹³³ See Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 170ff.

¹³⁴ Newton General Scholium of the *Principia*. Cited in Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, p. 152.

doctrine of salvation.

Various other attempts were made in the seventeenth century to overcome this distancing of the creator from the creation. One of the most notable being the concept of “plastic nature” which had a brief currency in the second half of the seventeenth century. In a passage not noted in Traherne’s *Commonplace Book*, but closely following those cited above, Gale observes that

Plato’s *indwelling Soul of the Universe* is the same with that ... *Plastick, Efformative, Power, Spirit, or Principle*, which our *Chymists* take to be the *Universal Spirit*, informing all things.¹³⁶

The term “Chymistry” in the seventeenth century was interchangeable with Alchemy¹³⁷ and Gale’s reference to “our *Chymists*” alludes to the generation of thinkers attracted to the ancient wisdom contained in a variety of often esoteric sources including the Hermetic writings, the Kabbala, Rosucrucian, and other alchemical texts that were translated, mediated, and developed in the Renaissance by such figures as Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Paracelsus. The notion of a *plastic power* or *nature*, according to Hunter, emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century for a generation before falling into disuse.¹³⁸ It correlates, he argues, with the ancient concepts of *logoi spermatikoi* or seminal reasons, and also with the “classical and medieval belief in the vegetative soul.”¹³⁹ As W.C. Curry observes, Augustine developed the notion, which maintained currency into the Renaissance, of *rationes seminales*; the “hidden seeds,” germs or material essences of created things which govern generation and movement, and which imitate, in the Platonic mode, the typical ideas of God or God’s Word.¹⁴⁰ As Hunter observes “the divines at Cambridge University particularly made the term “plastic nature” their own in their efforts to combat the materialism towards which they saw [Hobbes and Descartes] leading the world.”¹⁴¹

While Traherne refers to a “Universal Spirit” in “Activity II” he does not copy Gale’s note on plastic nature into his *Commonplace Book*, or seem to use the term himself.

¹³⁵ Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, p. 125.

¹³⁶ Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 320-21.

¹³⁷ OED.

¹³⁸ Hunter finds the term resurfacing in the eighteenth century with Berkeley from whom, he argues, Coleridge may have gleaned it. Hunter, "The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of Plastic Nature," pp. 199, 213.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁴⁰ Curry, "Tumbling Nature's Germens," p. 32-36.

¹⁴¹ Hunter, "The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of Plastic Nature," p. 200.

He does touch upon the issue, however, under “Cohaesion” in *The Commonplace Book* where he once again draws upon the *Divine Dialogues* of the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More.¹⁴² (Traherne’s insertions are enclosed in square brackets)

There is nothing so unconceivable to me as the holding together of the parts of Matter: which has so confounded me when I hav seriously thought upon it, that I hav been prone to think with myself, that the Gimmers¹⁴³ of the World hold together not so much by Geometrie as som natural Magick [for] Matter has no vinculum of its own to hold it together, so that of it self it would be disunited into a Congeries of mere Physical Monads or into Particles so litle, that it implies a Contradiction they should be divided into less. [For they are truly indivisible¹⁴⁴ and] impenetrable [in like maner.] And therefore [they] touch one another as it were in Smooth Superficiess: how therefore they hold together or what is the Principle of their Union [is inconceivable.]¹⁴⁵

More’s characters reject the mechanical speculations of Descartes and reach the conclusion that the gimmer (joint or hinge) of the world, the vinculum (bond of union or tie) that prevents the disintegration of matter into a congery (mass or heap) of atoms, is a spiritual, intellectual, and “spermatical” principle. They further conclude that this spiritual principle might not only explain such puzzling phenomena as gravity which in their view resists “Mechanicall Solutions ... being so manifestly repugnant to the confessed laws of Mechanicks,”¹⁴⁶ but also that it might act to “plainly thwart the acknowledged Laws of Mechanicks” that mechanistis “[pretend] to run through the whole frame of the World.”¹⁴⁷

Traherne’s response to the question of “the holding together of the parts of Matter” is somewhat different. On the one hand, he might have agreed with thinkers such as More and Ralph Cudworth who posited a spiritual governance over the whole creation. More’s rejection of an overly dualistic Platonism in *Divine Dialogues* is recorded by Traherne under the entry for “Omnipresence” in the *Commonplace Book*. Philotheus is “a zealous and sincere Lover of God and *Christ*, and of the whole Creation” who argues against Hylobares,

¹⁴² More, *Divine Dialogues I-III*, pp. 32, 119, 120. The speakers are Hylobares (a Materialist. He speaks from the beginning of the extract to “Magick”) and Philotheus (a “Lover of God and Christ, and of the whole Creation.)

See Frances L. Colby, "Thomas Traherne and Henry More," *Modern Language Notes* 62 (1947). Colby identified More as the source of this entry.

¹⁴³ Joints or Hinges. The word is obscured in the ms, and Colby (see above note), working from Gladys Wade’s transcription of this passage, assumed it was “Germs” – a term associated with the material essences that Augustine, building on Stoic notions, termed *rationes seminales*.

¹⁴⁴ Traherne inserts here the key point of Philotheus’ discussion a few pages on (p. 125.)

¹⁴⁵ CB. f. 26v.2.

¹⁴⁶ More, *Divine Dialogues I-III*, p. 43.

“a young witty, and well-moralized Materialist,” and Cuphophon, “a zealous, but Airie-minded, Platonist and Cartesian, or Mechanist,” and against “very famous Criticks in Points of Theologie, who mainly from this consideration, that the foul and ill-sented places of the Earth are an unfit Receptacle of the Divine presence, have made bold to confine the Godhead to the Heavens. Which opinion of theirs,” Philotheus concludes, “is rather to be imputed to the nicety of their Sense then to the sagacity of their Wit.”¹⁴⁸

On the other hand, however, the notion of *plastic nature*, in accord with its Neoplatonic heritage, also distanced God from direct involvement with the creation. It seemed only logical to Cudworth, who made a direct connection between *plastic nature* and the Platonic World Soul, that God should deputise the administration and regulation of nature to “a plastic nature,” which More described as the “Spirit of Nature ... A substance incorporeal, but without Sense and Animadversion, pervading the whole Matter of the Universe, and exercising a Plastical power therein.”¹⁴⁹ Cudworth and others found in the concept a means of linking the divine world with the material world, without implicating divinity directly in every minor and possibly mucky detail. There is something unseemly, he seems to imply, in the idea that “God himself doth all immediately, and, as it were with his own hands, form the body of every gnat and fly, insect and mite ...”¹⁵⁰ There is needed, therefore, a subordinate instrument which “doth drudgingly execute that part of his providence, which consists in the regular and orderly motion of matter.”¹⁵¹

Traherne’s affinity with several aspects of Cambridge Platonism have been well documented, but as Hawkes argues, “Traherne differs radically in his attitude to matter.” Whereas Whichcote and Cudworth make “the sensual world ontologically inferior to ideal forms,” Traherne “consistently exalts the dignity and blessedness of material things.” The problem lies with our failure to properly value, enjoy, and possess all things.¹⁵² In Traherne’s adherence to Hooker’s maxim “the being of God is a law to his working” he also goes against More’s assertion that the laws of nature are in need of ‘thwarting’ by the spiritual principal at work in the world. More’s Spirit of Nature is seen as being in

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁴⁸ CB f.71v-72r ; Ibid., “The proper Characters of the persons in the ensuing Dialogues, with some Allusion to their Names” ; The First Dialogue, pp. 157-158. The CB entry for Omnipresence also notes More’s conclusion that there is “no defilement in particles of matter.” (DD I, p. 158.)

¹⁴⁹ “Immortality of the Soul” in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, London (1662), p. 193. Cited in Hunter, “The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of Plastic Nature,” p. 202-3.

¹⁵⁰ Cudworth. *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678.) Cited in Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁵¹ Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, p. 393.

¹⁵² Hawkes, “Thomas Traherne : A Critique of Political Economy,” p. 372. See also 2.2.3.

opposition to or “tugged” by matter.¹⁵³ While More publicly revoked his early attraction to Cartesian physics and expanded his circle to include “apologists for Van Helmont and Boehme,”¹⁵⁴ and to develop his own theory of the Spirit of Nature, there is, in the intermediary nature of this notion, a residual spirit-matter dualism.

The positing of a subordinate plastic principle reflects the controversial tendency of some Platonists to equate the Christian Trinity with the Neoplatonist hierarchy of being. Aware of the dangers of doing this, Cudworth, as Sarah Hutton notes, claimed, against the general consensus, that Plato in fact pointed to a unity in the trinity of the godhead. “The more refined Platonists,” Plotinus, Amelius and Porphyry posited a “supra-mundane soul in addition to the World Soul, “not properly and [essentially] part of that mundane animal, but a being elevated above the same.”¹⁵⁵ The Trinity so defended by Cudworth might, then, maintain an internal unity, but the Trinitarian understanding of the *incarnate* Word and its connection with the “mundane,” world, and with the “common things” so loved by Traherne, is lost. It is true that Traherne, in the *Commonplace Book*, connects the Christian Trinity with the Platonic one described by Hermes, but he does so in such a way that his selections (avoiding dualist passages¹⁵⁶) and interpretations of Hermes highlight the themes of unity in the godhead and the eternal generation.¹⁵⁷

As D. W. Dockrill points out, other more orthodox Trinitarian thinkers with Platonist leanings, such as Jackson, and Stillingfleet also questioned whether Christian philosophy required such an intermediary spirit between God and the universe.¹⁵⁸ It is on these grounds that Jackson, as we have noted, rejects the notion of the Anima Mundi. Traherne, as we also noted, is actually attracted to the notion, but in his understanding of it is fundamentally attuned with Jackson’s orthodoxy concerning the relation of God to the

¹⁵³ See Arlene Miller Guinsburg, "Henry More, Thomas Vaughan and the Late Renaissance Magical Tradition," *Ambix* 27 (March 1980), p. 168.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁵ Ralph Cudworth. *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), chap. IV. Cited in Sarah Hutton, "The Neoplatonic Roots of Arianism : Ralph Cudworth and Theophilus Gale," *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of XVI-th to XVIII-th Centuries*, ed. Lech Szczucki (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, PWN - Polish Scientific Publisher, 1983), pp. 141-2.

¹⁵⁶ The Hermetic writings are a mixture of Stoic and Platonist philosophy, and Traherne used them selectively. See Carol L. Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus," *Renaissance News* 19 (1966)

¹⁵⁷ See 2.4.3, “But leaving Allegorie ...”

¹⁵⁸ D. W. Dockrill, "The Heritage of Patristic Platonism in Seventeenth Century English Philosophical Theology," *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context : Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*, eds. G. A. J. Rogers, Jean-Michel Vienne and Y. C. Zakra, International Archives of the History of Ideas ; 150 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), p. 59.

world.¹⁵⁹ Traherne includes in his *Commonplace Book*, a passage from Jackson on Seneca's intuition of divinity in such sublime sights as a grove of ancient trees. Jackson concedes that Seneca "well cleansed might add fertilitie to Christian devotion" in proving "that God is neare us, even within us," but points to the "error in the common sort of heathen, in whom trees of unusuall height, or like spectacles, did raise an imaginatió of Gods presence, which sight of grasse, of ordinary herbes, or lower shrubbes (though in the lowest of them he be continually present) could not prompt unto their drowsie fantasies."¹⁶⁰ According to Dockrill, Jackson "moderated the Plotinian doctrine of the transcendency of the One" and "following Pico Della Mirandola and Aquinas before him" held that "God transcends beings but not Being."¹⁶¹ Traherne, who takes extensive notes from both authors, takes a similarly Thomistic approach. The God that "transcends beings but not Being" does not relegate the care of even the smallest and most common beings to a drudging and cajoling intermediary spirit. Even

The Creation of Insects affords us a Clear Mirror of Almighty Power ... God had done as much in little there, as he had done at large in the Whole World.¹⁶²

There is, in fact, almost an inverse relation in Traherne, between the size of an object and the wonder it excites as a "Mirror of Almighty Power." He argues against Epicureans and Manichees who "would fain be persuaded that sands and Atoms are beneath his care, whom they confess to be God, and all the lesser Matter of the World unworthy of his Providence."¹⁶³

Atoms are Material Spirits

Atoms, therefore, as the smallest and most common object in the universe, are especially fascinating to Traherne.

An Atom is a marvellous Effect of Almighty power, or a great miracle in a little

¹⁵⁹ See 2.4.2, "Ancient Philosophers have thought God to be the Soul of the World" ; 2.4.4, "O Life ... Thou Soul and Mysterious Bride of the Univers!"

¹⁶⁰ CB "Grove" f. 52r.1, f. 51r.2 ; Jackson, *The Originall of Unbeliefe*, p. 199, 191.

¹⁶¹ Dockrill, "The Heritage of Patristic Platonism in Seventeenth Century English Philosophical Theology," p. 57.

Yet, as Dockrill describes, Jackson also emphasises the ultimate unknowability of God – approached but not comprehended through creation. While Jackson finds God comprehensible in the world, but ultimately incomprehensible ; Traherne admits the immensity of God to be incomprehensible – but "not so Incomprehensible, but it may be understood" and hopes to lift the veil "at least by a Chink, (if we remove it not wholly.)" (KG p. 258, title chapter 2, ll. 2-3 (f. 149v.)

¹⁶² KG p. 422-423, ll. 17, 43-44 (f. 289v-290v.)

¹⁶³ KG p. 349, ll. 44-47 (f. 222v.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

Room: perhaps I may say, it is an infinit Miracle in no Room, for it is so small, that it taketh up no place at all... yet is there an unsearchable Abyss of Wonders contained in it; innumerable Difficulties, Uses, Excellencies and pleasures concentrating in its Womb for our Information and Happiness; the Clear Knowldeg of which will make us Expert in the Chiefest Mysteries of GOD and Nature.¹⁶⁴

The nature of the atom is a key to one of the “Chiefest Mysteries of GOD and Nature” – that is “the holding together of the parts of Matter” and the relationship between the spiritual and the material.

Much of the material in Chapter 18 “Of the Matter of the Univers.... a treatise on Atoms” and in Chapter 19: “Of Material Spirits. Of the Nature of Light and of the prodigious Wonders that are hidden in its Nature” is also covered in *Commentaries of Heaven* where “Atom” is one of the longest entries. As Eliot Rose observes, Traherne’s erasures show that it went at least four columns over the space allotted to it.¹⁶⁵ Traherne himself notes after the rambling poem that concludes the entry: “Consider: Whether it be not best to leav out some of these poems.”

Traherne begins his treatise on atoms in *The Kingdom of God* with the juridicial observation:

The Matter of the World, and the Matter of Gods Kingdom are distinct things. The Matter of the World is only Corporeal: But things Spiritual may be the Matter of Gods Kingdom ... The King himself is a part of the Kingdom: for as much as he is the Head of his people.

He goes on, however, to subvert his own statement with the observation that

All the Territories, and Treasures are palpable Matter in any Kingdom: So are the commodities and Fruits of the Land upon which account all things in nature are the Matter of Gods Kingdom. God himself being a part of it his Kingdom is Infinitely Divine and Sacred ...¹⁶⁶

There is a similar retractive movement in *Seeds of Eternity*:

¹⁶⁴ CH f. 164v.1.

¹⁶⁵ Elliot Rose, "A New Traherne Manuscript," *Times Literary Supplement* 19 March 1982, p. 324.

¹⁶⁶ KG p. 341, ll. 1-8 (f. 215v.)

bec. the Body is but the Case of the Soul, we shall as such pass over it in the beginning, tho perhaps afterward we shall repell that opinion as a vulgar Error, that maketh it the impediment and prison of the mind, and looking on it as a glorious Instrument and Companion of the soul, utter things more advantagious concerning it.¹⁶⁷

In the final chapters of the *Kingdom of God* Traherne continues to redress that error; he begins, at this point, with the atom. Introducing the central chapters concerning the “Material Univers” he announces: “We will begin with the matter of the Visible World, the vilest¹⁶⁸ and basest object that is in it.”¹⁶⁹ Traherne reprises his familiar rhetorical device of raising such poor dregs to the very greatest height of our esteem. Almighty Power, as Traherne elsewhere argues,¹⁷⁰ is exerted in the eternal generation of the Word, which is made made manifest in the very particles out of which every object in the world is composed. As a marginal gloss states: “The World [is] Infinitely Glorious because an Infinit Excellency Secretly lurketh in evry Atom.”¹⁷¹

If Almighty power then be truly Exerted in the production of an Atom, how Glorious is the World; and how Infinitely deep is evry Creature in which there is an Infinit Number of Such Atoms Composing its Existence! ... Almighty Power is a Common Principle in its Operations, yet Infinitely Sacred, and therefore Notwithstanding its Commonness ought to be as Infinitely Esteemed ... In evry Sand, in Evry Grain of Dust, there is an Infinit Number, yet Evry one of these is a Temple of his Omnipresence, an Effect of his Eternity, an Object of his Will, a Subject of his Power, a Gift of his Lov, a Work of his Wisdom, a means of our Happiness, an Engine of his Glory.¹⁷²

Traherne similarly exclaims in *Commentaries of Heaven*:

in looking at the smallness of the atom the soul may faint in admiration of God who by things so small hath made a fabrick so glorious as heaven and earth is, for the manifestation of his Wisdom, that all the excellency and the Power might be of GOD.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ SE, p. 240, ll. 312-316.

¹⁶⁸ vile: in 17th century usage – of little value, cheap (OED.)

¹⁶⁹ KG p. 341, ll. 21-22 (f. 216r.)

¹⁷⁰ See 2.1.3.

¹⁷¹ KG p. 343, fn. 8 (f. 218r.)

¹⁷² KG pp. 343-344, ll. 105-123 (f. 218r-218v.)

¹⁷³ CH f. 167v.1.

The atom in Renaissance discourse did not always receive the good press given it by Traherne: “A history of the atom in literature,” writes Stephen Clucas, “is a history of anxieties and unspoken fears, a history of neuroses” and peppered with “hysterical narratives of disintegration.” In Traherne’s period, the perils of civil war, religious schism, and Hobbesian political theory were described in atomist terms.¹⁷⁴ The revived ancient atomism of Lucretius was seen by some as proof of the chaos innate in matter, requiring the oversight of a divine monarch, or great Architect to ensure coherence and solidity. Others, such as Richard Bentley, felt “revulsion at the idea of autokinetic atoms, moving and operating without the will of God, in a purely material and mechanical universe.”¹⁷⁵ The notion was simply disbelieved by others such as Donne, Jonson and Milton, who found it inconceivable that a world composed of invisible particles should have any form or substance.¹⁷⁶ Clucas goes on to describe Henry More and Traherne as “Pro-Atomists” who took up the “poetic task” of casting atoms as agents of integration.

There are however, as Clucas also notes, fundamental differences between the two theories of integration. More finds atoms to act as plastical spirits excited into action by God. They are “life, form, sprite, not matter pure / For matter pure is a pure nullitie.” The material world is the “‘knots of the universall stole / Of sacred Psyche’, a woven fabric in which atoms are merely parts of a ubiquitous spiritual contexture ‘fixt, [made] grosse by conspissation.’”¹⁷⁷ Traherne’s “fabrick of the World,”¹⁷⁸ however, is of a more solid construction. He starts from the supposition that atoms are material, defining an atom as “a physical Monad, or an Indivisible and Tangible Realitie, of no Dimensions, parts, or powers, but meerly passiv, and a Seed of Corporietie.”¹⁷⁹ Atoms are “tossed to and fro from Side to Side in the Smallest Pores of a Solid Body” till it is “fixed and glued to another, or made quiet by cleaving to a Body.”¹⁸⁰ The nature of a body is determined by how loosly or firmly the “Lumps’ or ‘Heaps” of atoms are “Coagulated.”¹⁸¹ “Evry Body” therefore “consists of Solid and Volatile parts ... all Beauty and Pleasure is produced by a Regular proportion of quiet and Motion. Its order and Measure being the cause of all.” Unfolding “the operations of Nature Mathematically,” Traherne observes “The Strength of Atoms united ... the Amiable Strengths and the Forces of Union.”¹⁸² This would seem to tend toward Boyle’s

¹⁷⁴ Stephen Clucas, "Poetic Atomism in Seventeenth-Century England: Henry More, Thomas Traherne and 'Scientific Imagination'," *Renaissance Studies* 5.3 (1991), pp. 332-333.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹⁷⁷ All quotations are from More’s *Democritus Platonisans* (1647), cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.

¹⁷⁸ KG p. 491, l. 136 (f. 355r.)

¹⁷⁹ KG p. 342, ll. 65-67 (f. 217r.)

¹⁸⁰ KG p. 345, ll. 205-206 (f. 220r.)

¹⁸¹ KG p. 346, ll. 248-252 (f. 221r.)

¹⁸² KG p. 346, ll. 244, 215 (f. 220r-220v.)

mechanical view of matter as a single primary and passive substance, organised by “the action of outward agents” such as motion into corpuscles of varying kinds.¹⁸³ On the other hand Traherne not only enlivens the mechanical rhetoric by describing atoms as “Engines of [God’s] pleasure” but discounts the mechanical account in going on to define atoms as “Material Spirits.” Though material they display several attributes of the Deity – “Simplicities,” “Incorruption,” and “Immutability”¹⁸⁴ and they are infinite in number; there is a “Restless, and Continuall Activity of Spirits,”¹⁸⁵ the “volatile” atom is “Infinitely prone to Motion,” and “doth not Incline to the Centre at all.”¹⁸⁶ Whereas Boyle, in a voluntarist vein, attributes the motion of atoms to God working “in a supernatural way” performing “I know not how many thousand miracles every hour,”¹⁸⁷ Traherne speaks of the seemingly innate and “Infinit Liberty” of an atom “upon Account of its Divine Original.”¹⁸⁸

As if to prepare his readers for what he acknowledges to be a surprising paradox, Traherne invites them to join him in a delightful reverie upon the journeyings of an atom as it makes its way through the universe: “Let us single out any sand upon the Sea Shore ...” He imagines this sand dissolved into many particles – some turning into Air, others “moved into earth, and become one with it.” He follows the fate of one, leaving “the residue to their Several Fortunes.” This atom makes its way through the food chain and through the great circulatory system of the universe in a series of evaporations, exhalations, and absorptions. The atom is active but also acted upon by the forces of the cosmos. It is

born up by the Sun, and for ought we know absorpt into that Fiery Vortex, Glittering there, and assisting as a part of that Flaming Globe. Thence it may be darted in a beam to a Star, and be Either fixed in one of those Splendid Orbes, or reflected in an Influence, and travail to the Moon, or perhaps to the Earth. It may chance in falling to dip into the Sea, and penetrate a fish like a Ray of Lightning, Suppose a Whale or a Dolphin.

There is an element of serendipitous whimsy in its adventures, contrasting with the alarming images of atoms dancing with wild and chaotic abandon put out by some of Traherne’s contemporaries.¹⁸⁹ As in many narratives of pilgrimage, there are good deeds accomplished

¹⁸³ Robert Boyle. *Origin of Form and Qualities* (1666). Cited in Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, p. 161.

¹⁸⁴ KG p. 343, ll. 90 ff. (ff. 217r-219r)

¹⁸⁵ KG p. 345, l. 203 (f. 220r.)

¹⁸⁶ KG p. 345, ll. 171-173 (f. 219v.)

¹⁸⁷ Robert Boyle, *Origin of Forms and Qualities* (1666). Cited in Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, p. 161.

¹⁸⁸ KG f. 223v.

¹⁸⁹ See Clucas, "Poetic atomism in seventeenth-century England," pp. 335-336.

along the way, and dramatic changes in fortune. While resident in the Whale or Dolphin, it might

Act, and Minister among its fellows (The Animal, Material, and Vital Spirits) obeying the Impressions of a Sensitiv Soul till at last it escape, and for varietie of delight Enter an Oyster and mingling there in som transparant Drop be fixed in a Pearl. It may come from so base an Original to a Ladies Neck, Sit at a King's Table, be advanced to his Throne, or Crown, or Scepter. An Infinit Libertie it has, and upon Account of its Divine Original may enter the Thought of an Holy Angel.¹⁹⁰

A similar narrative appears in the poem "Atom" in *Commentaries of Heaven* in which Traherne describes a 'small Atom from a Mirie Fen / By shining Beams awakened, leavs its Den, / And Mud behind" and, as Clucas describes, "ascends in a seventeenth century version of the hydrological cycle" to become a "Golden fiery Beam." In this poem Traherne describes the purposiveness with which atoms move:

...in an Atom we
Such Endless depths of Alsufficiency
Behold ...
For as Ejected from the Sun they Ray
In various Places, in a various Way,
So do their various Works perform, and mov,
As if their Actions did proceed from Lov.¹⁹¹

As the immutable atom, the engine of God, travels the universe without transmutaion, but joining itself to other bodies, so Traherne understands the Word of God, the Exertion of Almighty Power, to be creative, communicative, of "Matter" and the "Realitie" of "Solid Existence" ; remaining entire in itself yet the bond or "viniculum" of creation:

To giv Matter to so huge a fabrick, and to make an Univers So bright and Glorious out of Nothing is a Stupendious Effect, yet but a little taste of his Almighty power. All the Angels in Heaven cannot out of nothing Create a Sand, nor conceiv the Realitie of its Solid Existence ... Even Gods word Effected it without Transmutation, imparting nothing of it self therunto.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ KG p. 349, ll. 55-77 (f. 222v-223r.)

¹⁹¹ CH ff. 170r.2 ff ; CHP, pp. 98ff., ll. 3-10, 149-151 ; 157-159.

¹⁹² KG p. 282, ll. 50-55 (f. 169r.)

Having delighted his reader with this series of migrations, Traherne proceeds to argue what he perceives to be a contentious point, employing a favourite tactic of veiling boldness with a show of caution:

I dare not Insist too much upon Physical Speculations, but this I shall say; such Atoms are Rightly called Animal and Vital Spirits in Men and Beasts because they are the Instrument of Life and Motion, of Animation, Concoction, sence , etc. And Spirits they may be called to Wit, Material Spirits because they are the Mean between Immaterial Spirits and Material Bodies. For with Spirits they are void of Bodies, with Bodies they are full of Matter ... I Know it will surprize you to say that any thing Material should be Incorporeal. But consider the Demonstration well:¹⁹³

Similarly in *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne observes of the atom that it is a “Mechanical or Material Spirit”¹⁹⁴ and the “mean or clasp between Immaterial Spirits and Material Bodies. For with Spirits they are void of Body, with Bodies they are full of Matter.”¹⁹⁵ It is the Atom that acts as “a Medius Terminus for Common Union. And without these material Spirits, Immaterial could neither liv in Bodies, nor govern the same.” An atom “is a real Mathematical Point” and “Tangible” but because it “hath not its three Dimesions” it might in “Numbers Infinitely Infinit” be “Scattered, and dispersed over all the World for the Impregnation, Information, and Life of the Whole, and for the Light, Glory, and Splendor of it.”¹⁹⁶

In defining atoms as “Material Spirits,” Traherne avoids the dualism of both Boyle and More. Where Boyle sees divine intervention in the ordering of physical particles, and More finds the material world to be held together by atoms of plastical spirit acting under the sway of a higher spiritual power, Traherne posits a nexus, rather than an ordering, interweaving or yoking together, of matter and spirit.

Unitie of Matter and Forme

The second, and related, respect in which Traherne’s atomism differs from that of both Boyle and More is in his Aristotelian insistence upon the union of form with matter. As Hunter observes, among the various solutions to the spirit-matter dilemma of the

¹⁹³ KG pp. 349-350, ll. 77-83, 87-88 (ff. 223r-223v.)

¹⁹⁴ CH f. 168v.2.

¹⁹⁵ CH f. 170r.1.

¹⁹⁶ KG pp. 349-350, ll. 84-85, 90-95 (f. 223v.)

seventeenth century, several older ideas survived despite “forcefull opposition” by such figures as Boyle and Matthew Hale, including the “scholastic notion of substantial forms which had been elaborated by Alexander of Hales.”¹⁹⁷ In relating this scholastic metaphysic to matter Traherne distinguishes between “the Essence, and Existence of Evry object; the being, and the Manner of its being; the subject it self, and its Qualities, or Accidents. The subject it self being as it were the Matter, and all its Qualities and Accidents, that difference it from other Things, the Forme.”¹⁹⁸ He also insists upon an essential unity between these constituents.

All Matter without its Form is but one: For it is the Form that puts the Difference between things, and things. ... The Truth is, it cannot Exist without Som Form or other. It must Eyther be united or Divided. If it be united it Constitutes a Body of Many Parts ... the parts of Matter throwly divided, will be realy Indivisible, and fully bear the Name of Atoms, Which som think to be the first Matter of the World.¹⁹⁹

Under “Matter” and “Chaos” and “Atom” in the *Commonplace Book* Traherne records from Gale various ancient theories concerning the creation of the universe. He notes Democritus’ theory of “an infinitie of Atomes scattered up and down the *Vacuum* (which the Phenicians called *Chaos*) which being coagmented, or fermented together, were the *material* Principle of all *Bodies* ...” Traherne accepts the atomist view, describing atoms “tossed to and fro” as the “first Matter of the Univers”²⁰⁰ but denies the rule of chance described by Epicurus whereby bodies are formed “without any certain *Cause*, or *Counsel*.” He melds atomism with the account of creation in Genesis and John. Gale, as Traherne records, finds Plato’s first matter - passive and formless “yet the seed, and receptacle of all things” and “receptive of any forme” – answerable to the Spirit that lay “upon the face of the deep ... fashioning, and reducing every Creature to its proper Forme.”²⁰¹ Atoms, Traherne argues, though indivisible parts and “the first Matter of the Work,” were created at the same time as the bodies they comprise. The creation, as the Word of God, was an act of unification – a melding of metaphysical form and physical matter:

...But the Word of God, by which we understand that the Worlds were made, telling us that they were Created in a Masse or Chaos, we are taught to conceiv them united in their Creation, so that in order of Nature they are before their

¹⁹⁷ Hunter, “The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of Plastic Nature,” pp. 198-99.

¹⁹⁸ KG p. 341, ll. 26-29 (f. 216r.)

¹⁹⁹ KG pp. 341-342, ll. 33-47 (f. 216v.)

²⁰⁰ KG p. 342, fn. 1 (f. 217r.), marginal gloss.

²⁰¹ CB “Chaos,” f. 25v., “Matter,” f. 65v.; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp. 324-326, 323-324.

Effect, but not in time, the whole and the Parts being Created together.²⁰²

In *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne makes a note to consider: “Whether the Reunion of the same Atoms be necessary to Individuation vid Resurrection”²⁰³ The entry on Resurrection does not appear in Traherne’s unfinished encyclopaedia but his thoughts on this topic are recorded, however, in this “treatise on Atoms” in the *Kingdom of God*:

A Mirror of the Ressurrection lies in this Intrinsic Immutabilitie. The Whole is a Third thing, resulting from the union of these Simple Parts which continuing afterwards, may assist under other new Formes in the Production, or Existence of other Bodies and because the particles continue after the Dissolution of the Body which they composed the self same Parts may return again, and make the same Individual that was before. The Same Matter, and the Same Spirits united together in the same maner, composing the very same object, that was before their Dissolution. For Time and Continuance are not the principles of Individuation, but unitie of Matter and Forme.²⁰⁴

As Robert Crocker highlights, Henry More in his *Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660) controversially denied “the physical resurrection of the ‘same’ body – at that time the accepted orthodox interpretation of the Resurrection.”²⁰⁵ He could not accept, as Traherne here proposes, that the individual or ‘numerical’ identity of the resurrection-body comprised the reassembly of physical particles that “may by then have been widely dispersed and transformed.”²⁰⁶ More’s interpretation of the resurrection-body was derived from Origen; he Platonically understood that only the “form” of the body would be united with the immortal soul - that the risen body, although seemingly recognisable, would be composed of semi-material or subtle ‘matter.’²⁰⁷ More uncompromisingly, Cudworth was to claim in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, that as the body was composed of matter in a constant state of motion and change (echoing Origen’s argument that the “substratam” of the body was in constant flux²⁰⁸ and anticipating the modern discovery of cell-renewal), its “gross atomic particles returned to the non-existence implied by the term ‘matter’, when isolated from the [plastic] spirit informing it.”²⁰⁹ While More defended his view as the more

²⁰² KG p. 342, ll. 52-56 (f. 217r.)

²⁰³ CH f.172.2.

²⁰⁴ KG pp. 344-345, ll. 160-169 (f. 219r.)

²⁰⁵ Crocker, *Henry More, 1614-1687 : A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist*, p. 88.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103. See also J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: A & C Black, 1977), pp. 470, 474-9.

²⁰⁸ See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 471.

²⁰⁹ Crocker, *Henry More, 1614-1687 : A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist*, p. 104.

‘rational,’ and Traherne’s explanation leaves not a few logistical questions unanswered (such as the ultimate residence of atoms at the resurrection that have, by his own admittance, constituted a succession of bodies) Traherne’s attempt to meld science and theology reveals, perhaps, a more profoundly incarnational perspective and a greater reverence toward the human body and its earthly life.²¹⁰

More decidedly rejected, then, the “Unitie of Matter and Forme.” His position is outlined by Crocker:

By treating all beings as inseparable compounds of matter and form, ... vitalists were led, according to More, to either consider life as entirely material and self-generating, or to relegate the deity to the role of a spectator outside his own Creation ...²¹¹

More’s solution, as we have seen, was to insert the “plastical” Spirit of Nature “between the ideas in the creative Logos and their expression in the natural world.” According to More, “without this principle it would be possible to imagine falsely that either the world was a machine driven by chance, as the mechanists implied, or a self-generating eternal animal, as hylozoic vitalism seemed to suggest.”²¹² Traherne, however, overcomes these binaries, not by positing a go-between, but by stressing the the principles of activity and incarnation.

Nor is Traherne of a mind with Boyle. Boyle, as Klaaren summarises, found in matter “No hidden powers and potentialities but qualities concrete” and undermined the “Explanation of matter by proliferating forms.” Boyle, he argues, “critically differentiated form from matter” and exercised the voluntarist “excision of ideas and forms from the mind of God.”²¹³ “Dismissing both the Spiritualist emphasis upon “forms and seeds” and “mysterious powers” and the rule of chance in the causation of motion, Boyle, in *Origin of Forms and Qualities* (1666), saw God working, not incarnationally, but as we have noted, “in a supernatural way” performing “I know not how many thousand miracles every hour...”²¹⁴ Traherne, as we also established in an earlier chapter, is not of such a voluntarist cast.²¹⁵ Although he emphasises the workings of Almighty Power that creates atoms out of

²¹⁰ Where Traherne marvels at the interior world revealed by anatomy (see “Thanksgiving for the Body”) More, as Sawday observes, seems unimpressed. Of a dissected brain he finds it impossible to believe that “this little lurking Mushrome” commands the whole “fabricke of the Body.” Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, p. 263.

²¹¹ Crocker, *Henry More, 1614-1687 : A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist*, p. 167.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²¹³ Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, p. 162.

²¹⁴ Robert Boyle. *Origin of Form and Qualities* (1666). Cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

²¹⁵ See 2.1.2, 2.1.3.

nothing and describes the mathematical operations of passive atoms, all the emphasis is again upon immanent activity. Atoms are the instruments of an incarnating and active God; they have a “Divine originall” and behave in his “Similitude.”

Does Traherne, then, lean more towards the vitalist philosophies of such contemporaneous figures as Thomas Vaughan, Jacob Boehme, Jan Baptist van Helmont and Anne Conway? Such views certainly accorded a greater, if less orthodox, role to Christ in the universe. Vaughan’s *Anthroposophia Theomagica* (1648) attempts, according to Guinsberg, to “harmonise cabbalist and hermetic thought with the Biblical account of creation in *Genesis* and the analyses of the Logos in John”²¹⁶ and his *Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650)²¹⁷ outlines an unorthodox Rosicrucian Christology, describing a soul of the world or spirit of nature guided by a “metaphysical ... seed or glance of light” associated by a series of arcane associations with Christ.²¹⁸ In Helmont’s “Spiritualist view,” describes Klaaren, “all God’s works, including the personae of the Trinity, could be run together in such a way that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, understood as cosmic wisdom and spirituality, was essential to true natural philosophy, medicine, and chemistry.”²¹⁹ Helmont’s speculations were grounded in a belief that the spiritual and the material formed a single reality; he described a Creator Spirit or *Archaeus* not only pervading the whole of nature but operating as the constitutive principle of all life and motion. In this can be seen traces of the Stoicism that Helmont confesses to have converted from in favour of a mystical Christianity.²²⁰ As Klaaren observes “not all Spiritualists introduced Christology as fully into natural philosophy.”²²¹

Anne Conway, who had a close association with both Helmont and More, was to counter More’s dualism of soul and body with a “monistic and vitalistic theory of

²¹⁶ Guinsburg, "Henry More, Thomas Vaughan and the Late Renaissance Magical Tradition," , p. 38.

²¹⁷ sub-titled *Or a Discourse of the universall Spirit of Nature, with his strange, abstruse, miraculous Ascent & descent.*

²¹⁸ Guinsburg, "Henry More, Thomas Vaughan and the Late Renaissance Magical Tradition," pp. 39-40.

²¹⁹ Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, p. 102.

²²⁰ See the first chapters of *Oriatrike*, “The Author’s Confession.” and “The Author’s Studies.” Helmont held the “ancient notion of seminal principles or ‘ferments’ were implanted by God in the primordial waters of creation.” Augustine had used this idea and Helmont followed Paracelsus’ notion of an *archaeus* or formative spirit present in the seed of each being, inspiring its growth and surviving its death in a gaseous discharge. Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science*, p. 153.

²²¹ Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, pp. 56, 62ff. In Helmont’s scheme, which he backed with empirical experiment, the element of water is the prime spirit bearing matter of creation, and the element of air is the “immediate efficient,” the constitutive and unifying agent of all things and identified as the *Archaeus*. In Helmont’s formulation of the *Archaeus* and in John Chandler’s remarkable introduction to his translation of Helmont’s *Oriatrike* (1662), the emphasis is not on a plastic power, but on Christ.

substance,”²²² and assert that matter, rather than being essentially inert, is a form of spirit - that body is not “dull and stupid matter” but, as Hutton summarises, “substance endued with life, each particle of which has the capacity for self-motion.”²²³ “Every Body,” writes Conway, “is a certain Spirit or Life in its own Nature ... a certain intelligent Principle having Knowledge, Sense, Love, Desire, Joy, and Grief ... and by consequence hath Activity and Motion, *per se*.”²²⁴ Traherne stands between such views and the more orthodox and uncontentious views of Boyle, who though initially enthusiastic about Helmont’s ideas in the 1640s and early 1650s, eventually and decisively rejected the ‘spiritualist’ philosophy. Like Conway, Traherne perceives a “verisimilitude or analogy between created things and the creator” – matter cannot exist “devoid of life and goodness”²²⁵ as God is “infinitely good and communicates his Goodness infinitely.”²²⁶ This, as we have seen, is essentially the message of the early chapters of *The Kingdom of God*. Traherne is engaged by the notion of a communicative, active God, and finds the world to be made in his “Similitude.” Whereas Conway holds that matter is itself spiritual, Traherne’s view is less monistic, and more thoroughly informed by a Trinitarian understanding of the operation of the Logos. He affirms, unlike van Helmont, the creation *ex nihilo*: “No Imagination can fathom that Depth of Power, by which out of Nothing som thing is made.”²²⁷ It is by the action of the Word that matter is united with divine form, and it is atoms, as “Material Spirits” that are the agents of this union – the “mean or clasp” between spirit and matter.

²²² Sarah Hutton, *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Philosophy: Anne Conway, F.M. van Helmont and the Seventeenth-century Dutch Interchange of Ideas*, *Quaestiones Infnitae* ; v. 9 (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 1994), p. 5

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²²⁴ Anne Conway, *Principia philosophiae* (1690 ; probably written in 1670s. See Sarah Hutton, "Henry More and Anne Conway on Preexistence and Universal Salvation," *"Mind Senior to the World" : Stoicismo e Origenismo nella filosofia platonica del Seicento inglese*, ed. Marialuisa Baldi (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1996), p. 114.) Cited in Hutton, *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Philosophy*, pp. 3-4.

²²⁵ Hutton, *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Philosophy*, p. 4.

²²⁶ Conway, *Principia philosophiae*. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²²⁷ KG p. 348, ll. 1-2 (f. 221v.)

2.4.3. For the Sun is the Root of Light and Life

By Systole and Diastole

The unity of form and matter in the microcosm reflects, for Traherne, a principle of unity at work in the macrocosm. Traherne further explores this relation, this principle of cohesion, through his meditations upon the Sun as the antitype of the Son. Atoms themselves, he observes, “doth not Incline to the Centre at all”²²⁸ but are “Scattered, and dispersed over all the World for the Impregnation, Information, and Life of the Whole, and for the Light, Glory, and Splendor of it.” He continues:

The Sun is the centre and Fountain of them, the original Source whence they spring, and the point of union wherunto they all return; the General Mint of Spirits, transforming Air into Fire, and upholding all the Operations of the Unvers. For as by Systole and Diastole the Heart all the Pulses of the Body beat, and by the Circulation of the blood (lately found out) all Life and Motion is maintained:²²⁹

Traherne here takes up William Harvey’s discovery (“lately found out”) of the circulatory system and pumping function of the heart.²³⁰ Harvey’s work marked a great advance, as there had been little progress on the subject since Galen, and Traherne eagerly picks up the anatomical terminology of ventricle contraction and auricle expansion or “Systole and Diastole” and applies it to the operation of the Sun:

This in the Microcosm is answered with an Universal Circulation in the Macrocosm: the Sun being as it were the Heart of the Unvers, drinking in the Blood, and sending it forth Continually to all the parts impregnated with motion and Refined, for the Conservation of the whole. By that Circulation, which is Infinitely Swift and Rapid, the Sun in an Instant transforming Aether into Flame, and pouring it out in its Beams; a Gentle Circulation is maintained, wherin the Superfluous and Drossy parts retire from the earth, that would otherwise oppress and encumber all Terrestrial Bodies: And the Bodies themselvs by these Exhalations that breath away, Communicat their odors, Vertues, Natures, Qualities: new Spirits fresh, and vegete, flowing in, to inspire them evry Day.²³¹

²²⁸ KG p. 345, l. 172 (f. 219v.)

²²⁹ KG p. 350, ll. 93-100 (f. 223v.)

²³⁰ Harvey’s findings were initially published in Latin in 1628, but Traherne probably here refers to to the English edition: William Harvey, *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*, (London: 1653)

²³¹ KG p. 350, ll. 100-110 (ff.223v-224r.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

Traherne relates the operations of the human body to that of the cosmos and in turn connects these with divine truths. He does this, I would argue, not to establish a simple analogy but to describe a principle of consistent patterning and reasoning underlying the entire creation. In this he resists the mechanistic Cartesian view of the body and adheres to the scholastic theory of correspondence. William Harvey himself, as Sawday notes, “leaned on a system of beliefs inherited from Aristotle, which held that the universe and the human body – the interior and exterior worlds – were united in the common bond of correspondence.”²³²

Having expounded on his theory of atoms as “Material Spirits” emanating from the “General Mint” of the sun, Traherne, ever aware of a critical audience, had disclaimed, as we noted above, “I dare not insist too much upon Physical Speculations” but nevertheless went on – “this I shall say” – to discourse on atoms as the “Instrument of Life and Motion.” Here, after describing the “Universal Circulation” of particles between earth and the sun he again notes:

I could justify this by many Infallible proofs and Tokens and easily answer all objections brought against it, but because I am engaged by more Divine and heavenly Affairs, I proceed to more high and mighty Observations.

Despite this defensive qualification, however, he goes on to speak of light in relation to the Light of John's gospel - in a manner that again implies not mere analogy but verisimilitude.

*And the Light was the Life of Men.*²³³ Thus Speaketh the Text of the holy Bible. An Allusion of Infinit Depth; a Divine and eternal Mysterie, being painted out in a Temporal, and Visible, Created Wonder, for that which is Light in the open Air, is Life in Organised Bodies. The Same Spirits which affect the Ey, inform the Soul, and are the material causes of its Senses and Affections. Why is it an Universal Canon, and Rule of Nature that all Bodies Should be porous: But that they may receiv the Influences of Heaven And the Assistances inspired by other creatures and communicat themselvs after the Manner of the Deitie, to all that is about them?²³⁴

There is an assumption of an integral connection between the pumping heart in the body, the pulsing sun at the heart of the universe, and the Son who is creative of and pervades the whole scheme - just as the Pythagorean fire “diffuseth it self through the universe, and just

²³² Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, p. 23.

²³³ Traherne reverses the word order of “light” and “life” in his citation of John 1:4. See discussion below.

²³⁴ KG p. 350, ll. 114-122 (f. 224r.)

as the Heart in Man's Body sheds abroad its Natural and Vivivick Heat into all the members."²³⁵ Traherne here insists upon a virtual identification of Life and Light. He in fact reverses the word order of "light" and "life" in his citation of John 1:4 which actually reads: *in him was life; and the life was the light of the men*. Whether the transposition is intentional or not, it is telling, and Traherne's following argument is built upon it. He is driven to expound, at length, on "the Nature of Light" and "the prodigious Wonders that are hidden in its Nature."²³⁶ It is important to establish the precise nature of light and the sun because they have a direct bearing on the light of Christ. In a battery of questions, Traherne conveys an urgency and an impatience to get to the bottom of the matter - to prove "That Light is Material" and to enquire closely into its nature:

... Why does it shine at all? or how does it raise vapors, and Exhalations? or to what purpose? Why do sublunary Bodies let them go? Methinks an Account of these things should be well made, before we grow too Confident.²³⁷

It is also important to Traherne to understand, with the support of a host of ancient and modern authorities, that "the Sun hath the Nature of Fire" and is the source of light and heat.²³⁸ Traherne pauses in his breathless account to confess "I gallop over all, and hastily touch but the Tops of things" but immediately moves onto to speak again of specifics and to speak in detail of various experiments – of "Burning Glasses" and fire in a cup – which concern the nature of fire and the sun's beams. As vital as establishing the graphic and concrete particulars, is the propensity to awe expressed in Traherne's flow of speculations, queries, and exclamations:

Is not this a Miracle, as great as is imaginable? hath not Almighty Power wonderfully Manifested its Measure here? What Admiration, What Amazement is Sufficient to meet and Entertain the Wonders of the thing! ... For Evry Point of Heaven, Evry Plannet, Evry Star reflecting the Sun's Light is Seen again over all the World, as the Sun it self is Shall we Stop here; or Shall we proceed? Shall we touch yet more deep and Mysterious Wonders? ...²³⁹

²³⁵ KG p. 376, ll. 28-29 (f. 248r.) ; heavily based on Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp. 163-4.

²³⁶ KG p. 348 (f. 221v.), title chapter 19.

²³⁷ KG p. 351, ll. 146-148 (f. 225r.)

²³⁸ Traherne here draws upon his entries from Gale under "Sun" in the *Commonplace Book* which confirm, with reference to ancient and new philosophy, that the sun is fire. E.g.: "Neither are there wanting from some of great vogue amongst the *New Philosophers*, who defend this *Platonick persuasion* ; that *the Sun is Fire*, &c. So Dr. *Willis* in his *Treatise de Febribus* saies, *Light seems nothing else but a flame kindled into a greater dimension*, &c. And *Comenius* in his *Physicks* makes the first Light, Gen I. 3. to be no other than *Fire*." (Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 341 ; CB f. 91r.). See also Chapter 23 of KG which includes an extensive amount of material from Gale concerning the sun.

²³⁹ KG pp. 352-353, ll. 189-221 (f. 226v.)

Traherne seems undecided about the question of whether the earth moves around the sun. Pritchard catches him in the entry for “Astronomie” in *Commentaries of Heaven*, in the “belated” process of absorbing the new discoveries. He moves from a consideration of the number of spheres (which he originally states “is” the first question of astronomy, then amends to “of old, was”) to question whether there be any at all in light of Tycho Brahe’s discovery in 1572 of “the Appearance of the Star in Cassiopœias Chair ... that Accident having made great Alteration in the Science.” He still, however, regards Copernicus’ theory as mere hypothesis and is unsure whether the “earth stand still or no.”²⁴⁰ Matar notes that such a position, was not unusual in mid seventeenth century England, with Boyle himself still accepting the Ptolemaic principle. Assuming a correspondence between cosmology and theology, the Ptolemaic view fits, as Matar argues, Traherne’s “neoplatonic homocentrism” which finds humanity the “fulcrum of universal life.”²⁴¹ Matar finds, however, a reconciliation with Copernican cosmology in Traherne’s mystical understanding of the Sun as a “derivation from the immaterial sun” – the source of “generation and fructification,” and providing both “biological life and redemptive illumination to man.”²⁴² In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne emphasises the life-infusing properties of the Sun which operates at the centre of the universal circulation of atoms and vapours, and as the fountain of all life. In this manuscript, Traherne also moves a step closer to completing this Copernican reconciliation when he entertains the opinion of some of “the Wits of the Age” that “the Sun stands still, and is the centre of our System of the World ... Without which there are other Suns, at almost infinit Distances Divided from each other, about which other Opaque Orbes or Bodies move as the Earth and Planets about this Sun ...”²⁴³ Although he elsewhere rejects the possibility of more than one sun (seeing the existence of one Sun corresponding with the one God) Traherne appears to have reconsidered his position and his placing of a sun at the centre of each world in this work is consistent with his reverence for the sun as an emblem of an omnipresent God.²⁴⁴ It is perhaps more accurate to say, however, that Traherne was in the process of adapting his views, because he also reverts to a pre-Copernican mindset in asking “Does not the Sun which moves four Hundred thousand Miles an hour seem to Stand Stock Still, when we look upon it?” and in describing the sun moving around the moon.²⁴⁵ Despite such slips, I would argue that in *The Kingdom of God*

²⁴⁰ Pritchard and Traherne, "Traherne's Commentaries of Heaven (With Selections from the Manuscript)," p. 11.

²⁴¹ See CM IV. 74-78 centred on Pico’s affirmation of the dignity of man.

²⁴² Nabil Matar, "Thomas Traherne's Solar Mysticism," *Studia Mystica* 7.3 (1984), pp. 55-56, 58-59.

²⁴³ KG pp. 369-370, ll. 16, 48-52 (ff. 241v, 242v.)

²⁴⁴ CMII.10 As Matar argues, the singularity of the sun corresponds to the singularity God. Matar, "Thomas Traherne's Solar Mysticism," pp. 55-56.

²⁴⁵ KG p. 353, ll. 247-248 (f. 227v.) ; p. 370, ll. 83-84 (f. 243r.)

Traherne moves a step closer to integrating Copernican cosmology into his theological system. This reconciliation is further strengthened by the analogy made between the operations of the sun and the systole and diastole of the human heart.

Should We Turn All These Realities into an Allegorie

Turning from his observations upon the material nature of light, heat, the sun, and the universal circulation, Traherne considers the theological import:

Should we turn all these Realities into an Allegorie: God is Light, and in him is no Darkness at all.²⁴⁶ The Realitie of matter is the Shadow of a diviner Substance. The Spiritual Light is the Verity which the other was made to adumbrate. GOD is Infinitely more Perfect, more All Sufficient and more communicativ then the Sun is, more Bright and more Excellent. What would all Light be, were it not for the Light of the Understanding? Death and Darkness! GOD doth evry way Communicate himself, and by himself all things: He communicates himself, and all things to innumerable Persons: He is all Act in Infnit Motion; yet seemeth at Rest, becaus he is infnitly quiet in that Motion. When the Light of God is in the Intelligible Sphere of the understanding, it is So Incorporated with it, as Light in the Air: A Man would take them to be one. All that Glory being indeed Dependent, tho it Seemeth inherent, It seemeth to be our own while it is derived and borrowed.²⁴⁷

The association of the sun with God, as Traherne's *Commonplace Book* records, has an ancient history. In the Christian tradition, explicated in a key Pauline text, cited by Traherne, "the Invisible things" of God "from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made ..." (Romans 1.20)²⁴⁸ The sun is not seen as itself divine, but nonetheless holy as a gift from, and an emblem or image of God. As Traherne argues, informed in his observations by Gale, the sun is not the chief among Gods, as the Phoenicians prompted by "Reverence, and Amazement"²⁴⁹ had idolatrously believed, but is "indeed but one, that it may be the Image of his Unitie, who is the Creator of the same; But present by its Beams, and powerfull in all Effects, that it might resemble his Wisdom, and Goodness, and power in his Omnipresence."²⁵⁰ Traherne is clearly influenced by the regard for the sun as the ultimate emblem of God in the Neoplatonist traditon. Traherne's

²⁴⁶ 1 John 1:5.

²⁴⁷ KG p. 354, ll. 293-304 (f. 228r.)

²⁴⁸ KG p. 259, ll. 48-51 (f. 150v.)

²⁴⁹ CB f. 248v ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp.70, 53.

²⁵⁰ KG p. 377, ll. 48-51 (f. 248v.)

notebooks attest to his extensive reading of Hermes and the Renaissance Neoplatonist Ficino who dwell upon the sun as the source from which all energy flows and returns. In Ficino, as Matar observes, Traherne may have found a kindred belief in “Nature” as a bridge to “Grace” - “the natural qualities of the sun intrinsically lead man to the experience of divine qualities.” The sun is both a “representation and passageway to God.”²⁵¹ It is in this understanding of the centralising and illuminating role of the sun communicating through the eye and the life of the body, to the soul, that Traherne is reconciled to the Copernican placing of the sun at the centre of the universe.²⁵²

Again, however, we might distinguish Traherne from those Neoplatonists who identified the sun with the *anima mundi* or a plastic power,²⁵³ as well as from mechanists such as Boyle who, though awed by the life-giving properties of the sun, saw it as entirely distinct from and subordinate to its remote governor.²⁵⁴ Traherne’s understanding is perhaps closer to that of the Oxford Platonist Thomas Jackson, who from the evidence of the *Commonplace Book* he had read extensively, and who Hutton describes as writing in the “idom” of the ancient Christian Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 500.)²⁵⁵ Both Jackson and Traherne speak in emblematic terms of a “borrowed” light from the fountain of light. The lesser light of the sun, and the light of human understanding both “dependent” upon the greater and more perfect light of God. Traherne, however, does not share what Hutton describes as Jackson’s “Platonist contempt for the natural world as being inferior to the ... realm of the divine.”²⁵⁶ Traherne dwells on the seemingly “inherent” nature of this borrowed light. The unity of form and matter is, he illustrates, like a child’s swirling fire stick which seems to make a solid circle of fire.²⁵⁷ Without this material representation or illumination the soul would remain in darkness. The sun is no mere illustration of divine power but an integral part of the universal circulation and a source of marvel. Traherne’s pervasive thanksgiving for the sun echoes the solar hymn found in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite:

What praise is not demanded by the blaze of the sun? For it is from the Good that its light comes, and it is itself the image of the Good ... Indeed, just as the

²⁵¹ Matar, "Thomas Traherne's Solar Mysticism," p. 58.

²⁵² As we note above, Traherne’s views on the possible existence of other suns is inconsistent. Although his placing of the sun at the centre of each world is consistent with his reverence for the sun as an emblem of God.

²⁵³ Ficino saw the sun mediating the influence of the world soul. See Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science*, p. 129ff. More linked the fire of Hermes to the world soul. See Guinsburg, "Henry More, Thomas Vaughan and the Late Renaissance Magical Tradition," p. 48.

²⁵⁴ See Hunter, "The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of Plastic Nature," pp. 205-206.

²⁵⁵ Hutton, "Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse, Aristotelian," pp. 645-646.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 646.

goodness proper to the deity permeates everything that exists, ... so that it illumines every creature and gives it life, ... and its height and breadth, its cause and its purpose; so likewise with the image in which divine Goodness is revealed, that great sun which is wholly light, and whose brightness is unceasing.

Traherne writes, as does Dionysius, of how the Sun has the “power to make things grow, and flourish, to quicken, Ripen, Cherish and comfort all the Creatures,”²⁵⁸ and of the vivifying, purifying and renewing powers of the sun. Dionysius describes how the sun “gathers together all things that are scattered, turning them towards himself as their source and centre and perfect fulfilment.” The light “uses its property of revelation through images to gather together and draw to itself ... everything that receives its rays ...”²⁵⁹

In his commenatry upon Dionysius’ hymn to the sun, Clément notes that the sun both “symbolizes and incarnates the life-giving radiation of the divine glory ... The Good and the Beautiful, spreading its presence like the sun, initiates a Trinitarian game of separation and conjunction; it gives each object its limits and at the same time its urge towards communion, its leap in the light towards the fount of the sunshine, towards the centre where the lines converge.”²⁶⁰ The image of a child’s swirling fire stick that seems to make a solid circle of fire indicates just such a convergence: a union of elements so close that it seems that the fire is inherent in the air. This image takes on a Hermetic hue when we consider Hermes’ vision of the universe contained and whirled about by the Word:

But the Workman Mind, together with the Word, containing the Circles and Whirling them about, turned round as a Wheel his own Workmanships; and suffered them to be turned from an infinite Beginning, to an undeterminable End; for they alwayes begin where they end.²⁶¹

Traherne nowhere plays this “Trinitarian game of separation and conjunction” so adroitly, or comes so close to the point of convergence, as in the chapter dedicated to demonstrating what a “Glorious a Creature” the sun is, “What an Image of the Divine Essence, how great an Embleme of the Holy Trinity.”²⁶² He describes the sun as “that Orb of Embodied Light.” The themes are communication, filling, bounty – a ceaseless and free pouring forth. But also

²⁵⁷ KG p. 353, ll. 249-250 (f. 227v.)

²⁵⁸ KG p. 317, ll. 86-87 (f. 195v.)

²⁵⁹ Dionysius the [Pseudo-] Areopagite, *Divine Names*, IV, 2 (PG 3, 696.) Cited in Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Text and Commentary*, (London: New City Press, 1993), pp. 221-222.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁶¹ Everard, *Divine Pymander*, II.15.

²⁶² KG p. 356 (f. 229v.), title chapter 20.

typical of Traherne, is the understanding that the Sun, like God, is generative of itself –

The Sun is an Embleme of his Wisdom, becaus it sheddeth forth Superfluous Beams, which would be a Burden to it self, and in the same Act refines, purifies, and Cloaths it self with Glory, upholds, Continues, and feeds it self, adornes, and Comforts all its objects, nay Enlarges, and Magnifies it self, while it Glorifies the Univers.²⁶³

The Sun, Traherne asserts, is the “Fountain and the End of it self” and emblematic of Christ, the alpha and omega, the beginning and end of all things. In the “Act of Shining” it enlivens and inspires others creatures “that they may impart themselvs in pure Exhalations,” it “Attracts, and Exalts, and refines, and Feeds upon, and heightens them at last to the Strength, and Purity of Flame and Glory.”²⁶⁴ Atoms descending from the sun are compared to Christ in the poem that concludes “Atom” in *Commentaries of Heaven*, as they gain a greater glory in their descent than in remaining on high. The idea is again related to the notion that “the SUN clothes itself by shedding forth its rays.” Like atoms and the sun, Christ is neither diminished nor changed, but fulfilled by this activity. Under “Assumption” in the *Commentaries* Traherne addresses the “difficulty” of how Christ is able to take on human form “without any prejudice to his Immutabilitie.” He answers

Verily Jesus Christ is yesterday, and To day, and the same for ever. In Him there is no variableness nor Shadow of Changing. He is Alpha and Omega, and as the Heavens do by a large Embrace contain the earth, so doth he by his Eternitie contain all Things in Himself, immutably forever. The Sun by one Act of shining sendeth forth many Beams; and he at once by the Infinite Life of his eternal essence is in all Operations, through out all Ages and Durations. ...he was All Act from Everlasting ... There is no Time wherin he was not the fountain and the End of all Things, the Creator Upholder and Enjoyer of them.²⁶⁵

Traherne sees the hypostatical union of God and man in Christ, as an eternal operation of God – “Which Trismegistus Notably observes. While making GOD and Eternitie both one, he saith GOD is abov all, and about all, and the Beams of GOD are Operations.”²⁶⁶ The beams of the Son irradiate “all” and are the means by which all things, though temporal are contained within Eternity.²⁶⁷ Traherne also describes the beams of the Sun as “its Substance out of its Orb or Disk, and freely present in all its Objects.” It is the “Act of Shining” that

²⁶³ KG p. 358, ll. 88-92 (f. 231v.)

²⁶⁴ KG p. 358, ll. 114-127 (f. 232r.)

²⁶⁵ CH f.152v.1.

²⁶⁶ CH f.152v.2.

drives the whole circulation: “Life it self is his substance: His Life is in the Act, and his Act in the Essence.”²⁶⁸

Traherne conflates representation with manifestation, image with emanation: – “While the Sun Manifesteth the Glory of God, it is thus an Embleme of the Blessed Trinity ... as the Embleme is admired by evry Ey that sees it clearly, so the prototype is adored, which is the Fountain of the Same.” Furthermore, “In the Beatifick Vision we shall find it impossible not to see the Trinity while we understand the unitie.”²⁶⁹ It is a “Glorious Miracle in the Sun” that its beams “Scatter themselves over all the World” and “enters deeply, and inspires all with Life and vertue, Strength, and Motion ...”²⁷⁰ Humanity is served not only by the concentration of beams upon the individual, but by the enlivening action of beams upon all objects that “do me Service” and upon the friends “in all Worlds” that “lov me” and make “me to lov them.” The Sun is emblematic for it points to “How much greater God is” in “his Infinit Lov” but it is a “Deadly mistake not to know” that the “friends” that enjoy the sun and the world it causes to be, and who are the “delightfull Spectators of my Glory” are “my Joys and Treasures.”²⁷¹ The sun penetrates so deeply that it not only inspires the love of God, but conveys it. As if to emphasise this penetration, Traherne implicitly conflates Sun and Son in blessing the “Sun of Righteousness for this Light.”²⁷² Into this complex of Light and Life, Traherne, as we elaborated under “the Omnipresence of Action” has interwoven Love – an “Infinite love” that “whispers in every Gale of Wind”²⁷³ and is “The first Original, and Spring of things” – a love that begets the Son,

the Light of all our Comfort, the Fountain of all our Wisdom²⁷⁴ and the Sun of all our Consolation, whose Rays Spreading abroad throughout the univers, produce the Day of Glory;²⁷⁵

But Leaving the Allegorie, and Coming to the Matter

²⁶⁷ “For a Thing may be Temporal in it self, that is Eternal in God.” (CH “Atom” f.165v.2.)

²⁶⁸ KG p. 359, ll. 171-172 (f. 233r.) See also “The Anticipation:” “That so the End should be the very Spring, / Of evry Glorious Thing; ... And as the Sun by Shining’s clothd with Beams, / So from Himself to All His Glory Streams ...” (ll. 37-38, 52-53.)

²⁶⁹ KG p. 360, ll. 212-218 (f. 234r.)

²⁷⁰ KG p. 361, ll. 220-236 (f. 234v.)

²⁷¹ KG p. 361, ll. 243-248 (f. 234v-235r.)

²⁷² KG p. 361, ll. 253-254 (f. 235r.) The term appears in Malachi 4:2.

²⁷³ KG f. p. 313, ll. 143-146 (f. 192v.) See 2.1.4.

²⁷⁴ See Psalm 63.1-6.

Traherne's use of the terms "Image," "embleme," "Type," "reflection," and elsewhere "similitude" need, then, to be understood in the context of a Christian tradition shaped by the mystery of the Incarnation. The divine attributes of Wisdom, Goodness and Power do not exist in a state of pure detachment, but, in Traherne's orthodox scheme, find their perfection in expression and embodiment. As Gunton states, Christ should not be "understood rather docetically as completely freed from the trappings of space and time ... present to present and future eras, as a Platonic form is present to them all." Rather, "God as the Creator of the temporal order through his outgoing Word, not only gives temporal and spatial form to what is other than himself (creation), but takes it also. He becomes flesh."²⁷⁶ In light of this teaching it is important to assess to what extent Traherne, as an avowed and passionate Trinitarian, shared the regard of the Cambridge Platonists for the Greek Church Father, Origen. I would argue that Beachcroft's identification of Traherne with Origenism with and Neoplatonism needs some qualification.²⁷⁷

While, as Patrides notes, Protestants generally appealed to the authority of the primitive church – as does Traherne – "it was always understood that Origen should be on the whole avoided and that the other Greek fathers should be studied in the light of Tertullian and especially St Augustine." The Cambridge Platonists, he concludes "inverted the procedure with almost mathematical precision."²⁷⁸ Traherne shares a passion for many of the ideas associated with Origen and the Greek Fathers and championed by the Cambridge Platonists – free will, universal salvation, and the pre-existent soul (including Christ's human soul.) Traherne shares their irritation with the complexities of medieval scholasticism (although he does not entirely reject it, and employs many of its terms) and is also attracted to one of the few Latin Fathers favoured by the Cambridge Platonists – namely Aquinas and his formulation of "the Graeco-Roman theory of natural law."²⁷⁹

It might be argued, however, that Origen's teachings on the Trinity were a significant point of difference between Traherne and several Cambridge Platonists.²⁸⁰ Gale associates Origen with the Arian heresy, which came to fresh notoriety in the Socinian

²⁷⁵ KG p. 310, ll. 1-14 (f.190r.)

²⁷⁶ Colin E. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), p. 134.

²⁷⁷ T. O. Beachcroft, "Traherne and the Cambridge Platonists," *Dublin Review* 186 (1930), p. 281.

²⁷⁸ Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 5. See also Patrick Grant, "Original Sin and the Fall of Man in Thomas Traherne," *ELH* 38 (1971) for his survey of the use made of the early church fathers in the seventeenth century.

²⁷⁹ Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, *ibid.* See 2.1.2 - 2.1.3.

Patrides also lists St Anselm and his theory of the Atonement, as being attractive to the Cambridge Platonists. Traherne, however, departs significantly from Anselm's view. See 2.4.5 for a discussion of Traherne's understanding of the Atonement.

²⁸⁰ I am indebted to Sarah Hutton for this suggestion.

controversy of Traherne's time and is generally highly critical of "Platonizing Christians." Echoing widely held opinions – including those of Richard Baxter,²⁸¹ and Traherne's bishop, Herbert Croft,²⁸² - Gale decries the "errors in the first four centuries after Christ," which he attributes to the unhealthy influence of Greek philosophy on the early Christians – especially the School of Alexandria - and describes as persisting though the wiles of Papist Scholastic philosophy. Traherne includes in his *Commonplace Book*, under "Philosophie," Gale's criticism, backed by the "Learned *Stillingfleet*"²⁸³ of the "Idolizing humour of crying up *Platonick* philosophie, and making it equal to, if not above *Scripture*" which

had too great influence on many of those whom we count *Christian Fathers*, especially *Origen*; and does continue up to this day among many *Platonists*.²⁸⁴

Much the same point is repeated under "Idolatrie."²⁸⁵ Traherne's wariness of Origen is indicated not only by his extracts from Gale, but by the absence (as far as I have found) of any direct reference to him in his other works.

It is important, however, to address the question of whether Traherne's Christology is amenable to Origen's as Origen is one of the figures associated with the development of the notion of the the Cosmic Christ. Teilhard was indebted to the Greek Fathers, and according to Lyons, "had Origen in mind" when formulating his notion of the cosmic Christ.²⁸⁶ Amenable to Teilhard, and to Traherne, is Origen's "strongly positive" teaching regarding the Son of God: "He belongs eternally to the godhead: he is the perfect mirror of the Father's goodness, love, truth, and all his other attributes, reflecting them in assimilable form to all the rest of the creation."²⁸⁷ Both Origen and Teilhard, argues Lyons, "deal with the fundamental problem in cosmic Christology — mediation between the absolute and the contingent, between Creator and creatures." As Hague observes, Teilhard began by describing the soul of the world as an intermediary between the evolving world and the absolute, supernatural, principle of unity in the universe - which Teilhard understood as Christ, the Omega Point. He came, however, to reject this duality and return, according to

²⁸¹ See Grant, "Original Sin and the Fall of Man in Thomas Traherne," p. 41.

²⁸² Croft, *Naked Truth : the First Part, ot the True State of the Primitive Church by an Humble Moderator*, pp. 3-4.

²⁸³ *Origin Sacrae*. Book 3 Chap 3, 13.

²⁸⁴ CB f. 78v.1 ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp. 264.

²⁸⁵ CB ff. 56r.2-56v.1 ; *Ibid.*, p. 264-266.

²⁸⁶ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 5.

²⁸⁷ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 1194.

Also amenable to Traherne, as will be argued in the following section, is Origen's view of "true knowledge" as "the participation of the purified soul in the Wisdom of the Word and a way towards deification and union with Christ."

Hague, to a “true patristic and medieval theology,” albeit it in a new evolutionary cosmological context, in styling Christ as directly filling all things and as the end of all things. While Teilhard ultimately rejected any duality in the relation between Christ and the world, Origen held to Platonic idealism, and as Lyons sums “presented the Son not merely as divine hypostasis but also as a subordinate cosmic principle and thereby helped sow the seeds of Arianism.”²⁸⁸

Traherne engages with Platonic philosophy but as an ardent Trinitarian, resists and veers away from the dualism of Platonic idealism. The Ideal Forms and Divine Ideas, as Traherne notes from Gale, were widely interpreted by both pagan and Christian Platonists as the creative thoughts of God.²⁸⁹ “God is the Archetype, or Universal exemplar of all things made,”²⁹⁰ the “prototype of the Universe.”²⁹¹ The Mind of God, “his Wisdome, is the Nature and Substance of all Ideas” which “according to the Sentiment” of Plutarch, Philo and Plotinus “are the “Origines of things.”²⁹² As Happold observes, “Christian Neoplatonism equated the Logos of St John’s Gospel, the second person of the Trinity, the divine Activity, the World Principle, the That which is the basis of the manifold, and which was incarnate in Jesus Christ, with the *Nous* (Mind) of Plotinus. Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen call the *Logos* the Idea of Ideas.”²⁹³ While Gale finds the Platonic notion acceptable to a degree, because derived from the biblical account of creation, he objects to the application of the Neoplatonic Trinity to the Christian.²⁹⁴ The difficulty is in making the Idea (Mind or Wisdom) an emanation of God, an intermediary principle, instead

²⁸⁸ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 5.

²⁸⁹ CB “Divinity” f.35r ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp. 174-175, 177, 178.

²⁹⁰ CB “God” f.50r ; *Ibid.*, p. 178.

²⁹¹ CB Creation f. 30r ; *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²⁹² CB “God” f.50r ; *Ibid.*, p. 178 cont’d.

Although not noted in the CB, Gale attributes this passage to Augustine: “Thus *August. Stouch. Eugubinus, de Peren. Philosof. l.1.c.12.*”

See also “Perfection” where Traherne notes Gale’s equating of the Divine Archetype to the Judaeo-Christian notion of the image of God. Referring to the *Timaeus*, he writes:

... when ‘the Father beheld this Mobile *Animal*, the image of the Eternal Gods, which he had begotten, he rejoyced, and was recreated. --- and by so much the more, when he considered that it was made exactly conformable to it’s Paradeigme, or Eternal exemplar.’ Thus *Jo. Grammaticus* touching the parallel betwixt *Moses*, and *Plato. Austin de Civit, Dei. lib. 11. cap. 21.* enterprets *Moses* in the same manner, that *Plato does*. ‘In that (saies he) ‘tis said *Gen. 1.31 God saw all things that they were good.* We must understand the approbation of his work made according to Art, which is the Wisdom of God, &c.’ God’s seing all things to be Good implies their *Conformitie* to that *Original Idea*, or *Eternal Platforme* of Divine Wisdome, and Decrees. (CB 75v ; selections from Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p.333.)

²⁹³ F. C. Happold, *Mysticism : A Study and an Anthology*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, c1970), 204.

²⁹⁴ As Traherne notes from Gale (a few pages after the above extract, under “Idea”) it is “mistaken” to believe, as does Laertius, that the Primary Idea, and the secondary Exemplar in Plato are “Synonymous.” This “*Exemplar*, or *intelligible Image*” is by the Pythagoreans “generally stiled ... *intelligible World*, which they place in the middle, betwixt the Supreme World or the Divine essence, and the Sensible World, or Universe.” (CB. f. 55r.2 ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 181-2.)

of being “Synonymous” with the One. As Gale makes clear elsewhere, those “drenched in Platonick speculations touching the Divine word of John with that of Plato” make the error of separating the Idea and Exemplar.²⁹⁵ This is the same difficulty that we have discussed in relation to the notion of plastic nature, or More’s “Spirit of Nature” – a concept that Traherne seems to pass over with disinterest. Central to Traherne’s thought is the synergistic principle of tri-unity in the godhead which is generative of the world. As the elements of the Trinity inform each other, they inform the world; the principle of communication spills over from the godhead, creating, informing, filling the universe.

It is through this lens that Traherne finds, as we noted earlier,²⁹⁶ intimations of the Christian Trinity in “Trismegistus that Sublime and Mysterious Oracle among the Gentiles, who if he were a Heathen, was the Strangest Heathen that ever the world produced.”²⁹⁷ Hermes, says Traherne under “Generation” in the *Commonplace Book*,

(Extracts from Hermes underlined)

Affirmeth The Father to be in the Son whom he calleth the Mind, the Son in the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit in the Creatures. All which are by the Production of Eternity. For all this Universal Body, in which are all Bodies, is full of Soul, the Soul full of Minde, the Minde full of God. (For within he fills them, and without he contains them, quickening the Universe.²⁹⁸

Traherne is clearly aware of the scepticism surrounding the provenance of the Hermetic texts²⁹⁹ but is also inspired by the intuitive wisdom he finds in them. The Hermetic corpus was especially revered by seventeenth century Neoplatonists, but as Marks notes, “it is the

²⁹⁵ Sarah Hutton quotes a passage from Gale, where he points out the errors Arius, Samosata and Origen in “adopting a Platonic interpretation of the *logos*”: “these Philosophic Notions about the Platonic *logos* and *tria* [...] supposed a real difference betwixt *ho pater* the Father, *ho logos* the Word, and *psyche tou kosmou* the Soul of the World.” (Ibid., p. 140.) See Hutton, “The Neoplatonic Roots of Arianism : Ralph Cudworth and Theophilus Gale,” p. 144.

²⁹⁶ See 2.1.3.

²⁹⁷ KG p. 463, ll. 118-120 (f.332r.)

²⁹⁸ CB f. 48bv ; Everard, *Divine Pymander*, X.37, 38.

²⁹⁹ In 1614 Isaac Causaubon questioned the authenticity of the Hermetic texts. Traherne acknowledges this doubt over the texts but reveres the intuitive wisdom contained in them. “Whether this Author bearing the name of Tris. be that ancient Heathen, the Egyptian Hermes that was contemporary with Moses or som thing elder then he is a Q. as it is also whether there were any such Hermes or no. The Mysteries seem too clear Perspicuous & Divine for any Heathen ... However it be it is a venerable & learned Author of great Esteem & Authority in the World, & by the Common Consent of all learned men, many grave & venerable Mysteries are contained in it: for the sake of which also the Worke has so many Ages been esteemed Hermes.” CB “Generation” f. 47v-48r. As Marks notes, the passage may be borrowed from another source, though the sentiment is Traherne’s and is repeated in *Christian Ethicks*. See Marks, “Thomas Traherne and Hermes Trismegistus,” pp. 118-119.

conclusion of modern authorities that the hermetic philosophy is an eclectic mixture consisting of Aristotelianism, Platonism, and Stoicism” and Traherne clearly extracts elements congenial to his own thought, leaving aside those passages opposing the physical and spiritual worlds, and counselling flight from the material and corporeal realm.³⁰⁰

Traherne clearly has Hermes in mind when he notes:

Som of the Ancients,³⁰¹ and some Modern Authors among the Christians, divers also of the Jewish Rabbies hav been of the opinion that GOD is Archetypon [sic] of the World, and that there is nothing visible in this Material Univer, but is the Type of some thing invisible in the Highest Heavens: which is not a Dream, tho som hav (in a Manner) but dreamed of it. The Similitude of his Wisdom, Goodness, and Glory, of his Purity and Beauty, Greatness and Majesty, is aptly Typified in this Material Tabernacle. The Light is an Embleme of his Diviner Knowledg; the Existence of the World a Curious Figure of his Eternal Essence; Fire a Material picture of his Lov; the Waters are emblemes of those living Affections that flow in the Bosoms of Men and Angels.³⁰²

Traherne is far from meaning that divinity is entirely transcendent to the world and that the world is composed of mere shadows of the Divine Ideas; the world houses God and his “Familie” and gives substance to what otherwise might seem “a Dream.” For Traherne the world is at once the type and the offspring of the Word. As he notes from Hermes:

The Elements of the World [are] made Of the Will and Counsell of God; which taking the Word, and beholding the beautifull World (in the Archetype thereof) imitated it, and so made this World, by the principles and vitall Seeds or Soul-like productions of it self.³⁰³

Although Hermes posits, between the Word of God and nature, “another Minde, the Workman” who is the “God of the Fire, and the Spirit” and fashions the seven spheres which “contain the Sensible World,” he also describes how the Word of God “Straightway

³⁰⁰ Ibid., fn 6, pp. 119 ; p. 125. It has also been suggested that at least some the writings post date the advent of Christianity.

³⁰¹ Among the ancients Traherne has in mind is Hermes Trismegistus. Under “Generation” in the *Commonplace Book* he includes the following extract from *The Divine Pymander* (II.12): “ ... Hast thou seen in thy minde that Archetypall Form? which was before the interminated and infinite beginning? ... The Elements of the World [are] made Of the Will and Counsell of God ; which taking the Word, and beholding the beautifull World (in the Archetype thereof) imitated it, and so made this World, by the principles and vitall Seeds or Soul-like productions of it self.” (CB f. 48bv.2)

³⁰² KG p. 362, ll. 3-13 (ff. 235r – 235v.)

³⁰³ CB f. 48bv.2 ; Everard, *Divine Pymander*, II.12.

leaped out ... into the clean and pure Workmanship of nature, and was united to the Workman, Minde; for it was Consubstantiall.” The Mind of God is described as “Male and Female, Life and Light.”³⁰⁴

Shortly after his observation on the opinion of “some ancient and modern authors,” that God is the Archetype of the world, and a reflection on how “The Scriptures abound with such delicate shadows, or sensible Representations” Traherne, importantly, moves on:

But leaving the Allegorie, and Coming to the matter, we may Contemplat how Wonderful God is in his House, and Famelie ... Here is a Visible World, a World of Treasures on Earth to be Enjoyed.³⁰⁵

John Everard, the translator of the *Divine Pymander* so avidly read by Traherne, perhaps indicates the direction that Traherne is tending to. For Everard, as summed by Jones,

Every created and finite thing ... from a grain of sand to a radiant sun and from a blade of grass to the Seraph that is nearest God - is a beam or ray or expression of that eternal Reality ... reveals God in space in time; and all created things together ... revealing a single organic universe “acted and guided by one Spirit” – the Soul of all that is.³⁰⁶

In this, Traherne and Everard move some way beyond the concept of a world created in pale imitation of “eternal Reality,” and draw upon an essentially Christic and Thomist understanding of creation. The Son as “the only Word,” says Aquinas, “is expressive not only of the Father, but of all creatures.”³⁰⁷

Traherne’s resistance to dualistic idealism and his insistence on the “Unitie of Matter and Form” and the fusion of “Light and Life” is, therefore, informed by his Trinitarianism and limits the degree to which he might be understood as a Platonist. I would disagree with John Spencer Hill’s placing of Traherne squarely in the Platonist tradition and his assesment that “The external universe was meaningful [to Traherne] ... primarily as a metaphor for “the Everlasting Expansion of what we feel and behold within us.”³⁰⁸ Nor,” he continues, “are the beauties of nature more than symbols of the transcendent Creator

³⁰⁴ CB f. 48bv.2 ; Ibid., II.13-14.

³⁰⁵ KG p. 363, ll. 36-37, 53-54 (ff. 236r-236v.)

³⁰⁶ Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 247. Jones cites John Everard. Some *Gospel Treasures Opened*, (London 1653), pp. 637, 658.

³⁰⁷ ST I 34.3.

³⁰⁸ CM 5.3.

whose immanence and omnipresence they render intelligible.”³⁰⁹ The key text in this regard is Romans 1:20:

For that which may be known of GOD is manifest in them. For the Invisible things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his Eternal Power and Godhead.

Traherne’s interpretation of this text differs significantly from that of Origen’s. For Origen, the text indicates that “the visible world contains teaching about the invisible world.” The creatures, he writes, “have the task of elevating the soul and guiding it to the contemplation of celestial objects.” The apostle thus shows “without any possible doubt that ... each visible reality is a symbol, and refers to an invisible reality to which it is related.”³¹⁰ Traherne, also citing Romans 1:20 in the second chapter of *The Kingdom of God*, begins in a Platonist vein. He describes the “Kingdom of God” as a “Mirror of his essence wherein all his Attributes and perfections are to be seen,” “Objects of Delight” are taken “into the Understanding, and as Ideas of Perfection into the Will; they being the causes of our Joy, and the Copies of our Imitation.” He also, however, describes the Kingdom as a “living fountain” and sees the visible world not as an allegory for, but as the *site* of the “Life of God:”

Nor indeed could the Life of GOD consist without his Operations, nor can his Attributes but in them any where be found. Since therefore God himself, and the Eternal Generation of his Son, are made Known by his Works, and his Holy Spirit dwelleth in us, when their Glory is Revealed. Since the Kingdom of GOD was made to Be Enjoyed, and we are Capable of all its Glory, since it is the Center of our Union, and the sphere of our Communion with GOD;³¹¹

The language of activity is married to the language of consistency – the embodiment of “God himself” through “the Eternal Generation of his Son.” Traherne gives primacy to the power of perception - there is a distance to be travelled in the Understanding for the idea of perfection to take root in the will - but the perfection is there “to be seen” and “dwelleth in us.”³¹² The Kingdom of God is the centre of union between the visible and invisible. As Traherne states in *Select Meditations*:

... the Heavens above are in a Mirror seen, as far beneath them, as they are above,

³⁰⁹ Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature*, , pp. 47, 50.

³¹⁰ Origen. *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Cited in Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, pp. 220-221.

³¹¹ KG p. 259, ll. 52-58 (f. 150v–150r.)

³¹² In this Traherne differs from many Platonists who give primacy to the will.

and both Conjoynd make an Intire Sphere, Seeming Divers but the very Same.³¹³

Through the motif of reflection Traherne unites type and prototype in a single reality. The mirror was a key image in the medieval view of what Wildiers describes as a “cosmos ordered by wisdom and love, in complete harmony with the image of God visible in the person of Christ” in which there is a “real interpenetration of the cosmic and supernatural order” and the realms of Cosmology and Revelation, nature and grace reveal the same structure. Contemplation of one reveals the truth in the other “just as two mirrors which reflect each other’s’ rays.”³¹⁴ Traherne applies a similar world-view to an atom:

When in all Its Operations I behold an Atom and see it representing my GOD unto me: When I behold a Mirror of his Essence, in it and a Temple of his presence, a Token of his Lov, and an offspring of his Will, an attendant upon his Throne, an object of his Joy, a Spectacle of his Ey, a Work of his Hand, a Subject of his pleasure, and a means of his Glory! Me thinks his Holiness that Suffers him not to make any thing Excellent than is possible, becomes Visible in a Manner, and Shines most Divinely.³¹⁵

Traherne is not describing two parallel tiers of reality but a multi-faceted and dynamic relationship between God and world. The Archetype shines upon and through the type. The type is offspring of the Archetype, as well as its dwelling place. It is also an object of its pleasure and the vehicle of its glory. The divine gives of itself in creating another, and in the joy of the creature delights itself. “The fountain is Seated in the object of its beams, as the sun in a Mirror: Thence it darteth Beams upon it Self again, and becometh its own Object in the Fruition of another.”³¹⁶

We might extend what Ira Clark says of Traherne’s “transcendence” of the personal typology of David and Adam to his understanding of “this Material Universe” as “the Type of some thing invisible in the Highest Heavens” and a “Curious Figure” of God’s “Eternal Essence.”³¹⁷

Traherne understood typology. But just as he blurred individuality by fusing personalities and expanding them, so he characteristically came to overlook those disparities between type and antitype which Reformed typologists emphasised. He

³¹³ SM III.78.

³¹⁴ Wildiers, *ibid.*, p. 77.

³¹⁵ KG p. 348, ll. 17-23 (ff. 221v-222r.)

³¹⁶ KG p. 299, ll. 53-55 (f. 182v.)

³¹⁷ KG p. 362, ll. 6-12 (f. 235r – 235v.)

stressed their similarities to the degree that the type is virtually absorbed into the antitype.³¹⁸

Traherne's transcendence of typology approximates Coleridge's philosophy of symbol in which, as Perkins describes, there is no mere allegorical allusion to "a unity of appearance and ideality," but there "is an inward unity of the objective reality and subjective apperception of that reality."³¹⁹ Coleridge, like Traherne, was attracted to the Platonic and alchemical symbols of sun and light representing reason and revelation, but beyond this, the sun is also "a living, dynamic, transforming power."³²⁰ Underlying this common approach is a shared emphasis upon the incarnational dynamics of the Christian Logos. For Traherne, the ultimate antitype is Christ – the Light of the world, who shines in it as the source and sustainer of every being and as the one in whom all things consist.

We have noted the transposition of *Light* and *Life* in Traherne's citation of John's text – "*And the Light was the Life of Men*" – and how the concrete particulars of material light and the fiery sun are of such great importance and such a source of amazement to him. Traherne's use of this text as "An Allusion of Infinit Depth; a Divine and Eternal Myserie, being painted out in a temporal, and Visible, Created Wonder," differs from the orthodox and purely allegorical understanding of John's description of Christ as the light of the world. Many of Traherne's Anglican contemporaries insisted, like Bishop Cosin, that the expression is "but a metaphor" and that its meaning is "transferred from the natural to a figurative sense" which "takes a higher signification." The "principal scope of the Evangelist in this place," concludes Cosin, is either "the essential Light which is Christ" or the "supernatural light of faith and grace, which is the working of Christ upon them and their lives that believe in Him."³²¹ Cosin illustrates his point about the intransigence of some souls to the light of reason by speaking in metaphorical terms of "divers and sundry men [who] walk by the sea" who, although lit by the same sun, pick out objects of various worth – some fixing upon "little light pebbles" while others seek after "the precious pearl and

³¹⁸ Ira Clark, "God's Immanence in All and the Poet's Imitation of all Adams : Thomas Traherne's Transcendence of the Neotypological Lyric," *Christ Revealed : The History of the Neotypical Lyric in the English Renaissance*, University of Florida Monographs. Humanities ; no. 51 (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1982), p. 140.

³¹⁹ Mary Anne Perkins, *Coleridge's Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p. 49.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³²¹ John Cosin, "Paris, In Festo Nativitatis Christi, 1651 ... St. John i, 9, 1. ... Erat Ille lux illa, et vera illa lux, &c," *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, John Cosin, Lord Bishop of Durham. Now First Collected.*, vol. 1, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), pp. 282-283. Cosin extends this metaphorical approach to the eucharistic injunction to eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood, "for the new doctrine of a gross and corporal manner is not Catholic." (pp. 282-283.)

amber.”³²² Traherne, however, is driving at a more intimate connection between the material and the divine. As one of the beachcombers described by Cosin, Traherne is disposed to value the pebble as much as the pearl, to see God in a grain of sand, and to bask in the material light as the means by which the immaterial is understood. There is an intrinsic value in the microcosm as an expression of the macrocosm. The light of Christ is manifest in both: “The same Spirits which affect the Ey, inform the Soul, and are the material causes of its senses and Affections.” Traherne speaks of John’s “Allusion” but it is an allusion that points to the principle of fusion, not simply played out on two levels, but uniting them: why else should all Bodies be porous, “But that they may receiv the Influences of Heaven.”³²³

His particular understanding of notions such as emblem and representation is further illustrated in the chapters on the “Material Univers” which interweave scientific observation with divine reflections and passages of scripture, rich in organic imagery, drawn from such texts as the Psalms and Ecclesiastes. In Chapter 26 concerning “Of the Seas and Rivers, of Trees and Herbs and Flowers, of Minerals and Precious Stones” Traherne observes:

The Springs and Rivers, which flow from the Sea, are Branches of the Benefit it conferreth on us. They peep out in remoter Regions, as tokens and Representatives of the ocean, from which they flow, and to Shadow forth that Great and universal Circulation, that is deprehended in the World, and which indeed hath Emblemes of those Effects of it self in evry thing.³²⁴

The passage runs into an extract from Ecclesiastes describing the circuits of the waters, the sun and the wind – “All the Rivers run into the Sea, yet the Sea is not full, into the place from whence they com, thither do they return ...”³²⁵ Traherne picks up the theme of eternal return, observing that corn and straw, consumed by cattle, “being Changed into Excrements return in to the field, and enrich it for more: Nothing is unclean, that is So Wise and Holy.”³²⁶ Everything in Traherne’s scheme is Wise and Holy as an emblem and effect of the “Great and Universal Circulation.” He speaks of the springs and rivers flowing before us as intimations of the equally tangible but distant and unseen sea from which they flow. Such, implies Traherne, is the relation between the world and its unseen creator, the one flowing into the other.

It is the perfection of God that his ideas do not remain “meer possibilitie” but

³²² Ibid., p. 287.

³²³ KG p. 350, ll. 116-120 (f. 224r.) See 2.4.3, “By Systole and Diastole.”

³²⁴ KG p. 395, ll. 50-54 (f. 265r.)

³²⁵ Eccl. 1:7, 5-6.

become “Actual” – that the embryonic life contained in the “Kernel of Eternity” be allowed to grow and fruit. “For if things possible be Infinit in variety, and things Actual Infinitely better, How pleasing, and Glorious, and Blessed must things Actual be?”³²⁷ This is the creative, incarnating action of the Trinity – the fulfillment of the antitype in the prototype:

GOD is existent, and the Generation of his Son is Actual, and the procession of the Holy Ghost. These are better then all possibles whatsoever. The World and the Kingdom of God are Existent. So are Angels, and Men, those high and sacred Images of the Deitie. Infinit Goodness Wisdom and Power and Blessedness are Existent. And the Similitudes of these in the Creatures. What can be more Excellent then these? The Antitypes are in God and the Prototypes themselvs are Apparent in their Similitudes, as Causes are in their Effects, and Objects in the Powers Enjoying them. Which since God is Infinit in all his Ways, must be Infinitely Glorious.³²⁸

Traherne links the economy of antitype and prototype with that of Act and work. It is God’s “infinite Pleasure to be Infinitely exerted.”

The Act in it self is the Substance, and the Effect its Shadow. The Work produced is one thing, the Act producing it another. But there is a Real Resemblance, that is fit and absolute between them.³²⁹

Traherne demonstrates a rich Christological understanding of reality that echoes the ‘moderate realism’³³⁰ of medieval Scholastics such as Aquinas and Duns Scotus, in which there is a real interconnection between divine archetypes, the human soul and the world of particulars. It is out of this sense of interconnection that Traherne

³²⁶ KG p. 395, ll. 54-61 (f. 265r-265v.)

³²⁷ KG p. 339, ll. 97-99 (f. 213v.)

³²⁸ KG p. 339, ll. 99-107 (f. 214r.)

³²⁹ KG p. 340, ll. 137-140 (f. 214v.)

³³⁰ Like Aquinas, Scotus sought a middle path between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism. Knowledge of universal ideas, he held, is acquired not purely through the senses nor by divine illumination. The term ‘realism’ is used in the Scholastic sense whereby “abstract concepts (‘universals’) have a real existence apart from the individuals (‘particulars’) in which they are embodied.” (See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., ed. F.L. Cross, E.A. Livingstone, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 1370.) The early scholastics, Erigena and Anselm were influenced by such Neoplatonist realism; Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Bonaventura are associated with various degrees and types of moderate realism. Aquinas maintained that ideas have their origin in the senses, but universal archetypes also exist in the mind of God, outside and prior to their manifestation in the particular. Both positions are in opposition to ‘nominalism.’ William of Ockham held universals to exist purely as concepts in the human mind and the world of reality to have no inherent rationality but to be contingent on the will of God which can only be known through Revelation. It has been argued that the severing of faith from any interconnection between the world and the rational intellect marked the fall of Scholastic theology into abstraction. (See Ford, “The Natural Law Context of Thomas More’s *Utopia*,” pp. 73-78.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

synthesises Light and Life, and finds the Sun to be “the Key and Clew of Nature’s Labyrinth.”

For the Sun is the Root of Light and Life, and gives Light in Philosophie, being a fountain of knowledg, as well as of Formes. All Interiors and assisting Formes proceeding from it, and being truly Its own in all the Creatures, as all Exterior Idæes and Beauties be, which its Light occasions.³³¹

³³¹ KG p. 383, ll. 125-129 (f. 254r.)

The Matter is so Intricat, and Deeply Entangled

The “Key and Clew of Nature,” then, lies in the Act of Shining - in bringing the possible into actuality, growing into fruition, bringing the Archetype into prototypical life, and the Word into flesh. Almighty Power is able

to shut up a Sea of Sweetness in the smallest Sand, and to Enrich a Centre with an infinit Temple, to bring Honey out of a Rock of Stone, Good out of Evil, Light out of Darkness, Order out of Confusion ...³³²

“It may riot in the Excess of Imaginary Pleasures and make them real.”³³³ By virtue of this centering, converging, power

Infinite Relations Excellencies and Services lie Concealed in the Smallest Being, and God is there who is all in all.³³⁴

Traherne’s paradigm is not only incarnational but also relational – the divine presence in the centre of each being forges a profound relation between each being. This is a ubiquitous theme in Traherne. In *Christian Ethicks* he distills the thought into verse:

In all Things, all Things service do to all:
And thus a sand is Endless, though most small.
And every Things is truly Infinite,
In its Relation deep and exquisite.³³⁵

The Universal Circulation, Traherne explains, is a system of Emanation, Inspiration, Expiration, and Transpiration driven by the generative fire of the Sun, “Gods visible Image and vice gerent [sic]” which is the “cause and Fountain of all Emanations wherby all Beings Exchange themselvs for each others Sake to one another, and are united together.”³³⁶ Traherne is reaching toward such an understanding in describing the “Deep and Inward” communication of all corporeal beings caused by the Sun – the “transpiration” of “Spirits and “Interior Qualities.” Particles of Light and atoms, infinite in number, infinitely volatile and able to travel “inestimable spaces” in the “Twinckling of an Ey” minister to all objects.

³³² KG p. 282, ll. 71-73 (f. 169v.)

³³³ KG p. 282, ll. 63-64 (f. 169r.)

³³⁴ KG p. 339, ll. 83-90 (f. 213v.)

³³⁵ “As in a Clock” (from *Christian Ethicks*)

³³⁶ KG p. 381, ll. 11-13 (f. 251v.) See Chapter 24: (KG p. 381 ff. (f. 251r ff.)) “Of all the Emanations and Influences. Their Efficient, Material, Formal, and Final Causes. The Reason of their Strength, or Weakness: And of the periods and degrees in their Revolutions.”

In the Universal Circulation, Traherne exclaims “there is a Real Communication of Parts, and Spirits!” For though these “Rayes of Light” are “no part of the objects from which they Come” they seem “realy the whole and realy the same.” Such communications are “not of Shadows and Images, but things of themselvs, Substances being imparted in their own Essential Parts and Spirits.” “Particles of Light” are “immitted” into and breathed out from the “Pores” of all “vital Wights, and Vegetables.” As God communicates himself entirely and infinitely, each creature “is wholly Communicated from the Very Centre of evry Part and Assignable Particle in him, yet is wholly Intire, and wholly continued” and “what they receiv, they faithfully returne ... finally to the conservation of the World and to the Benefit of all in the Reparation of the Æther, the Sun and the Stars.”³³⁷

Thus likewise in those Known, but unaccountable Mysteries he resembles the Light (as much as may be) Innumerable Millions of Objects, Figures, Colors, Motions and Stations, in all their Variety, Dimension, Greatness, Symmetrie, and Proportion, from all Parts and Quarters of the World, are represented in himself, in Evry Point and Centre of his Immensity, without Confusion, Dislocation, Distraction, or Contradiction.³³⁸

The Light of the World gives and imperceptibly becomes Life – “As the Solar particles abide in all the parts of the Body, not under the notion now of Light, but Life; nor so much under the Notion of Heat, as of Spirits.”³³⁹ There is, as we have noted from Clément, no confusion of parts in this “Trinitarian game of separation and conjunction” but at the same time there is a “leap in the light towards the fount of the sunshine, towards the centre where the lines converge.”³⁴⁰

Christ is the point of convergence found at the centre of each creature. In the segment arguing that the “Generation of the Son of God is the full exertion of Almighty Power”³⁴¹ Traherne describes a universal incarnation – each creature is the meeting point for a multitude of spirits, and the “end” or fulfillment of all things. Each creature is a “Centre of [God’s] Omnipresence” and itself contains “Innumerable Creatures.”

... evry one being made the Temple of God, or the Comprehender of all to Enjoy him wholly. Evry one of these will be the Absolute End of all things and comprize in it self all Excellencies of Angels Seraphims Cherubims and men, and Enjoy all

³³⁷ KG pp. 381-383, ll. 45-48, 72-76, 82, 84, 90-93 (f. 252r-253v.)

³³⁸ KG p. 355, ll. 322-329 (f. 228v-229r.)

³³⁹ KG p. 355, l. 315-17 (f. 228v.)

³⁴⁰ Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 221.

³⁴¹ KG p. 333, fn. 2 (f. 209v.), marginal gloss.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

in him for ever. Being Immaterial, Invisible, and Spiritual, they will be all penetrable, and Innumerable Multitudes of Such Spirits may be in the Same Centre ...

Traherne then inserts into his manuscript: “and for ought we know, every one like Jesus Christ who is the Glory of the Father.”³⁴² The Light of the world and every aspect of the multifarious world itself meet in hypostatical union – each element is distinct, there is no confusion of parts, yet they are “deeply entangled” and joined to the enveloping whole. Every object in the world, from an atom to the Sun, is a “point and Centre of his Immensity.” In the communication of particles of light in the centre of every creature there is “unfolded” the “Glory of Eternal Wisdom:”

An Abyss of Wonders lies here, at which all Nature may Tremble; an Extremetie of Height in allmighty Power, that is Expresst in the Atchievment, as much as is possible. The Matter is so intricat, and deeply entangled; that he never heard of the Light, nor ever saw it, nor in the least Measure is able to Consider it, that seeth not the Glory of Eternal Wisdom and Counsel in this Atchievment, when it is unfolded to him. All we can say, is, Infinit Wisdom by making Particles infinitely small made provision, that infinit Numbers might meet in the Same Divisible, or Physical Point without disturbance, as freely as if one alone were passing by through infinit and Endless Spaces.³⁴³

Traherne describes a deep and labyrinthine entanglement of Light and Life. The notion is awesome, an “unaccountable [Mystery],” “An Abyss of wonders ... at which all Nature may Tremble” as it did at the passion of Christ when the earth quaked and the sun was eclipsed.³⁴⁴ The depths of divine immanence or ‘expression’ of the Word in the World is an “extremetie of thought in allmighty power.” That atoms of light are in some sense the “Ideas” of God impregnating the universe, is an overwhelming thought to Traherne – and he retreats to a position beyond reason:

But notwithstanding this, Ideas so great in Appearance, so inconceivably small in realitie, so Exact and Lively so many thousand, and yet so Naked and intire; so manifold and Various are strange and Stupendious things, which no Line of Reason will ever Sound to the Bottom (such Infinit Abysses of Wisdom are in them) till Eternitie it self Enlighten the Soul in the highest Heavens.³⁴⁵

³⁴² KG p. 334, ll. 151-157 (f. 209v.)

³⁴³ KG p. 355, ll. 335-344 (f. 229r.)

³⁴⁴ See Matthew 27: 45-54. See also 2.4.5 for further discussion of this phrase.

³⁴⁵ KG p. 355, ll. 344-349 (f. 229r-229v.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

Traherne turns from the contemplation of such “manifold, “strange and Stupendious” intricacies, things “Strange yet Common,” to consider in Chapter 28, “Life in General, which is the Sublimer Matter of Gods Kingdom.” Traherne shifts his focus to that in which all these mysterious matters “consist” – the omnipresent and piercing power of “Life it self.” For underlying all of these speculations, I would argue, is ultimately a vital sense of the Cosmic Christ – the active centre of all life in all worlds. According to Aquinas, “The Word is per se life, always perfect life.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁶ Aquinas. Commentary on St John. I.3, n. 86. Cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 159.

2.4.4. Life It Self

“Life it self” “is his Substance. His Life is in the Act, and his Act in the Essence.”³⁴⁷ Traherne defines Life in terms complicit with his Thomistic emphasis upon the active essence of God. His chapters concerning Life reprise themes from earlier chapters describing the “omnipresence of action” – the free, loving, creative and communicative essence of God which, like the Sun, is “Naturally prone to dispers its Rayes: and so Prone that its Freedom becomes its Highest Necessitie.”³⁴⁸ Working within an Aristotelian framework, Traherne grasps the Efficient and Final and Instrumental Causes of Life, but finds its Material and Formal Cause “almost impossible to be understood.” In a phrase that recalls his admiration for Hooker, “wading into the spring and fountain of Laws, and digging neer unto the root of things”³⁴⁹ Traherne promises: “As far as we can Wade, we will proceed into the Mysterie.” God is the “efficient cause of life” the end of which is that “the glory of the Univers might be usefull and enjoyed.” Having dismissed those that would by “meer Mechanical Operations solv all the Phænomenon of Life” Traherne defines Life as an “Abilitie to Apprehend, and Move.” It is, says Traherne, “in my Apprehension ... so Simple a Being” that the “Power to Perceiv” is at once its “Material cause,” “Form,” “Essence” and its “Quidditie.”

Desire is the energising force that spurs creation. “Desire is an Act” and in Life “of Necessitie.” It is constantly covetous³⁵⁰ of what is pleasurable, and has the capacity to “freely lov what is sweet and easy” and “delightful.” These are all terms that Traherne has used previously to describe the essence of God. “All Life,” he here says, “is Immediately from GOD.” According to Hooker’s “first and Eternal Law ... The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working: for that Perfection which God is, giveth Perfection to that he doth.”³⁵¹ This “Mysterious being,” therefore, is manifest as the power of perception and desire – the life force - in all creatures. “An Ant,” says Traherne, “is a more Glorious Creature than the Sun; for they know themselvs, and are Sensible of the Light, and of the Comfort of their lives.”³⁵² Traherne imagines that even inanimate creatures – “the Heavens, and the Earth, the Minerals, Vegetables, Elemental, and Celestail Bodies” - “by a Secret Instinct of Nature aspire to Life as their End.” If even creatures without sense possess “an high but Natural Appetite press to their own perfection ... How much more shall these

³⁴⁷ KG p. 358, ll. 171-172 (f. 233.)

³⁴⁸ KG p. 360, ll. 180-181 (f. 233.) See 2.1.1.

³⁴⁹ KG p. 369, ll. 1-15 (f. 241v.) See 2.1.3.

³⁵⁰ “Evry Living Creature ... will ... Hope for an absent Good, and covet it with desire.” (KG pp. 409-410, ll. 34-43 (f. 277r-277v.)) See 2.1.4.

³⁵¹ KG p. 369, ll. 4-7 (f. 241v.) See 2.1.3.

lively, and Glorious Things, which are capable of pleasure, and prone to Enjoy it ... much rather value and desire Life than Inanimat Creatures?” It is within this context of self-perfecting and creative desire that Traherne introduces another text central to the Cosmic Christ tradition:

in respect whereof the Apostle saith, The Whole Creation groaneth and Travaieth in Pain, untill now: for the Earnest Expectation of the Creature waiteth for the Manifestation of the Sons of God.³⁵³

The text is significant because of its emphasis, reiterated here by Traherne’s contextualization of it, upon the redemption of the entire creation; its linking of the themes of Creation, Incarnation and Redemption.³⁵⁴ As in childbirth, pain and travail end in joy; Life itself is the fruition of all desire and expectation; Life is the means and end of itself: “Life Takes Pleasure in nothing so much as in Life it self.” It is the “Fountain and the End of it self” ; the Son is the alpha and omega, the beginning and end of all things.³⁵⁵ Furthermore it is because

true Goodness, Wisdom, Holiness, Glory, Virtu, Pleasure, Love, and Blessedness, are founded in Life, and cannot without life hav any Being, It is Impossible to declare how near and acceptable Life is unto all these their Eternal Prototypes.³⁵⁶

Again Traherne plays the “Trinitarian game of separation and conjunction”³⁵⁷ between prototype and type. It is, for Traherne, a game motivated by the desire for connectivity and pleasure:

Beauty loves to be Seen, Glory to be Honored...Goodness to be Communicated ...
O Life which art the Darling of GOD and Nature, thou Invisible Light and Beauty of the World ... the very Ground-work of God’s Kingdom, because the very Matter and Essence of lov and Goodness are taken from thee.³⁵⁸

Christ is the ultimate prototype of Life:

³⁵² KG pp. 410-411, ll. 84-86 (f. 278r.)

³⁵³ Romans 8: 22 ; KG p. 411, ll. 121-124 (f. 279r.)

³⁵⁴ See Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, pp. 158-159.

³⁵⁵ KG p. 358, l. 114 (f. 232r.)

³⁵⁶ KG p. 412, ll. 157-160 (f. 280r.)

³⁵⁷ Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 221.

³⁵⁸ KG pp. 412-413, ll. 165-195 (f. 280v.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

As the life of Jesus who is himself, the Way, the Truth, and the life, is
Incomparably Glorious, So is the Life of GOD, of Heaven, and Blessedness.

In this Trinitarian game Traherne begins to separate out and distinguish between the prototype and the type in distinguishing the life of this world and the after-life:

And if here upon Earth the Sweetness of life be so Delicious, because we are
Sensible of our Selvs, and the light of this World; how much more Divine and
sacred will that be, where all the Ends of living will at once be Enjoyed in all their
Dimensions?³⁵⁹

But this movement is immediately checked by the impulse towards conjunction – “this
World” is included among “the Ends” that will hereafter be enjoyed. Traherne also re-
emphasises that it is the same common life that flows through all things:

But we need not soar into so high a Key: Look upon Life, but as it is the ornament
and Glory of the World, and being as it is the Fountain, and the End of the
Universe, see whether it does not Justifie these Aspirations and Prayses.³⁶⁰

The locus of reality is not exclusively in the prototype but communicated “immediately” to
the type – to “Life, but as it is” - which is “Common and alwayes neer, but” – and Traherne
again slips into the Trinitarian game - “too near us to be well considered, and too
Mysterious to be understood.”³⁶¹ Traherne reiterates his theme of things “Strange yet
Common” ; a theme that speaks of the Heraclitean Logos – the “Account” which “holds
forever” yet “men ever fail to comprehend” and “are at odds with” though it is “that with
which they most commonly associate.”³⁶² So Traherne observes that “because it is a Pure
Immaterial Power, an Interior Endowment, a Transcendent Celestial Excellencie; we perceiv
it not, we weight it not, we know it not.” Nonetheless “the Glory of its Nature makes it
evident and the Necessity of its Excellency objecteth it Manifestly before our Eys, as the
Daughter of Infinit Goofness, and the Sole Inheritrix of all it Comprehendeth.”³⁶³

O Life ... Thou Soul and Mysterious Bride of the Univers!

³⁵⁹ KG p. 416, ll. 314-319 (ff. 283r-283v.)

³⁶⁰ KG p. 416, ll. 322-325 (f. 283v.)

³⁶¹ KG p. 417, ll. 359-360 (f. 284r.)

³⁶² CM I.3 ; Heraclitus and Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus : An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, Fragments I (Diel 1), p. 29 ; V (Diel 71-73), p. 31. See I.1.

Having defined Life as “the Daughter of Infinit Goodness, and the Sole Inheritrix of all it Comprehendeth,” Traherne then addresses himself directly to her:

O Life I cannot Enough Admire thee! Thou Soul and Mysterious Bride of the
Univers! Thou Beauty of the World! Thou Daughter of God!

Traherne amasses to Life the praises rendered to the World Soul in the ancient world, and to the Biblical figure of Wisdom. In this passage, as in many others, there are echoes of Medieval paeans to Wisdom or Dame Nature in which, as Matthew Fox describes, “the cosmic Christ” is celebrated “with vigor”: Hildegard of Bingen, for example, wrote of “the fiery life of divine wisdom” and of The Word as “living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity” that “manifests in every creature.”³⁶⁴ Alan of Lille, in his hymn to Dame Nature also implicitly fetes the Christic Logos or Wisdom as the “Child of God and Mother of things, / Bond of the world, its firm-tied knot,” the “Morning star of our sphere,” the “Life, light, glory, beauty and shape, / O Rule of our world.”³⁶⁵ Traherne’s response to the notion of the Soul of the World is in many ways close to that of the medieval Platonists of Chartres who, as Brown describes, seven hundred years after the High Platonism of Augustine, “recovered, through their own speculations on the *anima mundi*, a sense of the density and significance of the natural world ...”³⁶⁶ M. –D. Chenu notes “the peculiar success enjoyed for some fifty years by the theory of the world soul, a theory adduced to subserve the lofty conception of Nature, for the universe too has its animating principle, its “entelechy.”^{367 368}

In Traherne’s passages of praise to Life, to Infinite Love, to Activity, he again draws on material that we have noted from the *Commonplace Book*: Gale’s information

³⁶³ KG p. 417, ll. 361-368 (f. 284v.)

³⁶⁴ Fox also refers to Francis of Assisi’s hymns to Brother Sun, Wind and Air and Sisters Moon, Water and Earth ; Mechthild of Magdeburg’s mystical experience of Christ as All in All and her sense of each person as a reflection of “living Son of God with all his works” ; Dante Alighieri’s vision of the Love that moves the sun and stars and description of the Son as an “Eternal Light” reflected in the human soul and “scattered on leaves throughout the world.” ; Julian of Norwich’s attempt to touch the “inness” of God in all creatures, the divine “I am” that is “all that is.” Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, pp. 109-126.

³⁶⁵ Translation from the Latin given in Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century : Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, p. 19.

³⁶⁶ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo : A Biography*, p. 504.

³⁶⁷ Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century : Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, pp. 22-23, 69.

³⁶⁸ Although the appropriation of this pagan idea was widely criticised, as in Traherne’s day, there was, as Wildiers observes, a widespread debate in the 12th, 13th, and in later centuries over whether God might be thought of as the Soul of the World, or the Soul of the World associated with the Holy Spirit. Aquinas and Augustine were non-committal, or reserved in this issue. See N. Max Wildiers,

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

regarding the fiery logos of Heraclitus and the Stoics, and the deification of the Sun by the Pythagoreans and Chalcedeans; and Jackson's citation of lines from Virgil that evoke the *Anima Mundi*:

*Through earth, through seas, through heavens profound live goodnesse doth diffuse.
From his presence, Cattle, men, birds, sucke the spirit of life
From him all springs, in him all end:*

Ignoring, as we have also noted, Jackson's assertion that "To thinke God is in the World as the Soule is in the bodie is a grand Seminarie of idolatrie and Sorcerie"³⁶⁹ Traherne composes his own hymns to the "live goodness" from whom "all springs" and which he explicitly links with Christ. In the poem "On Christmas Day" he reflects:

'Tis he that Life and Spirit doth infuse:
Let ev'ry thing
The Praises sing
Of Christ the King of Jews;
Who makes things green ...³⁷⁰

The poem "Activity II" in *Commentaries of Heaven* is a celebration of the "Act Acted"³⁷¹ and alongside a Thomist reverence for the eternally active and communicative Word of God, Traherne catches after the elemental poetics of World Soul, in terms that echo his praise of Christ in "On Christmas-Day." He invokes the language of the fiery Logos, the divine presence that blesses the very Seeds of nature, the "Universal Soul" that "maketh all the Meadows Green." Christ is implicitly present as that which "comes down From Heaven, thy Sacrifice to burn and Crown!" The ancient language, evoking cosmic "Splendours," is "Worthy of so Great a King." Traherne enlivens the image of the Watch, much favoured by mechanist philosophers, by making its Spring the same as that "Spring which Decks all nature with her flowers" and at the most basic and material level "Blesseth all her Seeds and Powers."³⁷² All the emphasis is upon activity as an immanent principle of perpetual becoming that, in its decking and blessing, infuses life. Also in this poem is found the blending of the masculine and feminine aspects of the Logos in the paradox of "Watery

The Theologian and his Universe : Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present, (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 67, fn. 21.

³⁶⁹ CB "Paganisme" f. 74v.1 ; Jackson, *The Originall of Unbeliefe*, , p.160.) See 2.4.2.

³⁷⁰ "On Christmas-Day," ll.37-41.

³⁷¹ It follows the apology for and expansion upon the scholastic term 'Act' that we discussed under "The Omnipresence of Action." See 2.1.1.

fire” that at once “enflames Desire” and “quencheth Thirst.”³⁷³ In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne is struck by the paradox that the fire, heat and light emanating from the sun, as the agents of “Liquefaction” and “Fluiditie,” and the “Great universal Circulation,” are the “Efficient cause of Water” and the “deep abyss:”

And if there be so Great a Truth in this;
That Fire gives Being to the Deep Abyss:
Its very Waves; and its Fluiditie!
Without which two no depths at all could be.
What can a Paradox be thought! A Spring
Is som Diviner, and Celestial thing.³⁷⁴

The notion of watery fire draws, as Traherne notes in his *Commonplace Book* from Plato’s first matter, “the Common Mother, and Nurse” of all the elements,³⁷⁵ and is associated by Traherne with Christ who is both “Active fire” and Living Water, the Light and Life.

Returning to the hymn to Life in Chapter 28 of the *The Kingdom of God*, we find further instances of Traherne’s fusion of the Christic lexicon with the ancient and Hermetic. To the language of infusions and influences he adds the language of quintessence and elixirs:

O Thou Image, or Essence of GOD, thou Spiritual Being, how shall I sufficiently Prize thee? With what Words shall I praise thee, or my Creator for thee? Thou art the light of life it self, and the light of life as far above all the Works of GOD (that are visible and Material) as they abov Nothing: the Chief Elixir, the Greatest Jewel, and the primest Treasure.³⁷⁶

In a theme to which we will shortly turn Traherne also describes Christ’s crucifixion as the “Price and Elixar of our Joys.”³⁷⁷ “Like the alchemists’ long-awaited philosopher’s stone, or first matter,” writes Blaine Greteman of Traherne’s Hermetic language, “Christ’s blood

³⁷² In doing so, Traherne is closer in spirit to the Stoic conception of the creative Logos, than Augustine’s notion of the seeds or germs of nature, the *rationes seminales*, that reflect in their operations the pattern established by a remote divine exemplar.

³⁷³ CH Poems “Activity II,” ll. 21-22.

³⁷⁴ KG p. 395, ll. 69-78 (ff. 265r- 265v.)

³⁷⁵ Under “Matter – vid Atoms, Cohesion &c” Traherne records Gale’s notes from the *Timaeus*: “The *Germ* or *Species* of which everything is composed ; and he expressly saies that it is neither Fire, nor Water, not Earth, nor Air, but the Common Mother, and Nurse of all these, which effuseth its seed, and virtue *Waterie, Firie*, [and] *receptive of the formes of Air, and Earth*. And indeed this Platos’s ... first matter of the ...Chaos (CB f. 65v ; Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, pp. 323-4)

³⁷⁶ KG p. 418, ll. 396-400 (f. 285r.)

³⁷⁷ C1.56 ; See also “Thoughts I,” l. 59: “The Quintessence, Elixar, Spirit, Cream.”

functions as an elixir” which “strengthens and refines the vital, communicative soul within creation.”³⁷⁸ It is an elixir which transforms inanimate matter into the stuff of life. The light of life is at once above the material world and lifts it “abov Nothing.” Christ, the life and light of the world, is here, as Teilhard envisioned, “the Master of the world, leading like an element of the world, not only an elemental life, but (in addition to this and because of it) leading the total life of the universe.”³⁷⁹

Thou Art Everywhere Expanded

The Kingdom of God is essentially a quest for this “Chief Elixer” which, in its Christic guise, is not some mythical and elusive prize, but is a mystery made manifest:

When we seek thee, thou art hidden in a meer Indivisible Centre; When we find thee, thou art Everywhere Expanded, and at once Surroundest innumerable objects:³⁸⁰

For Traherne, as for Teilhard, the entire universe comprises the divine milieu. The word *milieu* has no exact English translation, but “it implies at one and the same time both centre and environment.”³⁸¹ Traherne here again draws upon the maxime: *Deus est sphaera cujus centrum unique* - God is a sphere of which the center is evrywhere and the circumference nowhere.³⁸² Traherne’s use of the image reflects the great breadth of ideas associated with it: The plenitude to be found at every point of the immense sphere of Trinitarian activity; the totality of God’s Being in every fragment of time and space; the unity of each past and future moment in the eternal consciousness of God; that God is a luminous point, infinitely radiating light and energy, diffusing and multiplying itself; the Incarnation as a manifestation of the maximum or infinite in the minimum or finite; the soul as a centre comprehending the immense sphere of God.³⁸³ The definition, according to Poulet, first appeared in a pseudohermetic manuscript in the twelfth century and is especially associated with Cusa’s articulation of the “coincidentia oppositorum” – the meeting of all contradictions in God who is everywhere and nowhere - both the circumference and the centre of the world. Traherne frequently expands upon this concept of the “maximum in the minimum” – the containment or hiddenness of the infinitely great in the infinitely small.

³⁷⁸ Blaine Greteman, "Invisible Communication : Hermeticism in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne," M.Phil., Oxford, 2001, p. 62.

³⁷⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 86.

³⁸⁰ KG p. 417, ll. 373-375 (ff. 284v-285r.) See 2.4.4.

³⁸¹ Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, n. 27, p. 232.

³⁸² See 2.3.3, “A Centre without Period, Limit, or Bound.” ; See also 2.5.3, “A Blessed Sphere of Sights; An Abyss of Joys.”

“The Life of God,” says Traherne, “makes all life valuable” and his Glory, discernible by the enquiring soul, “lurk[s] in the Secret and hidden Properties of his Creatures.”³⁸⁴ But, he promises “there is nothing hid, but it shall at last be opened.”³⁸⁵ Things “Strange yet Common” that have been “hid in GOD” shall be “so Explained, as that the interior Beauty should be understood.”³⁸⁶ The Word is both hidden and revealed in creation. Traherne, like Teilhard emphasises the “inwardness” of things - The “Inward Communications” of each being, the glory that is “hidden” in every creature and “secretly lurketh in every Atom.”

Traherne’s focus, however, is not entirely on this hiddenness of the maximum in the minimum, this presence at the centre. Life, once found, is also discovered to be “Everywhere Expanded, and at once Surroundest innumerable objects.” In this emphasis upon the dilation of the centre, Traherne reflects the fresh interpretation given to the definition by Renaissance philosophers. As Poulet summarises:

Following Nicolas de Cusa, Ficino, Pico, Patrizzi, Campanella, and above all, Bruno in Italy, Charles of Bouelles, Pelletier of Mans, Ramus, La Boderies, Yves of Paris in France, Paracelsus, Kepler, Boehme, Kircher, Leibniz in Germany, the Platonists of the Cambridge School, and the poets called “metaphysical” in England, all return, no less indefatigably than the scholastics of the Middle Ages, to the emblem of the circle and the center; but what strikes them in this image is the circle perceived as a dilation of the center. The divine reality is no longer situated at two extremes, in an invisible circumference and within an ineffable central point; it is everywhere present and moving in the cluster of activities that It projects in every direction around Itself.³⁸⁷

Although Poulet focuses on Traherne’s application of the emblem to human consciousness,³⁸⁸ I would argue that Traherne’s understanding of the soul’s capacity is predicated upon an understanding of Christ’s filling of the universe. In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne “unveils” a Christic centre to the material universe; Divine Life is “Everywhere Expanded, and at once Surroundest innumerable objects” and as we noted above, those “Innumerable Millions of Objects, Figures, Colors, Motions and Stations, in all their Variety, Dimension, Greatness, Symmetrie, and Proportion, from all Parts and Quarters of

³⁸³ See Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, p. xi- xxiv.

³⁸⁴ KG p. 426, ll. 185-192 (f. 294v.)

³⁸⁵ KG p. 382, ll. 69-70 (f. 253r.)

³⁸⁶ CM I.3. See 1.1.

³⁸⁷ Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, p. xxiv.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

the World, are represented in himself, in evry Point and Centre of his Immensity.”³⁸⁹

Christ is in each centre – the all in all – and through this inward communication expands the sphere or “milieu” of his omnipresence. Traherne repeats throughout *The Kingdom of God* the theme of how Christ is not only creative of the universe, but the universe is creative of Christ; God in Christ in some sense creates or magnifies himself through the creation:

Tho Almighty God had made the Heavens and the Earth ... Without Life, Even God himself could not hav seen them, nor could anything else hav enjoyed them. Figures, and Colors, and Smell, and tangible Qualities, are all forreiners, and Strangers, to the nature of GOD: but Life is a Domestick Propertie of his Essence ... this Fountain of Delights, this Womb of Pleasures! ...life alone can apprehend his Glory and Magnifie the Same.³⁹⁰

Teilhard similarly suggests that Christ is completed or built up by his creation. The relation between the Cosmic Christ and his body - the world - is relational. As Lyons observes, the Cosmic Christ is like a centre seeking a sphere, and the cosmos is like a sphere seeking a centre.³⁹¹ The centre thus, paradoxically, fills and expands the sphere, exceeding itself in the process:

Thou fillest Heaven and Earth without Dimensions. Thou Exceedest thy Self and all other things: Thou livest in thy self and in all other things ... Thou Wonderfully Extendest in evry Creature, from East, to West, from North to South, from the Centre to the Heavens.³⁹²

Thou Piercest, and Feelest Their Very Centre

The hymn to Life is structured around two basic movements – filling and feeling: “Thou feelest and thou fillest all things.” Life does not simply surround all things, but “piercest, and feelest their very Centre” and is “present” with them “in a living manner.” It sees, touches, admires, delights, honours, esteems and rejoices in the creation. Traherne’s marginal heading for this section reads: “To fill all with an Act of Admiration, and love, is better than to fill all with a Material Body.” This reprises the argument that it is better that the omnipresent God have no body in order that he might fill, rather than exclude with a vast

³⁸⁹ KG p. 355, ll. 324-327 (f. 228v-229r.)

³⁹⁰ KG pp. 416-417, ll. 326-335, 351-355 (ff. 283v-284r.)

³⁹¹ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 186.

bulk, all other things and again touches a common Teilhardian theme – that of a love, both personal and cosmic, present in each part of the universe. Each part of that universe, by virtue of this personal presence at its centre, is also paradoxically contained by that centre – the very scent, texture, colour and taste of the universe are contained in the living, feeling centre.

The Verdure of Trees, and fruits, and Flowers are in thee in a Way more Sweet, and Delicious then in themselvs. The Moysture of the Seas, and the Beauty of the Stars is Surmounted by thee. The Richness of Gold, and the Orient lustre of Pearl, the Smoothness of oyl, and the Sweetness of Wine, and Milk, and Hony, the Beauty of all faces and the Symmetrie and perfection of all Features and complexions, is in thee by Eminence. So is all the Melodie, fragrancy, and Delight of Musical Instruments, and Sweet Perfumes.³⁹³

The sensual world is contained in Life “by Eminence.” Life it self is the supreme original of all created things, not so much as the Idea which material things imitate, but as the “first-born of all creation” in whom all things were created – through whom and for whom all things were created and in whom all things consist. For Sittler (as we cited earlier) Christ “is not only the matrix and *prius* of all things; he is the intention, the fullness, and the integrity of all things.”³⁹⁴ As we have also discussed, Traherne seems not to understand Christ’s preeminence in a legalistic and purely transcendent way, but as the the “first Born, and Beginning of Evry Creature” ; “ a Being ... in which are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom, and Knowledg, all the Perfections of God, and all Possible Creatures.”³⁹⁵

Again, the dynamic is Trinitarian – there is no diminishment of transcendence in immanence, and no confusion of the spiritual in the material, but a relation based on reciprocity and a self-pleasuring, regenerative desire for the other:

Thou fillest all things with a Feeling, that none is sensible of but thy self: With a Feeling that makes them to live unto thee, while thou livest to Enjoy them: yet thou disturbest none, excludest none, oppressest none, in the Fruition of them. Thou Feedest upon all, without Diminishing the objects on which thou feedest, or bereaving any other that would feed upon them. Thou turnest thy food into Pleasure, and Delight, and feedest others with thine own Enjoyments. Thou Convertest thy Nourishment into Praises, and complacencies, that Enrich the

³⁹² KG p. 417, ll. 371-380 (f. 284v.)

³⁹³ KG p. 418, ll. 405-412 (ff. 285r-285v.)

³⁹⁴ Sittler, "Called to Unity," pp. 177-78.

³⁹⁵ KG p. 333, ll. 112-117 (f. 208v.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

World, wherein thou art Sustained.³⁹⁶

In a poem that appears earlier in the chapter, Traherne similarly describes how the “Great Feast of Feasts can never all be spent” – although “Each one doth eat/ The total Feast, yet Each one leavs it whole” and how the “... Pure Cup of Life, to which tho all / The World does daily flock to drinke, yet Still / It Keeps its equal Plenitude ...”³⁹⁷ The “Cheif Elixer” which works its transformative power in others but remains itself entire, is here described eucharistically as a “Great Feast of Feasts” and a “Cup of Life.” As such imagery suggests, the life and body of Christ is not only undiminished, but is itself refreshed and “sustained” as it is consumed by the entire world. It is within this eucharistic context that Traherne makes his insatiable plea to Life:

O let me taste and drink thee in, let me be replenished with thee for Evermore.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ KG pp. 417-418, ll. 385-392 (f. 285r.)

³⁹⁷ KG p. 415, ll. 286-297 (ff. 282v – 283v.)

³⁹⁸ KG p. 418, ll. 400-401 (f. 285r.)

2.4.5. The Phoenix Nest

Christ Crucified

And now let us link the first and last terms of this long series of identities. We shall then see with a wave of joy that *the divine omnipresence* translates itself within our universe by the network of organising forces of the total Christ. God exerts pressure, in us and upon us – through the intermediary of all the powers of heaven, earth and hell – only in the act of forming and consummating Christ who saves and sur-animates the world. And since, in the course of this operation, Christ Himself does not act as a dead or passive point of convergence, but as a centre of radiation for the energies which lead the universe back to God through His humanity, the layers of divine action finally come to us impregnated with His organic energies.

Le Milieu Divin

Teilhard links the “omnipresence of action” – the eternal generation of the incarnate Word with “the living link, the organising soul of the Pleroma” – “He in whom everything is reunited, and in whom all things are consummated – through whom the whole created edifice receives its consistency.” In the preceding sections we have discussed the “organic” sense in which Traherne understands this consistency; his sense of a Christic Soul of the World, which like the Sun is the “Root of Light and Life.” This has encompassed Traherne’s transcendence of typology in his understanding of God and world, Son and Sun – his positing of a living relationship and Universal Circulation between the divine and material – a relation which is expressive of the eternal generation of the Son and “Life itself” which, as the conclusion to Traherne’s hymn to Life suggests, is offered as an inexhaustible eucharistic feast to all beings. The final sections of this chapter will expand upon this eucharistic theme and upon how Traherne experiences the risen Christ in the world.

For Teilhard, the “total Christ” “saves and sur-animates the world” - is both Creator and Redeemer:

The universe assumes the form of Christ – but, O mystery! the man we see is Christ crucified.³⁹⁹

Several critics, as we noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, have found “Christ crucified” to be of peripheral interest to Traherne. As we noted in the introduction, Sherrington believes that the experience upon which Traherne’s poetry “is based is not

³⁹⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," p. 208.

mystical union with Christ but mystical union with the world, which seems to take his place as the Mediator between God and man”⁴⁰⁰ and Maitland speaks of “the missing Christ.” Pinsent notes the specific absence of the word *Christ* in much of Traherne’s writing, suggesting that those passages that do focus on the Passion are not integrated with his work as a whole. Pinsent notes that only “7 out of about 100 poems” explicitly allude to the life and Passion of Christ: “Of these ‘The World’ is fairly typical ... a few lines on Adam’s sin and Saviour’s blood and 6 stanzas on God in Creation and childhood experience.”⁴⁰¹ This section will specifically address Traherne’s understanding of the redemptive role of Christ and argue that the apparent lack of eucharistic symbols in Traherne points not to a de-centering of Christ, but to an expansion of the active Christic centre to the whole world, with the cross as “a centre of radiation for the energies which lead the universe back to God.”

In Bloody Characters

Ponsford and Ross point to an absence of eucharistic symbols in Traherne reflective of a general movement in Reformation poetry. The poetry of the seventeenth century, according to Ponsford, “illustrates a gradual shift away from Augustinian thought and consequently demonstrates an emasculation of the traditional symbols of the Church and Eucharist.” He finds Traherne’s Christianity “if it has any orthodoxy” to be typical of such Anglicanism, while Ross similarly groups Traherne with those “leftward” of Catholic Anglicanism.”⁴⁰² Herbert is seen, by these critics, to be one of the last representatives of the typological tradition, undermined by the Protestant approach to the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the elements, instead of being symbols of the “real presence” of Christ become metaphorical reminders of his passion. Cranmer, as Ponsford points out, defined the Eucharist as “a figurative speech spiritually to be understood.”⁴⁰³ Ponsford also sees Traherne’s development of his own repertoire of imagery as “perhaps an attempt to create a new symbolism when the traditional Eucharistic imagery was no longer valid.”¹

Traherne, I would argue, does in fact have a fully developed sacramental sense – but it is extended to the entire universe rather than confined to the expected symbolism of bread, wine, blood and the lamb that, according to Ponsford, “the poet consistently fails to

⁴⁰⁰ Sherrington, *Mystical Symbolism in the Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, p. 132.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴⁰² Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, *Poetry and Dogma : The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 1954), p. 94.

⁴⁰³ Ponsford, "The Poetry of Thomas Traherne in Relation to the Thought and Poetics of his Period," p. 115. For discussion of Ponsford’s view that Traherne’s repertoire of imagery is “vague, ethereal, abstract” and “displays a “drift to disembodied mysticism” see 2.5.3 “what Glory lurks in all things.”

exploit.”⁴⁰⁴ It might be countered that Traherne exhibits a poetic of unmediated and immediate “real presence” - an immanentist poetic, inspired by Life itself. Such issues are indeed “deeply entangled” and the perceived division between Catholic and Protestant poetics of immanence becomes blurred as Traherne, like Teilhard, presides over a “mass on the World” offering the world back to God through their sacrament of praise:

Since today, Lord, I your priest have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I shall spread my hands over the whole universe and take its immensity as the matter of my sacrifice.⁴⁰⁵

Traherne displays what a commenatry on John’s gospel describes as the “ample sweep” of the Eucharistic prayer in the early church,

thanking God for much that seems remote from the Sacrament. For all life, they felt, was of a piece, and shot through and through by the astonishing goodness of God.⁴⁰⁶

The world he celebrates is a world of infinite multiplicity – inclusive of bread, wine and body and blood but also, for Traherne, the trees outside the city gates and the twinkling eyes of the old men within them. In infancy, says Traherne, “The Earth did undertake / The office of a Priest.”⁴⁰⁷ The moment of transubstantiation for Traherne occurs not only at the communion table, but in every act of creation. In this he is out of step with Christian Platonists such as John Everard – for while, as a Protestant, he might agree with Everard’s view that men “turn shadows into substance” instead of using the sacraments as “tutors” and “guides” to Christ who is “the Truth and Substance,”⁴⁰⁸ he does not see the world itself as such a shadow. It is human thought which must be transformed in order to uphold the world to its Creator. Habgood describes Traherne’s vision of “orient and immortal wheat” as in this sense sacramental.⁴⁰⁹ We might also think of the great catalogue of wonders that would greet the Celestial Stranger in Chapter 25 as a priestly spreading of hands over the universe.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁰⁵ See Teilhard de Chardin, “The Priest,” p. 205ff. See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “The Mass on the World,” *Hymn of the Universe* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 19.

⁴⁰⁶ *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994-2002), commentary on John 1:5, 9-13, pp. 466-467.

⁴⁰⁷ “Dumness,” ll.64-65.

⁴⁰⁸ John Everard, *Gospel Treasures Opened* (1653), p. 558. Cited in Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, p. 251.

⁴⁰⁹ John Habgood, “The Sacramentality of the Natural World,” *The Sense of the Sacramental*, eds. David Brown and Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1995), p. 23. Habgood discusses the concept of “the world as a cosmic sacrament” in Teilhard de Chardin and Shmemann.

For Traherne, then, the whole world is a sacrament of Christ's presence. This was the view of the Familist⁴¹⁰ "heretic" Giles Randall who according to his detractors taught that

our common food, ordinary eating and drinking, is a sacrament of Christ's death"
and that "all creatures [*i.e.* everything in the visible creation] held forth God in
Christ"⁴¹¹

Although Traherne certainly did not reject the sacrament of the eucharist, frequently expressing his love for the rites of the Church, this "heretical" view seems to resonate with his repeated emphasis upon the "Whole World," the value of such "Common" things as air and water and even "my household stuff,"⁴¹² his thanksgivings for the body and his recognition of the omnipresence of "Infinit Lov" which whispers in "evry Gale of Wind," and keeps us company at our table and accompanies us on our walks.⁴¹³ Such a vision is not, of course, heretical but fundamentally in tune with the Cosmic Christ tradition from Paul through to Teilhard.

"Life it self" is God's presence. This sacramental view of the world is not necessarily limited, as Ponsford and Ross suggest, exclusively to those who accept the doctrine of transubstantiation. Nor does resistance to this doctrine, or a downplaying of the symbols associated with it, necessarily imply a turning away from symbol and typology towards mere metaphor. Traherne dwells not so much upon the symbolic elements of the eucharist but upon the whole world as a type of God. The typological relation implies a real relation between type and antitype – one informs and is the fulfillment of the other. Traditional typology, however, privileges the antitype as the locus of truth, whereas Traherne's concern is with the activity of God and the "Great Circulation" in which the Christic antitype is not so much the elevated and somewhat distant locus of truth, wisdom, goodness and love, but the source from which these things flow into and circulate about the universe. As we noted earlier from Clark, "Traherne rejoices that Christ has extended revelation beyond types."⁴¹⁴ This, as DeNeef, observes is the "radical literalness"⁴¹⁵ of

⁴¹⁰ Familists: members of Family of Love sect. They rejected the sacraments, emphasising the inner light. They disappeared in Europe soon after 1600 but survived in 17th century England. The work of the founder, Henry Nicholas, was read by Quakers and followers of Boehme.

⁴¹¹ Edwards, *Gangraena* (1646.) Cited in Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, p. 254.

⁴¹² "Thanksgivings for the Body," l. 315.

⁴¹³ KG f. p. 313, ll. 143 ff. (f. 192v.) See 2.1.4.

⁴¹⁴ Clark, "God's Immanence in All and the Poet's Imitation of all Adams : Thomas Traherne's Transcendence of the Neotypological Lyric," p. 147.

Traherne – the acceptance of a real and solid union (without confusion) of the divine and the mortal.

The “sacramental vision” according to Scott, entails a “deep yearning to find the essential structure of reality to be a sacramental pattern which grounds our relationship to the world – to persons and things – in a dialectic of sympathy and exchange.”⁴¹⁶ Traherne finds and eucharistically celebrates this relation in the cup of “Life itself.” Speaking of how the world is “made for man” and how the Angels are but “Spectators” to “our Redemption and Marriage with the Lamb” and “our Creation,” he observes that

God had before this made an Epistle of his Lov. He had written it upon the Earth in knots and flowers, in Letters of Gold, in the Sun, in Silver Copies in the Stars, in Bloody Characters, in the Living Creatures which was in more Bloody ones afterwards Copied in the Death of his Son.⁴¹⁷

Notable here is Traherne’s sense of both an historical act of redemption, and an ongoing, act of grace in the Life and “Bloody Characters” of “Living Creatures.” The trope of the written word or book are commonplaces in Christian writings concerning the creation. Many Christian writers speak of the creatures as the words of God, and the book of Nature in which God’s Word may be read and through which we are united to him. According to Maximus the Confessor, for example,

[the Logos] while hiding himself for our benefit in a mysterious way, in the *logoi*, shows himself to our minds to the extent of our ability to understand, through visible objects which act like letters of the alphabet, whole and complete both individually and when related together ... Thus he gathers us together in himself, through every object ... enabling us to rise into union with him, as he was dispersed in coming down to us.⁴¹⁸

Klaaren argues, however, it was a development peculiar to the seventeenth century to see the creatures as the “publications” of God – a development commensurate with the rise of voluntarism and the emphasis upon divine displays of power rather than the Logos - hidden yet apparent in all things. Boyle speaks in the new vernacular - of creation as an open book,

⁴¹⁵ A. Leigh DeNeef, *Traherne in Dialogue: Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), p. 27.

⁴¹⁶ Nathan A. Scott, Jnr., *The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred*, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 42.

⁴¹⁷ KG p. 492, ll. 193-197 (ff. 356v-357r.)

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

a “well-contrived romance” - “full of real hieroglyphicks, where (by an inverted way of expression) things stand for words, and their qualities for letters.”⁴¹⁹ He also describes the world as a “vast fabrick” but this must be contrasted with the fabric described by Traherne which is not an object of manufacture, but an interweaving, a knotting together and an entanglement of bloodied, rather than contrived characters.

In *The Ceremonial Law* Traherne similarly reflects on the creatures that, like hieroglyphics, conceal yet reveal the divine mystery:

As Hieroglyphicks on a Pyramid,
The Secret Thoughts of the Egyptians hid,
Whose fancies and conceits embodied were
In Beasts and Birds and Trees engraven there ...

So is it here, Diviner Mysteries
being veiled in the Creatures Properties
Blood, Incense, Oyl, fire, Water, Cedar, Wood
With Hyssop, Scarlet, Ashes understood,
Gold, silver, Lights and Sacrifices, all
Both Things and Actions either great or small
In that vast Pattern of the World revealing
All Sacred Secrets, and yet all concealing.⁴²⁰

The passion of Christ is implicitly written into the “vast Pattern of the World” – in Blood and Water, Hyssop,⁴²¹ the wood of the tree, the incense, fire and ashes of sacrifice. This passage is couched in Traherne’s description of how “the Vail of Moses that concealed the Light” was rent at the passion of Christ. The “Types and Shadows” of the “Ceremonial Law” are “don away in Christ, the Skreen Removd, the Cloud disperst, when he is seen.” As “Gods Brightness” in Moses was, beneath the veil, “united so divinely in / His members,

⁴¹⁸ Maximus the Confessor *Ambigua* (PG 91,1288.) Cited in Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, pp. 227-8.

⁴¹⁹ Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, , pp. 145-146.

⁴²⁰ CL “The Vail” ; CL (Smith), p. 28, f ll. 27-28, 37-39, 49-52, 63-70.

This work was identified by Laetitia Yeandle of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C. See Julia Smith and Laetitia Yeandle, "Felicity Disguised in Fiery Words: Genesis and Exodus in a Newly Discovered Poem by Thomas Traherne: Traherne's The 'Ceremonial Law'," *Times Literary Supplement* 7 Nov. 1997, p. 17. Smith and Yeandle describe *Ceremonial Law* as a “typological poem based on the biblical narrative of Genesis and Exodus, showing how in the events of the Old Testament we might see “As in a Glass our Gospel Mysteries.”

⁴²¹ “... they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.” (John 19:29.) ; “They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall : and when he had tasted therof, he would not drink.” (Matt. 27:34.)

and so mingled with his Skin” so is Christ with our Souls: “No Vail, nor Skreen, nor Cloud can com between.” Gregory of Nyssa speaks of God in Christ clothing himself with our nature as he “clothes himself with the universe,” both containing and dwelling within it. Christ “maintains creation in existence” just as he, in the Incarnation, “mingled himself with our being.”⁴²² So for Traherne, the creatures reveal as they veil or clothe the divine mystery. Although the “Creatures Properties” are likened to hieroglyphic “Pictures” they do not obscure the truth but contain and convey the mystery. As Saenz observes, “the Word or Hieroglyph encapsulates the message.”⁴²³ Creatures, like words, impart “the Inward and hidden Nature of the thing they Signifie.”⁴²⁴

Thomas Browne also speaks of intimations of divinity in the text of Nature:

For in this Mass of Nature there is a set of things that carry in their Front, though not in Capital Letters, yet in stenography and short Characters, something of Divinity, which to wiser Reasons serve as Luminaries in the Abyss of Knowledge.⁴²⁵

For Browne, the “stenography and short Characters” of the world seem, however, to simply represent the divine through a system of signs; in the dark “Abyss of Knowledge” they light and sign-post the way. For Traherne the two realms are more “deeply entangled” – the world speaks, in Capital Letters, of the divine mystery because it is not merely analogous to it. In the workings of the very atoms that comprise its material structure there is, conversely, an “Abyss of Wonder.” The creatures, like Moses’ radiant skin, are “mingled” with “Gods Brightness.” In his “radical literalness,” he edges towards Teilhard’s concept of the incarnate Word which, as King summarises,

is a word that is incarnate, not only as a *human* being, but present as *an element* in *all beings*, in all created reality, all of which needs completion, fulfillment and redemption. God is incarnate in matter, in flesh, in all of creation, in the cosmos. The incarnation of Christ becomes extended to the dimensions of the cosmos; it is an event and mystery of cosmic extension ... Teilhard firmly believed that

⁴²² Gregory of Nyssa. *Catechetical Orations*, 25 (PG 45, 65-8). Cited in Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, pp. 39-40.

⁴²³ C. Saenz, "Thomas Traherne's View of Language in Restoration England," D.Phil., Oxford University, 1997, p. 201.

⁴²⁴ KG p. 384, ll. 135-136 (f. 254v.)

⁴²⁵ Thomas Browne *Religio Medici* Sec. 12. Cited in Kenneth J. Ames, *The Religious Language of Thomas Traherne's Centuries*, (New York: Revisionist Press, 1977), p. 33.

everything around him “is the body and blood of the Word.”⁴²⁶

Traherne similarly connects Christ and All Things; the Word being incarnate in all the “Bloody Characters” of the world.

The Trophie of the Cross

Pat Pinsent, as we have noted, in a comparative study of the image of Christ in Herbert and Traherne, finds a Trinitarian identification of God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer - while Traherne, it is argued, “makes explicit the difference.”⁴²⁷ Pinsent describes Traherne’s meditations on the Passion as being atypical of seventeenth century Anglican writing in their fervour and “enthusiasm” and sees them as a somewhat forced attempt to bring Christ to the centre of his mind:

Although repetition and heightened emotion are to be found throughout the *Centuries*, the effect seems a little less emphatic and more spontaneous in his meditations upon nature and creation than in those upon the passion of Christ ... in encouraging his reader to gaze intently on the person of the crucified Christ, Traherne is also admonishing himself. His natural instinct seems to be to perceive God in nature, so that he feels the need consciously to bring himself to concentrate on the explicitly Christocentric element of religion.⁴²⁸

That the “Christocentric element of religion” is in fact integrated with Traherne’s perception of “God in nature” is the argument of this thesis. There is, however, an element of truth to Pinsent’s argument as there are indeed jarring passages in Traherne in which the connection between the Passion and Creation which we found in the above passages is absent:

Alas! couldst thou ever have Contrived Such a Service, either So profitable to Thee or So vile to Him, as His coming Down from Heaven to Dye for Thee! ... What Greater Condescention, then that the king of Glory should leave His fathers Throne, and be basely mangled Upon a Crosse for thy Sin!⁴²⁹

Patrides, in his survey of theories of the Atonement, allies Traherne with the Penal-

⁴²⁶ King, *Christ in All Things*, , pp. 64-5. King cites *Hymn of the Universe* (London: Collins Fontana Books, 1970), p. 27.

⁴²⁷ Pinsent, Pat “The image of Christ in the writings of two seventeenth century English country parsons: George Herbert and Thomas Traherne” *Images of Christ, Ancient and Modern*. Porter, S. E. Porter & M. A. Hayes eds. Sheffield Academic Press Sheffield, 1997 pp. 230-231. See 1.1.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴²⁹ SM II.70.

Substitution Theory which emerged in the Reformation.⁴³⁰ Built upon Anselm's "Satisfaction Theory," Christ is regarded as paying a ransom to the Father for the sins of humanity. The theory is couched in the rhetoric of legal transaction. Divine Justice demands punishment as satisfaction, the re-payment of a debt to a just and angry God. The mediating action of Christ, taking humanity's place in the dock, pacifies the Father's anger. As both Patrides and Mozley note, this language was widely employed on the Continent by a range of Protestants and in Britain by both Puritans and Anglicans, and is found in writers such as Donne, Jeremy Taylor, Lancelot Andrewes, Milton, Richard Hooker. It is also found in Traherne, who describes how Christ "pacified the Wrath of God by his Death, and satisfied his Justice in our nature."⁴³¹

The penal-substitution theory of the atonement is difficult to reconcile with Traherne's work as a whole. It is implicit in such a view that the incarnation is essentially an abasement and humiliation and such language pulls strongly against the more positive strains concerning the incarnation and "this little star" that characterise Traherne's thought. It might be said that the penal-substitution view was so ubiquitous that Traherne could not escape writing from within this paradigm. The very awkwardness and conventionality of these passages, so lacking any of the distinctive qualities and charm that mark his meditations on "Life," or "Infinit Love," for example, point to their being something of a foreign import – an isolated subscription to the prevailing orthodoxy that Traherne fails to integrate with his overall personal vision. This personal vision, according to several critics, in fact places Traherne in opposition to 'orthodox' Anselmian and Augustinian positions on original sin and the atonement. Ponsford, for example, aligns Traherne with a decline of "Augustinian teachings on the Fall" through the seventeenth century – the de-emphasis of grace in "a new enlightenment theology" influenced by the fifth century British theologian Pelagius.⁴³² He describes Traherne as "at least partly Pelagian"⁴³³ in his emphasis upon the

⁴³⁰ Patrides also describes three other theories: the *Recapitulation Theory* whereby Christ as the second Adam and representative of mankind restores the Edenic relationship between man and God lost by the first Adam. This is further discussed below ; the controversial *Ransom Theory*, which originates from Irenaeus, whereby Christ pays the ransom for man's acquittal to Satan, baiting him by taking on human flesh ; and the *Satisfaction Theory* set forth by Anselm whereby reparation for sin can only be made by the God-man: – since man offended God only a man can offer satisfaction, but only God is capable of overcoming the devil. See C. A. Patrides, "Milton and the Protestant Theory of the Atonement," *PMLA* 74.1 (1959), pp. 7-9.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12. ; J. K. Mozley, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, (London: Duckworth, 1915), p. 156. According to Mozley, the only new note regarding the issue of Atonement in the seventeenth century was struck by the Quaker Robert Barclay with his emphasis upon an outward redemption performed by Christ for us, which is an external representation of an inner redemption wrought by Christ in us when we submit to the "guidance of the inner light or seed implanted in every one." (p. 158.)

⁴³² Ponsford, "Traherne's Apostasy," p. 180.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

innocence of the child, and his lack of stress upon inherited guilt in favour of the voluntary fall of each individual. Salter also finds in Traherne's affirmation of human freedom "traces of [Pelagian] heresy": "We read nothing in him of the necessity for grace."⁴³⁴

Traherne's thought, according to such views, seems to be irreconcilably split between Anselm and Pelagius. I would argue, however, that while Traherne's harsh Anselmian statements should not be ignored, they need to be held in balance with a more pervasive understanding of Christ and the passion that draws on a broader Christian tradition. As Patrick Grant counters, many critics define the Pelagian heresy against the Augustinian orthodoxy of original sin. Whereas Traherne, he argues, is indebted to an alternative tradition represented by the pre-Nicene Father, Irenaeus, in whom there was a revival of interest in the Renaissance, especially among Latitudinarian and Arminian thinkers. Traherne, Grant observes, was well versed in the early Fathers and cites Irenaeus in *Roman Forgeries*.⁴³⁵ Traherne mirrors Irenaeus in many of his central concerns and beliefs: it is the destiny of man to become God-like; the entire creation is at man's disposal and that the world is revelatory of God; sin is man's moral choice and linked to a failure to properly value the creation; man does not so much inherit as magnify Adam's sin; redemption is a restoration of innocence – a higher innocence wrought by experience; both grace and the exercise of free will are essential to redemption; the atonement is necessary to restore paradise; and rather than defeating Adam, Christ, the second-Adam, restores him to the lost paradise.⁴³⁶ Traherne, like Irenaeus, links the tree of the crucifixion with the tree of knowledge – "That Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradice of GOD!"⁴³⁷ In all this Traherne is closer to the Recapitulation Theory whereby, according to Patrides, the second Adam, as a representative of mankind gathers "together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth."⁴³⁸

It should not be inferred then – either from the isolated nature of Traherne's Anselmian statements, or by describing his vision of innocence regained as verging on heresy - that Christ is "missing" from the heart of Traherne's work. As Wolf argues, Traherne's meditations on the Cross

establish beyond any doubt the Christological orientation of Traherne's thought and the centrality for him, despite his unwillingness to wallow in expressions of

⁴³⁴K. W. Salter, "Traherne and a Romantic Heresy," *Notes & Queries* N. S. 2 (1955), p. 156.

⁴³⁵ Grant, "Original Sin and the Fall of Man in Thomas Traherne," p. 43 ; *Roman Forgeries*, pp. 17, 31, 134.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-57.

⁴³⁷ CM I.55 ; Eph 1:10 ; See *Ibid.*, p. 55.

sinfulness, of the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ. Although Traherne's concepts of the Cross are largely Anselmian his piety about it is patristic in quality.⁴³⁹

This patristic quality might be defined in relation to what Gustaf Aulén, in his seminal work on the doctrine of the Atonement, calls the "Classic idea" typical of the early Fathers and the New Testament texts, and revived by Luther.⁴⁴⁰ He distinguishes it from the "Latin view" of the cross as a legal satisfaction of divine justice, the price for sin, the ransom paid for salvation. The Classic idea, he argues, is essentially captured in two phrases: 'Christus Victor' and "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."⁴⁴¹ Christ, according to Irenaeus, became man so that man might overcome death and sin and become divine. The work of the Atonement is continuous with the Incarnation – perfecting and completing the creation.⁴⁴² The Christ of this tradition is triumphant and victorious, the slayer of sin and reconciler of Heaven and Earth. All of the key themes of the Classic view are present in Traherne: In *Commentaries of Heaven* Traherne emphasises the etymology of the word Atonement – "a compound of At and One, for to Atone is to set at one those persons that were divided"⁴⁴³ and affirms that in Christ's assumption of human form "many more Ends" than the satisfaction of divine justice "might be promised" including "the Manifestation of Gods Goodness to Sinners, of Mans Excellency, of the Seriousness of Gods love, of the Dignity of Nature, the Glory of the Universe, the Desirableness of Heaven and Eternal Glory."⁴⁴⁴ The theme of the deification of man is the culminating theme of *The Kingdom of God*, and it is wrought by the triumph of Christ reconciling the entire cosmos to himself.

Traherne celebrates "Christus Victor" with vigour in the third and fourth chapters of *The Kingdom of God*, moving from his more familiar discourse on the "The Variety of Lives and Treasures in the World" to a thundering sermon on "The Combat between the flesh and the Spirit"⁴⁴⁵ and the "Prince of Darkness" who "is but an Intruder into the regions of

⁴³⁸ Patrides, "Milton and the Protestant Theory of the Atonement," p. 7.

⁴³⁹ Wolf, "The Spirituality of Thomas Traherne," p. 63.

⁴⁴⁰ Aulén finds both Greek and Latin Fathers contributing to the "Classic view": Origen, Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Augustine, Gregory the Great. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert 1931 (London: SPCK, 1970), pp. 37-40.

Mozley also challenges the view that Luther promoted the penal-substitution theory. See Mozley, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, pp. 142-143.

⁴⁴¹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, pp. 6, 4.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. 19ff.

⁴⁴³ CH f.173r.1

⁴⁴⁴ CH f.151v.1.

⁴⁴⁵ KG p. 261 (f. 151v.), title chapter 3.

Light.”⁴⁴⁶ Man is only a “little lower than the Angels” and “Crowned ... with Glory and Honor”⁴⁴⁷ and the “Dragon”⁴⁴⁸ only has power over the world by the cooperation of humanity: “It is we that make our selvs Vassals, and Slaves to these Weak and Miserable Vagabonds ... And this makes the World divided into two Cities, the City of GOD, and the citie of the Devill.” There is a mighty contest between the two cities “But *God will tread satan under out feet shortly, and his Wrath is great becaus he Knoweth he hath but a short time.*”⁴⁴⁹ Christ will be completely victorious – “nothing can be out of its Circumference” and “he will make all things new.”⁴⁵⁰ In an argument that serves to distance Traherne from the Penal-Substitution camp, he argues that God “honorably and Gloriously permitted Evil” and “bringeth Good out of Evil, Light out of Darkness, Order out of Confusion; Humility out of Pride, Lov out of Hatred, Holiness out of Guilt; Joy out of Sorrow; Glory out of Shame; Life out of Death; Strength out of Weakness; and Happiness it self out of the greatest Misery.”⁴⁵¹ There is a tendency in the penal-Substitution view, to isolate the Incarnation and the Passion as moments and interventions in history, rather than being, at the same time, aspects of an ongoing and intrinsic cosmic process – an eternal out-working of light from darkness. As if sensing the potential difficulty of his claim, Traherne sidesteps the controversy – “But it is not the Time for these things” - and gets to his core point:

All that I shall observ is, that we are in the Kingdom of God even now. It is worthy of our Remark. For ye are *come unto Mount Zion, and to the City of the Living God ... And to Jesus the Mediator of the new Covenant, and to the Blood of Sprinkling ... now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the Blood of Christ. For he is our Peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the Middle Wall of Partition between us. That he might reconcile both unto God, in one Body by the Cross, having Slain the Enmity therby ...*⁴⁵²

In his “Poetical Description of the Glory”⁴⁵³ of God’s Kingdom where “Evry Creature which is in Heaven, and on the Earth, and under the Earth, and such as are in the Sea” give all honour to “him that sitteth upon the Throne”⁴⁵⁴ Traherne cites the Antiochene Father, St John Chrysostom:

⁴⁴⁶ KG p. 263, ll. 111-112 (f. 154r.)

⁴⁴⁷ Heb 2: 5-9.

⁴⁴⁸ KG p. 263, l. 112 (f. 154r.)

⁴⁴⁹ KG p. 264, ll. 130-138 (f. 154v.) C.f. Rom. 6:20, Rev. 12:12.

⁴⁵⁰ KG p. 264, ll. 141-142 (f. 154v.)

⁴⁵¹ KG p. 264, ll. 151-156 (f. 154v.)

⁴⁵² KG p. 264, ll. 156-170 (f. 155r.) ; Eph 2: 11-16.

⁴⁵³ KG p. 266 (f. 155v.), title chapter 4.

⁴⁵⁴ Rev 5:13.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

For Heaven also receiveth those things which are upon Earth, and the Earth the things that are in Heaven. For such is the City of GOD having the church of the first born, and the Spirits of Just Men made perfect.⁴⁵⁵

The tidings of this reconciliation and perfection, of “Peace upon Earth” are

sounded forth by the material Accents of all the Creatures. In that City is Erected the Trophie of the Cross: There are the Spoyles which our Savior took, when he led Captivitie Captive, and gave Gifts unto Men. There ... we may see the place where Death lies Crucified, here Satan is trampled under foot, where Sin is Slain, and where all the Glorious Monuments of our Redeemers Victory shine in Eternal Splendor. There you shall see the Great tyrant of Mankind, the Red Dragon bound in Chains; His Bow broken and all the Multitudes of his Captives following his Triumphal Charet, that overcame the powers of Darkness.⁴⁵⁶

Here is what Aulen describes as the “note of triumph characteristic of Apostolic Christianity”⁴⁵⁷ and the great “drama of redemption,”⁴⁵⁸ the sense of “stupendous conflict” and the triumphal thrill and fanfare of Luther’s hymns.⁴⁵⁹

Moving to the second of Aulen’s cardinal points in the Classical view, we also see that Traherne embraces the view that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.” The Classic view is, crucially, not a juridicial doctrine – the Greek Fathers and Augustine, Aulen argues, “find the deepest reason for Gods action in an inner Divine necessity, the necessity imposed by His love.”⁴⁶⁰ This “organic connection” between Incarnation and Atonement is the leading characteristic of the doctrine of redemption in the early church.⁴⁶¹ Christ is the ultimate manifestation and agent of divine love in creation. This is the primary significance of the Incarnation or the emptying of Word into matter which, according to Scotus and Irenaeus, would have occurred even without the Fall and man’s need for redemption. Such an understanding is expressed in Traherne’s insistence upon the theme of eternal communication and “Infinit Lov” breathing through the creation. “Sin was the occasion but Love the Original of this Atonement,” he writes in the *Commentaries*, “It springeth from a Lov infinit ... the Lov of CHRIST, the Lov of CHRIST in giving him self,

⁴⁵⁵ KG p. 266, ll. 26-28 (f.156r.) Traherne is quoting from Chrysostom’s *On Matthew*, Homily 50, 3.

⁴⁵⁶ KG pp. 266-267, ll. 31-39 (f. 156v.)

⁴⁵⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p. 25.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45. The theme of divine necessity is discussed under 2.1.3.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

which passeth knowledg.”⁴⁶² Traherne repeatedly stresses that Love is the cause of both the Incarnation and the Atonement. There is a sense that Traherne, in *The Kingdom of God*, is wrestling with the problem of how to reconcile his convictions about the working of Infinite Love with the doctrine of a wrathful God punishing his son:

I Know very well that the Essence of God is his Blessedness, and that he is All sufficient in himself for ever. But I know withall that Lov is his Essence And that the Happiness of God, is the Happiness of Lov, which wholly intendeth it Self, and its objects Welfare ... In preferring its object abov it self, it Magnifieth it self Divinely, and by Reason of the Candor and Integrity of its End, becometh Infinitely Glorious.⁴⁶³

The Father sent forth his Son and the Son “forsook” his Father to take our part when “Enmity and Variance fell out between us.” The key point for Traherne, however, is that he forsook, yet “forsook not his Father” and that even when dying upon the cross was reigning in the “Throne of Glory.” Also the Father was “pleased, while he was displeased” – giving his son up to Death as he exalted him:

... his only beloved Son was well-pleasing unto him, in Redeeming us: and yet in Redeeming us Endured the Wrath of his Eternal Father. That there should be Secrets enow in the Nature of Lov, to Justify these things is Strange, and is very pleasant to see them answering the Miracles and prophesies that confirm our Faith.⁴⁶⁴

The Trinitarian paradox of this divine and ardent love - “desperat, and more Violent than Burning Flame”⁴⁶⁵ - is that it is the one and same God who is wrathful and humiliated; God gives and empties himself in order to bring light out of darkness; Christ is not a penal substitute but God reconciling the world to himself. In the Latin view Christ’s sacrifice is “made to God from man’s side, from below; in Paul it is the Divine Love itself that makes the redemption.”⁴⁶⁶ The key text supporting this understanding is from Corinthians:

All things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having

⁴⁶² CH f.174v.1.

⁴⁶³ KG p. 324, ll. 139-144 (f. 201v.)

⁴⁶⁴ KG p. 324, ll. 167-171 (f. 201v.)

⁴⁶⁵ KG p. 324, l. 155 (f. 201v.)

⁴⁶⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p. 72.

committed unto us the world of reconciliation.⁴⁶⁷

The Anselmian statements that led Patrides to place Traherne in the Penal-Substitution camp need to be read in this wider context. Luther is often seen as spear-heading this view of the Atonement, but as Aulen argues, “no side of Luther’s theology is more misinterpreted than his teaching on the Atonement.” Luther, he considers, revived and intensified the patristic view.⁴⁶⁸ In his *Longer Commentary on Galatians* Luther, in opposition to the Socinians, is adamant that

... He Himself is the Life, and Righteousness, and Blessing – that is, in His nature and His essence He is God. Therefore those who deny Christ’s Deity lose all Christianity and become mere heathens and Turks. ... When therefore we teach that men are justified through Christ, and Christ is the conqueror of sin, death, and the everlasting curse, then at the same time we testify that He is in His nature God.”⁴⁶⁹

Similar statements are found in Traherne – Christ, he says, was “made Sin, and a Curse for us”⁴⁷⁰ and the Atonement is the process through which

God is Pacified and Satisfaction made for the Sin of Man. Which Satisfaction it is denied by the Abominable Socinians, a sort of Christened Turks, or Baptized Infidel ... The Socinians wil hav him only to be our Wisdom, but neither our Righteousness Sanctification nor Redemption ... He hath given a valuable Consideration for it, for which cause God is said to hav purchased his Church with his own Blood ...⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ 2 Cor.5:18.

⁴⁶⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, pp. 101-102.

⁴⁶⁹ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁷⁰ KG p. 493, l. 259 (f. 357v.) ; cf. 2 Cor 5:21.

See also, for example, CM II.38: “How then should we be saved? Since Eternal Righteousness must be paid for our Temporal Iniquity, Since one must suffer by his own strength on our Behalf, and out of his own Fulness defray out debt in infinit charity, and that is the midst of sufferings; which no Angel nor Seraphim is able: since he must Pay an Obedience which he did not owe: both in Loving men when themselvs were Hatefull, and in Loving God when he was Hated of Him: since none by GOD could do this, and it was inconvenient for GOD to do it: whither shall we flie for refuge? verily we are in a great Strait: but in the midst of these Exigences Lov prepareth for it self an Offering. One Mighty to Save concerning whom it is Written, *This Day hav I begotten Thee.*”

⁴⁷¹ CH ff. 173r.2-174r.1. Socinus objected to the notion of satisfaction - it being a contradiction in God to both forgive sins and to demand satisfaction for them. Christ continually intercedes by saving humanity from the penalty of death. His passion demonstrated his full concern in the sufferings of humanity and serves as an example to his followers who might suffer yet have eternal life. See Mozley, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, pp. 147-150. Traherne also objects to the anti-Trinitarianism of the Socinians.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

Although both speak of sacrifice this does not necessarily indicate the Latin or Penal—Substitution view, as the Classical view also emphasises sacrifice, but it is God who both makes and receives it, rather than imposing his law and demanding satisfaction. For Traherne, it is as necessary to the nature and law of God to love his creatures, as to die for them:

... by his Widsom and Goodness, and consistent with them and his other Attributes, he cannot deny himself nor lie, nor without Shedding of Blood remit Transgression, nor make it possible for the Blood of Bulls and Goats to purge away Sin, nor invent another law that should give Life to Sinners without the Death of his Son.⁴⁷²

In accordance with the prevailing Protestant orthodoxy, Traherne does speak of “satisfaction” but whereas the Latin view places a legal condition upon the operation of divine love, Traherne sets no such limits. The cross, for Traherne, bears the Life and the Love of God which cannot be separated - he compares God’s love to the forgiving love of a man for his adulterous wife –

So deeply is it Engraven in the Nature of som, and Encorporated in their Soul, that they can more Easily ceas to liv then Love, thinking their very Being, when their Lov is destroyed.⁴⁷³

In the Latin view, writes Aulen, “the idea of Divine Love is regarded with some suspicion, as though it needed to be watched lest it should infringe on the demands of justice.”⁴⁷⁴ Traherne, however, is scathing of the “pusillanimous Niggards (who think they shall be undone by Liberalitie)” and “fear least God also should over Act himself in Bounty,” who “look upon his Creatures like strangers to himself. Wheras God knoweth they are his very Bowels, the Works of his own Hands, and the Pleasures of his Goodness.”⁴⁷⁵

Let it Softly Then Distill

⁴⁷² CH f.175v.1.

⁴⁷³ KG p. 325, ll. 180-182 (ff. 202r-202v.)

⁴⁷⁴ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, p. 130.

⁴⁷⁵ KG pp. 296-297, ll. 208-210, 226-228 (ff. 180v -181r.)

The atonement of the cross is, significantly, the subject of a poem that completes a chapter reprising this theme of overflowing bounty. In “A Larger Commentarie upon the Properties of Goodness ...”⁴⁷⁶ Infinite Goodness is described as being “like a Spring ... running allways out of it self.”⁴⁷⁷ Ardent and jealous in its operations, God’s “Goodness alone is an Oracle interpreting the sence and meaning of all the World.”⁴⁷⁸ In this context the crucifixion for Traherne becomes, as McIntosh observes, a ‘condensation’ of the “whole mystery of divine self-giving” through which “Christ restores to human minds a glimmering of the true principles of the whole cosmic order.”⁴⁷⁹ He is so “deeply Concerned” and his

Lov is so Infinit and Its object So Tender a part of himself, that had he a Bodie,
and did he live here upon Earth, he would become our shield to save us, by
receiving the wounds himself, that are Inflicted on his People ...

If God’s love is so great, asks Traherne, “How great then ought our Lov be to all his Creatures?” Nothing is more “pleasing and Delightful” to Infinite Goodness than that its bounty is prized and all its creatures cherished. Christ’s passion is thus introduced as a “New Mine of infinit Depth” in which the “infinit Good” done to “infinit Myriads of Creatures” overflows from the innocent to the guilty.⁴⁸⁰

O JESU GOD, whose own Dear Blood
Was Shed to do a Sinner Good!
 A Bleeding Deitie!
Vaild over in Humanitie!
 And Crucified for me!
A God so rent and torn, and scourged and nailed!
 O how thy Goodness hath prevaild!
O what a Benefit it makes me see
The Goodness is the Lov of God to me!

And did the Great Creator move
The Heavens with an Equal Love!
 Did he Intend my Bliss,
With an Affection like to this?
 O what a deep Abyss!
The very Glory of the King of Kings,

⁴⁷⁶ KG p. 298 (f. 181v.), title chapter 10.

⁴⁷⁷ KG p. 298, l. 28 (f. 182r.)

⁴⁷⁸ KG p. 299, ll. 75-76 (f. 183r.)

⁴⁷⁹ McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, pp. 11-12.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

Is the first fountain of those Springs
That feed my Soul! His GODHEAD Ministers,
And such a Worm abov himself preferres!

The theme of sacrifice is evident in the “Bleeding Deitie” who “such a Worme abov himself preferres.” Yet it is the same Love which “move[s] the heavens” and “feed[s] my Soul,” and Traherne, veers sharply away from any suggestion of penal-substitution:

O Say not So! His Lovs too Great
His Essence too, is too Compleat,
To be so Injurd! He
(All Worth and all Felicities,
Must Ever abov thee
Prefer himself, and be! It is most fit
My Friend that I should this Admit.
For while he does prefer himself, I see
My Self preferd in all Felicities.

The King of Glory Peace and Bliss
My Greater Self my better is.
He did all things for me.
His Goodness is the Deitie,
And my Felicities.
He died for me! Ah say no more! His Lov
Will too Severe and Piercing prove!
It is Intollerable and may Kill
With Sweetness. Let it softly then distill.⁴⁸¹

Here again is reiterated the Classical view that it is God in Christ who himself makes the sacrifice – so far from being a penal-substitute, Christ in shedding his blood, “does himself prefer.” The passion is something of an act of self-preservation – because the creatures are “his very Bowels,” the act of sacrifice becomes necessary to prevail over sin and preserve the selfless communication of Goodness that flows to each creature in their creation. As Traherne outlined earlier in the chapter:

The fountain is Seated in the object by its Beams as the sun in a Mirror: Thence it darteth

⁴⁸⁰ KG p. 303, ll. 205, 203 (f. 185r.)

⁴⁸¹ KG pp. 303-304 (ff. 185v-186r.)

Beams upon it Self again and becometh its own Object in the Fruition of another.”⁴⁸²

In preferring himself, God also prefers the speaker:

For while he does prefer himself, I see
My Self preferd in all Felicitie.

For the speaker is made in the image of God, his happiness is the fruition of God’s desires, and he is contained in God, who is his “Greater Self.”

From the brutality of a “A God so rent and torn, and scourged and nailed!” is softly distilled the gift of Love. It is not the Wrath, but the Love of God that is almost “too Severe and Piercing” to bear, did it not “Kill With Sweetness.” Traherne speaks in similar terms of darting particles of light that, if they were not so minute, would shatter the bodies they met with: “Tho Comming with Infinit Swiftnes it Should seem to Strike with Infinit Violence, and undoubtedly Kill us, in piercing us thorow: yet all is Safe and Easy ...”⁴⁸³ The piercing light of the cross is also the light of the Word that shines in the darkness and in the beginning of every creature. “What is that which shines through me, and strikes upon my heart without hurting it?” asks Augustine. “’Tis Wisdom, Wisdom itself which thus shines into me.”⁴⁸⁴

O what a deep Abyss!

Contemplating such piercing sweetness emanating from the “Great Creator” Traherne declares, “O what a deep Abyss!” The term ‘abyss’ is suggestive of infinite depth, as well as a great “gulf,” or an “infathomable cavity or void space.”⁴⁸⁵ It is associated with the primal chaos - the “abyss of nothing”⁴⁸⁶ out of which all things are made (“Where was? in what Abyss, my Speaking Tongue?”⁴⁸⁷), to hell,⁴⁸⁸ and the state of sin,⁴⁸⁹ and also, as

⁴⁸² KG p. 299, ll. 53-55 (f. 182v.)

⁴⁸³ KG p. 354, ll. 272-274 (f. 227v.)

⁴⁸⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts and W.H.D. Rouse, ed. Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1912), 11.9.

⁴⁸⁵ C. T. Onions, rev., ed., *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973): Abyss : ME bottomless ; depth ; 1. The great deep, the primal chaos; the bowels of the earth; the infernal pit; see Abysm 2. A bottomless gulf; any infathomable cavity or void space 1639.

1. the depe bottomlesse abisse of the yerth 1534. 2. The awful abyss which separates us from the stars Herschel. *fig.* An abyssus of goodness. Bacon. Abysses of disgrace. Burke

⁴⁸⁶ KG p. 297, l. 238 (f. 181r.)

⁴⁸⁷ “The Salutation,” l.6.

Clements observes, in relation to the *via negativa* of mystical Christianity – to express the unknowable, unfathomable mystery of God.⁴⁹⁰ In Traherne the *via negativa* is always balanced with the *via positiva* – an interpenetration of the mysterious and the “Solid.” The light “shineth in the darkness,”⁴⁹¹ floods, and fills the Abyss with wonders. The fact of creation is then seen, paradoxically, as a “profound Abyss,”⁴⁹² the world filled with and by the incarnate Word of God whose

Being is his Happiness ... It is a Mine of infinit Wonders and Pleasures, an Abyss of infinit Wonders, a World of Mysteries, a boundless Infinity of Illimited Excellencies.⁴⁹³

Traherne revels in this paradox of the fathomless fullness of Christ, and in the revelation of an “Abyss of Blessedness,”⁴⁹⁴ an “Abyss of Wonders” in every corner of the physical universe. To repeat a passage cited earlier and recall the theme of the “Wonders of Light” Traherne finds, for example, that:

An Abyss of Wonders lies here, at which all Nature may Tremble; an Extremitie of Height in allmighty Power, that is Express in the Achievement as much as possible ... The Matter is so intricat, and deeply entangled ... Infinit Wisdom ... by making Particles infinitely small made provision, that infinit Numbers might meet in the Same Divisible or Physical Point without disturbance, as freely as if one alone were passing by through infinit and Endless Spaces ... no Line of Reason will ever Sound the Bottom (such Infinit Abysses of Wisdom are in them) till Eternitie it self Enlighten the Soul.⁴⁹⁵

Eccl. 24: 3-5 “I came forth ... walked in the depth of the abyss.” 1:1-4 ; In the CB under “Chaos” Traherne records Gale’s view that Plato’s first matter conforms to the description of creation in Genesis 1.2 where the Divine Spirit moves over the waters. Hermes also describes a “Subtile spirit” that moved in the watery “infinite darkness in the Abyss.” (Everard, *Divine Pymander*, III.3.)

⁴⁸⁸ “the deep Abyss where Satan crawls.” (“On Leaping Over the Moon,” l.59.)

⁴⁸⁹ Thus you see I can make merry with Calamities, and while I griev at Sins ...Descend into the Abysses of Humilitie, and there Admire a new Offspring and torrent of Joys (CM III.48.)

⁴⁹⁰ Arthur Lee Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 26-27.

⁴⁹¹ John 1:5.

⁴⁹² O what a Wonderful Profound Abyss / Is God! In whom Eternal Wants and Treasures / Are more Delightfull caus they both are Pleasures (“The Anticipation,” ll. 70-73) ; The Highest Things are Easiest to be shewn ... A GOD indeed. Whose Excellence, / In all his Works, must needs exceed all Sence. ... / Nothing’s truly seen that’s Mean: ... / Where may we find a more profound Abyss? ... His Gifts as they come down / Are infinit, and crown / The Soul ... (“The Demonstration,” ll. 25-39.)

⁴⁹³ KG p. 315, ll. 12-16 (f. 194r.)

⁴⁹⁴ Com the Philosopher along with me, / And let us trie a new Philosophie: / as Old as Ages, but from Ages hid, / Till JESUS CHRIST removd the Envious Lid, / Which coverd that Abyss of Blessedness, / Which we’ll not only see, but will possess. (CH Poems “Aristotle” pp. 76-78.)

⁴⁹⁵ KG p. 355, ll. 335-348 (f. 229r.)

He elsewhere exclaims of the atom that “there is an unsearchable Abyss of Wonders contained in it ... the Clear Knowledg of which will make us Expert in the Chiefest Mysteries of GOD and Nature.”⁴⁹⁶ There is also a “Mysterious Abyss of Wonders in the “Conceptions Desires Thoughts and Contemplation” of an ant.⁴⁹⁷ There is an “Abyss of Wonders” in particles of light, in the atom, the conceptions of all sensible creatures, and in the cross – the repetition of the striking term⁴⁹⁸ points to the deep ‘entanglement’ of Christ in the “sence and meaning of all the World”⁴⁹⁹ and to the cross as the point of convergence, the centre into which all elements of the world and all experiences are gathered.

The Cross is the Abyss of Wonders, the Centre of Desires, the Schole of Virtues, the Hous of Wisdom, the Throne of Lov, the Theatre of Joys and the Place of Sorrows; It is the Root of Happiness, and the Gate of Heaven ... To this poor Bleeding Naked Man did all the Corn and Wine and Oyl, and Gold and Silver in the World minister in an Invisible maner, even as he was exposed Lying and Dying upon the Cross.⁵⁰⁰

Kenneth John Ames observes that despite conventional and “maudlin” elements in his reflections upon the crucifixion, “Traherne insists upon transcending the conventional level and its emphasis on the corporeal Jesus” finding “in this bleeding wounded man ... the incarnate God of all worlds.”⁵⁰¹

All Nature May Tremble

Into the “deep Abyss” of the cross, then, all things are gathered, and arising from it, Christ also fills all things. It is a “New Mine of Infinite Depth” and also a cosmic centre. This “Glorious Univers” is the “Kernel”⁵⁰² or “Yelk of all Eternitie” and “Our Saviors Cross doth in the Centre lie.”⁵⁰³ It is “That Centre of Eternity, That Tree of Life in the midst of the

⁴⁹⁶ CH f. 164v.1.

⁴⁹⁷ CH “Ant.” ; CH (Pritchard), p. 17.

⁴⁹⁸ In a search of the Chadwyck Healy English Poetry Database, which provides the full-text of poems published from Anglo-Saxon times to the end of the 19th century, this striking phrase only occurs twice: Joseph Beaumont (1616-1699), in a majestic vision of the ascended Christ, describes the “*Universe’s King*” as an “Abyss of Wonders.” (“Psyche” st. 15) : Shelly describes the “mind of human kind” as a “deep abyss / Of wonder and bliss.” (“Prometheus Unbound,” ll. 94-95, 99-100.) Traherne, as we have noted and will expand upon in the next chapter, also refers to the human mind as a “Deep Abyss.” (“My Spirit,” l. 77.)

⁴⁹⁹ KG p. 299, l. 76 (f. 183r.)

⁵⁰⁰ CM I.58, 60.

⁵⁰¹ Ames, *The Religious Language of Thomas Traherne's Centuries*, p. 48.

⁵⁰² KG p. 482, ll. 52-53 (ff. 347r-347v.)

⁵⁰³ CH “All Things” ll. 19-20.

paradise of GOD!”⁵⁰⁴ Once again Traherne echoes the themes of primitive Christianity: As Clément observes, in a very ancient Easter homily “The cross is truly the tree of life, the axis of the world brought back into line and giving a new stability to creation:”

Jesus has shown in his own person all the fullness of life offered on the tree ... O divine crucifixion, whose reach extends everywhere and to all things! O most singular of all things singular, thou art truly become all in all!⁵⁰⁵

Early Fathers, such as Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor, stressed the link between creation and the cross – that the creative Word of God who contains all things was, according to Irenaeus, “made flesh and hung upon the tree, that he might sum up all into himself.”⁵⁰⁶ Wolf, elaborating upon the theme of Traherne’s patristic piety in relation to the tree of life, finds

His principle of the coinherence of all reality finds its climax as the Son, through whom all things were made, dies upon the sacred tree to which all of creation silently bows in adoration.⁵⁰⁷

“All nature” may also “Tremble” at the expression of “almighty power” in such phenomena as particles of light and atoms – as it did when the earth quaked and sun was eclipsed at Christ’s passion.⁵⁰⁸ Patrides finds that, in contrast to earlier ‘primitive’ commentaries upon the crucifixion, many Renaissance commentators describe the eclipse and quaking of the earth at Christ’s crucifixion as miracles expressive of God’s wrath, rather than of nature’s intrinsic connection to its Creator.⁵⁰⁹ Traherne here implicitly, and elsewhere explicitly, reverts to the primitive view.⁵¹⁰

In the *Church Year-Book*, for example, Traherne copies “A Prayer Most of which was taken out of Dr Featly [sic] for Ascension Day”⁵¹¹ in which Featley (as loosely transcribed by Traherne) praises the

⁵⁰⁴ CM I.55.

⁵⁰⁵ Anonymous *Easter Homily* inspired by Hippolytus, *Treatise on Easter*, 49, 61, (SC 27, pp. 175-91). Cited in Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁰⁶ Irenaeus. *Adversus Haereses* (V.18..2.) Cited in Armstrong, *St. Augustine and Christian Platonism*, p. 19.

⁵⁰⁷ Wolf, "The Spirituality of Thomas Traherne," p. 63.

⁵⁰⁸ See Matthew 27: 45-54.

⁵⁰⁹ C. A. Patrides, "Renaissance Commentaries on the Passion," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 20 (1964)

⁵¹⁰ E.g.: “Who art Thou who Bleeding here caused the Ground to Tremble and the Rocks to rend, and the Graves to Open? Hath thy Death Influence so high as the Highest Heavens? That the Sun also Mourneth, and is Cloathed in Sables?” (CM I.88.)

Creator and Repairer of nature, in Thee not only all the Kindreds of the earth, but all the Creatures under the Cope of Heaven are Blessed. And therefore they Groan together with us, Desiring fervently thy Second Coming. The Earth was Sanctified, and Blessed by thy Birth, and by thy Treading upon it, the Water by thy Descending into the River Jordan, and thy Baptism in it: and by thy walking upon the Seas.

Whereas Featley finds the Air blessed “by thy ascending through it” and fire by “sending down the holy Ghost in the likenesse of fiery cloven Tongues,” Traherne takes up the theme less transcendently, finding the Sun also blessed “by thy Beholding it,” and “the Air by thy Breathing it.” Following Featley he describes how all creatures, whether without voice, understanding, sense or affection yet praise, know, listen to, and bemoan Christ; how the ‘earth quaked at thy passion,’ and all creatures “voluntarily offer Thee their service. As the Foal to bear thee, the Dove to Manifest Thee, the Fish to Discharge Thee ...” Featley continues, expressing the desire to be lifted “from the earth” and “transported to Heaven.” Traherne, however, prefers to dwell a little longer on the earth sanctified by the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ:

How happy am I who Breath in the same Air, Tread upon the same Earth, am Invironed by the same Seas, served by the same Heavens, Refreshed with the same Waters, and See the Same Sun, which Ministered to Thee. All these I receiv by vertue of thy Lov in all; in all these I hav Communion with [thee] ... ⁵¹²

The primary significance of the ascension for Traherne is Christ’s consequent filling of all things. It is conceived as something of an eternal cosmic principle rather than as an isolated historical event. In *The Kingdom of God*, rehearsing the themes of subsequent chapters, and the psalmic phrases that appear throughout his works, Traherne promises that when we enter the triumphant City of the risen God we shall find the whole creation gathered into the victorious Christ:

we Shall see the Sun and Moon and Stars, the Streams, the Rivers, the floods of Honey, and Oyl and Butter, the mines of Gold, and the Fountains of Living Waters, the flowers of Paradise, and the Fruits of Eden. All Ages and Kingdoms, and the Souls of Men in their power and Glory; their Bodies also made like unto

⁵¹¹ Daniel Featley, *Ancilla Pietatis : or, The Hand-maid to Private Devotion*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for Nicholas Bourne and to be sold at the South entrance of the R. Exchange, 1626), pp. 490-493.

⁵¹² CYB ff. 40-41.

his Glorious Body, by the Powerfull Working, wherby he is able to subdue all things to himself, the Virtues and Vices of all the World, the Battails and Victories of God our Savior.⁵¹³

Much of what we have said in relation to Traherne's treatment of the cross in *The Kingdom of God* has been drawn out with reference to other of his works that deal with the subject more directly. Given the magnitude of the work, it would seem on the face of it that the cross is a comparatively minor concern in it. Even in works such as *The Centuries*, as Martz observes, the cross seems to have been "displaced from its primary position in the devotional life." This displacement, however, is only apparant - for the significance of the cross has in fact been expanded or dilated to encompass the entire creation. Traherne, says Martz, takes care "to enfold the Cross within the "all,""⁵¹⁴ apprehending it as "the ligature of all Creation."⁵¹⁵ This understanding of the cross is captured in the type of the phoenix on her nest of spices that Traherne embeds in Chapter 25's great catalogue of creation.

A Phoenix Nest, a Bed of Spices

Mid-way through his accounting of the wonders that so amaze the Celestial Stranger (ranging "from Sands to Spires of Grass to Insects, from those to Birds, from Birds to Beasts, from Beasts to men, from Earth to Heaven") Traherne, as we briefly noted, pauses to take breath and reflects:

He would think himself faln into the Paradise of God, a Phoenix nest, a Bed of Spices, a Kingdom of Glory.⁵¹⁶

He thus places, in the traditional type of the phoenix, the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ in "the Heart of the Universe."⁵¹⁷ Like the Tree of Life it is "in the midst of the Paradice of GOD."⁵¹⁸ Traherne demonstrates not only that the Earth is the "Centre of the Heavens,"⁵¹⁹ but that Christ is the centre of the Earth, concluding the chapter with a rhapsodic variation on the New Testament hymns to the cosmic Christ revolving around the conviction that

⁵¹³ KG p. 267, ll. 47-54 (f. 157r.)

⁵¹⁴ Louis L. Martz, *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 62.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵¹⁶ KG p. 388, ll. 36-38 (f.259r.)

⁵¹⁷ According to Greek myth, the phoenix is an Arabian bird which after a span of years makes a nest of spices, fans it into flame with its own wings, then arises to new life from the ashes.

⁵¹⁸ CM I.55.

⁵¹⁹ KG p. 392, l. 179 (f.285r.)

Christ “is before all things, and by him all things consist.”⁵²⁰ The life, death and resurrection of Christ, explains Gunton, is expressive of the “intrinsic patterning” or “*logic of divine love*.”⁵²¹ The logos or “logic of divine love” is uttered throughout creation as well as in the act of salvation. The nest of the world is consumed by fire along with Christ, and also rises with him. Like the tree it is “set on fire with invisible flame, that Illuminateth all the World. The Flame is Lov. The Lov in His Bosom who died on it.”⁵²²

Love is the onely sacrifice. It is Like our Saviour its own Priest, and its own Alter, Perfume and Flame. A Prophet Priest and king. O my God it is like thy son, the Phænix of the world. Its comprehensiv sphere, a flaming Temple. The Antitype of her who is faigned Miracle of all the Birds and more then So. Its own Alter fire nest and Sacrifice. O Thou nest, and Bed of spices! In its Highest Agonies, ever Dying, Expiring and Reviving every moment.⁵²³

Traherne here evokes eternal cycles of death and resurrection; a cosmic principle of Love and Goodness that is “in its Highest Agonies, ever Dying, Expiring and reviving every moment.” Traherne again transcends typology, for Christ is the “Antitype of her who is faigned Miracle of all Birds and more then So.” For Love, embodied in “Our Saviour,” is “its own Priest, and its own Alter, Perfume and Flame.” It is hailed as a phoenix as well as “Thou nest, and bed of spices”; it is “its own Alter fire nest and Sacrifice.” Here is another “deeply entangled” matter – for Christ is both priest and sacrifice; phoenix and nest; the place of sacrifice, the object sacrificed, the transforming fire and the perfume released by its flames, the creator, redeemer, and immanent sustainer of the world. That which redeems is “the divine logic” of that which is redeemed. The colourful, fragrant world that the Celestial Stranger has fallen into is the very nest of Christ, and Christ’s sacrifice, typifying the “Goodness” of God, is impatterned in nature itself:

The Sun Shineth for others, Fountains spring for others, Bees make Hony for others these litle Creatures ... will Expose themselvs in Battel to the Death for the preservation of their King. Even feeble Hens forgetfull of their Weakness will flie into the Paws of a Lion to save their Chickens from being devoured; the Pellican will feed her yong ones with her Blood, Tygres tho ravenous, almost Starv themselvs to Death while they cary the prey to their Cubs. A Lioness or a Bear bereaved of her Whelps, as if her Heart and Soul wre stoln from her, runs upon all Dangers, and Death to recover them ... The Generous principles of Nature, are

⁵²⁰ KG p. 393, ll. 235-244 (f.263v.)

⁵²¹ Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*, p. 125.

⁵²² CM I.60.

⁵²³ SM II.77.

2.4. THE ACTIVE CENTRE

Seeds and Sparks as it were of Eternal Goodness.⁵²⁴

This Love is “is a Phoenix that will revive in its own Ashes” and “will thrust in it self as the Greatest of all principles ... It seems it will break in evry where, as that without which the World could not be Enjoyed.” Love breaks in everywhere, arising from the centre, permeating the fragrant nest of the world, and the human heart that will “allow it room.”⁵²⁵ Traherne promises his “Excellent friend” in the *Centuries* that contemplating Christ “Dying upon a Cross” and seeing “one self the Beloved of GOD” will “make the place wherin you love a nest of Sweet Perfumes, and evry Soul that is round about you will be a Bed of Honor and Sweet Repose unto you.”⁵²⁶ The “Bed of Spices” that the Celestial Stranger has “faln into” is not only associated with the nest of the phoenix but also with the beauties of the beloved in the Song of Solomon, whose cheeks “are as a bed of spices” and to whom the lover goes as “down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.”⁵²⁷ The Christian allegorisation of the song as an expression of Christ’s love for the Church is extended by Traherne to express not only Christ’s love, but his centrality to, the colourful and fragrant world that so amazes the man from the stars.

⁵²⁴ KG p. 293, ll. 39-40, 55-62, 68-69 (ff. 177v-178r.)

⁵²⁵ CM IV.61.

⁵²⁶ CM I.80.

⁵²⁷ Sol. 5:13 ; 6:2.

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

The divine milieu henceforward assumes for us the savour and the specific features which we desire. In it we recognise an omnipresence which acts upon us by assimilating us in it, *in unitate corporis Christi*. As a consequence of the Incarnation, the divine immensity has transformed itself for us into *the omnipresence of christification*. All the good that I can do *opus et operatio* is physically gathered in, by something of itself, into the reality of the consummated Christ. Everything I endure, with faith and love, by way of diminishment or death, makes me a little more closely an integral part of His mystical body. Quite specifically it is *Christ whom we make or whom we undergo in all things*. Not only *diligentibus omnia convertuntur in bonum* but, more clearly still, *convertuntur in Deum* and, quite explicitly, *convertuntur in Christum*.¹

Le Milieu Divin

2.5.1. Co-heirs with Christ

The focus now shifts from Christ's action in the world to the action of the individual in the world. The same poetic that Traherne uses in relation to the omnipresent, active and centrifugal and victorious life of Christ in the cosmos is also used to speak of human life and the human soul, indicating a deep relation between the two spheres. As outlined in Chapter 3, this relation is forged by a driving desire for a unitive transformation with what, in the succeeding chapters, has been described as the active centre of the mysterious pleroma – with “Life it self.” The translation of that desire into the act of Christification – the building up of the mystical body of Christ – is the concern of this final stage. All that we have said in relation to Christ as the Sun, the centre, the Abyss of Wonders, the all in all, the possessor, container, consummator and redeemer of all things is now applied to the role of humanity in the cosmos. This chapter, therefore, revisits many of the themes and passages discussed in the preceding chapters – the aim being not so much to recapitulate as to complete the circle, for according to Traherne, Christ lives in each of his co-heirs; in each son of God conformed to his image.

The first part of the chapter considers the implications of the atonement and the manner in which the triumph of Christ over darkness and evil is reprised in each life that is

¹ I.e.: Not only for those loving him are all things converted into good but converted into God and quite explicitly converted into Christ. Cf.: Rom 8:28-29: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to the purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be firstborn among many brethren.

“Glorified with Hazzards.”² The second part then moves to consider the redemption of the entire universe through the action of each comprehending and comprehensive soul, using the themes encapsulated in the poem “A Wise Man” as a focal point for the work as a whole. The poem concludes the chapters on the material universe, sums earlier discussion of the capacities of the soul, and looks forward to the themes of humanity’s enjoyment of the world and pivotal role in the restoration and fulfillment of the kingdom. The Wise Man, by feeling, enjoying, illuminating, and piercing all things, is the “Means of the Worlds Glory.” He is the “Golden Clasp”³ in whom soul, body and world are united. He transmutes the pleasures of the bodily senses by centring all things in his consciousness, upholding and perfecting all things in a song of praise to the source of all life.

For Traherne, all things are “gathered” into the “consummated Christ,” and “converted into Christ” through the agency of humanity. In the refining forge of experience, humanity is “Glorified with Hazzards,” made Wise, and thereby “conformed to the image” of Christ. In both paths – trial and enjoyment – it is only through the perfect freedom of humanity that the “omnipresence of Christification” can be achieved. Each valiant quest to overcome the darkness and each loving and voluntary act of encompassing the Universe makes real and expands the mystical body of Christ.

² KG p. 503, l. 379 (f. 365v.)

³ KG p. 483, l. 88 (f. 348r.)

2.5.2. Glorified with Hazzards

Among those things that most puzzle the Wit of Man, an Estate of Trial ... seemeth far beneath the perfection of Eternal Love ...⁴

Traherne's aim in the final chapter of *The Kingdom of God*, having discoursed so fully on the working of Infinite Love, is to solve this puzzle and to reveal why, in fact "it was better to be made in a State of Trial, then immediately placed in the Throne of Glory."⁵ Traherne seems to have spent comparatively little time expatiating upon the Estate of Trial during the course of the work; and the other three estates - of Innocency, Grace and Glory – seem more central to his work as a whole. Michael Suarez observes, however, that Traherne is very much attuned to the large body of seventeenth century devotional writing upon the four estates.⁶ The existence of sin and error, far from being of peripheral interest to him, is in fact the impetus behind all of his encouragements towards a recovery of Innocence, the recognition of Grace and the attainment of Glory. Traherne's writings, he argues,

chiefly concern the necessity and nature of a pervasive and continual conversion from the sinfulness and misapprehension characteristic of the secular realm, to the righteousness and correct perception proper to a life informed and enriched by grace.⁷

While it is essential to Traherne's philosophy that "you are as prone to Lov as the Sun is to Shine,"⁸ there is also, as Suarez recognises, the need for sustained labour in clearing the dross so that this quality can be recognised and exercised. His "design," as stated in *Christian Ethicks*, is not to berate his reader to examine their sins,

but to elevate the *Soul*, and refine its Apprehensions, to inform the Judgment, and polish it for Conversation, to purifie and enflame the Heart, to enrich the Mind, and guide men (that stand in need of help) in the way of *Vertue*; to excite their Desire, to encourage them to Travel, to comfort them in the Journey, and so at last to lead them to true Felicity, both here and hereafter.

⁴ KG p. 495, ll. 1-3 (f. 358r.)

⁵ KG p. 495 (f. 358r.), title chapter 42.

⁶ Michael F. Suarez, "Against Satan, Sin, and Death: Thomas Traherne and the "Inward Work" of Conversion," *Reform and Counterreform : Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther*, ed. John C. Hawley, Religion and Society; 34 (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1994), p. 90.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸ CM II.65.

He does not, therefore, “speak much of *Vice*, which is far the more easie Theme, because I am intirely taken up with the abundance of Worth and Beauty in *Vertue*” - the ugliness of vice being obvious when set against the attractions of virtue.⁹

Furthermore, the Estate of Trial for Traherne, in which such virtues and vices are negotiated, should not be seen, as Suarez also points out, as being in dialectical relation to the other states, but as part of an ongoing process of “continuity in transformation.”¹⁰ This is the very pattern of the eternal Incarnation, Passion, and Ascension of Christ, and of the human life lived in his similitude. Where Traherne speaks more directly in his other works of “Descending into Hell for the sake of others”¹¹ this emptying or *kenotic* impulse is seen in *The Kingdom of God* as underlying the entire fabric of the universe. It is the “Glory of Gods visible Image and vice gerent; the Sun” to be the “cause and Fountain of all Emanations wherby all Beings Exchange themselvs for each others Sake to one another, and are united together.”¹² The Sun “poureth out it self for the Good of all.”¹³ The Christic Life is empatterned in the life of every creature, but it is consciously reiterated in the actions of humanity, and thus offered back to its source:

For we are the Sons of God, and Heirs and Joynt Heirs with Christ; If so be we that suffer with him, that we may be Glorified together¹⁴ with the Eternally begotten Wisdom of God the father shall hav Communicated to us all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge, the Communication will enable us to attain our End, both in the fruition of our Happiness, and in the prais of his Glory: moving us to Sacrifice our Souls and Bodyes unto God, in the Brightness of those Flames, which will be our Holiness and felicity.¹⁵

In this sacrifice we are “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”¹⁶ There is an intrinsic relation, a “continuity in transformation” between sacrifice and glory, death and life. For this reason, “All things in Heaven and Earth,” even “Afflictions and persecutions, and Death it self, [are] the Treasures of a Christian.”¹⁷ As Teilhard also expresses it, “Life and death, unity and plurality, element and totality, possession and quest, being and becoming ... such is the

⁹ CE p. 3.

¹⁰ Suarez, "Against Satan, Sin, and Death," p. 91.

¹¹ CM I.90.

¹² KG p. 381, ll. 10-13 (f. 251v.)

¹³ KG p. 357, l. 62 (f. 231r.)

¹⁴ Rom. 8:17.

¹⁵ KG p. 276, ll. 269-276 (ff. 163v-164r.)

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 4:8-10.

¹⁷ KG p. 441, ll. 97-99 (f. 310r.)

Pleroma of the world and of Christ.”¹⁸

The Estate of Trial is part of the whole synergistic Trinitarian system and expressive of the Will which, as Traherne once more reiterates, is one with the Essence of God.

Suppose he had Willed nothing? Then verily he had not been. ... His Will is the Word by which he commanded all Things to exist ... Remove his Will, you remove all his excellency and among those himself would be quite abolished ...¹⁹

“He could hav immediatly Communicated his Glory to the Soul”²⁰ but, argues Traherne, it is not only better, but essential to his nature, that he did not. The Estate of Trial is a part of “his excellency” and his very self would be “abolished” if things were any different. For it essential to his very self that the creatures as “his very Bowels” and “the Works of his own Hands”²¹ should have the freedom to love their creator and their fellow creatures. God “loves to Glorifie his Wisdom by bringing Vast Perfections to maturitie out of the smallest Seeds to beautifie himself by doing the the most excellent Works, and to fill all Eternitie in all its parts with Such varieties of Beauty, and order, that every Particle of the fabrick may contribute Beauty, and Glory to the Whole.”²² Each part of the whole is to become, in this Estate of Trial, “capable of all his Lov” and conspires to delight God in innumerable varieties of ways. Traherne enlarges upon the many nuances of feeling that make up the “fabrick” of human love:

Lov to an infant, to a child, to a man, to an old man is different, to a Servant, to a Son, to a Friend, to a Bride. to a Mistress, to a Stranger, to a poor Man, to a Rich man, to a Queen, to a Wife, Love beginning, and a Lov continuing, a long time after Marriage.²³

All such plenitude and variety works to increase the splendour of the whole - “as when the Several Strings of a Lute are touched by a Dexterous hand ... which produces a Melodie

¹⁸ Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," p. 214.

¹⁹ KG p. 496, l. 53-60 (f. 359r.)

²⁰ KG p. 496, l. 63 (f. 359r.)

²¹ KG f. p. 297, ll. 226-228 (ff. 180v -181r.) In a similar vein Blondel, as we noted earlier (2.4.1, *In him all things consist*) held that we cannot isolate Christ in the Cosmos or “represent Him as an intruder, an alien in the crushing and hostile immensity of the universe.” We can either, he observes, “fall back into a murderous symbolism, or go forward towards a realism which is self-consistent throughout ...” Teilhard de Chardin, Blondel and Lubac, *Correspondence : Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maurice Blondel*, p. 23.

²² KG p. 499, ll. 190-194 (f. 361v.)

²³ KG p. 499, ll. 201-204 (f. 362r.)

Sublime.”²⁴ Each type and degree of love in creation contributes to the “fullness” of God’s “felicity,” is “Beautifull in its Season” and will remain “in God forever.”²⁵

“This is the Key of other Mysteries” ; while the Divine Essence is “Allsufficient” being able to create, it is yet “needfull,” desiring the existence of creatures distinct from yet included in itself to fully enjoy and magnify itself.²⁶ Reciprocally, human needfulness is the condition creative of the enjoyment and fulfillment of the Divine Essence. One of the chief reasons Traherne gives for the “Inconveniences that would hav followed our immediat Exaltation” is that there would have been no need of a “Visible World: sea, Air, fire, Earth, Skie ...” It is the wisdom of God to so “Multiply our Wants,” (the state of need or want being an ‘imperfect’ state), “that our Treasures might be Multiplied, (for that Nothing without the Want of it could be a Treasure.)”²⁷ This argument recurs throughout Traherne’s writings and is central to the workings of a “Unitive Transformation” in which, as we have noted, “Wants are the Bands and cements between God and us.”²⁸ The second reason, therefore, that an immediate exultation would be “inconvenient” is that the objects of our wants and desires taste all the sweeter for being thirsted after: “Heaven had not been Heaven, had there been no Desire ... Delay quickeneth Desire with an Impatience as Delightfull, as Eager and maketh Room for many Longings and Endeavors, which are sweet and Beautifull to the Ey of Knowledg, yet without this Delay had never been Created ...”²⁹

Traherne is moved to state these views as an article of faith:

We declare the Estate of Trial to be necessary³⁰ for Gods Pleasure, and the Perfection of Gods Kingdom, for our Glory, and Perfect Enjoyment, for the Existence of innumerable Millions of Celestial Treasures, and Delights, which tho they Spring up in time, are Eternally to be Enjoyed, and that it is far better things Should be thus, then we by being rashly and hastily placed in Glory, prevented of our best and highest Advantage:³¹

²⁴ KG p. 499, ll. 211-213 (f. 362r.)

²⁵ KG p. 499, ll. 214-216 (f. 362r.)

²⁶ In a flight of Scholastic complexity, Traherne argues that without this act of creation “which the essence of God is, it is not Allsufficient, becaus no cause without its Effect is so fully satisfactory, as that Cause is, which hath produced the effect, wherof it is the Cause.” (KG p. 497, ll. 108, 106, 107, 118-120 (f. 360r.)) As we observed in relation to the term “Act,” Traherne defends and employs such fine argument when “innumerable Questions of infinite concernment” (CH f. 30r.) depend on a tireless digging into the heart of the matter. Here he is driving toward the conclusion that the act of creation is an act of desire, and defines the very nature of what God is.

²⁷ KG p. 498, ll. 143-150 (ff. 360v-361r.)

²⁸ CM I. 51.

²⁹ KG p. 498, ll. 152-158 (f. 361r.)

³⁰ That is, essential to the nature of God and creation.

³¹ KG p. 497, ll. 124-129 (f. 360v.)

The Estate of Trial has not been instituted, in Traherne's scheme, as a penalty for sin, nor is sin seen to be endemic to the world, or the world itself to be a battle ground in the campaign for heaven. Traherne, with his emphasis upon desire and enjoyment, consciously strains against the widespread views of those such as William Sherwin who addresses his readers as fellow "Christian Sufferers" who "must thru much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God."³² The term "tribulation," which Traherne seems rarely to use, suggests the endurance of inevitable suffering, whereas "trial" is more suggestive of difficulty that may be overcome. In the previous chapter we noted Patrick Grant's placing of Traherne in a patristic tradition represented by Irenaeus, and attractive to Latitudinarians and Arminians, according to which the sin of Adam is not so much inherited as magnified by those who choose to sin and fail to value the creation. Redemption is therefore the operation not only of grace but also free will and those who freely choose [and enjoy] wisely are restored to a state of higher innocence.³³

Being placed immediately in the Estate of Glory, Traherne argues, would deprive man of his liberty and therefore his full share of glory in this higher estate. There would be "no Consultation, no Debate, no Trial,"³⁴ no "Dispensation of Rewards, and Punishments,"³⁵ and therefore no victory for "Vertue had been an Easy, and an abject Superfluity."³⁶ So also, according to Aquinas, "Man has free will: otherwise all counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain."³⁷ All this has the makings, according to Traherne, of a great dramatic spectacle

where all is Smooth, be it never so high and Blessed to the Enjoyer, it affordeth little Delight to the Spectator, because there is no Danger of Difficulty nor Place for his Virtuous, and Heroik Actions, which awaken the Concern, and desire of the Soul, and commend the Actor to a more high Esteem, infusing Life and Beauty into the Scene, by a Well compiled Varietie, and making felicity more Wellcom, when it Cometh,³⁸

Lest this seem like a gladiatorial sport at humanity's expense, Traherne emphasises that God,

³² William Sherwin, *The Word Written, Concerning the Word Everlasting*, (London: Printed for Francis Smith, and to be sold at the Elephant and Castle, without Temple-Bar, [1670]), "To the Reader."

³³ Grant, "Original Sin and the Fall of Man in Thomas Traherne," passim.

³⁴ KG p. 500, ll. 242-243 (f. 362v.)

³⁵ KG p. 498, l. 159 (f. 361r.)

³⁶ KG p. 498, ll. 163-164 (f. 361r.)

³⁷ ST I 83.1.

³⁸ KG p. 498, l. 170 – p. 499, l. 176 (f. 361r.)

Angels and Men are alike actors and spectators in a “twofold Capacity.”³⁹ Each is a witness to the glory of the other. All creatures, Angels and Men, writes Traherne, are “my Treasures” for “while I lov them as my self, I am Theirs, and they delightful Spectators of my Glory.”⁴⁰

Just as theatrical drama is entirely undermined by predictability of plot, so the spectacle of the Estate of Trial would be undermined by the foregone conclusion of a glorious final scene. Without the absolute freedom of the actors to determine their own destiny the scene would be all light and no shade - rather, and interminably, tedious with

Nothing being seen but Pleasures and praises, nothing heard but Hosannas, and hallelujahs throughout Eternitie.⁴¹

Heaven would be a boring place without Earth. While it is the glory of God, argues Traherne (rehearsing the core theme of his early chapters⁴²), that he is both a free and necessary agent whose Will, Essence, and Delight are one, it is essential to our glory that there be no hint of necessity in our nature. The difference between God and us is that God was “the first Author of his own Choise; His delight was Infinitely free, and the necesitie of its Working was not impressed from without.” Any necessity in our nature, however, that would place us immediately in a “Stiffe, and Passive”⁴³ State of Glory would be imposed from without and “tho it did not bereav us of the Pleasure, would rob us of the Beauty and Glory of the Action.”⁴⁴

To giv us therefore the power of Doing all that is Excellent, without the necessitie of doing it, is the vertical point, the very Zenith or utmost height of our Exaltation.⁴⁵

It is a point of unapologetic pride that we are the “Sole and Absolute Authors of our own operation. Therefore it is Said, that we are his Workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto Good Works, which God had before prepared, that we Should walk in them.”⁴⁶ We are like God, whose essence is both free and necessary, in as much as

³⁹ KG p. 499, l. 181-182 (f. 361v.)

⁴⁰ KG p. 361, ll. 247-248 (f. 234v.)

⁴¹ KG p. 496, ll. 75-77 (f.359v.)

⁴² As discussed under 2.1.2.

⁴³ KG p. 501, l. 278 (f. 363v.)

⁴⁴ KG p. 500, ll. 259, 265 – p. 501, l. 272 (f. 363v.)

⁴⁵ KG p. 500, ll. 250-252 (f. 363v.)

This Libertie he gives us is as Gratefull to our Nature, as Just and Necessary, as obliging, as Delightfull. It makes us Capable of being Noble and truly Generous in our Thoughts, and Affections. It is very Acceptable, because we desire to be sincere in our Judgments, and true in our Apprehensions: As he is, who bestowed it on us.⁴⁷

Traherne balances the absolute freedom of humanity with the disposition “prepared” in us towards “Good Works.” Though agreeable and delightfull, the doing of “Good Works” is not compelled - and it is in the element of perfect liberty that Traherne sees the great drama or ‘spectacle’ inherent in the Estate of Trial – in the journey of an independent soul at perfect liberty, and also completely vulnerable. Traherne employs the traditional type of the Bride – (as representative of the Church, or humanity in general) to explore this relation. She is “frail, and Mutable; being placed in such an Estate, wherein there is danger, least She may really become evil.”⁴⁸ She is “placed in the Estate if Trial, as a virgin untouched, that She might Experience all the Approaches of So Beautifull a Suiter, and Gratifie his Affection with the Greater Pleasure.”⁴⁹ She is desired by God, having “something peculiar to her Sex which God himself doth not enjoy, unless it be in her.”⁵⁰ Bride and suitor complement each other: he is “Strong,” she is “more weak, and tender, and Delicat: He is to prepare Enjoyments; She to Enjoy them: He to provide, She to inherit.”⁵¹ Though the weaker party it is “absolutley in her power, whether she will or no” – the suitor is thus, poignantly and dramatically, at her mercy – “O What fear, and Compassion! what Expectation, and Desire! What Agonie, what Weakness and Danger, till the Work be done!”⁵² The bride is vulnerable, but she is also powerful; she is an active and ardent, if unpredictable, partner, not “Stiffe, and Passive.”

The liberty of the will is a passionate point with Traherne and many Renaissance theologians resistant to Calvinism – we, says Traherne, “Should complain, and be distasted” if deprived of it. In *Commentaries of Heaven* he draws upon a sermon by Robert South in which man’s will is celebrated as that “great seat of freedom, that with a kind of autocracy and supremacy within itself commands its own actions, laughs at all compulsion, scorns restraint, and defies the bondage of human laws or external obligations.”⁵³ On a similar note of defiance Traherne asserts “We Abhor to be Servile in any thing. We dislike all that is

⁴⁶ KG p. 501, ll. 289-291 (f. 363v.) ; Eph 2:10.

⁴⁷ KG p. 274, ll. 208-212 (f. 162v.)

⁴⁸ KG p. 502, ll. 352-353 (f. 365r.)

⁴⁹ KG p. 503, ll. 358-360 (f. 365r.)

⁵⁰ KG p. 502, ll. 341-342 (f. 364v.)

⁵¹ KG p. 502, ll. 345-347 (f. 364v.)

⁵² KG p. 503, ll. 365-367 (f. 365r.)

base and Mean, and Account it a part of our Honor and freedom to be free in our Censures.”⁵⁴ It is the work of the liberated soul, rather than grace alone, Traherne argues, that will bring us, with Christ, to the “Throne of Glory.” His views on the Estate of Trial, and free will are therefore intimately related with his view of the victorious Atonement. Although much Anglican thought followed the legalistic Calvinist understanding of an imputed righteousness granted to man by the punishment undertaken on his behalf by Christ, it was characteristic of the High Anglicanism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to follow the Council of Trent which posited, in counter-response to this view, an inherent or imparted righteousness of Christ, requiring man’s cooperation with God in walking the path of good works toward salvation.⁵⁵ “It is For this cause our Saviour telleth us,” writes Traherne, “ ... *he that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also ...*”⁵⁶

Traherne goes a step further – not only is it our glory to cooperate with God, but it is uniquely within our power to increase the divine estate:

That he has Work enow of his own, and needeth only ours is Evident[,] ours alone he desires to be Superadded, the offices of Charity, pietie, and Gratitude are all he requires ... Our own works he desires, and there is something in them so sacred, and Mysterious, so precious and inestimable, that Nothing is able to compensate the loss or Absence of them.⁵⁷

Christ has won a victory that needs to be re-won in every life. Just as God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, so as “Agents” men are “capable of Innumerable and Endless Excellencies, which they might receive from themselves, and their own Actions ... for their own Operations were ordained to be the Means by which they should be Cloathed, and Crowned with their utmost Perfection.”⁵⁸ In the mystical body of Christ, writes Teilhard,

... we, who are his members, must continue, in humility and fear, in the excitement of danger, to work for the fulfillment of an element that the mystical Body can obtain *only* from us. Our peace of mind is underlaid by the exaltation of creating, in the midst of such hazards, a everlasting work that could not exist without us.⁵⁹

⁵³ CH “All Things” ; South, “Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions,” p. 24.

⁵⁴ KG p. 275, ll. 212-214 (f. 162v.)

⁵⁵ See Cross and Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, “Justification,” p. 914.

⁵⁶ KG p. 468, ll. 25-28 (f. 336r.) ; John 14:12.

⁵⁷ KG pp. 469-270, ll. 70–79 (f. 337r.)

⁵⁸ KG p. 456, ll. 31-36 (f. 325v.)

⁵⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Priest,” pp. 213-214.

The concept of “Good Works” performed “in the midst of Hazzards, Assaults, and Temptations”⁶⁰ is considerably enlivened and ennobled, then, by what Teilhard refers to as “the human passion to conquer the world.”⁶¹

As conquerors, Traherne asserts, we occupy a station higher than the very Angels. In two linked poems which, as Maule points out, also appear in a similar form in *Christian Ethicks*,⁶² Traherne argues that “For Man to Act, as if his soul did see / The very Brightness of Eternitie” is to ‘exceed’ a “Seraphim” and speculates that

The Angels who are faithfull while they view
His Glory, Know not what themselves would do
Were they in our Estate. A Dimmer Light
Perhaps would make them Erre, as well as we.⁶³

Traherne has dedicated the preceding chapter to demonstrating that man is “a More Glorious Creature than the Angels” and argues that while man in the Estate of Innocence might be placed lower than the Angels, by negotiating the “Hazzard inevitable in an Estate of Trial” is “Crowned with Greater Honor, and Glory.”⁶⁴ In this estimation, according to Marks, Traherne “exceeded the enthusiasm”⁶⁵ of the Cambridge Platonists, although there are, as Traherne is undoubtedly aware, precedents in the Church Fathers for such affirmation.⁶⁶ Traherne’s claims are squarely based on his embrace of the principle of co-heirship with Christ. Speaking of the exalted state of the men and women for whose benefit the marriage of heaven and earth takes place, the Celestial Stranger observes:

Men that trample⁶⁷ the Earth under feet are the Creatures for whom this Marriage

⁶⁰ KG p. 501, ll. 303-304 (f. 364r.)

⁶¹ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Priest,” p. 214.

⁶² “The first bears an exact, the second a divergent, relationship to the poem in ch. 21 of *Christian Ethicks*.” Jeremy Maule, *Five New Traherne Works : The Lambeth Manuscript : notes from a talk presented to the Thomas Traherne Conference, Brasenose College, Oxford, 30 July 1997* [typescript], ; CE, pp. 140-141.

⁶³ KG pp. 501-502, ll. 309-.340 (ff. 364r-364v.)

⁶⁴ KG, p. 488 (f.352v.), title chapter 41 ; p. 491, ll. 156-159 (f. 355v.)

⁶⁵ Carol L. Marks, “Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism,” *PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America)* 81 (1966), p. 524.

⁶⁶ See Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 19.

Chrysostom and other Greek Fathers including Gregory Nazianzen (both cited by Traherne) also held that there is no barrier, save the blindness, to the soul’s deification ; the soul has complete freedom either to sin or to live in the image of God. – See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 348-352. This theme is expanded upon in 2.5.3.

⁶⁷ Earlier Traherne wrote of “Infinit Lov” that “It is trampled on the Earth and Crowns us in the Heavens.” (KG f. p. 313, ll. 146-147 (f. 192v.) ; See 2.1.4.

is made, and theirs is the Benefit of all the union.⁶⁸

As we noted in discussing that passage, Traherne is perhaps working with the ideas behind the text from Hebrews in which man is described as being made “a little lower than the angels” and God as having “put all things in subjection under his feet” although not completely as yet: “But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the Angels for the suffering of death.”⁶⁹ The risen Christ, however, has indeed “all things under his feet.”⁷⁰ Traherne thus identifies humanity as co-heirs with the suffering *and* the risen Christ and therefore *higher* than the angels. In using the word “trample” he again spurns the timorousness and pusillanimity of those that would not fully embrace their co-heirship with Christ. As if to exemplify Traherne’s definition of a “pusillanimous spirit,” Nicholas Lockyer, whose “severall Lectures painfully preached” we encountered earlier,⁷¹ reflects on these same texts, and exhorts men to remember that:

Man is a little lower than then Angels, Angels a great deal lower then Christ.”
 “What is under Christs feet,” warns Lockyer, “he can trample upon at pleasure; pride is no small sin, and yet it grows up (the Lord knows) from very small things ... Consider Christ as the keeper up of Angels, and ‘tis enough to keep down the spirit of any man.”⁷²

The concept of “Good Works” is further exalted in Traherne’s sense of human action ‘superadding’ to the action of Christ in the universe. “Each one of our works,” writes Teilhard, “helps to make perfect Christ in His mystical totality”

... through the unceasing operation of the Incarnation, the divine so thoroughly permeates all our creaturely energies that, in order to meet it and lay hold on it, we could not find a more fitting setting than that of our action.⁷³

“Our action” is, Traherne argues, creative of the very Kingdom of God which owes “its Perfection, nay verily its Existence” to the Estate of Trial.⁷⁴

God delights in the Actions of Righteousness, and Wisdom don in his Kingdom, more then in all other things whatsoever. For all Eternitie is the Seedplot where

⁶⁸ KG p. 392, ll. 200-202 (f. 262r – 263v.)

⁶⁹ Heb. 2: 7-9.

⁷⁰ I Cor. 15:27, Eph. 1:22.

⁷¹ See 2.4.1.

⁷² Lockyer, *England Faithfully watcht with, In her Wounds*, p. 199.

⁷³ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 34.

they are sown. all Obligations, Endeavors, and Rewards, the Soyl that Enrich it: God himself being the Sun, and the ocean, and the Soul the Seed that is made to fructifie.⁷⁵

Mortal life, then is not a mere preparation for the Kingdom of God, but an organic part of it:

So piecing this Life with the Life of Heaven, and seeing it as one with all Eternity. a Part of it, a Life within it. Strangely and Stupendiously Blessed in its Place and Season.⁷⁶

Traherne unites the poetic of seedplot and seasons with that of the Bride – as she emerges from the garden of life, adorned with summer flowers:

As summer fruits owe their maturitie to the verdure of the Spring and to the tender Buds, and Early Blossoms that appeared in the beginning: so doth she all her Amiableness and Glory to the virtues, wherwith She comes Cloathed from the Estate of Trial.”⁷⁷

In her “Crown of Victorie and Triumph”⁷⁸ is reprised the triumph of *Christus Victor*. In this final chapter of *the Kingdom of God* Traherne thus naturally leads from the rhetoric of vulnerability, into that of pride, honour and liberty, and thence into the rhetoric of victory. The type of the Bride merges with that of a prince “raised to a Kingdom by ... a brave Education ... a Royal Exposure to Gallant Exploits, from whence a Man may return laden with Honors, and Trophies, and becom his Peoples Joy.”⁷⁹ It is “far better,”⁸⁰ then, to be so “Glorified by Hazzards” than to be “(without Desert) immediatly Clapt in the Throne.”⁸¹ In her triumph the Bride is also endowed with a series of other types and identities – she is “an Amazon” and “a Beautifull Soldier.”

She is so Transcendent a Creature that no one Name will Containe her: A Virgin, a Bride, a Wife, a Mother, a Daughter, a Soldier, a Priest, a Subject, a King, a Servant, a Son, a friend, an Image, a Temple, a Throne, a Vine, a Garden, a fountain, a Sun, a Star, a City, a Sea, a Crown, a Jewel, a Realm, a Dominion, a

⁷⁴ KG p. 499, ll. 219-220 (f. 362v.)

⁷⁵ KG p. 500, ll. 227-231 (f. 362v.)

⁷⁶ CM IV.93.

⁷⁷ KG p. 503, ll. 367-373 (f. 365r.)

⁷⁸ KG p. 499, l. 176 (f. 361v.)

⁷⁹ KG p. 503, ll. 374-377 (f. 365v.)

⁸⁰ KG p. 503, l. 374 (f. 365v.)

⁸¹ KG p. 503, ll. 378-379 (f. 365v.)

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

Principalitie, a Power, a virtue, an Angel, an Haven, a Heaven, a Deitie:⁸²

In this list, with each word suggesting, by association or alliteration, the succeeding element, Traherne enmeshes types of humanity – wives, daughters, soldiers, friends – with types of Christ – head of all dominions, principalities and powers; the servant king, the vine, a fountain, a sun, a star. Like Christ the phoenix, the Bride is also her own priest, temple and deitie.⁸³ As Clark observes of Traherne’s work generally, where many of his predecessors (and contemporaries) “halt at identifying with a type that is saved, praying to be saved,” Traherne “presses” an identification “with God the Son in a way that surpasses even medieval imitations of Christ.” Here, in the type of the Bride merged with any number of other types, Traherne claims for humanity what Clark refers to as “Christ’s absorption of types.”⁸⁴ By her heroic action and “Glorified with Hazzards,” she is conformed to the image of Christ and reconciles, gathers to herself, and transcends all elements of experience. From the type of the Bride we move to consider the “Wise Man” through whom Traherne further explores humanity’s co-heirship with Christ.

⁸² KG p. 503, ll. 381-388 (f. 365v.)

⁸³ See 2.4.5.

⁸⁴ Clark, “God’s Immanence in All and the Poet’s Imitation of all Adams : Thomas Traherne’s Transcendence of the Neotypological Lyric,” p. 148.

2.5.3. A Wise Man

As Spotless Even as the Deitie

That the soul is made in the Image of God “is a Nice and Mysterious Point, but of Infinit Concernment, and as profitable, as it is Mysterious. It is well therefore,” continues Traherne (matching his inexhaustible expansiveness to his theme), “that we hav so many places wherin to speak of it in different Manners.”⁸⁵ In the poem “A Wise Man,” Traherne gathers together strands of thought from throughout *The Kingdom of God* and explores this mysterious point through the scriptural injunction to “Get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”⁸⁶

1

A Wise Man will apply his Mind
 To Joys of Evry Kind:
 A Good Man will take Care to please
 His GOD in Evry thing;
 A Holy Man can find no Ease,
 Untill he duly bring
 His Heart to that Estate, that he might be
 As Spotless Even as the Deitie:⁸⁷

Wisdom is the “unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness” who by “entering into holy souls ... makes them friends of God and prophets.”⁸⁸ Wisdom does not enter unbidden however, she must be tirelessly sought out and ‘got.’

For if thou seekest after Knowledg as Choyce Silver, and Searchest for her as for hidden treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledg of GOD. Exalt her and she shall promote thee, she shall bring thee to Honor, when thou dost Embrace her. An Ornament of Grace shall she adde unto

⁸⁵ KG p. 458, ll. 118-120 (f. 327v.)

⁸⁶ Prov. 4:7.

⁸⁷ KG, p. 404ff. (ff. 274r ff.) I have departed from the line spacing in Ross’ transcription of stanzas 2-6. The rhyming and syllabic pattern of these stanzas matches that of stanzas 7-15 (with minor variations in stanzas 11-14) so it seems logical, given the ambiguity of the ms, to follow the pattern that is more clearly established in the later stanzas. Stanza 1 also follows the same rhyming and syllabic pattern, but the line spacing in the ms clearly differs from the other stanzas.

⁸⁸ Wis. 7:26-27: For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new : and in all ages entering into holy souls, she makes them friends of God, and prophets.

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

thine Heart and a Crown of Glory shall she deliver to thee.⁸⁹ For he that overcometh shall Inherit all Things. I will be his God, and he shall be my Son,⁹⁰ saith the Lord Almighty.⁹¹

Along with the Cambridge Platonists, Traherne echoes Origen's view of "true knowledge" as "the participation of the purified soul in the Wisdom of the Word and a way towards deification and union with Christ."⁹² For Traherne, it is through the sight of Understanding and being "present allwayes" to the Kingdom "by an Act of Knowledge" that we come to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" and to "Enjoy things in the Image of God ..." To obtain the Knowledge of God is not a quest to find out about God, but a quest after participation in divine Wisdom – to become a Son of God, an "unspotted mirror of the power of God." The Queen of Sheba, writes Traherne, admired Solomon, the "Wise King," and observed how happy his servants were in hearing his wisdom. In the Kingdom of God, however, all "Attendants are Celestial Kings." All attain the wisdom of Solomon and "sit down at the Heavenly table, and feast while the Son of man cometh forth to Serv them ..." ⁹³

Since the Perfection of the World dependeth on the Perfection of Intelligible Powers, it pleased God to Creat them so perfect That Nothing might be desired more Compleat. And yet he gav them a Power to be infinitely more Compleat, and more perfect then they were in their first Creation. ... they were Capable of infinite Attainments of Bliss, and Glory, Of which they were not yet partakers:⁹⁴

The desire for this participation, says Traherne, is implanted in the soul. The "Good Man will take care to please His God in evry thing." He mirrors God's desire to give him pleasure, and desires to be as pleasing as Christ, with whom God was "well pleased."⁹⁵

I freely confess nothing is so obliging to me as to be infinitely pleasing. It is a Disposition so Deeply radicated [sic] in my Soul, that my Essence must be annihilated before it can be rooted out. ... And I think it the Similtude of Gods Goodness in my Nature, that makes me so desirous of it.⁹⁶

In *A Sober View*, a work also contained in the Lambeth manuscript, Traherne observes "To

⁸⁹ Prov. 2:4-5, 4:8-9.

⁹⁰ Rev. 21:7.

⁹¹ KG pp. 268-269 (f. 158r-158v.)

⁹² Cross and Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 1194.

⁹³ KG p. 480, ll. 269-289 (f. 345v.) ; Luke 12:37.

⁹⁴ KG p. 456, ll. 20-28 (ff. 325r-325v.)

⁹⁵ Mt. 17:5.

⁹⁶ KG pp. 459-460, ll. 173-178 (f. 329r.)

be *Beloved of Great and Mighty Personages* the Soul naturally desires:” The ambition of the sentiment is rebuked by a reader, perhaps a tutor or mentor, who remarks in the margin:

I think not the humble Soul rather desires to be conceald and little Esteemed soe that if you speak of a Regenerated Nature, it desires nothing but to be Wel pleasing unto God, and is not prone to desire much Love and applause: tho: careful to doe all that may deserve it.⁹⁷

Traherne however, is unrepentant. He consistently affirms the soul to be as “avaricious” and “insatiable” in its desires as God – and as utterly “prone to desire much Love and applause.” Humbleness in Traherne’s passionate rhetoric might be equated with pusillanimity, which as we have discussed, he equates with a pinched refusal to accept the bounty of God.⁹⁸

Nor is it enough that we are disposed to please, the desire for an ever more complete participation must be fulfilled. That which is latent must be activated. There is, says Traherne, “A twofold perfection; innate and acquired.”⁹⁹ “The Holy Man” must restlessly work to “bring / His Heart to that Estate, that he might be / As Spotless even as the Deitie.” Such work however, once the eye of the soul has been cleansed of the sin of ingratitude and sees the world “aright,” is not daunting - for to be *pleasing*, to be Wise and Holy, is, quite simply, to be *pleased*.

Nor are we capable of being pleasing or Delightfull to him, till we do Good and Amiable Works in prizing all his Gifts and Loving all his Children ... We must be Transformed into his Similitude, before we can be Blessed ... infinit Goodness ... is infinitely Wise, and can do infinit Good to infinit Myriads of Creatures ...¹⁰⁰

The getting of Wisdom, therefore, lies in the ‘application’ of the mind “To Joys of Evry Kind:”

⁹⁷ SV p. 144, fn. 1.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of the sin of pusillanimity see 2.2.2.

⁹⁹ KG p. 456 (f. 325v.), marginal gloss.

¹⁰⁰ KG pp. 302-303, ll. 192-204 (f. 185r.)

Prize the Sun, the Stars, the Skies

2

A Righteous Man will duly Prize
The Sun, the Stars, the Skies,
The Earth, the Seas, the Clouds, the Rain
The Mountains, and the Hills,
And evry Spring that back again
From all those Hills distills,
The Thunders, Lightenings, Meteors Hail and Snow
With evry thing in Heaven or Earth below.

3

A Man that hath a Tender Sence
Feels all the Excellence
Of evry Creature, and doth see
In evry Kind of thing
Vast Treasures of felicitie
Giv'n him by the King.
A Pious Man adores the Lord of Glory:
A Learned Man with Joy doth read his Story.

4

A Gratefull Person offers Praise
For all his Works & Ways;
And for the Glory which he sees
In the Bright Heavens above:
For all the Flowers and fruitfull Trees,
That do Express his Love
A Blessed Man is full of Appetites,
And in the Glory of his God delights

The defined poetic structure of “A Wise Man” - generally composed of alternating rhymes in short eight and six syllable lines, opening with a rhyming couplet and rounding off with a ten syllable rhyming couplet – conveys a comprehensive sense of harmony and of things being rightly ordered. This is also communicated in the reiterative pattern of line openings: “A Wise,” “A Good,” “A Holy,” “A Righteous,” “A Learned,” “A Heavenly Man.” That the work of being pleased fits easily into the universal scheme is also conveyed by the happy rhyming of “Appetites” and “delights.” No matter how great such appetites,

implies Traherne, they will be met with delights. This work of being endlessly delighted is the highest calling of the soul, for it is a source of endless delight to God:

Consider therefore what it is to please God! What it is to answer all the obligations and Rewards in Heaven and Earth! What it is to Gratifie Gods Desires, or bereave, and frustrate all his Designes:¹⁰¹

Furthermore, and agreeing with what Traherne has earlier said in opposition to voluntarist conceptions of God, there is a sense in which God's very being is bound up in this act of delight. God "delighting infinitely in his own Operations, and Seeing them to be Infinitely Amiable ... coveted Nothing more then the Similitude of them in the Perfection of his Creatures, and imparted as it were a Particle of his own Essence in giving us a Power to Educe them."¹⁰² We, implies Traherne, have the power, through our active enjoyment of the world, to "Educe" or draw forth the bountiful Operations of God. That this is Traherne's seemingly heretical meaning is confirmed in the poem that concludes this discussion of how "the Works of Love and Holiness are the Best Imaginable."¹⁰³

The Cause and End of all Gods Works is Joy
The Cause and End of GOD! Himself is Joy.
Destroy his Joy, and him himself Destroy!¹⁰⁴

The exclamation marks indicate an intent to shock – we have the power to not only "educate" God, but to cause the destruction of God by withholding our joy. Our power lies in our freedom:

Alass he is able to make innumerable Myriads in a Moment. But he cannot make us to be, what we ought to be, Amiable, and Gratefull, Obedient, and Pious, Loving and Holy, Wise, and Voluntary, freely delighting, and well pleasing; unless we are willing to be what we ought. For to be Willing is to Will of our own Accord.¹⁰⁵

God's enjoyment of his own creation is not complete without this voluntary work of the soul. Viewed this way, it might be argued that, for Traherne, our Joy completes God. The hint of heresy is sidestepped in the confirmation that God "taketh Care / In evry Thing a

¹⁰¹ KG p. 470, ll. 115-117 (f. 338r.)

¹⁰² KG p. 468, ll. 17-21 (f. 336r.)

¹⁰³ KG p. 468 (f. 335v.), title chapter 38.

¹⁰⁴ KG p. 472, ll. 205-207 (f. 339v.)

¹⁰⁵ KG p. 470, ll. 85-89 (f. 337v.)

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

fullness to prepare,” instigating the circular flow of enjoyment between God, world and self - so that joy is in some sense irresistible and inevitable. Such prepared “Joys and Pleasures” are God’s own:

All which first must be
His own: And then his Creatures Melodie:

Cefalu points to Traherne’s Thomistic orthodoxy on this point; it is the nature of God to “bestow” rather than to “gain.”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, as we discussed under “The Omnipresence of Action” and “the Consummation of All Things,” there is in Traherne a certain sense that God might be augmented, built up by “our Joys:”

Or rather first be theirs, and after his:
His Joys are his, because his Creatures Bliss:
Delighting him in pleasing us!

Creatures have a vital part to play in the universal circulation:

Our Joys
Are no Impertinent and feeble Toys.
They all are Gods: and as they overflow,
Return to him, to whom themselves they owe.¹⁰⁷

It is the “overflow” of “Our Joys” that precipitates their return to the source from whence, perhaps now with even greater accumulated force, they flow back to us. God, as we have noted, is an Infinit Fountain “Magnified by its overflowings, and Enlarged by its Disbursements.”¹⁰⁸ Our joys are like so many springings forth from the Word; they are innumerable and like scattered seed, bear fruit and further multiply:

Joys are as thick as Atoms in the Sun,
As many as the Drops that all ways run
Into the Sea; They flourish in Each Ear
Of Corn in Seed are Scattered evry where:
Grow on all Trees, as many as the Leavs

¹⁰⁶ See Cefalu, "Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne," pp. 258-259.

¹⁰⁷ KG p. 473, ll. 234-243 (f. 340r.)

¹⁰⁸ KG p. 298, ll. 9-10 (f. 182r.)

In Multitude ...¹⁰⁹

The omnipresence of action, then, is not confined to God. His essence is communicated to us and we also entertain the paradox of liberty and necessity in our actions - that is the freedom to “see the world aright” and the predisposition to do so.¹¹⁰ We also are able to be present to all ages and times and objects - the active soul might love and comprehend all things and, as a river running to the ocean or a spring coursing back to the fountain, return joy and life to its source and perfect the “working” of Infinite Love. Expanding upon the theme of Circulation, Traherne observes that:

But as there is a ... Circular Generation in Ice and Water, which is somewhat repugnant to the Rules of Logick, which defines it impossible, for the Cause to be the Effect of what it causeth, or the Effect to be cause of its cause, So is there a perpetual and Eternal Reciprocation here. For as Water begets Ice, and Ice begets Water, the Perfection we receive from God makes us to admire, and Love his Perfection, and the Love of his Perfection increases as ours; and the more our Perfection is increased, the more we admire his, and the more we admire it, the more perfect we are ... Thus backward and forward there is a perpetual Growth of Excellencies.¹¹¹

In Trinitarian theology it is Christ, the second person of the Trinity, that bespeaks this perpetual process of outflow, embodiment and return. For Teilhard the cosmic body of Christ is conceived to be in the process of becoming – of being built up through the interconnected evolution of the world and the collective evolution of human consciousness. For Traherne the engine for building the body of Christ is enjoyment. It is enjoyment that perfects and augments the creation. According to Christopher Armstrong, Traherne urges that “Our task is no less than to sustain the creation and the Creator, heaven and earth, time and eternity, in parallel and perfectly reflective consonance with the being and creative activity of God.”¹¹²

“What is it then to Enjoy the World, all Worlds?” asks Traherne. “... to Enjoy God is Infinitely Greater than all this Were not Enjoyment of all Worlds, and the Enjoyment of God one.”¹¹³ Traherne distinguishes between

¹⁰⁹ KG p. 473, ll. 216-221 (f. 339v.)

¹¹⁰ See 2.5.2.

¹¹¹ KG p. 318, ll. 143-151, 159-160 (ff. 196v–197r.)

¹¹² Christopher Armstrong, *Solitude and Communion : Readings in Thomas Traherne and R.S. Thomas : The First Annual Traherne Lecture, October 10th, 2003, In Memory of Jeremy Maule.*, (2003), p. 7.

¹¹³ KG p. 474, ll. 10-15 (f. 340v.)

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

the Enjoyment and Creation of Worlds, and between the Enjoyment of the World, and of God: not as if it were possible to Create without Enjoying, or to Enjoy the World without Enjoying God; but that we may See what a Vast Height and Measure of Glory lies in the Enjoyment of God, which Infinitely out weighs all Worlds; and what a Transcendent Excellency lies in the power of Enjoying, which in its full extent is Infinitely greater than the Power of Creating Worlds.”¹¹⁴

Traherne rhetorically inverts and confounds the expectation that divine powers exceed those available to humanity, not only stressing the neglected importance of enjoyment, but making it the very end or purpose of the creation.

Among all powers (if you Enquire which may be better than other[s], None is more Excellent that that which can See, and Lov, and Enjoy.¹¹⁵

The power to part the sea as did Moses, or ascend to heaven in a chariot as did Elijah, or to command the winds as did Christ, is “Childishness and Weakness in Comparison” he declares. Without seeing, loving and enjoying, it is “Emptiness and Miserie.”¹¹⁶ To be able to make worlds but not enjoy them “is but a ridiculous and curious vanitie.” This is Christ’s meaning, says Traherne, when he promises: “*He that believeth on me, the Works, that I do, Shall he do also &c Greater Works than these shall he do, becaus I goe to my father.*”¹¹⁷

It is a Piece of perverseness in us to invade his Work, and Neglect our own.¹¹⁸

Such rhetoric is put into service against those who pay lip service to the notion of enjoying God, but convey no real understanding of what this entails:

It is the frequent discourse of Divines, both in the Pulpit, and the Press to allure Men to pietie and Devotion by the Enjoyment of God, which is proposed and talkd of as the Highest and best of all possible Rewards. But if any one ask what the Enjoyment of God is? Which is certainly an Important Question; for how can we Enjoy God, without knowing what it is to Enjoy him? Their Answers for the most part are so Cloudy and obscure, being wrapt up in General Terms, and Allegorical formes, that we can fasten upon Nothing in particular ...

Traherne hopes to “mend this defect a litle” and discover “what is peculiar in the Enjoyment

¹¹⁴ KG p. 475, ll. 47-53 (f. 341v.)

¹¹⁵ KG p. 465, ll. 202-203 (f. 334r.)

¹¹⁶ KG p. 465, ll. 214-219 (f. 334r.)

¹¹⁷ KG p. 468, ll. 27-28 (f. 336r.) ; John 14:12.

of God, that is worthy to allure us to Morality and Religion.”¹¹⁹ Traherne’s wide-ranging response to this question essentially drives towards to the conclusion that the “Enjoyment of God in his Kingdom is the Life and Glory of it.”¹²⁰ Enjoyment is not something superadded as a reward to sweeten the religious life, but, dispensing with allegory, is the very life of God’s Kingdom. Such enjoyment entails “Loving what he Loves”¹²¹ for to enjoy God is to “take Infinit Complacency in him for being what he is. God is Lov, and he that dwelleth in Lov, dwelleth in God, and God in him. The very essence of God is Lov ...”¹²² We are therefore to “Enjoy him in all his Works,” in which he is “Illimited in Bounty and giveth all things.”¹²³ The “Righteous Man” is to “fasten upon” things “in particular,” and prize each of those elements celebrated in the central chapters - “The Sun, the Stars, the Skies, / The Earth, the Seas, the Clouds, the Rain / The Mountains, and the Hills,” “evry Spring,” “The Thunders, Lightenings, Meteors, Hail & Snow.” In short, “evry thing in Heaven or Earth below.” He prizes these with a “Tender Sence,” and “Feels the Excellence / Of evry Creature , and doth see / In evry Kind of thing / Vast Treasures of felcitiy.” David the psalmist, as we will elaborate shortly, is the archetypal Wise Man. This “Glorious Person,” reflects Traherne in the *Centuries*, teaches us what it is to be Sons of God:

to be present as [God] is by Sight and Lov, without Limit and without bound with all his Works, to be Holy towards all and Wise toward all as He is. Prizing all his Goodness in all with infinit Ardor, that as Glorious and Eternal Kings being pleased in all we might reign over all for ever more.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ KG p. 466, l. 221 (f. 334v.)

¹¹⁹ KG p. 476, ll. 90-102. (f. 342r.)

¹²⁰ KG p. 480, l. 264 (f. 345v.)

¹²¹ KG p. 476, l. 104 (f. 342r.)

¹²² KG p. 477, ll158-160 (f. 343v.)

¹²³ KG p. 478, ll. 206, 215 (f. 343v.)

¹²⁴ CM III.96, 97.

And Like the Sun doth Shine

5

A Heavenly Person is Divine
 And like the Sun doth Shine
 On all the Stars, on evry Spire
 Of Grass, on Evry Sand;
 All Lands and Ages doth admire
 And doth in evry Land
 Lov all the Persons like an Angel, which
 Like Angels are, and do that Land Enrich.

As the Love of God is “Illimited” so are the “Appetites” of the Soul “insatiably Ambitious and Covetous”¹²⁵ ; its beams ray infinitely in every direction and through every age. It lights not only upon those things visible to the eye and present to the senses, but upon all things in times and places. The final chapters of the *Kingdom of God* might be considered an elaboration upon the Pauline text:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.¹²⁶

The Sun, light and sight imagery ubiquitously employed by Traherne has, of course, a long history in the Christian tradition. It was particularly attractive to the Platonists of Traherne’s generation and “adapted,” as Hutton observes, “from a general stock-in-trade of Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines and metaphors.”¹²⁷ Hutton also points to Traherne’s familiarity with light and sight imagery in the works of Plato and Plotinus, and their re-working in Hermes Trismegistus and Ficino, in which God is the “very *Light*” by which the mind or soul understands, just as the sun enables the eye to see.¹²⁸ Traherne is drawn by the image of the shining soul dispensing light, rather than simply seeing with the aid of an external light source. In the luminous “Infant-Ey” of the Dobell poems and in his numerous reflections upon the radiant soul there are echoes of Neoplatonist sources and also, most especially in *The Kingdom of God*, of the Antiochene Father, John Chrysostom’s reflections

¹²⁵ KG p. 476, l. 106 (f. 343r.)

¹²⁶ 2 Cor. 4:6.

¹²⁷ Sarah Hutton, "Platonism in Some Metaphysical Poets : Marvell, Vaughan and Traherne," *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 172.

¹²⁸ See CE, p. 41 and SM III.16 where Traherne refers to Plato. (The specific source, though not noted by Traherne, is Plato’s *Republic* VI.) Cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173. See also 2.4.3.

on Matthew's text "Ye are the light of the world:"¹²⁹

There is Nothing saith he, that makes a Man so Glorious and conspicuous, as this Splendor of virtue tho with great Study he labor to lie hid. For as if he were arrayed with the Sun, so brightly Shall he shine, that his Beams will not only dart from him upon Earth, but even beyond the Heavens shall his Rayes extend &c¹³⁰

In Chapter 4, where Chrysostom is also cited, Traherne similarly describes how the soul "within it self" is able to act upon all Objects, at all Distances whatsoever" and "Dart its Beams upon Every Creature in Heaven and Earth, when it is Enlightned with Power and Wisdom ..."¹³¹ In this we find Traherne's confirmation both of Matthew's text and Paul's injunction to *be* the light:

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.¹³²

- an injunction which Traherne follows particularly closely in his expansion upon Chrysostom:

And indeed his Rayes are himself. His very person is conveyed to all Eys in all Nations and Worlds. The Splendor of his Love and the Perfection of his Pietie is shed abroad like perfume, and present with all that know it. In the Beams of Knowledge and Charitie he is beyond all Limits of Place, and Time.¹³³

The children of Light, the sons of God, operate in the similitude of Christ who, in a passage that has proven pertinent at several other points in our argument,¹³⁴ and also echoes Chrysostom, Traherne celebrates as:

the Light of all our Comfort, the Fountain of all our Wisdom and the Sun of all our Consolation, whose Rays Spreading abroad throughout the univiers, produce the Day of Glory; In the Light of which we see the Excellency of all his Creatures, the face of God and the End of our Creation; Our Happiness and the Measure of it..¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Matt. 5:14.

¹³⁰ KG p. 465, ll. 188-192 (f. 333v.) Traherne extracts from Chrysostom's *Homily on the Gospel of Matthew* 15.11.

¹³¹ KG p. 268, ll. 91-94 (f. 157v.)

¹³² Eph. 5:8.

¹³³ KG p. 465, ll. 192-196 (f. 333v – 334r.)

¹³⁴ See 2.1.4, 2.4.3 "Shoud we turn these Realities into an Allegorie," 3.1.

Whereas Moses, as Traherne describes in *The Ceremonial Law*, must cover his luminous face after his encounter with God, in Christ the veil is removed and each person is both a receiver and a source of light; viewing, with complete freedom and by their own light, both the nearest and most common creatures and things, and the farthest reaches of an infinite universe.

... ten thousand Rayes flie from me, and are Scattered away in other places: my desire is to Enjoy it all. And truly Nature is so severe, that without the Satisfaction of this desire it is not Satisfied.¹³⁶

The divine desire that freely drives an endlessly diverse creation is matched by the soul's unhampered desire to see and enjoy all – to shed its powerful and universal light so as not to leave anything in darkness. Alexander the Great, says Traherne, is “wittily fained” to have “sate down and Cried for more Worlds. so insatiable is Man that Millions will not Pleas him. They are no more then so many Tennis-Balls, in Comparison of the Greatness and Highness of his Soul.”¹³⁷ The prizing of tangible treasures whets the appetite: “The Soul is Insatiable ... Its Expectations are Infinit, so are Its Desires. Having a Taste of Pleasure, and liking it well, it could wish it Everlasting.”¹³⁸ Traherne cautions, however, against ingratitude for present realities: While “it is possible to make Innumerable other Worlds,” “things Actual are Infinitely Better then meer Possibilities, and therefore Chosen becaus they are better. It is a Sickness of a fastidious Nature to loath existent and present things, a disease to desire Absent and unmade.”¹³⁹ Warming to this theme, Traherne makes the point in even stronger terms:

Oh Blindness, O corruption! O Madness of Humane Nature! That is allways Gazing and Staring about, despising the Wisdom of God, and flying from Realities to fancies, and Chimeras, seeking for Delight, and placing all Expectation of Happiness in Exotick possibilities! While Actual Appearances are so neer at hand, and Gods Goodness hath made actual most truly rare and Excellent!¹⁴⁰

In the poem that concludes Chapter 22, Traherne balances complementary impulses towards

¹³⁵ KG p. 310, ll. 10-14 (f. 190r.)

¹³⁶ KG p. 361, ll. 222-224 (f. 234r.)

¹³⁷ CM I.22.

¹³⁸ KG p. 271, ll. 57-59 (f. 159v.)

¹³⁹ KG p. 338, ll. 58-59, 63-64 (f. 213r .) See also CM I.21: If you be Negligent in Prizing these, you will be Negligent in Prizing all. there is Diseas in Him who Despiseth present mercies, which till it be cured, he can never be Happy. He esteemeth nothing that he hath, but is ever Gaping after more: which when he hath He despiseth in like manner. Insatiableness is Good, but not Ingratitud.

¹⁴⁰ KG p. 466, ll. 229-234 (ff. 334v-335r.)

“distant things” and the “neer at hand” - an insatiable desire after “Multiple Kingdoms” and gratitude for the “Multitude of Wonders and Delights” in this - ultimately possessing all in all worlds. Milton’s archangel Raphael counsels Adam that “Heav’n is for thee too high,” and to “Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there live” but to know that “That which before us lies in daily life, Is the prime Wisdom.”¹⁴¹ While Traherne defies this first counsel in Chapter 25 of the *Kingdom of God*, it is through the very device of summoning such an appreciative spectator in the Celestial Stranger that he has complied completely with the second. He does dream of other worlds, and admits:

I hav a restless Illimited fancy, that can Imagine innumerable Millions of other kinds of Worlds, which is so far from being satisfied with all these, that I hav a room for all Possibles together.

He sees, however, “by clear Intuition, that it was best to leav all Possibles unmade, that are not actually created ... that God is whatever he is, all pleasing and Glorious”¹⁴² – that things are Commanded because Holy, not Holy because Commanded. The insatiable soul, then, seeks out realities rather than fantasies. These are

so far from Diminishing, that they magnify the faculties of the Soul beholding them. A sand in your conception conformeth your soul, and reduceth it to the Cise and Similitud of a sand ... All the Spaces abov the Heavens enlarg it Wider to their own Dimensions. And what is without Limit maketh your Conception illimited and Endless.¹⁴³

Traherne’s flights of the soul are concerned with the workings of things “made” and, though not necessarily visible to the physical eye, nevertheless “present.” He imagines, for example, the workings of an atom “in all the Elements, and Creatures wherever it hath been, is, or will be Working, from the day of its Creation to this Moment, and from this Moment to the End of the World.”¹⁴⁴ Following a passage describing a viewing of the sea (to which we will turn shortly), Traherne reflects on the mind’s capacity to imagine the treasures of the sea that are hidden in its “Deep Abysses,” and to grasp the working of the whole universal circulation and marvel at “an Incomparable Work, full of Deep and Mysterious Wonders.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ PL VIII, 172, 175, 193-4.

¹⁴² KG p. 477, ll. 127-133 (f. 343r.)

¹⁴³ CM IV.73.

¹⁴⁴ KG p. 348, ll. 28-30 (f. 222r.)

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

Many rude and Ignorant Mariners daily see it, that never come neer it with their Souls, to understand the Reason of its Amplitude and Glory. The Soul may ascend the Chariot of a Thought, and be there in a Moment. Thy Spirit may move upon the face of the Waters, and visit Evry Iland, Creek, and Haven, and Cover all its Spacious and Vast Extents in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America.”¹⁴⁶

The soul, then, is a *creative* spirit ranging over the cosmos, and gathering all things into consciousness. The rhetoric of travel and motion in this action of the soul suggests not escapism but visitation. Notable in Traherne’s meditations and citations regarding the omnipresent soul is the concept of being present with things, of being conveyed by the rays of thought to “All Lands and Ages.”

I conceiv, and understand not by the Sight of my Eys, but by the Intellectual Operation. &c I am in Heaven, in the Earth, in the Water, In the Air, in the Living Creatures, in the plants, in the Womb, evry where.¹⁴⁷

Traherne here quotes from the seventh book of the *Divine Pymander* then continues with an extended verbatim extract from the tenth book.¹⁴⁸ These passages clearly resonated very strongly with him, as they also appear in the *Commonplace Book* and in *Christian Ethicks*.¹⁴⁹ In *Christian Ethicks* Traherne defends the “boldness” of Hermes. After quoting his son Tatus on the capacity of the “Intellectual Operation” to be “evry where,” he adds: “Whereupon he [Hermes] asketh him, “*Dost thou not know (O my Son) that thou art born a God, and the Son of The One as I am?*” He then proceeds to quote, as he does here in the *Kingdom of God*, Hermes’ reflection on the soul’s capaciousness and swiftness – “Command thy Soul to go into India, and sooner then thou canst bid it, it will be there.”¹⁵⁰ God, continues Hermes, has “all the World to himself, as it were all Thoughts, or Intellections” and urges his son to “Equall thy Self to God” and “Inceas thyself unto an immeasurable Greatnesse” in order to

understand all things, every Art, Evry Science, and the Manner and Custom of Evry Living Thing ... Comprehend in thy self the Quality of all the Creatures, of the fire, the Water, and Dry and the Moist, and conceiv likewise that thou canst at once be Evry where, in the Sea, in the Earth; at once understand thy self not yet Begotten in the Womb, yong, old, to be Dead, the Things after Death, and all these

¹⁴⁵ KG p. 394, ll. 17. 32-33 (ff. 263r-264v.)

¹⁴⁶ KG pp. 394-395, ll. 36-41 (f. 265r.)

¹⁴⁷ KG p. 463, ll. 121-123 (f. 332r-332v.) ; Everard, *Divine Pymander*, VII.47.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, X. 118-137.

¹⁴⁹ CB “Man” f. 65r.1, “Capacity” f. 23v.1 ; CE, pp. 226-227.

together.¹⁵¹

In its God-like “simplicitie,” observes Traherne, the all-seeing soul possesses a “mysterious omnipresence” and is able to

in a Thought be present there, with Adam in Paradice, with Christ upon the Cross, with God in the Creation ... If it please, it can contract itself to the littleness of a Sand, to a Centre, and in a Moment dilate like a flash of Lightening over all the Heavens. Nay fill all Eternity, and the House of God.¹⁵²

In this, Traherne joins the vision of the “strange heathen,” “the most venerable of all the Magi,” who “understood himself to be where he Thought he was,” with that of Chrysostom:

We may in a Moment com unto the Gates of Heaven, and like Lightening penetrate those Eternal Courts and present our Selves before the Throne of God.¹⁵³

The cosmic maelstrom is driven by the activity of both “Infinite Love” which “Speaks aloud in Thunder”¹⁵⁴ and the Soul that, in its image, is able “in a moment” to “dilate like a flash of Lightening over all the Heavens.”

This theme of the all-encompassing soul, as Jordan observes, is frequently found in seventeenth century meditations. He cites Boyle’s reflection on the capacity of the mind to “force its passage” into “imaginary spaces, that are beyond the outermost part of the outermost heaven, and can in a moment, return back, to consider the smallest Circumstances of the meanest humane affairs.”¹⁵⁵ We might also note the recurrence of the phrase, “in a moment,” or “at once,” in the citations from Traherne, Chrysostom and Boyle. It is used in conjunction with a rapid change in focus that shifts from the most remote and vast to the most near and minute; a shift that is captured in Traherne’s rhyming of “Sand” with “Land.” In Traherne the theme of instant comprehension is associated with Christic knowledge. In arguing that God’s creation of his Image is “the first of all his Works (For the last in Execution is the First in Intention)” Traherne applies the “common” Aristotelian “maxime” he had earlier used in relation to the Eternal Generation of the Son to the human soul.

¹⁵⁰ This passage also informs meditations upon the swiftness of the soul in SM III.72 and CYB f. 90r.

¹⁵¹ KG p. 464, ll. 151-157 (f. 332r.)

¹⁵² KG p. 465, ll. 180-186 (f. 333v.)

¹⁵³ KG p. 268, ll. 109-111 (f. 158r.)

¹⁵⁴ KG p. 313, l. 146 (f. 193v.) For a discussion of this passage see 2.1.4.

Through the exertion of undrainable Almighty Power God is “able to make the Sublimest Creature which his Ey seeth in a moment.” “His knowledg is infinit”

and if he pleaseth, he can in the first Moment of Time produce an Existence, that Shall Include the Perfections of all Suns, Elements, Heavens, Stars, Angels, Men, Arch Angels, Cherubims, Seraphims, Thrones, Dominions, Ages, Kingdoms, and Eternities. And this he did: For at first he begot his Son ...¹⁵⁶

The generation of the Son coincides with the Father’s vision of the entire spatial and temporal universe. All that his “Ey seeth” is ‘included’ in the “Existence” that is the Son. All the creatures are a part of that existence, but it is the special place of humanity, as children and images of God, to also see all that the Father sees and generates through the Son.

...the Son loveth his friends, and will shew them all that the father doth, and Greater things then these: that we seeing what the father Sheweth to the Son may all marvel.¹⁵⁷

The pupil of the soul, contracting and dilating as it encompasses all things, reflects the eternal process of divine incarnation and ascension, as it concentrates in each creaturely centre and expands to fill all things in the sphere of its unbounded circumference.

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.¹⁵⁸

Man is the co-heir of what we have described as the simultaneously centralising and radiating, organising, incarnational force through whom all worlds and all eternal and finite things are reconciled and consummated. Able, according to the Cusean tradition described by Poulet, to expand his “imagination beyond measure,” and to “contract it in the extreme” and to thus “transport himself simultaneously both toward the circumference and toward the center.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Robert Boyle, *Occasional Reflections Upon Several Subjects* (London, 1665). Cited in Richard D. Jordan, "Thomas Traherne and the Art of Meditation: Devotional Works of the Late 1600s," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46.3 (1985), p. 389.

¹⁵⁶ KG p. 333, ll. 105, 108-112 (f. 209r.) ; cf. Col 1: 15-20, Col 2:9-10.

¹⁵⁷ KG p. 276, ll. 267-269 (f. 163v.) ; Rom. 8:17.

¹⁵⁸ Eph. 4:10.

¹⁵⁹ Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, p. xiii.

A Glorious Person Lives and Dies in Love

6

An Activ Man is Still employd:
Till all things are Enjoyd
He never Rests: And then his Rest
Is in felicitie:
His Life and Business is Express
In Joy and Melodie.
A Glorious Person lives and dies in Love;
And Love his only Happiness doth prove.

7

A Wise, a Good, a Holy Man,
To End where we began;
A lively Righteous Gratefull Soul,
A Pious Learned Wight
A Blessed Man that doth Controul
The Powers of the Night,
An Active Heavenly Glorious Person is
Employd, and Busy, in the Work of Bliss.

In the contraction and dilation of his soul, shining upon all things and peoples in all ages, the Wise Man acts as a child of light, actively, restlessly, and joyfully, loving all that God loves. In the *Third Century*, David the psalmist is described as just such a “Glorious Person.”¹⁶⁰ He, as we noted above, is the archetypal and felicitous Wise Man, living and dying in Love, whose “Life and Business” was expressed “In Joy and Melodie.” “O Sing, Sing O My Soul with David Sing!” exclaims Traherne in “transcendent Raptures:”

The Lov and Joy of all the World is mine!
And I O Lord my God am thine!
Am thine! am thine!¹⁶¹

Michael Ponsford has argued that while “there are few poets of the seventeenth century who do not recognise the value of the Psalms as both a spiritual guide and a literary model ... none aspires to so complete an identification with David the Psalmist as Thomas

¹⁶⁰ CM III.96.

¹⁶¹ KG p. 477, ll. 169-171 (f. 343v.)

Traherne.”¹⁶² As well as frequently incorporating phrases and extensively paraphrasing passages from the psalms, in the *Third Century* Traherne also claims David as a kindred spirit, articulating those things that he, as an infant, had known by a “Whispering Instinct of Nature:”¹⁶³

When I saw those Objects celebrated in His Psalmes which GOD and Nature had proposed to me, and which I thought chance only presented to my view: you cannot imagine how unspeakably I was delighted ... For by this I perceived that we were led by one Spirit: and that following the clew of Nature into this Labyrinth I was brought into the midst of Celestial Joys:

To “contemplat all the Works of GOD,” he finds affirmed, “was to live in Heaven and the only way to becom what David was a Man after Gods own Heart.”¹⁶⁴

A Wise Man is a “lively Righteous Gratefull Soul” ; he is also a “Learned Wight” with the “Power of Examining Gods ways.”¹⁶⁵ In this Traherne again resists the censure of his tutor, who in his comments upon a similar sentiment in a *Sober View* notes that: “in my opinion it is much more modest to say the Soul is made to Consider his ways then to Examine them for to Examine Implies more an Authority then a duty ...”¹⁶⁶ Traherne, however, would “shew the Justice of the Soul, in its Severe Expectation that God should be Infinitely good:”¹⁶⁷ “Neither is it Boldness in the Soul, to make such Enquiries, but a Modest confidence of his Infinit Excellency, that it will Endure the Test.”¹⁶⁸ Traherne describes man as a “privy Counsellor of God. For he is able to Examine the Original and End of all his ways ... he is admitted to the Counsel table of the most High, and hath a Liberty of Inspection into the Secrets of his Bosom.” “Jesus Christ the Eternal Wisdom” calls us, he notes, to be “*not Servants, for the Servant Knoweth not what his Lord doth: but I hav called you friends.*”¹⁶⁹

In the work of attaining the Image of God, and piously studying his ways

An Active Heavenly Glorious Person is

¹⁶² Michael Ponsford, "Men after God's own heart: the context of Thomas Traherne's emulation of David," *Studia Mystica* 9.4 (1986), p. 3.

¹⁶³ CM III.16.

¹⁶⁴ C III.70.

¹⁶⁵ See KG p. 274, ll. 182-183 (f. 162r.) & marginal gloss.

¹⁶⁶ SV, p. 73, fn. 4.

¹⁶⁷ KG p. 273, ll. 167-168 (f. 161v.)

¹⁶⁸ KG p. 274, ll. 188-189 (f. 162r.)

¹⁶⁹ KG p 275, ll. 243-250 (ff. 163r-163v.) ; John 15:15.

Employd, and Busy, in the Work of Bliss.

It is not enough, for Traherne, that the works of God be enjoyed in a “Meerly passiv”¹⁷⁰ way. There is a great restlessness in the activity of prizing all things, shining upon such vast expanses and loving all persons in all lands – in matching the omnipresence of God’s action and Infinite Love in the world. As the final section of this chapter will elaborate, it is the glory of man that he is free to act in this way as we

could never be made to liv in his Image, unless we were able to doe it freely, and to becom Acts, Existing as he doth of our own Accord; In that our Glory and Blessedness consisteth ... Our Wisdom and Holiness is acquired by Acting freely: and our Goodness founded in the Desire of pleasing God, of our own Accord.¹⁷¹

Toil, as well as restless activity is implied in all this business and employment. We are to get Wisdom and “seekest after Knowledg as Choyce Silver, and Searchest for her as for hidden treasures.”¹⁷²

tho we cannot here upon Earth Comprehend it by Reason of its Depths, and Innumerable Mysteries, yet we will Consider as many as we are able; and feel, and see, and prie into the Bottom, as far as we can; that we may grow at least in *the Knowledge of the Mysterie, that hath been hid from Ages and Generations ...*¹⁷³

In discussing the omnipresence of God’s action we encountered “The judicious Hooker” engaged in such toil – “wading into the spring and fountain of Laws, and digging neer unto the root of things”¹⁷⁴ Traherne may have had in mind St Augustine’s maxim *Unde rapimur amore indagandae veritatis* (Whence we are seized with a love of truth requiring to be dug / mined for.)¹⁷⁵ In a world blinded by sin, it is necessary to dig for the truth. The Logos is most apparent yet hidden:

... wisdom is now become profound, Happieness concealed, Felicity Buried: we must Sweat for her as for Hidden Treasures.¹⁷⁶

The “Blessed Man,” therefore, “doth controul the Night” in being “Active,”

¹⁷⁰ KG p. 456, l. 29 (f. 325v.)

¹⁷¹ KG p. 458, ll. 110-116 (f. 327v.)

¹⁷² Prov. 2:4-5, 4:8-9 ; KG p. 268-269, ll. 122-123 (ff. 158r-158v.)

¹⁷³ KG p. 259, ll. 62-66 (f. 151r.) ; Cf. Col. 1:26.

¹⁷⁴ KG p. 369, ll. 1-15 (f. 241v.) ; See 2.1.3.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I.5.8.

¹⁷⁶ SM III.42.

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

“Employd, and Busy, in the Work of Bliss.” His virtue, as Chrysostom tells Traherne, cannot “lie hid,” but will “dart from him” as though “he were arrayed with the Sun.”¹⁷⁷ He is the light that “shineth in darkness.”¹⁷⁸ His soul “Covets a Compleat and absolute Felicitie,” a full inheritance of “Sublime and perfect Goodness” from the creator, as

half Eternitie full of Light and Beauty, and half Eternity void, and Desolate; Half his Omnipresence full of Blessedness, and half of it full of darkness, and Confusion; is not agreeable to perfect felicitie, nor to right Reason, for it would exhibit an Infinity that is Infintly defectiv.¹⁷⁹

The Wise Man will not rest in the “Work of Bliss” till his cup is full.

¹⁷⁷ KG p. 465, ll. 188-192 (f. 333v.)

¹⁷⁸ John 1:5.

¹⁷⁹ KG p. 274, ll. 169-177 (ff. 161v-162r.)

What Glory Lurks in All Things

The active loving of all that God loves involves, then, a freely exercised and “lively,” enjoyment and a learned “Examination” of all God’s works, and a heightened awareness of “what Glory lurks / In all things.” Stanzas 8 to 10 describe how the Wise Man is transfigured in these acts of comprehension:

8

He feels, he sees, he tastes, he knows,
He like his Maker Grows,
He loves, and Prizes all his Works
Even as his God doth doe,
And Ponders oft what Glory lurks
In all things he doth view.
While evry thing Enflames his Soul with love;
And evry thing his Joy, his Bliss, doth prove.

9

His Noble Sence exalteth all
That is before his Ey,
And by their Heavenly Names doth call
Them while on Earth they lie
And evry thing (tho that is Strange)
Is ev’n without a Change
Divine to him as he himself: for he
Is Holiness, and all Felicities.

10

The Coal which touchd the Prophet’s lips
is hid in Simple chips:
In Evry Bush he sees a Fire
In evry Rock a Spring,
To quench the Thirst of his Desire;
His God in Evry thing.
All Heaven descends, Environs, Enters him;
He is Transfigurd to a Seraphim.

11

Being transformd, himself he is

A very Spring of Bliss.
 And evry thing he Sees, his Ey
 Doth Bless and Magnifie.
 His touch whatever it doth feel,
 Be it Stone, or Steel,
 Or wood, or Earth, it turns it all to Gold;
 His Fingers pierce, whatever thing they hold.

Traherne describes an ecstatic encounter with the things of the earth – every sight or touch of bush, rock, stone, metal, or wood ‘quenches’ the “Thirst” of the Wise Man’s “Desire” as his prying eyes and fingers uncover the Glory that “lurks” in each thing. Although in *The Kingdom of God*, unlike the *Centuries* and *Select Meditations*, there are no specific personal references to moments of epiphany, the work is essentially concerned with explicating the pervasive mystical relation between God, world and self. There are many points where Traherne breaks the stream of theological discourse, with a passionate interjection in the first person: “I am ravished,” he confesses, “at the Fullness of my Joy.”¹⁸⁰ The torrent of words and exclamation in many of the passages we have been examining also convey this sense of rapture in contemplating the rich complexity of the cosmos. Although the question of Traherne’s status as a mystic is outside the scope of this thesis,¹⁸¹ it is notable, as we observed at the outset, that many commentators from the earliest reviews at the turn of the century, to a whole range of contemporary ‘new age’ internet sites have, with frequent citation of the *Third Century’s* reflections on the visions of childhood, hailed Traherne as a ‘nature mystic’ and compared him to the Romantic poets, and to Walt Whitman.¹⁸² Writing in 1931, Gladys Wade went as far as to say that Traherne “is being proclaimed as one the

¹⁸⁰ KGp. 348, ll. 30-31 (f. 221v.)

¹⁸¹ Several critics have sought to assess Traherne’s status as a mystic against various taxonomies of mysticism” E.g.: Underhill’s classic five stage scheme (Keith William Salter, *Thomas Traherne : Mystic and Poet*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1964) ; Bonaventura (Martz, *The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton*, ; Transcendentalism (James J. Balakier, *Thomas Traherne's Concept of Felicity, the "Highest Bliss," and the Higher States of Consciousness of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Vedic Science and Technology*, 1990, Available: <http://www.edu/msus/traherpart1.html>, 3 April 2001.) ; Carl Albrecht’s psychology of mystical consciousness (Wohrer, *The Growth of a Mystic's Mind : A Study of the Evolution and the Phenomenology of Traherne's Mystical Consciousness.*) Many find Traherne to fall short of being a “great mystic” or to occupy but a minor place in the canon.

Clements has pointed out the limitations of applying such schemes too strictly, and usefully points to Traherne’s place in the broad Christian contemplative tradition as well as a number of sources and kindred spirits. (Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne.*) Several contemporary approaches to mysticism and spirituality are more concerned with the spirituality of the ordinary than with establishing hierarchies of extra-ordinary experience, and stress the ways in which direct personal experience resists classification or conformity to schemata. (See, for e.g.: Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry : Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara Rumscheidt and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001)) Such approaches seem appropriate to Traherne who emphasised the naturalness of holiness, and revered the most “common” things as revelations of God.

¹⁸² See 1.1, fn. 1.

the greatest mystics England has produced, perhaps the greatest Nature-mystic the world has ever seen.”¹⁸³ The Edwardian nature poet, Edward Thomas, saw Traherne as a kindred spirit with the pantheistic Richard Jefferies who “like Traherne ... saw the corn as 'orient and immortal wheat' ; for as he moved about he felt in the midst of immortal things.” In an uncanny resemblance to Traherne’s then undiscovered Celestial Stranger “let down on a suddain,” Jefferies, as Thomas describes, “says that to him,

as a boy, the earth was that radiant vision which it would be to one set suddenly down upon it; and the freshness is still there.¹⁸⁴

Thomas affirms that Jefferies, also like Traherne, “wrote with “utterly abandoned sincerity” as “one in whose veins the sea floweth, who is clothed with the heavens, crowned with the stars ... one who so loves and enjoys the world that he is 'covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it'.”¹⁸⁵

Not all commentators perceive Traherne to be so rapt in the material world. Eliot found Traherne “more a mystic than a poet” and then chiefly a mystic of the *via negativa*, interested only in the mysterious and the transcendent.¹⁸⁶ Ponsford, describes Traherne’s imagery as being “vague, ethereal, abstract” and displaying a “drift to disembodied mysticism.”¹⁸⁷ Ross views “the joy which runs in the visionary universe of Traherne” to be purely “a joy in transcendence.”¹⁸⁸ A few other critics have suggested that any spontaneous, or ‘cosmic’ mystical experience of nature Traherne might have described is extrinsic to his Christianity. Maitland, for example, sees that Traherne’s personal spiritual experience “not only transcends Christianity, but also does not involve Christ.”¹⁸⁹ Wohrer considers that

¹⁸³ Wade, "St Thomas Aquinas and Thomas Traherne," p. 666. See also: Wade, "Traherne and the Spiritual Value of Nature Study,"

¹⁸⁴ Thomas refers to Jefferies work *In the Open Air*. Thomas and Gant, *Richard Jefferies*, p. 172.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172, 276. Thomas quotes from CM III.3. ,I.29, I.31. See also Edward Thomas, "Thomas Traherne's "Meditations", " *Morning Post* 31 Aug. 1908 ; Edward Thomas, "The South Country," Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1984), Chap. 8 contains references to Traherne.

¹⁸⁶ T. S. Eliot, "Mystic and politician as poet: Vaughan, Traherne, Marvell, Milton," *Listener* 3 (1930)

¹⁸⁷ Ponsford, "The Poetry of Thomas Traherne in Relation to the Thought and Poetics of his Period," p. 117.

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *Poetry and Dogma*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁹ Maitland, "Thomas Traherne's Path to Felicity : the Missing Christ," , Abstract.

Similarly, Wohrer similarly concludes that it was only in infancy that Traherne experienced a mystical union with the Divine in nature and that only CM III.17 can “with some reservations – be assessed as a poetic transcription of a spontaneous awareness of the sacredness of Creation, since this experience dates from Traherne’s irreligious phase.” (Wohrer, *Thomas Traherne : The Growth of a Mystic's Mind : A Study of the Evolution and the Phenomenology of Traherne's Mystical Consciousness*, p. 146.)

Sherrington also fails to see a connection between Christ and nature: “Since nature poetry deals with the material realm, it seems most mystical when nature is pictured as transformed by the divine immanence; yet such a vision most invites ... a tendency to disregard the transcendence of God, and

Traherne occasionally conveys a sense of ‘merging’ completely with Creation in an awe-inspiring awareness of ‘one-ness’” but suspects that Traherne has no real experience of a ‘nature-mystical union’” or sense of “a ‘Divine Presence’ *in* and emanating from nature.” Any such experience, he concludes, would need to have dated from his “irreligious phase.”¹⁹⁰ Golz considers that “while Traherne, in keeping with his life as an Anglican priest, necessarily employed at times the dualism of a distant divinity beyond or behind immediate physical reality, his description of mystical experience transcended such dualism.”¹⁹¹

Such critics attribute either to Traherne specifically, or to the Protestant sensibility, or to Christianity *per se*, a tendency to oppose the immanent and transcendent. This, as we have argued, is quite alien to the Patristic and Cosmic Christology espoused by Traherne. What is at issue here, however, is not what Traherne espouses, so much as whether he actually conveys a real sense of connection with the glorious world he describes. One early review, in contrast to Edward Thomas, thinks not. Frances Towers strikes an impatient, almost sarcastic note in describing Traherne’s “heavenly harping, which drowns the voices of earth so that bird-song and the rune of the sea and the wind soon lose their precious earthly meaning, their individual poetic significance.” The “delicate flowers of spring” when described by the “mystic” are

jewelled chalices, filled with sacramental wine. Red roses wet with dew, emblematic to the lover of the grace and fragrance of his beloved, in the transcendental gardens of mysticism are cold and scentless jewels dedicate[d] to the worship of God. They become “merely a pattern in the ecclesiastical embroidery.”¹⁹²

The contemporary poet, David Constantine, is not so dismissive – “as the writing of mystics often does, Traherne’s flings down before you shockingly novel ways of seeing your life in the universe” – but he similarly observes that Traherne is blinded by the light:-

his poems are remarkably lacking in concrete reality. As though he is not actually

thus to become Romantic rather than Christian.” (Alison J. Sherrington, “Christian Nature Mysticism in the Poetry of Vaughan, Traherne, Hopkins and Francis Thompson,” Ph.D., Australian National University, 1978, p. 226.)

¹⁹⁰ Wohrer, *Thomas Traherne : The Growth of a Mystic's Mind : A Study of the Evolution and the Phenomenology of Traherne's Mystical Consciousness*, pp. 149, 146.

¹⁹¹ David Golz, “Thomas Traherne and the Zen Poet of “On Believing in Mind”,” *Studia Mystica* 13.1 (1990), p. 64.

¹⁹² Frances Towers, “Thomas Traherne: His Outlook on Life,” *Nineteenth Century and After* 87 (1920), p. 1025.

seeing the real world at all. Pure vision. White light. Ecstatic and vapid.”¹⁹³

Traherne’s “Noble Sense” so “exalts” the world, such arguments imply, that the actual world is consumed in a fire of idealism. In the lines:

All heaven descends, Environs, Enters him;
He is Transfigur'd to a Seraphim

such critics might see the light of heaven eclipsing a true vision of the world. Ponsford argues that Traherne seeks “new felicity through the power of the mind, shunning the world itself.”¹⁹⁴ Jordan similarly argues that for Traherne the world is better in thought than in actuality; and indeed that the thought of the world is independent of the physical senses:

... the sensual deprivation of a child in the womb and the limits of an infant’s perceptions immediately after birth serve Traherne as symbols for the soul in its ideal state ... the “world” as it appears in Traherne’s meditations is never meant to be taken simply as the actual world experienced by the senses. Rather Traherne means to consider the ideal creation which exists in God and in God’s image, the soul of man.¹⁹⁵

Traherne’s epistemology, I would argue however, is decidedly more empirical,¹⁹⁶ and his Christology more incarnational, than such views suggest. He in fact contrasts the nothingness from which the child enters the world with the glories, including the air he breathes and the limbs of his own body, that salute him upon his arrival.¹⁹⁷ The infant in Traherne does not represent a limited perception, but rather one of infinite capacity and potential. To the dumb infant, “The Heavens were an Orakle” and “The Earth did undertake / The office of a priest.”¹⁹⁸

He Feels, he Sees, he Tastes, he Knows

¹⁹³ David Constantine, *Thomas Traherne and Edward Thomas : Notes from an address to the Traherne Association Festival 2001*,

¹⁹⁴ Ponsford, “The Poetry of Thomas Traherne in Relation to the Thought and Poetics of his Period,” p. 23.

¹⁹⁵ Jordan, “Thomas Traherne and the Art of Meditation: Devotional Works of the Late 1600s,” pp. 397-398.

¹⁹⁶ Cefalu describes Traherne’s “theory of cognition” as “fundamentally Thomistic in its thoroughgoing empiricism.” Cefalu, “Thomistic Metaphysics and Ethics in the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Traherne,” pp. 256-257.

¹⁹⁷ See “The Salutation.”

¹⁹⁸ “Dumnesse,” ll. 63-65.

It might indeed be argued that Traherne's epistemology represents a thorough blending of Platonist and Aristotelian elements, grounded in material fact and "Real and Solid Enjoyment."¹⁹⁹ An infant's soul, writes Traherne in Aristotelian fashion, is "An Empty Book ... in which any Thing may be Written."²⁰⁰ The "Power of Comprehension" is an "Empty Faculty" and therefore the "cause of infinit Delight." It is a "Rasa Tabula"²⁰¹ Prepared in Him for the Drawing afterward of all the Pictures in Gods kingdom."²⁰² As Julia Smith notes, "In using this expression, Traherne apparently rejects the belief of the Cambridge Platonists in innate ideas implanted in the mind prior to sensory experience ... however, he makes an exception for one innate idea, that of infinite space."²⁰³ Other qualities and potentialities, patterned on the divine prototype, are also considered innate, such as the propensity to love, and the capacity for happiness. Blending empiricism, then, with a Platonist estimation of the capacity of the soul Traherne, in keeping with his incarnational and Trinitarian view of creation, finds another form of entanglement in the relation of the soul to the world, mediated by the body. The senses, he conceives, are "formed and framed by the union of Life and Matter."²⁰⁴

All Heaven Descends, Environs, Enters Him

The image of the soul as a *Tabula Rasa* implies a great receptiveness. In *Seeds of Eternity* Traherne observes that:

The Ey openeth upon the whole World, and letteth in the Beauty of all the Univers, informing the Soul with the Glory of Heaven and Earth and as it were inspiring[;] the Matter and Greatness of them filleth Man with all their Excellency and Perfection.²⁰⁵

The soul "like the Sun doth Shine," scattering its rays in all directions; through the agency of the body it is also the receptor of the material sun's rays which

Scatter themselvs over all the World, that in their Reflexion they may com back more Conveniently, having Enlightned all objects first with their Glory, and then Making their Beauty mine by the Vision of their Goodness; they do sacrifice

¹⁹⁹ KG p. 361, l. 237 (f. 234v.)

²⁰⁰ CM I.1.

²⁰¹ Blank tablet, normally "tabula rasa."

²⁰² SM IV.2.

²⁰³ Smith and Traherne, *Traherne, Thomas. Select Meditations*, p. 173.

²⁰⁴ KG p. 487, ll. 288-289 (f. 352r.)

²⁰⁵ SE p. 242, ll. 410-413 (f. 142r-142v.)

themselves in new Appearances to the Ey of my Soul and body, Els I should liv in perpetual Dark ...²⁰⁶

By “Systole and Diastole,” by scattering and reflexion, the Sun’s rays enliven all living things, which in turn serve and enlighten the soul:

It does not Illuminat all Superficialy, for the Pleasure of mine Ey only. It enters deeply, and inspires all with Life and vertue, Strength, and Motion, giving all the Goodness of their Qualities and operations to them for my Real and Solid Enjoyment ... the World wherin I live, is made a Region of Light and Glory by this Means, which were it not for them would be a very Dungeon.²⁰⁷

The material light of the sun is integral to the incarnate being of God in the world, and also to the life of the spirit, which participates in the “Systole and Diastole” of the Universal Circulation. For, as we have already noted,

that which is Light in the open Air, is Life in Organized Bodies. The Same Spirits which affect the Ey, inform the Soul, and are the Material Causes of its Senses and Affections. Why is it an Universal Canon, and Rule of Nature that all Bodies Should be porous: But that they may receiv the Influences of Heaven ...²⁰⁸

By this light, that is both material and heavenly, every element in the world is illuminated. The Biblical references in stanza ten all point, not to a transcendence of earthly things, but to a transcendence of the need for supernatural signs of God’s presence - as the light of heaven has entered deeply into every creature. The Prophet Isaiah saw in a vision that his “unclean lips” were purged by being touched with “live coal” which a seraphim had plucked with tongs from an altar;²⁰⁹ the Wise Man finds such a refining fire, not in coal from a holy altar, but in “Simple chips” - every fragment of the earth being holy. God appears to Moses in a burning bush and Moses is amazed that the bush is not burnt but that “God called unto him out of the midst of the bush”²¹⁰ ; the Wise Man finds “Evry Bush” on fire with God’s presence. In a similar spirit Teilhard, as Ursula King notes, “retained the glorious vision of a world caught by the blazing fire of divine energy and love. It is not surprising, therefore, that he prefaced his spiritual autobiography, “The Heart of Matter”

²⁰⁶ KG p. 361, ll. 227-234 (ff. 234r-234v.)

²⁰⁷ KG p. 361, ll. 234-237, 241-243 (f. 234v.)

²⁰⁸ KG p. 350, ll. 116-120 (f. 224r.) See 2.4.3, “By Systole and Diastole.”

²⁰⁹ Isaiah 6:6-7.

²¹⁰ Exodus 3:3-4.

with the worlds “The Burning Bush.”²¹¹ The world has no need of transformation; rather it is the Wise Man who is “Transfigured to a Seraphim” by virtue of his seeing the world “aright.”²¹²

... evry thing (tho that is Strange)
Is ev’n without a Change
Divine to him as he himself:

As we noted under “Unitive Transformation” Traherne draws upon the notion commonly found in early works of physico-theology of the ‘entitive goodness’²¹³ of creatures, and understands the soul to be transformed by seeing that things “are in them selves Holy.”²¹⁴ The Israelites demand a sign that God has not abandoned them in the desert of Zin; God empowers Moses to bring forth water by striking a rock but reprimands him “because ye believed me not”²¹⁵; the Wise Man, however, finds

In evry Rock a Spring,
To quench the Thirst of his Desire;
His God in Evry thing.

In being so pleased, the Wise Man is like the radiant Christ transfigured before his disciples in whom God announces that he is “well pleased.”²¹⁶ In finding “God in Evry thing” all things, including the Wise Man himself shine as brightly as Christ’s countenance.

When, therefore, Traherne writes of the Wise Man: “All Heaven descends, Environs, Enters him,” he is speaking of a union of Light and Life and “His God in Evry thing” that surrounds him. “God,” writes Teilhard, “enfolds us and penetrates us by creating and sustaining us”; and for Traherne the light of Heaven “enters deeply and inspires” not only the Wise Man but all the beings that “environ” him. “If I may produce my own Experience,” asks Traherne, underlining the “Real and Solid”²¹⁷ nature of his meaning,

²¹¹ King, *Christ in All Things*, p. 19.

²¹² CM I.25-31.

²¹³ See: Maule, *Traherne and the Restlessness of God: the New Lambeth Discoveries (audiotape)*. This is in the tradition of earlier thinking, distilled by Aquinas, in which creatures are seen to exist “for their own sake” as “their own account of the divine goodness,” subsisting in their “own nature,” and possessing their own “uniqueness” (*proprietas*). See *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4, cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 122.

²¹⁴ SM II.54.

²¹⁵ Numbers 20:7-13.

²¹⁶ The Transfiguration is recounted in Mt. 17:1-13, Mk. 9:2-13, Lk. 9:28-36.

²¹⁷ KG p. 361, l. 237 (f. 234v.)

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

The World was a Glorious House ... It was a Marvelous Sphere of Great and most Glorious Enjoyments; the Beings that Environed me were my Goods and Treasures...²¹⁸

Traherne also describes how the works of creation “insinuat themselves into the Mind of the Enjoyer” ; he implies a mysterious and intricate infusion, instillation, and implantation – an operation that occurs “within us and without us:”

... such are the Effects of ... Goodness, that all its Works insinuat themselvs into the Mind of the Enjoyer, both as worthy for themselvs to be delighted in, and as true and lively Mirrors Exhibiting that Goodness in all its Glory. For there is none of that goodness, but it is Shed abroad upon the Creatures. Its Glory shineth in the Creatures and is the Life and perfection of them. It is a pittty we should be so little acquainted with that which is Infinit, and Eternal, universaly Omnipresent, remote yet neer at hand within us and without us, in Evry thing, apparent, and Compassing us about on Evry side.²¹⁹

The world is not a “shadowy” picture but a “lively Mirror” of Infinite Goodness that “Shineth *in* the Creatures.” “That which is Infinit, and Eternal, Universaly Omnipresent” infuses life into all creatures and as the “Mind of the Enjoyer” engages with all that is “neer at hand” and “apparant” it is suffused by the same light, the source of all life. The Works of Creation, and our need of them, insinuate in the Mind of the Enjoyer an instinctive desire after the source of life itself.

So when Traherne says “the world was more in me, then I in it”²²⁰ he means not as Skulsky argues, that the “abstract idea” of it is “better” than the world itself,²²¹ but that, as Teilhard describes, “the world itself had invaded my being.”²²² This sense of ‘invasion’ is invoked by the repetition throughout “A Wise Man” of the phrase “Evry” and throughout Traherne’s writings by the overwhelming nature of his catalogues and extended praises. As

²¹⁸ K G p.445, ll. 12, 15, 19-20 (f. 314v.)

²¹⁹ KG p. 287, ll. 3-11 (f. 173r -173v.)

²²⁰ “Silence” l. 81.

²²¹ “Traherne arrests his reader with a “glorious defiance of logic” describing a process of “engulfment,” “containing the world that contains us.” This “diversionary solipsism,” according to Skulsky, disguises the mundanity of Traherne’s meaning which is in fact that things are “in mind,” quite “simply and banally,” by virtue of being “thought about.” He then suggests that for Traherne: “the world is in me not only *as well as* I am in it – but *more* ... If we don’t literally contain the world, we literally contain something better: the idea of it. Better because, at least in the old Schoolman’s view of mental representation, abstract ideas are sharply defined standards to which bodies, including the speaker’s are only fuzzy approximations.” Harold Skulsky, *Language Recreated: Seventeenth Century Metaphorists and the Act of Metaphor*, (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 87, 88.

a brief aside, it might be noted that the English philosopher Douglas E. Harding cited Traherne in his theory of “the headless way” – a mystical sensation that the mind is entirely receptive to and filled with the world.²²³

His Fingers Pierce

Reciprocally, this sensory ‘invasion’ awakens the active intellect and prompts it to environ and enter into all things that environ and enter it. This “delicious” earthly life,²²⁴ sampled with the senses, is the invitation to uncover the Glory that lurks or is hidden in every creature. Nathan A. Scott describes the post-enlightenment loss of a sense of “seeing-into” the world; the world

is not experienced as carrying within itself the power and radiance of *presence*: it seems not to be ignited by any capacity for exchange or reciprocity ... This realm of earth, it seems, can simply no longer be experienced as a veil for something else which is presently dark and concealed but which will ultimately be unveiled and made manifest...²²⁵

It might be argued that Traherne’s purpose in writing *the Kingdom of God* was to urge, in the face of the voluntarist rhetoric of much of the ‘mechanical philosophy,’ the retention of this vision of and *into* the world - the maintenance of a sense of divine presence in “Every thing.”

For Teilhard, “the perception of the divine omnipresence is essentially a seeing, a taste,” a vision of the “incandescence of the inward layers of being,” an attraction to God who “tends, by the logic of his creative effort, to make himself sought and perceived by us.”²²⁶ The Wise Man feels, sees, and tastes – thence he loves and prizes all the works of God, and thence “he knows” and “Ponders oft what Glory lurks / In all things he doth

²²² Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mystical Milieu," p. 117.

²²³ Harding develops exercises based on the observation that one cannot see one’s own head and that the empty space where one’s head might be is taken up with the sight of the surrounding universe. See Douglas E. Harding, *On Having No Head, Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious*, (London: Arkana, 1961) ; *The Headless Way*, Available: <http://www.headless.org/English/main.html>, 2 May 2005.

The psychedelic folk band, *The Incredible String Band* have a song on their 1967 album *The Big Huge* entitled “Douglas Traherne Harding” which opens with the enigmatic, Traherne inspired lines: “When I was born I had no head / My eye was single and my body was filled with light.” The refrain is taken from CM I.29: “You never enjoy the world aright / Till the sea itself floweth / In your veins and you are clothed / With the heavens and crowned with the stars.” (Incredible String Band, *Big Huge*, WEA, 1967.)

²²⁴ KG p. 416, ll. 314-319 (ff. 283r-283v.)

²²⁵ Scott, *The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred*, pp. 22-23.

view.” Because God’s

Glory did lurk in the Secret and hidden Properties of his Creatures, he gav So great a Measure of life to the Soul, that it might be able to discern the Invisible qualities, and virtues of his Creatures. ... that Wisdom must be Seen ... a discursiv Reason was imparted to Man, wherby he might collect one thing out of another, and Command the Original, and the End of all in his Comprehension;²²⁷

The life of the soul is joined with “Life,” that “Soul and Mysterious Bride of the Universe” and “Daughter of God” that “seest,” “feelest,” and “filleth” all things.²²⁸

Thou livest in thyself and in all other things. When we seek thee, thou art hidden in a mere indivisible Centre; When we find thee, thou art evry where Expanded, and at once Surroundest innumerable objects, Thou piercest, and feelest their very Centre.²²⁹

In the context of Christification, the phrase “When we seek thee” springs into prominence. “When we find thee” in “innumerable objects,” infers Traherne, we participate in the Life that is Christic Wisdom and

live unto all Objects, and discern the fullness of God in all his Operations; live the Life of God, live to God, live in Communion with God, live to all other things in God, while GOD himself liveth in them Blessed for ever.

This Life cannot “Endure” to be “obscured by the Absence of any Raye, that may fall upon it; being operativ it is Activ, and cannot Endure to be Desolate, or Idle.”²³⁰ Each “Raye” of the restless soul not only illuminates all things, but can also *penetrate*, pierce, and feel all things. According to Teilhard “the great mystery of Christianity is not exactly the appearance, but the transparence, of God in the universe.”

Yes, Lord, not only the ray that stikes the surface, but the ray that penetrates, not only Your Epiphany, Jesus, but Your *diaphany*.²³¹

The rays of perception, like those of light, “pierce” the objects upon which they shine. “The

²²⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 122.

²²⁷ KG p. 426, ll. 191-202 (f. 294v.)

²²⁸ For a discussion of this passage, see 2.4.4.

²²⁹ KG p. 417, ll. 373-376 (ff. 284v-285r.)

²³⁰ KG p. 426, ll. 202-208 (f. 295r.)

²³¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 121.

visiv Rays” of “An Infant Ey” are “Beams of Light indeed,”

refined, subtil, piercing, quick and pure²³²

As we have seen, Traherne describes how swift, piercing beams of light would “Strike with Infinit Violence” if they were not so fine and, similarly, how the love of God expressed in Christ’s passion would be “too Severe and Piercing” to bear, did it not “Kill With Sweetness.”²³³ The same poetic that is used to speak of the Sun / Son as Life, Light, and Love is used to speak of the soul’s perceptiveness, piercing its object as gently and imperceptively as sunshine passing through a diaphanous veil. It is, therefore, a redeemed vision - overcoming the blindness and ignorance represented by the rough nails that tore the hands and feet of the Creator. The ‘salved eye’²³⁴ of the human mind exercises a piercing love, shining its “visiv Rays” upon and through all things and perceiving the Christic essence or pattern that shoots through and unites Heaven and Earth. “Purity,” writes Teilhard, “does not lie in separation from, but in a deeper penetration into the universe. It is to be found in the love of that boundless Essence which penetrates the inmost depths of all things.”²³⁵

Towers’ description of Traherne’s mysticism is, in fact, entirely inside out. “The religious poet,” she argues,

is not striving to look at life, to catch a glimpse of her hidden spirit of wonder. He endeavours to look beyond life into the white light of eternity; and those who are not like-minded with himself can only wonder that he should be so concerned with that which lies outside time and space.²³⁶

It is Traherne’s purpose in *The Kingdom of God*, as elsewhere in his works, to not only “catch a glimpse” but to “unveil entirely” life’s “hidden spirit of wonder,” the “Key and Clew of Nature’s Labyrinth,” the Light in Life, the Word in the World. “Upon the sight of the Glory of Creation” the Angels

... saw the Inward Depth, and Admirable Intricacy of the Same ... For the Wisdom and Goodness of God were not So much Seen in the wideness of Eternity, or in

²³² “An Infant-Ey,” ll. 7-8.

²³³ KG p. 354, ll. 272-274 (f. 227v.) ; KG p. 304, ll. 246-247 (f. 186r.) ; See 2.4.5, “Let it softly then distill.”

²³⁴ In a passage we will discuss shortly, Traherne asks: “If we will not pray for Ey Saly, that we may see, how shall we be made partakers of the Beatifick Vision?” (KG p. 268, ll. 82-83 (f. 157v.))

²³⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, pp. 64-65.

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

Creation of Illimited and Immortal Powers, as in the Glorious Unvers which is if I may so Speak the very centre of Gods omnipresence, and the Kernel of eternity.²³⁷

It is also for humanity to see with such transfigured and seraphic eyes – to see the “Inward depth” or “kernel” of each “Centre of Gods Omnipresence” and to find with the Celestial Stranger that this ‘little’ “Globe of the Earth” is the “Centre of Heaven.”²³⁸ As the “Kernel of Eternity” the world is not only at the centre of an infinite universe, the focus of divine energies, and contained within eternity, but is also itself the site of God’s presence – the place wherin the Word of Life dwells.

Because everything is “ev’n without a Change / Divine” the Wise Man

... by their Heavenly Names doth call
Them while on Earth they lie.

The change, Traherne implies, lies in the namer – “He is Transfigurd to a Seraphim” and

Being transformd, himself he is
A very Spring of Bliss.

Such transformation indicates not abstraction but a vast expansion of consciousness. Just as Christ ascends in order to fill all things and assume the cosmos for his body, transformed Wise Men become not disembodied seraphims, but

Visible Angels, and there is something Mysterious in those Creatures, that are made up of Souls, and Bodies, that all visible and Invisible things are united in them.²³⁹

In this hypostatical union of body and spirit, as will be expanded upon when we come to the final stanzas, humanity lives in the image of the Logos, the “very Spring of Bliss,” weighing with a transfiguring and “Noble sence” the inestimable value of all things as they are in themselves “ev’n without a Change” and yet turning all to “Gold.”

²³⁶ Towers, "Thomas Traherne: His Outlook on Life," p. 1028.

²³⁷ KG p. 482, ll. 45-53 (ff. 347r-347v.)

²³⁸ KG p. 388 (f. 259v.), title chapter 25.

²³⁹ KG p. 372, ll. 151-153 (f. 244v.)

Like Fire that Alters Evry Thing

It is with this sense of ‘raising up’ and completing the world, that the piercing sight and touch of the transfigured Wise Man is described as a transforming fire. It does not alter those things that are divine “ev’n without a Change” but, like the “Phænix of the world,”²⁴⁰ consumes all in its life-renewing fire of love:

12

Like fire that alters evry thing
On which it passes, he
Doth to his own Blest Nature bring
The objects he doth see;
They also burn, and turn to fire;
Love, Pleasure, and Desire.
Joy, Praise, Peace, Gratitude, and Bliss,
When well digested evry Creature is.

The Cross also is

a Tree set on fire with invisible flame, that Illuminateth all the World. The Flame is Lov. The Lov in His Bosom who died on it.

“In the light of which” the Wise Man sees “how to possess all the Things in Heaven and Earth” in the similitude of Christ.²⁴¹ This possession, or bringing of things into “his own Blest Nature” requires deep contemplation - not “a transeunt Glance, but a fixed Ey ...”

For as a Sudden Application of fire to Green Wood will not Kindle it, so neither will a Momentary Appearance of Infinit Goodness work any Effect, in an unprepared Soul. Before the fire be Kindled, that will giv us Light, we must stay upon the object, and the Application must be continued some time, that it might pierce and Enter; otherwise the concession will be very feeble, and the Impression that is left will never enflame us, but fleet away.

Every creature is thus “well digested” and assimilated into the Wise Man’s fiery heart. Each manifestation of God’s perfections is eucharistically considered “one by one” – “We will receive them quietly, and chew them Gently, that we may perfectly digest them.”²⁴²

²⁴⁰ SM II.77.

²⁴¹ CM I.60

²⁴² KG p. 337, ll. 20-21 (f. 212v.)

Teilhard similarly describes how

the world has little by little caught fire in my sight until, aflame all around me, it has become almost luminous from within ... Such has been my experience in contact with the earth – the diaphany of the Divine at the heart of the universe on fire.²⁴³

Being so consumed, the Wise Man becomes like the phoenix. As the Celestial Stranger observes, men and women are the “Sovereign Creatures” that “offer up themselves, their Souls and Bodies a living sacrifice: Flames of Love are in their Bosoms, and a Light Shineth in their Soule Beyond the Heavens.”²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. *The Heart of Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), pp. 15-16.

²⁴⁴ KG p. 390, ll. 118-120 (ff. 260v-261r.)

A Blessed Sphere of Sights; An Abyss of Joys

The World to this piercing, transfigured and blazing mind is:

13

A Glorious Region of Delights,
A Blessed Sphere of Sights
A fair transparent Mine of Treasures
A Real Map of Bliss
A fertile Womb of Heavenly Pleasures,
An Ocean, or Abyss
Of Joys; a World of Glory is the Place,
Wherin in Evry thing he Sees his Face.

This stanza is replete with images of containment – Wombs, Mines, Spheres, Oceans, Abysses all encompass and conceal the treasure they contain. Wombs, Mines and Abysses are places of darkness which paradoxically contain life or light bearing “Delights” ; the world is a “transparent Mine of Bliss” in which the Christic life is most apparant yet hidden. In a world blinded by sin it is also, as we noted in relation to the seventh stanza, necessary to seek Wisdom out:

His Kingdom is the Mine wherin Solomon would hav us Dig for the Treasures of
Wisdom and knowledg: His Works are the Deep Abysses and Mysterious Mines,
wherin we are to seek her as Silver, and Search for her as hid Treasures.²⁴⁵

These terms are also used throughout Traherne’s work to describe both the World and the Soul, and “the world in me” and me “in it:”

Why, All the Compass of this great Abyss,
Th’ united Service and Delight ...
The common Air and Light ...
It doth entire in me appear
As well as I in it: It gives me Room,
Yet lies within my Womb.²⁴⁶

The world and the soul are each found tightly enfolded in the other; the world is an “abyss

²⁴⁵ KG p. 447, ll. 92-94. (f. 316v.) See also SM III.42: “wisdom is now become profound, Happieness concealed, Felicity Buried : we must Sweat for her as for Hidden Treasures.”

of wonders,” it is a great “womb” of treasures that gives the poet “Room” ; his mind is also a womb in which the world is given room. This containment of the world that contains the self is achieved, according to Traherne, when the world is seen, and valued, aright – when the Christic life, the Logos, or divine reality that encompasses and permeates every Womb and Abyss is pierced and ‘mined.’ As the Wise Man’s “fingers pierce whatever they hold” he seeks “Life,” the “Daughter of God” as she lies “hidden in a mere indivisible Centre” ; when he finds her she is “Everywhere Expanded,” piercing and feeling the “very Centre” of “innumerable objects.”²⁴⁷ The ideal self, the Wise Man, then finds “The Kingdom of God (as our Savior saith, this Way) ... within [him.]”²⁴⁸ For Traherne, the City or Kingdom of God comes “unto us” as it is seen and received by us - as we perceive and love the World:

Our Soul is the Temple of the living God ... Wherefore let us Fear, and be Enlarged (He hath set the World in Mans Heart) that we may Comprehend his Kingdom.²⁴⁹

To be “enlarged,” as Traherne notes from Hermes, is to “Increas thyself unto an immeasurable Greatnesse,”²⁵⁰ to embrace the universe. Traherne uses the word “comprehend” in both its senses simultaneously here – to understand and to include. The ancient Hindu *Chāndogya Upanisad* similarly teaches an equation of ātman (the self) with Brahman (ultimate reality)

In the centre of the castle of Brahman, our own body, there is a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower, and within can be found a small space. We should find who dwells there, and we should want to know him ... The little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars; fire and lightning and winds are there; and all that now is and all that is not: for the whole universe is in Him and He dwells within our heart.²⁵¹

Traherne’s meditations upon the capacity of the soul, the swiftness of thought, the sea flowing in the very veins of the body speak of such a paradox – the presence of all things in

²⁴⁶ “Misapprehension,” ll. 54-55, 59, 63-65.

²⁴⁷ KG p. 417, ll. 373-376 (ff. 284v-285r.) See 2.4.4, “Thou art Everywhere Expanded.”

²⁴⁸ CM I.100.

²⁴⁹ KG pp. 267-268, ll. 74-77 (f. 157r.)

²⁵⁰ As noted above under “And Like the Sun Doth Shine,” KG p. 464, ll. 147-148 (f. 332r.) ; Everard, *Divine Pymander*, X.118-137.

²⁵¹ Chandogya Upanishad, 8.1. In *The Upanishads*, trans. Juan Mascaró (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), p. 120.

all universes in the small body that houses the mind and heart. The soul, like Christ, is the “sublimest of Creatures” and contains the “Perfections of all the Suns, Elements, Heavens, Stars, Angels, men, Arch Angels, Cherubims, Seraphims, Thrones, Dominions, Ages, Kingdoms, and Eternities.”²⁵²

Having rayed through every dimension the soul’s beams are reflected back into its own centre. “We are Born to be a Burning and Shining Light,” writes Traherne in the *Centuries*, and “I will in the Light of my Soul shew you the Univers.”²⁵³ As Hutton observes, Traherne’s ubiquitous image of the soul “as an all-containing, shining sphere recalls Plotinus (‘Let there be, then, in the soul a shining imagination of a sphere, having everything within it either moving or standing still’)²⁵⁴ The concept recurs throughout Christian writings on the soul: Cusa celebrated the capacity of the human mind, as it participates in the Divine Mind, to in some sense comprehend and thus enter into and contain everything: “Mind itself supposing itself to encompass, survey, and comprehend all things thus concludes that it is in everything and everything is in it.”²⁵⁵ Jordan notes that much late seventeenth century meditative literature explored the Neoplatonic conception of the infinite soul, as “the devout Christian ... attempted to exercise the powers of his soul to encompass the universe.”²⁵⁶ While Traherne’s language is that of a Christian Neoplatonist, it is not simply a borrowed rhetoric – but one that he employs with great and personal passion – repeatedly exclaiming at the wondrous capacity of the soul. In *Select Meditations*, he records something of an epiphany:

This Endless Comprehension of my Immortal Soul when I first saw it, so wholly Ravished and Transported my Spirit, that for a fortnight after I could Scarsly Think or speak or write of any other Thing. But like a man Doteing with Delight and Extasie, talk of it Night and Day as if all the Joy of Heaven and Earth were shut up in it.

The capacity to contain the world is a Christic capacity: “For in very Deed there I saw the Divine Image Relucent and shining, There I saw the foundation of mans Excellency, and that which which made Him a Son of God.”²⁵⁷ The insight, that so inspired Traherne’s ecstatic fortnight of “Doteing,” underpins his treatment of the soul in the world, and the

²⁵² KG p. 333, ll. 105-106, 109-111 (f. 208v.)

²⁵³ CM III.6.

²⁵⁴ *Enneads* v.8.9 ; Hutton, "Platonism in Some Metaphysical Poets : Marvell, Vaughan and Traherne," p. 173.

²⁵⁵ Cited in Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, pp. 125-6.

²⁵⁶ Jordan, "Thomas Traherne and the Art of Meditation: Devotional Works of the Late 1600s," p. 388.

world in the soul, and his entire conception of the Kingdom of God.

In Chapter 30, Traherne playfully explores the paradox of containing or possessing an immensity of treasures within the small shrine of the body in a meditation upon a “Curious and High Stomached” fly. This “Glorious Region of Delights,” this “Blessed Sphere of Sights” is at the feet of this “Resplendent” creature as it sits crowned with an “Imperial Tuff,” “Enthroned upon a Leaf ... contemplating all the World.”

That very Flie being made alone the Spectator, and Enjoyer of the Universe had been a little, but Sensible, King of Heaven and Earth.²⁵⁸

Through the resplendent fly Traherne defines for us the very nature of the the Kingdom of God. The Wise Man, viewing this splendid fly might draw the lesson that the entire “fertile Womb of heavenly Pleasures” is

a Kingdom ordained on purpose to be thine Inheritance, not only the place of thy Repose, and the Region of thy Joys, but the Means of thy satisfaction, be thy Ambition and Avarice never so Insatiable ... Certainly no kingdom can be more Divine then that wherein the least of all Subjects is the King, and the poorest in the Realm infinitely Rich and possessor of all.²⁵⁹

This is the point of Traherne’s repeated emphasis upon the sensation of being the “sole heir,” for only the sole heir possesses an undivided inheritance. All is apportioned to one; all things, the many, are comprehended and contained in the one.

It would seem that there could be no fuller joy than the possession of the whole world. The joy, however, is magnified even further for, as Traherne reminds us in the *Centuries*, “Men are in it who are evry one Sole Heirs as well as you.”²⁶⁰ Traherne takes great pleasure in the paradox that his inheritance is exponentially increased by the number of others that share in it. All is given to all, by that which is all in all.

He giveth all Eternaly to one, and perfectly to evry one, but resteth not here. He maketh one to enjoy all in himself, in evry one again. Look how many persons there are that enjoy all, so many other selvs hath evry one to be Blessed in; and the

²⁵⁷ SM IV.3.

²⁵⁸ KG p. 422, ll. 17-25 (f. 289v-290r.)

²⁵⁹ KG p. 429, ll. 61-64, 69-71 (f. 298r.)

²⁶⁰ CM I.29.

infinit multitude of all their Enjoyments, besides his own is his Enjoyment.²⁶¹

In the “possessing” of all things, the Wise Man is possessed by Christ:

... For all things are your’s; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your’s; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.²⁶²

As we noted in the “deeply entangled” matter of Light and Life, Traherne finds each creature to be “like Jesus Christ who is the Glory of the Father.” Each is a “Centre of his Omnipresence ... evry one being made the Temple of God, or the Comprehender of all ... Evry one of these will be the Absolute End of all things and comprise in it self all excellencies of Angels, Seraphims, Cherubims and Men, and Enjoy all in him for ever.” Each creature is “penetrable” and “Innumerable Multitudes” of spirits meet in its centre.²⁶³ In Teilhard’s language, “All the immortal monads converge upon Christ – but each monad, in turn, is to some degree the centre of the entire Cosmos,” and like Traherne’s fly enthroned upon a leaf, “resting upon and at the same time supporting its fabric ... Every single atom ... must co-operate ... in the fulfilment of Christ. Every particle, every process, must through some part of itself, appear in the definitive reality of Christ.”²⁶⁴

We have seen how Paul’s hymn to the “Cosmic Christ” brings the exhaustive catalogue of creation in Chapter 25 of *The Kingdom of God* to a close.²⁶⁵ Having ranged over the treasures of this “little star, so wide, so full of mystery” and considered the possibility of an infinity of worlds Traherne concludes, as does Lyons in his study of the cosmic Christ, that “however vast and strange the universe may turn out to be, it is Christ who is the centre of all.”²⁶⁶ Having placed Christ at the centre of all worlds, Traherne moves to consider the correspondingly central place of the individual in the cosmos - as a co-heir with Christ of all things:

Whether Worlds are Glorious enough Or no, to exist beyond the Heavens, I cannot tell; but of this I am sure, It pleased him to make us Coheirs with himself, and that Eyther these or things Infinitely more Great are beyond all Distances, prepared for us. Wherefore unto him be all Honor, and Power, and Prais, and Glory, and

²⁶¹ KG p. 334, ll. 170-174 (f. 209v.)

²⁶² 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

²⁶³ KG p. 334, ll. 151-157 (f. 209v.)

²⁶⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," p. 208.

²⁶⁵ See 2.3.3, 2.4.1.

²⁶⁶ Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 219.

Dominion, for ever, and ever. Amen.²⁶⁷

In Traherne's cosmic Christology, all are co-heirs with Christ of the entire universe of worlds. Just as all the beauty of the universe is concentrated in the earth as though it were the only world, the individual, by 'enjoying the world aright' and being as aware of present joys as the newly arrived and bedazzled Celestial Stranger, experiences the world as though its sole heir. The sense that "all are yours" and the viewing of the entire world as a gift to each individual is at the core of Traherne's overwhelming and mystical sense of "Blessedness" and "felicity." Having attempted to "account"²⁶⁸ for all things in the body of his work of physico-theology Traherne, in the final chapters, aims to show how humanity can also *possess* all things, and by possessing all things, redeem all things. In *Commentaries of Heaven* under the entry for "All Things" he draws attention to ten New Testament Scriptures that confirm our status as "Children of God ... Heirs of God, and joynt Heirs with Christ."²⁶⁹ In these texts, which figure prominently throughout *The Kingdom of God*, "our Savior promiseth us,"

that we shall *Enter into our Master's Joys*, and be made *Possessors of all his Goods*: Which in other words is expressed, by being made *the Sons of God*; and the same with that promise, wherby we are assured; that we shall *Inherit all things*. So that all things are the Joys and Treasures of God: *For by him all things were Created, that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, Visible and Invisible, whether they be Thrones or Dominions, or Principalities or powers, all things were Created by him, and for him.*²⁷⁰ And because they who are translated from Darkness into his Marvellous Light Enjoy them on Earth, therefore it is said, *we are as poor, yet making many Rich; as Sorrowfull, and yet allways rejoycing, as having nothing, and yet possessing all Things.*²⁷¹ And again, *All things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the World, or Life, or Death, or things present, or Things to Com, all are*

²⁶⁷ KG p. 393, ll. 244-248 (f. 263v-264r.)

²⁶⁸ For discussion of Traherne's Christic "accounting" see 2.4.1, "Christ and All Things."

²⁶⁹ CH f. 78r.: [1] For of him, and through him, and to him are All Things to whom be Glory forever and ever. Amen. Rom. 11.36 ; [2] He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all ; how shall he not with him also freely give us All Things: Rom. 8.32: ; [3] For all Things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the World or Life or Death, or Things Present, or Things to come, All are yours and ye are Christs, and Christ is GODs. [1 Cor 3:21-23] ; [4] As Sorrowful yet always rejoycing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing, and yet possessing All Things. 2 Cor. 6.10 ; [5] He that overcometh shall inherit All Things, And I will be his GOD, and he shall be my Son. Rev. 21.7 ; [6] And hath transfigured us into the Kingdom of his Dear Son, &c. Who is the Image of the Invisible GOD the first born of every Creature. For by him were all Things created that are in heaven and that are in Earth, visible and Invisible, whether they be Thrones, or Dominions or Principalities or Powers, All Things were created by him and for him. (ie Col. 1:13, 15, 16) ; [7] And the glory which thou hast given me, have I given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. Jo. 17.22 ; 16. 13.14.15 ; [8] He shall glorify me : for he shall receive of mine, and shew it unto you. ; [9] All Things that the father hath are mine, therefore said I he shall take of mine and shew it unto you. Jo. 16. 13. 14. 15 ; [10] The Spirit it self beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the Children of GOD. And if Children then Heirs, Heirs of God, and joynt Heirs with Christ, it so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.

²⁷⁰ Colos. 1.16.

*yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's.*²⁷²

That the import of this last passage set Traherne's mind ablaze to the alarm of some of his contemporaries is suggested by a wry observation in *Commentaries of Heaven*:

Beacaus it is a new Doctrine, and too great to be believed, that a man upon Earth should be the Heir of All Things, not only on Heaven, but in Earth, in Ages, Kingdoms, Time and Eternitie: and som have been ready to say to me, as Festus said to S. Paul, Much Learning hath made ye Mad ...²⁷³

It is not the "mad" man (although the outrageous enormity of God's limitless bounty, as fulsomly and often overwhelmingly described by Traherne, is enough to make one dizzy), but the "Wise Man" who might "on Earth might hav his Conversation in Heaven."²⁷⁴ All things are given to him as a co-heir of the Eternal Son, "For as all things were made for *Him*, so were they made for Us."²⁷⁵

In pulling all things into its centre and taking possession of the vast inheritance that is this "Blessed Sphere of Sights," the soul then itself becomes a Blessed Sphere, an "infinite temple" that is, like Almighty Power, able to "disperse enjoyments over all Worlds, and then recollect them again into a little point."²⁷⁶ As noted in "The Active Centre" Traherne, like many of the Cambridge Platonists and metaphysical poets, follows earlier Christian Platonists in being greatly attracted to the emblem of God as a circle with its circumference nowhere and a centre everywhere. As we also noted earlier from Poulet, many writers of Traherne's generation are particularly struck with the perception of the circle as a "dilation of the centre:"

The divine reality is no longer situated at two extremes, in an invisible circumference and within an ineffable central point; it is everywhere present and moving in the cluster of activities that It projects in every direction around Itself.²⁷⁷

Poulet finds Traherne to be the most eloquent "poet of the centre" but misses, I would argue,

²⁷¹ 2 Cor. 6:10.

²⁷² 1 Cor. 3. 21-23 (Ross transcribes last line as: "Christis is God's."); KG pp. 447-448, ll. 109-122 (f. 317r -317v.)

²⁷³ CH f. 78r.

²⁷⁴ CH f. 78v.

²⁷⁵ KG p. 448, l. 122 (f. 317v.)

²⁷⁶ KG p. 282-283, ll. 76-77 (f. 169v.)

²⁷⁷ Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, p. xxiv.

this incarnational and Christic aspect of Traherne's work in describing his thought as "relativist."²⁷⁸ For Traherne, he argues, the infinite sphere speaks not "of God but of man:"

The infinite sphere is nothing now but the field encompassed by human consciousness.²⁷⁹

Poulet's comment is reminiscent of those critics cited earlier who find the world to be only enjoyed by Traherne in the abstract. Human consciousness for Traherne, however, is not entirely self-referential – there is an inter-penetration of world and self. The objects that the Wise Man contemplates remain in themselves "ev'n without a Change," yet are brought to "his own Blest Nature" ; there is a "real Communication of Parts, and Spirits" as "Rays of Light" enter into "Bodies." These "Inward Communications" are "not of Shadows and Images but things themselves ... the Creature is wholly communicated from the Very Centre of evry Part, and Assignable Particle in him, yet is wholly Intire, and wholly continued."²⁸⁰ Reciprocally, the Wise Man centres the world in his consciousness, yet seeks out and "pierces" all things in it; his Soul is "Transformed into the Being of its Object ... and by Understanding becometh All Things."²⁸¹ In this we can again see Traherne blending Platonist and Aristotelian thought, for according to Aquinas,

Aristotle says that the human soul is potentially everything, and it is what it is by becoming all things. So it is possible for the perfection of the whole world to exist in one thing. Such is the fullness the soul may achieve.²⁸²

It is the "essential aspiration of all mysticism," writes Teilhard, "*to be united* (that is to become the other) *while remaining oneself*." The spirit or soul is at once within itself and without itself. In the *Centuries* Traherne surveys Aristotle's "eight maners of In-being"²⁸³ and concludes that "the In-being of an Object in a Faculty is the Best of all." The entire "Kingdom of God (as our Savior saith, this Way) is within you" – and this not only when you "think and Meditat" upon "His conception Nativity Life and Death,"²⁸⁴ but also, as Traherne makes emphatically clear, when you are present with

All which you have here GOD, THE WORLD, YOUR SELF. *All Things* in Time

²⁷⁸ Ibid., xxvii.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., xxvii.

²⁸⁰ KG p. 382, ll. 71-84 (f. 253r.)

²⁸¹ CM II.78.

²⁸² Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2. Cited in Fox, *Sheer Joy*, p. 94.

²⁸³ Cf. *Physics* IV.iii.

²⁸⁴ CM I.100.

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

and Eternity being the Objects of your Felicity.²⁸⁵

The Kingdom of God is structured around this indivisible relation of God, world and self, and culminates in the consideration of the

Indwelling of the Soul in GOD, and in all other things – where it is Contemplating and Enjoying.²⁸⁶

Traherne's notion of the indwelling Thought or Spirit is attuned, argues Clements, with the "combined Platonism-Aristotelianism" of Eckhart's formulation of the Logos: "it must be realized that the word, the *Logos* or idea of things, is in the things, and indeed wholly in each one of them, in such a way that it is nevertheless wholly outside each, wholly within and wholly without."²⁸⁷ The very capacity of the soul to grasp the idea of infinity, for example, is drawn from an awareness of what is outside, as well as inside, it. The Infinity of God as it "comprehends infinit Space" insinuates itself into "our Thoughts:"

... It surroundeth us continually on evry side, it fillles us, and inspires us. It is so Mysterious, that it is wholly within us, and even then it wholly seems, and is without us.²⁸⁸

So filled and inspired the human soul comprises an infinite sphere in a centre - but not in a solipsistic sense - for it is also, as the creative and Christic Soul of the World, "out of a centre," filling and inspiring the universe; eternally incarnating, ascending, and descending to fill all things.

As God is in the Univers, so the Soul in the Body is All in all ... It must be all in a Centre yet all out of a centre, all in one place, and all in another ... For his Work is like himself an infinit Sphere in evry Centre.²⁸⁹

As the co-heir of the Christic Logos, the soul is wholly within and wholly without all things in creation; it dwells in all things, and all things dwell in it. As a Christic heart of the world it works by "systole and diastole"²⁹⁰ – flowing simultaneously outwards and inwards, and as we noted above, like Almighty Power able "to disperse Enjoyments over all Worlds, and

²⁸⁵ CM II.100.

²⁸⁶ KG p. 463, ll. 124-125 (f. 332r-332v.)

²⁸⁷ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, pp. 130-131.

²⁸⁸ CM V.2.

²⁸⁹ CH "All in All" ff. 83r.1-2 ; 84r.2.

to recollect them again into a little point.”²⁹¹ Recollection for Traherne is more than the simple remembrance of things. It is the task of each human centre to ‘re-collect’ the kingdom into the “little point” of their own centre, or as DeNeef expresses it in relation to the Dobell poems, to “gather together the infinite variety of creation into a single “conjoynd” sphere of sight - the center of the Eye, the “end” of the “I.”” In this centering of the “I,” Traherne pursues the thought of other Renaissance Platonists described by Poulet - such as Bruno who finds the soul to be a “kind of center” and as the “converging place for all cosmic phenomena,” or Paracelsus: “The whole universe surrounds man as the circle surrounds the point,” or Ficino: “The soul is the center of nature,”²⁹² or, as Traherne notes from Mirandola, man is placed “in the Middle of World, that from thence thou mayst behold on evry side more commodiously evry thing in the whole World.”²⁹³ It is the role of each sole heir and radiant centre to be the Soul of the World: Traherne speaks, DeNeef stresses, not of “man’s soul in general, but *my* soul in particular.”²⁹⁴ It is “thy Self”²⁹⁵ the “very person”²⁹⁶ that is present to all things and able to penetrate all things. Traherne also stresses that each self is the sole heir of all things, for whom all things exist. Each person, as he tirelessly reiterates, is able to possess and contain all things after Christ, the all in all, and should insatiably accumulate to itself a treasure as vast as the universe itself. Hence the “astonishing ... privilege accorded the perceiving “I.”” For_ “Every “I” is an Eye, and the Eye is All.”²⁹⁷

The presence of the “I” also points to a *living* relation. Recognising the “Divine Image” incarnate in every soul, “I Sould see,” says Traherne, “evry soul as the sphere of all Things. A Living Sphere whom I could not chuse but Lov and treat with Grandure, because he is the Sovereign End of all Things.”²⁹⁸ The “life” that is “the light of all men”²⁹⁹ illuminates every eye:

That we seeing what the father Sheweth to the Son may all marvel.³⁰⁰ For we are the Sons of God, and Heirs and Joynt Heirs with Christ ... An Infinit Light will appear in our Souls, an Infinit Extent, and Infinit Kingdom ... a living Sphere of

²⁹⁰ KG p. 350, ll. 98 (f. 223v.) For a discussion of Traherne’s relation of the Sun / Son to the pumping of the heart see See 2.4.3.

²⁹¹ KG p. 282-283, ll. 76-77 (f. 169v.)

²⁹² Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, xxvi.

²⁹³ CM IV.76.

²⁹⁴ DeNeef, *Traherne in Dialogue*, p. 29.

²⁹⁵ KG p. 464, l. 150 (f. 332r.)

²⁹⁶ KG p. 465, ll. 192-196 (f. 333v – 334r.)

²⁹⁷ DeNeef, *Traherne in Dialogue*, p. 29.

²⁹⁸ SM III.45.

²⁹⁹ John 1:4.

³⁰⁰ Rom. 8:17.

Infinit Blessedness ...³⁰¹

Traherne's operational paradigm is, therefore, relational rather than relativist. He focuses not only upon the conscious mind as a centre, but upon the sensible universe that 'invades' the soul – and upon that universe itself as filled with the Life of Christ which is "Everywhere Expanded, and all at once Surroundest innumerable objects."³⁰² The capacity to transcend time and place does not render human consciousness an isolated, self-referential centre, for this very ability, writes Traherne continuing his commentary upon Chrysostom, "happeneth by reason of Gods Omnipresence who being Wholy Evry Where Evry thing Sheds Immediately from a Centre ..."³⁰³ The soul, in transporting itself to all times and places and being present with all things, responds to, and acts in the similitude of, Christ's filling of the universe – as the eternally contracting and dilating active centre. The infinite sphere in a centre is integrated with the other Christic emblems of eye, sun, and light – all of which Traherne employs to suggest entanglement, penetration and circulation. In *Select Meditations* Traherne describes Christ as "Lov mingling with our Lov as flame with flame, Knowledge shining in our knowledge as Light with Light, An omnipresent Sphere within our Sphere."³⁰⁴ Christ is within "our Sphere" so that each soul "in its own Centre is a Sphere / Not shut up here, but evry Where."³⁰⁵ Christ is also out of a centre, the infinite sphere that contains all other centres. "We," says Teilhard, "are the countless centres of one and the same sphere."³⁰⁶

Abyss of Joys

A particularly striking feature of Traherne's poetic of knowledge is the image of the soul's rays piercing and enlightening even the darkest abyss, "seeing," "knowing" and "piercing" the whole world and finding it to be an inexhaustible well of goodness – an "Abyss of Joys." Here we reprise the themes of the gently piercing sweetness of the Word and the "Abyss of Wonders"³⁰⁷ that defines the Cross.³⁰⁸ The soul contemplating such wonders then in turn also becomes a "deep Abyss / That sees and is" a "Bower of Bliss."³⁰⁹ As it perceives the divine light piercing "evry bush", the soul also is able to penetrate all things, fathom the infathomable, and search the depths of darkness to discover luminous

³⁰¹ KG p. 276, ll. 268-283 (f. 163v-164r.)

³⁰² KG p. 417, ll. 374-375 (ff. 284v-285r.)

³⁰³ KG p. 465, ll. 196-197 (ff. 333v – 334r.)

³⁰⁴ SM II.66.

³⁰⁵ "My Spirit," ll. 16-17.

³⁰⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, "Cosmic Life," p. 15.

³⁰⁷ CM I.58.

³⁰⁸ See "The Phoenix Nest." 2.4.5.

joys:

All Objects are equally near to the splendour of its Beams: As innumerable millions may be conceived in its Light, with a ready capacity for millions more; so can it penetrate all Abysses, reach to the Centre of all Nature, converse with all beings, visible and invisible³¹⁰

Traherne employs the term ‘abyss’ in a number of contexts to overlap the realms of Christ, the physical universe and the human soul. As we noted in the last chapter, he describes the “deep Abyss” of the cross,³¹¹ a “Mysterious Abyss of Wonders in the “Conceptions Desires Thoughts and Contemplation” of an ant,”³¹² an “unsearchable Abyss of Wonders contained” in an atom,³¹³ and “An Abyss of Wonders” in the “deeply entangled” matter of infinite numbers of particles meeting in a single physical point. “All nature may Tremble” at such natural phenomena – as much as at Christ’s passion which is at the “Heart of the Univers”³¹⁴ - a concentration, a drawing of all realities into the centre of the universe. Of the mystery of the atom, Traherne says negatively that: “No line of reason will ever sound the Bottom (such Infinit Abysses of Wisdom are in them) till Eternitie it self Enlighten the Soul”³¹⁵ and then positively, that there are “innumerable Difficulties, Uses, Excellencies and pleasures concentrating in its Womb for our Information and Happiness; the Clear Knowledg of which will make us Expert in the Chiefest Mysteries of GOD and Nature.”³¹⁶

Filled with such knowledge the soul itself becomes an “Abyss of Wonders.” As the co-heir of Christ, and image of God, the soul is a “Deep Abyss,” and a “Miraculous Abyss of infinit Abysses, an Undrainable Ocean, an inexhausted fountain of Endless Oceans, when it will exert itself to fill and fathom them.”³¹⁷ Shelley similarly describes the “mind of human kind” as a “deep abyss of wonder and bliss”³¹⁸ and Traherne’s reckoning of human capacity is equally Promethean and unbounded. “Over the Gate of Apollos oracle,” he writes in *Select Meditations*, “there was this Inscription. Know thy Selfe. As if by that alone we were Directed to the Treasuries of all understanding, to the Abisses and Depths of

³⁰⁹ “My Spirit,” ll. 77-79.

³¹⁰ CE, p. 40.

³¹¹ KG “O Jesu God, whose own Dear Blood ...” p. 303, l. 223 (f. 185v.)

³¹² CH “Ant” ; CH (Pritchard), p. 17.

³¹³ CH f. 64v.1.

³¹⁴ CM I.56.

³¹⁵ KG p. 355, ll. 347-348 (f. 229r.)

³¹⁶ CH “Atom” f. 164v.1.

³¹⁷ C II.83. See also: My Soul ... An Image of the Deity! ... A Deep Abyss / That sees and is / The only proper Place of hev’nly Bliss (“My Spirit,” ll.71-79) ; My Heart a deep profound Abyss (“Desire,” l. 22) ; the Soul is a Miraculous Abyss of infinit Abysses, an Undrainable Ocean, an inexhausted fountain of Endles Oceans (CM II.83.)

wisdom, and Knowledge.”³¹⁹

It is in the inward depths of the self, as it sees and feels and knows the atom and the ant, that the face of Christ is delineated. “The Place” in which “his Face” is seen is both within and without – it lies in the “fertile Womb” of the world that “gives me Room / Yet lies within my Womb.”³²⁰ In this “Place” we, as Teilhard explicates,

turn our attention to the Thing itself which appeared to us in the depth of each of being, like a radiant countenance, like a fascinating abyss.³²¹

Amid the survey of the material universe that comprises the central chapters of *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne summons his reader to join him in gazing into the “fascinating abyss” of the sea:

Did we from the top of som Rock behold the Interior Fullness of its Waves, and the Exterior fullness of its Uses. The terror and Majestie of its shoreless appearance, the plain and unknown extent of Waters; the Glorious Brightness of its Face and the Delightful Horror it breeds in the spectator; The Treasures which it covereth in its Deep Abysses ... we should think it an Incomparable Work, full of Deep and Mysterious Wonders.³²²

There is a sense of the Romantic sublime in this description, a sense of facing something so awesome that it might only be viewed from the safe distance of a rock. It, and indeed, as Traherne recalls in the *Third Century*, the whole world can appear entirely alien to the self - terrifying in its “Wideness” to one caught alone in a field in a “Lowering and sad evening.”³²³ Teilhard similarly describes an encounter with the “deep abyss” and “the distress characteristic of a particle adrift in the universe, the distress which makes human wills founder daily under the crushing number of living things and of stars.” There is,

³¹⁸ *Prometheus Unbound* IV. ll. 99-100.

³¹⁹ SM IV.6.

³²⁰ “Misapprehension,” ll.64-65.

³²¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 109.

³²² KG p. 394, ll. 12-16, 32, 33 (ff. 264r-264v.)

³²³ CM III.23: Another time, in a Lowering and sad Evening, being alone in the field, when all things were dead and quiet, a certain Want and Horror fell upon me, beyond imagination. The unprofitableness and Silence of the Place dissatisfied me, its Wideness terrified me, from the utmost Ends of the Earth fears surrounded me. How did I know but Dangers might suddainly arise from the East, and invade me from the unknown Regions beyond the Seas? I was a Weak and little child, and had forgotten there was a man alive in the Earth. Yet som thing also of Hope and Expectation comforted me from every Border. This taught me that I was concerned in all the World: and that in the remotest Borders the Causes of Peace delight me, and the Beauties of the Earth when seen were

however, a movement to encompass and engage with this great abyss. Teilhard hears “the voice of the Gospel ... speaking to me from the depths of the night: *ego sum, noli timere* (It is I, be not afraid).”³²⁴ Traherne also finds that “som thing also of Hope and Expectation comforted me from every Border” which “taught me that I was concerned in all the World” and “made to hold a Communion with the secrets of Divine Providence in the World.”³²⁵ He finds, as we noted in relation to the notion of infinite space,³²⁶ that “All Eternitie and the Amplitude of Illimited Space in all Its Extensions is full of Love, and,” the passage continues,

is fraught [with] most Glorious and delightfull Beings. All which are made to Entertain us with Abundance of Immeasurable Objects. Whose Nearness to the Soul, whose Intimacy within, whose Lustre and Glory, whose Sweetness and Life, whose Power and immortalitie forbid us to be desolate in any of our Solitudes.³²⁷

So in viewing the sea and in registering “the terror and majestie of its shoreless appearance,” and the visceral thrill, the “Delightful Horror it breeds in the Spectator” there is also communicated a comforting sense of divine immanence; “His Face” is intimated in the “Glorious Brightness of its face.” It is with this moving panentheistic feeling for the world that Traherne writes in the *First Century*:

You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea it self floweth in your Veins.³²⁸

The sea horrifies as it dwarfs the “Spectator” yet there is also an invitation to move beyond observance and “behold the Interior Fulness.” As Traherne writes in *Seeds of Eternity*, a work bound physically and thematically with the *The Kingdom of God*,

Because that light which we bring into the hidden Recesses of [the soul] will fill even Caves with Glory, and make the darkest prisons shine with Celestial Brightness, we will visit the remotest Corners, and deepest Abysses of the same for the face of an Angel appeareth in evry meanest Particle that can concerne it.³²⁹

made to entertain me: that I was made to hold a Communion with the Secrets of Divine Providence in all the World:

³²⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, pp. 54-56.

³²⁵ CM III.23.

³²⁶ See 2.3.1.

³²⁷ KG p. 340, ll. 168-173 (f. 215r – 215v.)

³²⁸ CM I.29 ; This meditation forms the refrain for the Incredible String Band’s “Douglas Traherne Harding,” for it is suggestive of the ‘headless’ experience of being invaded by the world. See footnote above, “His Fingers Pierce.”

³²⁹ SE p. 240, ll. 308-312 (f. 141r.)

2.5. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF CHRISTIFICATION

The abyss is a dark, frightening and awesome place, yet is full of Joys. Anthony Kelly's commentary upon Teilhard's journey in to the abyss might equally be applied to Traherne's experience of concernment with this "Ocean, or Abyss / Of Joys ... the Place, / Wherein in Evry thing he Sees his Face:"

Our existence becomes a calling, to relate to the mystery which has given us into being, and to make connections of care with everyone and everything that is already part of our identity. There is a kind of distress evident in such belonging. Yet a bewildered consciousness can find a healing, and grow to hope, in the presence of the mystery which has given itself into the heart of the universe.³³⁰

Traherne, as we have noted, describes the cross as the "Heart of the Univers."³³¹ The transfigured Wise Man participates in this awesome mystery of the incarnation. He shares the patristic insight, as summed by as Clément, that "the divine energies, reflected by creatures and objects, do not lead to anonymous divinity but to the face of the transfigured Christ."³³² Teilhard inversely expresses the same sentiment:

Christ is loved as a person: he compels recognition as a world.³³³

By immersing himself in the great Pleroma - the Sphere, Mine, and Womb of the world - the Wise Man finds an "Abyss of Joys" within and sees "his Face in Evry thing" without.

³³⁰Kelly, *An Expanding Theology : Faith in a World of Connections.*, Conclusion.

³³¹ CM I.56 ; See 2.4.5.

³³² Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 35.

³³³ Teilhard de Chardin, "The Priest," p. 213.

With a Beatifick Sight

14

Tho Common, Constant, freely given,
 Tho neer, tho daily seen,
 Tho Necessary, nay and even
 Eternal, Lov, (that Queen
 Of Bliss) doth for these Causes more
 Esteem them, and adore
 The Donor more: He takes far more Delight
 That sees them with a Beatifick Sight.

Seeing “his Face” in every particle of this “Abyss of Joys” is a “Beatifick Sight.” Whereas much Christian thought has described the “beatific vision” as a rare sight of the Divine Being or Essence in heaven – and beyond human capacity save for the exceptional granting of the gift of the “light of glory,”³³⁴ Traherne stresses that the Image of God is “implanted in us” enabling us to enjoy on earth all “the Treasures of God in the Similitud of God.” Such Godly Treasures include “his own Perfections, and all his Creatures”³³⁵ – all the “Common” treasures catalogued so exhaustively in the *Kingdom of God*. It is an abiding theme in Traherne that the things “most Common,” though of the most use and value, are not “esteemed” as they should be; that it is a great perversity to hanker after rare and useless things when those most “Common, Constant, freely given” and “Necessary” are so “neer.”³³⁶ Rather than a rare glimpse, or vision, of beatitude, Traherne describes an habitual “Beatifick Sight.” Paradoxically it is the possession of “the neer at hand” that the soul is transported to heavenly places – or rather, enjoys heaven on earth.

For Traherne, the “Beatifick vision” is essentially a redeemed vision: “If we will not pray for Ey Salv, that we may see,” he asks following Chrysostom, “how shall we be made partakers of the Beatifick Vision?”³³⁷ It is the Eye that will see “the world aright”³³⁸ and simultaneously admit us to the Kingdom of God: “His Kingdom is an Everlasting Kingdome, and the Ey must be opened, that it may come unto us.”³³⁹ The redeemed soul is like an open-eyed little child: “O Lov Inspire me, open mine Eys, make me a child of GOD,

³³⁴ Cross and Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 173-174.

³³⁵ CM III.58.

³³⁶ C.f. 2.3.3, “More Sublime than Saphires.”

³³⁷ KG p. 268, ll. 82-83 (f. 157v.); Chrysostom in Matth. (marginal gloss) - see *Homily* 1.16.

³³⁸ CM I. 25-31.

³³⁹ KG p. 267, ll. 63-64 (f. 157r.)

and a Citizen of Heaven.”³⁴⁰ The restored “Infant-Ey” is a “simple Light” and “Things doth see / Ev’n like unto the Deity.”³⁴¹

The soul, as it is made in the divine image, is an “Ey without walls,” and “like Jesus Christ, my Elder Brother, by whom it is Restored to its first power, an[d] again Called to be a Son of God.”³⁴² Seeing with a beatific sight, then, frees the soul to become a Son or Image of God:

Did we see how they are His, we should quickly discern how they are Ours: *For of his fullness we hav all received, even Grace for Grace*:³⁴³ and in the Transformation affected by the Beatifick Vision, *we Shall be changed into the same Image from Glory to Glory*:³⁴⁴ having Thoughts for Thoughts; Affections for Affections; Joys for Joys; Treasures for Treasures: Such thoughts and Such Affections, such Joys and Pleasures as he; His Will being ours, and ours his.³⁴⁵

The symmetry of Traherne’s phrasing here conveys the fullness of our co-inheritance in Christ. He also conveys, not only the fullness, but the infinite nature of that drive to fullness in citing from Corinthians:

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.³⁴⁶

Matar draws attention to the use of this text by Restoration theologians concerned to free up what they saw as confining Calvinistic notions of the divine. John Smith, Nathaniel Culverwell, Peter Sterry, and Traherne, he argues, were influenced by the Greek Father Gregory of Nyssa and his interpretation of this passage. Nyssa claims the the soul is “insatiable” and infinitely seeks after a God that is boundless in his being.³⁴⁷ Traherne’s Wise Man tirelessly pursues the beatific sight of Christ’s face “in Evry thing:”

³⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 3:18 ; KG p. 438, ll. 262-263 (f. 307r.) As Traherne observes in the *Third Century* “Our Saviors Meaning, when he said, he must be Born again and become a little Child that will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: is deeper far then is generally believed.” (CM III.5.)

³⁴¹ “An Infant-Ey,” ll. 3-4.

³⁴² SM I.91.

³⁴³ C.f. John 1:16.

³⁴⁴ C.f. Cor. 3:18.

³⁴⁵ KG p. 448, ll. 129-135 (ff. 317r -317v.)

³⁴⁶ The New Revised Standard Version of the King James Bible reads: And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the glory of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect.

³⁴⁷ Nabil I. Matar, “Mysticism and Sectarianism in Mid-17th Century England,” *Studia Mystica* 11 (1988) Matar refers to Traherne’s poems “Insatiableness” I & II.

Since the Contemplation of [the Kingdom of God] is the Means of our transformation³⁴⁸ from Glory to Glory, and our End is to Enjoy it; Since all our Happiness Consisteth in it, and the Beauty of Religion is Apparent by it; Truth and it being Equally Rich, and equally seen: tho we cannot here upon Earth Comprehend it by Reason of its depths, and Innumerable Mysteries, yet we will Consider as many as we are able; and feel, and see, and prie into the Bottom, as far as we can; that we may grow at least in *the Knowledge of the Mysterie, that hath been hid from Ages and Generations*,³⁴⁹ tho here upon Earth we cannot be made perfect Men in Christ Jesus.³⁵⁰

The Christic “Mysterie, that hath been hid from Ages and Generations”³⁵¹ is fathomless and so, therefore, is the Wise Man’s quest to feel and see, and taste and know – to “prie into the Bottom” of it. Although Traherne acknowledges that the quest is infinite – that we cannot yet, in this Estate of Trial, be made “perfect Men in Christ Jesus,” the tenor of stanza 14 and much of his treatment of enjoying things “Common, Constant,” and “freely given” suggests an essential ease, that derives from having the image of God “implanted” in our being, and the goodness of God poured into the world for our enjoyment. God’s bounty being infinite, so is the human desire and capacity for contemplation. “Desires so August and Insatiable” might be satisfied (though never sated) in seeing what God sees. “This Spectacle once seen,” writes Traherne, “will never be forgotten. It is a Great Part of the Beatifick Vision ... It puts a Lustre upon GOD and all his Creatures and makes us to see them in a Divine and Eternal Light.”³⁵² Nor is the great depth of the mystery of Christ a deterrent to the quest – being “Strange yet Common; Incredible, yet Known; Most High, yet Plain”³⁵³ to those with a clear eye and “an open face.” Though “hid from Ages” it might be uncovered in the present:

Eternal life is an object of our enjoyment here beneath. God the father Creating the world, Hereafter. There being a Thin vail in this Endless Tabernacle, between the Holy, and the Holy of Holies. which was rent at the passion of Jesus Christ. by “Tran[s]formation to the Divine Image is Tran[s]portation caused. The objects of our Glory are ever present: but our Thoughts are Absent. If our Souls were present we should be present with them. For our Treasures Glitter round a bout us

³⁴⁸ in MS. originally *Reformation*

³⁴⁹ Col. 1:26.

³⁵⁰ KG p. 259, ll. 59-67 (f. 151r.)

³⁵¹ Eph. 3:9.

³⁵² CM III.59-60.

³⁵³ CM I.3.

evermore.³⁵⁴

In the second chapter Traherne had used the motif of Moses' veil, promising to

Endeavor to rend the Vail; that at least by a Chink, (if we remove it not wholly) we may See into the Beauty of Holiness, and admire the Secret of the most holy place: for that which discourages Timorous Spirits, animates the Courageous; and the very Incomprehensibleness of its Nature, which seemeth to reprov us, shall be the Allurement, Inviting us to Consider it all.³⁵⁵

Referring to Paul's letter to the Ephesians Traherne explains that it is through Christ dwelling in our hearts that we "*may be able to comprehend with all Saints, What is the Breadth and Length, and Depth and Height; and to Know the Love of Christ which passeth Knowledge, that we might be filled with the fullness of God.*" The final verses of Traherne's narrative poem *The Ceremonial Law* also concern the veil of Moses "that concealed the Light / He had receiv'd" being "don away in Christ, the Skreen / Removd, the Cloud disperst, when he is seen." This light, which Traherne describes as "Dwelling in us," is also discovered beneath the "Hieroglyphicks," and "vast Pattern" of the world. In *The Kingdom of God*, Traherne intrepidly moves to "Consider it all," to "rend the veil," to comprehend all dimensions and reveal the "vast Pattern" of the world "that we might be filled with the fullness of God," share in the Beatific Vision of Moses, and like the wise David see "God face to face in this Earthly Tabernacle."³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ SM III.60.

³⁵⁵ KG p. 258, ll. 2-7 (f. 149v.)

³⁵⁶ CM III.94.

And Sense be DEIFIED

15

Natures Corruption he doth hate
Seeking his former State;
Or rather that Exalted one,
Which truly is Divine,
To be Enjoyd, when on the Throne
Of Glory he doth Shine.
Where all his Body Shall be purified
Flesh turnd to sense, and sense be DEIFIED.

The deification, or *theosis*, of man is a theme especially associated with the Greek Fathers, and summed in the adage “God became man so that man might become God.”³⁵⁷ As described by Allchin, it is a doctrine grounded in the Trinitarian understanding of a transcendent God that “comes to be present at the heart of his creation” through the Son in order to lift it up into union with him through the operations of the spirit.³⁵⁸ This life-bearing circulation, uniting God, humanity and all creation informs “A Wise Man” ; it also informs the structure and thematic concerns of *The Kingdom of God* as a whole - which moves from a consideration of the Divine attributes in their pure essence, to the material universe as a manifestation of those attributes and as the very Life of God, to a celebration of humanity as sharing in that Life as it encounters and gives praise for the world.

The theme of deification was somewhat controversial in Traherne’s time. With a sensitivity to wary readers, Benjamin Whichcote asks that we look for the “explication” of the manifestation of Christ

*in our selves; in our Nativity from above; in Mental Transformation, and DEIFICATION. Do not stumble at the use of the Word. For, we have authority for the use of it, in Scripture.*³⁵⁹

Traherne, unlike many others to whom this encouragement is directed, does not stumble at

³⁵⁷ See Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, chap. 5 ; A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988), pp. 1-7 ; Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 19.

³⁵⁸ Allchin, *Participation in God*, p. 5.

³⁵⁹ Benjamin Whichcote, Sermon on Act 13. 23. Cited in Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 70. Whichcote refers to 2 Pet. 1:4. “*being made partakers of the Divine Nature; which is in effect our Deification.*”

the word, declaring likewise in capital letters that the exalted Wise Man shall be “DEIFIED.”

Allchin points to some discomfort in certain Anglican circles with the notion of participating in the life of God but is able to trace this “forgotten strand in the Anglican tradition” beginning with two prominent figures in the Elizabethan church – Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker. Andrewes is cited in Traherne’s *Church Year Book*, and we have encountered “The judicious Hooker, that Glorious Beam of the English Church, and that admired Star of his nation, wading into the spring and fountain of Laws, and digging neer unto the root of things,” in our discussion of natural law. Hooker, as we have noted, is admired by Traherne for his

sage and important Maxims which he [casteth] up like Sparkling Jewels. Speaking of the first and Eternal Law, he saith, The Being of God is a Kind of Law to his Working: for the Perfection which God is, giveth perfection to that he doth.³⁶⁰

Against the Calvinists, Hooker, in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, champions the freedom of man’s will and the essential goodness of the creation as it flows from and is inhabited by God. Man participates in the “Perfection which God is” through his freely exercised love of “that he doth.” In seeing “His Face” in “evry thing” and magnifying it in his own “Blest Nature,” the Wise Man participates in, and further perfects, the very “Working” of God.

The theme of participation and deification is also taken up by such Cambridge Platonists as Whichcote, who are drawn to the Greek Fathers, and who also connect the theme with the question of natural law. Allchin points to its prominence in Ralph Cudworth’s 1647 sermon delivered to the House of Commons³⁶¹ – a section of which is utilised in *The Kingdom of God*. Traherne does not quote the passage specifically referring to our being made “partakers of the Divine nature”³⁶² but to another section justifying the possibility of this union. Traherne does not acknowledge his source, and makes amendments and insertions to fit his theme. From Cudworth he observes

Lov is the Law of the Spirit of life ... it maketh us becom a Law to our selvs and the more it prevaieth, the more it Eateth up all other Laws, being at once a

³⁶⁰ KG p. 369, ll. 1-7 (f. 241v.) See 2.1.3.

³⁶¹ Allchin, *Participation in God*, p. 14.

³⁶² cf. 2 Peter 1:4 ; Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at Westminster, March 31 1647*, (Cambridge: Roger David, Printer to the Universitie, 1647), pp. 25-26.

freedom from all Law, and the most severest Law in the World, but a willing and delightfull Law of the most constraining, and Indispensible Necessitie ...³⁶³

Where Cudworth writes of the Law of Love informing the “dead *Organ* of our Hearts,”³⁶⁴ however, Traherne strengthens the emphasis upon the innate nature of our divine similitude by describing a “Law ... Divinely written upon our Hearts.”³⁶⁵ Just as it is the nature, and therefore the necessity, of God to love, so is the man “full of Love” impelled, as Traherne again notes from Cudworth, to “Lov whatsoever God loves.”³⁶⁶

Also agreeable to Traherne is Cudworth’s view that “It is only Sin that Crumples up the Soul, which were it freely Spred abroad, would be as Wide and as large as the Univers.”³⁶⁷ So the Wise Man hates “Natures Corruption” in the sense that he hates the subversion of this natural Law of Love; rather, he “like the Sun doth Shine / On all the Stars, on evry Spire / Of Grass, on evry Sand” and “doth in evry Land / Love all the persons like an Angel.”³⁶⁸ Just as the “Beatifick Sight” for Traherne is not a glimpse of heaven, but a redeemed sight of heaven on earth, and a ‘prieing’ into the depths of the incarnate Christic mystery, so the deification of flesh and sense is not a flight from a corrupting material world but, as Whichcote notes, entails “*Mental Transformation*” –a “Beatifick Sight” of the creation as it is, “ev’n without a Change.”

Traherne is so far from shunning the material world in the movement to deification, that he echoes what Patrides calls the “spectacular utterance” of Gregory Palamas that “man, by virtue of the body created in the likeness of God, is higher than the angels.”³⁶⁹ It is the glory of men that they not only exceed the glory of angels in being “Glorified by Hazzards,” but that like Christ, they have both a body and a spirit. In “A Continuation of the Discourse proving that man, who is as it were the Assistent Form of all the World is a more Glorious creature by Nature then the Angels,”³⁷⁰ Traherne urges that “Our Bodies are not, as some Imagine them, enemies to be used, with all kind of Rigor. They are vessels worthy of the Treasures they inclose.”³⁷¹ In this he again exhibits a Thomist mind-set at odds with the extremes of Platonists such as Origen who described the soul as being imprisoned in the

³⁶³ KG p. 305, ll. 2, 16-19 ; *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 76.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁶⁵ KG p. 305, l. 14 (ff. 186r-186v.)

³⁶⁶ KG p. 305, ll. 25-27 (f. 186v.) ; Cudworth, *Sermon Preached before the House of Commons*, p. 78.

³⁶⁷ KG p. 305, ll. 31-33 (f. 186v.) ; *Ibid.*,

³⁶⁸ “The Wise Man,” st. 5.

³⁶⁹ Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, p. 19.

³⁷⁰ KG p. 488 (f. 352v.), title chapter 41.

³⁷¹ KG p. 488, ll. 1-2 (f. 352v.)

body as a punishment for sin.³⁷² As Sawday observes, it is the premise of Plato, Augustine, and the Calvinists that the body and the soul are at war.³⁷³ Traherne in *The Kingdom of God*, however, dedicates an entire chapter to demonstrating “That the Image of God in a Body, is yet something higher then one purely spiritual, or Incorporeal.”³⁷⁴ The body, he continues in the following chapter, is the very means of our glory:

Since ... our Senses are without Impediment, superadded to our Inward and Spiritual Powers, it seemeth that our Humane Nature is more then Angelical, because we have one Way more than they, to feel, and Enjoy all Objects, Visible, and Invisible, and their Way in like manner.³⁷⁵

Traherne describes a two way traffic and mutual relation between the intellectual and the physical senses, that is the delight not only of a “Person in whom a Body and Spirit are united” but the means through which the angels themselves can, somewhat vicariously, delight in the whole creation.

as on the one side, Living Bodies are the Occasion of the better half of those Delightful Objects that are in Heaven to be Enjoyed, even of all the Senses, Enjoyments, Pleasures, and Delights, wherwith all Material Objects are truly Crowned in their use, and End. So on the other, is it a Most Blessed Thing to be the means of so many Delights, which in us, and by us the very Angels Enjoy.³⁷⁶

God, through and in Christ, is creative of the world; and it is “in us, and by us” as co-heirs of Christ, that the creation is celebrated and delighted in. “Men differ from the Angels in their Affections, because they have Bodies on which their Affections Impress their feelings.”³⁷⁷ The “Visible World is admitted by the Ey: By which we Come to the Knowledg of God himself” which is experienced in the body:

it appeareth in the Eys, and Beautifieth the Cheeks, inspireth the lips, and Speaketh in the Tongue, governeth the Hands, and Danceth in the feet, boyleth in the Blood, and Warmeth the Spirits, Enflameth the Liver, and resting in the Heart, So cheereth the Same that it impresseth New Motions in all the Veins, and spreadeth Comforts over all the Body.

³⁷² For Aquinas’ critique of Origen on this point see *Summa contra Gentiles*, ch. 83 n. 22.

³⁷³ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, pp. 16-19.

³⁷⁴ KG p. 481 (f. 352v.), title chapter 40.

³⁷⁵ KG p. 490, ll. 86-89 (ff. 354t-354v.)

³⁷⁶ KG p. 488, ll. 18, 6-11 (f. 352v.)

The “Nature of Earthly Love” is thus “spiritual in its Essence,”³⁷⁸ engendered by a heavenly love made manifest in the material world and registered in the body.

Men, as we noted above, are “Visible Angels” in whom “all Visible and Invisible things are united.”³⁷⁹ In the “personal union” which is “so perfect that all in the Soul may be transmitted to the Body, all in the Body transmitted to the Soul, either partaking with the other in all its Affections,” man is the heir of Christ in whom the human and divine persons are united, without confusion - “For Which cause it is sayd concerning our Savior, that the Fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in him Bodily.³⁸⁰ That is, his Body is replenished with the Glory and Power of the GODHEAD, and all the Joy and Vertu therof ... dwelleth there in a Corporeal Maner.”³⁸¹ “Truly,” considers Traherne,

if we consider how all visible Things, and Invisible are united in us, we Cannot Conclude less, Man being so like him, who is the Head of all Visible and Invisible Things, and the Common Metropolis of all their Perfections, that he is the very Brother to Jesus Christ according to his Nature, His Soul is more Beautiful then the very Heavens, and his Body the Darling of the Whole Creation ... remember that the Humane Nature is Hypostatically united unto God ... And that GOD himself dwelleth in a Body for evermore, that our Savior is a Man, yet the most Absolute and Perfect Creature: that he is infinitely higher, than all Cherubims, and Seraphims, and that as our Head: that we are Members of his Body, of his flesh, and of his Bones: that we are exalted in him, and to sit with him in the Heavenly Places:³⁸²

Christ himself, he writes, has assured us that we are “equal to the Angels ... and are the children of God”³⁸³ and “Tho Vulgar Ignorance in Corrupted Minds think the Words Hyperbolicall,” there is in “our Saviors Words no figurativ Expressions, but Strict, and apparant Truth in the Highest Realitie.” The truth of his words is apparant, he reasons, in “the Hypostatical Union, and Perfection of our Savior Or the fabrick of the World ...”³⁸⁴ Here is what DeNeef has referred to as Traherne’s “radical literalness”:

Unlike most if not all of his seventeenth century peers, Traherne seems never to be

³⁷⁷ KG p. 488, ll32-33 (f. 353v.)

³⁷⁸ KG p. 489, ll. 47-48, 53-58 (f. 353v.)

³⁷⁹ KG p. 372, ll. 151-153 (f. 244v.) ; cf. Col. 1: 15-20.

³⁸⁰ Col. 2: 9.

³⁸¹ KG p. 488, ll. 24-31 (f. 353r.)

³⁸² KG pp. 490-491, ll. 128 – 133 ; p. 493, ll. 251-257 (ff. 355r, 355v, 357v.)

³⁸³ C.f. Luke 20:36.

³⁸⁴ KG pp. 490-491, ll. 125-141 (f. 353r.)

haunted by the radical otherness of God or the inescapable mortality of man ... most Renaissance religious poetry draws man into relation with God by proposing metaphoric correspondences ... But Traherne patently eschews this strategy by insisting on a relation that is radical in its literalness: the soul is divine, not by metaphoric hypothesis, but by logical demonstration of its essence and its acts, its necessary capacity.³⁸⁵

DeNeef refers to Traherne's belief in the divinity of the soul, but we might, as Traherne does, extend this concept of a radically literal relation, to the corporeality of the incarnation – to the “Mysterious Union” of body and soul which, “I dare boldly say, is the Greatest depth in the World”³⁸⁶ and exhibited in the body of Christ, the body of man, and in the “fabrick of the World.”

“When on the Throne / Of Glory he doth shine” the Wise Man will be present, therefore, in both body and soul. As we discovered in discussing his treatise on atoms, Traherne is convinced that every atom of the body will be resurrected and “shine” together with the soul “on the Throne / Of Glory.”³⁸⁷ Sawday contrasts Traherne's response to the body with that of Donne, who envisions the body being “sloughed off” after death:

Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eys,
Nor heare through the labyrinths of ears ...

“But for Traherne,” observes Sawday, “the body did not intervене in this frustratingly limited way. Instead, its glory was in labyrinthine complexity.”³⁸⁸ Throughout his works, Traherne anatomises and wonders at the function and beauty of organs and limbs. He, in fact, delights in the thought of Infinite Love ‘hiding’ in “the Labyrinth of our Ears, and Seen in the Sight of our Ey”³⁸⁹ It is “By these two his Wisdom and Goodness enter into the Soul. his Power, his Blessedness, his Glory.”³⁹⁰ In this state of Glory

... all his Body Shall be purified
Flesh turnd to sense, and sense be DEIFIED

The physical senses convey the truth manifest in the material world to the spiritual

³⁸⁵ DeNeef, *Traherne in Dialogue*, p. 27.

³⁸⁶ KG p. 483, ll. 106-107 (f. 348v.)

³⁸⁷ See 2.4.2, “*Unitie of Matter and Forme.*”

³⁸⁸ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, p. 260. ; Donne, the second “Anniversary” poem.

³⁸⁹ KG p. 313, ll. 164-165 (f. 193r.)

³⁹⁰ KG p. 489, ll. 49-50 (f. 353v.)

sense; the material world is thus absorbed and deified *in* the receptive and perceiving soul. Man, hypostatically uniting body and soul, is therefore seen by Traherne as the ligature, in whom and by whom, the world is perfected in use, enjoyment and praise:

...it is probable that the Angels see not the World immediately in it Self, but as it appears in the Apprehension of Man: For our Thoughts, and Apprehensions are nearer objects unto them, then Matter is. MAN was created, As the Golden Clasp (as Hermes calls him) uniting all Extremes, and as the Sovereign Head wherin all Visibles, and Invisibles are fitly concentrated, and Meet together. For neither can immaterial Spirits Enjoy the Glory of the Day, or use the Light, or need the Sun, or feed upon the Air, or Eat or Drink. Nor can Dust and Ashes see into the cause and End of Things, or Weigh the Lov and Goodness of the Donor, or Sing, or Celbrat his Everlasting Prayses.³⁹¹

Traherne's extensive quotation from *De Dignitate Hominis* in the *Fourth Century* centres on what Marks describes as "Pico's famous statement of this great commonplace of Renaissance humanism"³⁹² – the concept of man as the "Golden Link or Tie of the World between God and Creatures."³⁹³ In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne emphasises both the glory of man, placed at the centre of the creation, and his role in lifting and perfecting it. God has

made us the Means of the Worlds Glory, and Perfection, and the fountain of Innumerable Curious, and Glorious Objects, even of all Delights, and Pleasures in the Whole Univers, Organs, and Senses, and Vessels of Living Waters, where the Angels may come, and draw Affections Beautified and realized with Solid and Material Vehemencies, Sentiments, and Perfections that are Visible, and tangible.³⁹⁴

The very "Essence, and Quidditie" of Life is the "Power to Perceiv ... and Power to Desire."³⁹⁵ Without this power in creatures endowed with sense "the Heavens and Earth, the Minerals, Vegetables, Elementall, and Celestial Bodies, would all ... appear in a vain and languishing Estate." Though without sense, the elements of the world are impatterned with the desires of their creator and by a Secret Instinct of Nature aspire to Life as their End." They "press to their own Perfection; in respect the Apostle saith, *The Whole Creation*

³⁹¹ KG pp. 482-483, ll. 62-65, 87-93 (ff. 347v- 348r.)

³⁹² Marks, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism," p. 525.

³⁹³ CM IV.74.

³⁹⁴ KG p. 493, ll. 244-257 (f. 357v.)

³⁹⁵ KG p. 409, ll. 31-32 (f. 277r.)

*groaneth and travaileth in pain, untill now: for the Earnest Expectation of the Creature waiteth for the Manifestation of the Sons of God.*³⁹⁶ It is in the act of perceiving and being, like the little fly, a “sensible King of heaven and earth” that the whole creation is given birth.

Here again, Traherne has been misunderstood by critics who unilaterally emphasise his celebration of thought. Hutton concludes that for Traherne “Physical objects have value only in so far as they manifest the divine,” suggesting a “a Platonic turning away from the material to the intelligible world.”³⁹⁷ Skulsky finds that for Traherne, “conceiving and perceiving are wonderful by themselves.” He takes statements such as “Objective³⁹⁸ treasures are always Delightful”³⁹⁹ to also mean “by the same token, external treasures are always dead.”⁴⁰⁰ This ignores the important qualifier that Traherne always attaches to such statements - the world is “excellent” in itself, and only “dead’ to those who cannot enjoy it:

All Objects are Barren, tho never so Excellent, to him, whose Lov is Ecclipsed and Dead.⁴⁰¹

There is for Traherne, as we have argued in earlier chapters, an intrinsic worth in all things which are “Commanded because Holy” not “Holy because Commanded.” It is the eye of the soul that must be “salvd” before it can see this. There is, however, a sense in which things are fulfilled by being taken into the mind and heart of a spectator:

The Greatest Material Beauty in Nature, being but a Dead Shell, without Some more Important uses then the fleshly Ey is capable of discerning.⁴⁰²

Beauty withers and is uncouth to it self without an Ey, an Ey is the Throne of Beauty.⁴⁰³

Of the little fly, enthroned upon a leaf comprehending the whole world, Traherne writes:

The Universe hath a Temple in his Understanding: He is Surrounded with the Rayes of his own Knowledge, as the Sun is with the Glory of its Resplendent

³⁹⁶ Rom. 8: 22, 19 ; KG p. 411, ll. 117-124. (f. 279r.)

³⁹⁷ Baldwin and Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination*, p. 169.

³⁹⁸ i.e. in the consciousness mind.

³⁹⁹ CM II.79

⁴⁰⁰ Skulsky, *Language Recreated: Seventeenth Century Metaphorists and the Act of Metaphor*, p. 89.

⁴⁰¹ KG p. 438, ll. 256-257 (f. 307r.)

⁴⁰² KG p. 482, ll. 58-60 (f. 347v.)

⁴⁰³ KG p. 299, ll. 66-67 (f.183.)

Beams. All Visible and Material things find themselves alive in his Intelligence: His Eye is the Throne of Beauty, and his Sight the Lustre, and the Region of all their Glory.

He is “the Crown, wherewith all the Material World Material World is Beautified and Adorned.”⁴⁰⁴ There is a mutual relation between the soul and things of the world – “No Sight can be without a Visible, nor can any Thing be visible without Sight to see it ... all Sights and Sounds, and Tastes, and Smells and pleasant Contacts depend upon the Senses.”⁴⁰⁵

It is the human vocation to translate these sensations - to receive them into the “Intelligence” ; the wise soul is to read this “Epistle” of God’s Love, written “upon the Earth in knots of flowers, in Letters of Gold in the Sun, in Silver copies in the Stars, in Bloody Characters, in the Living Creatures.”⁴⁰⁶ To the Wise Man the world is not a meaningless collection of objects; he is able to discern and unveil what is conveyed in the hieroglyphics of the world.

as in Words all Objects are represented to the Mind, not by the force of Dead Syllables ... but by the Excellency, and Depth of a Sagacious Soul.⁴⁰⁷

The work of reading and sensing the world completes the incarnation, transforming the potential of all creatures into actuality. The all-seeing, radiant soul darting its beams upon all objects is an omnipresent agent of Christification. In the second chapter of *The Kingdom of God* Traherne lays the groundwork for this agency with an extensive quotation from Ephesians in which it is promised that

*he, of whom the whole Familie in Heaven and Earth is named, would grant us according to the Riches of his Glory, to be strengthened with Might by his Spirit in the Inward Man: That Christ may dwell in our Hearts by faith, that we being rooted and grounded in Love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, What is the Breadth and Length, and Depth and Height; and to Know the Love of Christ which passeth Knowledge, that we might be filled with the fullness of God.*⁴⁰⁸

Traherne continues to quote from Ephesians concerning the risen Christ’s headship over all

⁴⁰⁴ KG, p. 423, ll. 47-51, 56-57 (f. 290v.)

⁴⁰⁵ KG, p. 486, ll. 252-253, 257-258 (f. 351r.)

⁴⁰⁶ KG p. 492, ll. 193-197 (ff. 356v-357r.)

⁴⁰⁷ KG, p. 486, ll. 239-242 (f. 351r.)

⁴⁰⁸ Eph. 3.15-19. ; KG p. 258, ll. 10-16 (f. 150r.)

things and the corresponding power granted “to usward who believ” in the “spirit of Wisdom and Revelation.” To be filled with the fullness of God, extrapolates Traherne, is also to be filled with the fullness of his Kingdom, “Since ...God himself, and the Eternal generation of his Son, are made known by his Works:”⁴⁰⁹

... the fullness of his Wisdom and Goodness seemeth to be poured out into that Kingdom, which he made, and they that are made to Enjoy it, seem to be the fullness of him, that filleth all in all ... when his Kingdom is received into the understanding, and dwelleth in us, we may be filled with all the fullness of GOD: according to the Working of his Mighty power, whereby he raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the Dead, and seated him Infinitely above all Principality and Power in the Throne of Glory.⁴¹⁰

Moreover, all things are “raised up” in the fullness of the “Wise Man, a “Sagacious Soul” whose Ey / Doth Bless and magnifie” all that it sees.

The fruits and Flowers, the Beauties and Joys in every Ground must by Love, Shining upon them from my own Soul, be raised up unto me. For Want of which Lov all those Excellencies in GOD’S Kingdom are unknown and Despised. But he that loves with a Vehement and tender flame, will find the Element of his Soul among the Perfections of GOD, and Esteem these things as celestial Joys, that are Infinitely Precious. O Lov Inspire me, open mine Eys, Make me a Child of GOD, and a Citizen of Heaven.⁴¹¹

Mark McIntosh in regard to this aspect of Traherne’s thought emphasises that it is in the symmetrical balance of divine and human giving and receiving that the whole creation finds fulfillment:

... the fulfilment of each thing can only be as it is esteemed as a gift from God, received and delighted in; otherwise it is simply a mute object without meaning ...

In the act of rejoicing in such gifts, the Wise Man is

lifting up those existing things into the flowing of giving and receiving praise and delight that is the life of God. In other words knowing the truth of reality by praising God for it, actually transmutes each creature into its highest form of

⁴⁰⁹ Eph. 1:15-23 ; KG p. 259, ll. 54-55 (f. 150v.)

⁴¹⁰ KG p. 258, ll. 34-36 (f. 150v.) ; p. 260, ll. 94-98 (f. 150v.)

⁴¹¹ KG p. 438, ll. 257-263 (f. 307r.)

existence.”⁴¹²

Furthermore, the relationship is a dynamic one – in the process of bringing things into consciousness, “They are no longer things, but moments of relationship, events in the life of heaven, begun on earth. ... Such events in the life of truth have become translucent to the divine knowing and loving from which all truth springs.”⁴¹³

In all of this, Traherne contributes to the ongoing tradition, from the early church through to Teilhard and beyond, of a cosmic redemption in and through Christ. The whole creation is moving toward a state of wholeness in which each element will remain distinct yet exist in unity with every other element. Redemption, as the final chapters of *The Kingdom of God* elaborate, expands beyond a personal and spiritual redemption to the entire created order; in each “salvd Ey” the whole world is encompassed. “In each soul, writes Teilhard, “God loves and partly saves the whole world which that soul sums up...” and “it is here below that we give ourselves the eyes and the heart which a final transfiguration will make the organs of a power of adoration, and of a capacity for beatification, particluar to each individual man and woman among us.”⁴¹⁴ Just as All Things are gathered or summed up in Christ, so the soul in its work of accountancy is, as Traherne notes in *Seeds of Eternity*, called “the Summe of the World.”⁴¹⁵ The deification described in the final stanza of “A Wise Man” is such a summing or gathering up, a “lifting of things into “his own Blest Nature,” a ‘raising up’ of all the “fruits and flowers” by the Love shone upon them. Such “transcendence means,” as Maximus the Confessor explicates, a “transformation ...

And in man, and through his contemplation, the whole universe is brought back to God. Man in himself unifies the material and intelligible, earth and heaven, and brings it all back and presents it to God in his glorification of him.⁴¹⁶

The first step in identifying the Christic life with the Kingdom of God was, according to Teilhard, “to see the divine omnipresence in which we find ourselves plunged as *an omnipresence of action*.” In the final stage

we recognise an omnipresence which acts upon us by assimilating us in it, *in unitate corporis Christi*. As a consequence of the Incarnation, the divine

⁴¹² McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, p. 247.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁴¹⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, pp. 31-32.

⁴¹⁵ SE p. 238, l. 245. ; See 2.4.1, “Christ and All Things.”

⁴¹⁶ Cited in Armstrong, *St. Augustine and Christian Platonism*, pp. 21-22.

immensity has transformed itself for us into the *omnipresence of christification*.⁴¹⁷

By enfolding and piercing the world, the Wise Man has become an agent of “christification.” In seeing the world with a beatific vision he is “conformed” to Christ, “transformed” by the “renewing of [his] mind,”⁴¹⁸ and raised to the “Throne of Glory.” In seeing the divine active in all things, he participates in the divine omnipresence and is able to shine upon, enter into, contain, and give thanks for the world. This is the work and action of the soul. According to Teilhard – “All the good that I can do *opus et operatio* is physically gathered in, by something of itself, into the reality of the consummated Christ.” Traherne, therefore, expresses not only a great thirst and desire for the eucharistic feast of Life, but emphasises the reciprocal feeding of that Christic Life when “well digested evry Creature is:” “Thou convertest thy Nourishment into praises, and complacencies, that Enrich the World, wherein thou art Sustained.”⁴¹⁹

“Consider,” Traherne asks, “what it is to do that which no Creature may, which all creatures in heaven and earth cannot do for us, but we alone.”⁴²⁰ We alone, according to Teilhard, “through our own activity... must *build* – starting with the most natural territory of [our] own self – a work, an *opus*, into which something enters from all the elements of the earth.”⁴²¹ In becoming like the Wise Man - a “Gratefull person,” “A Blessed Man ... full of Appetites,” “A Heavenly Person” that shines “On all the Stars, on evry Spire / Of Grass,” and sees “In Evry Bush a Fire” and “in Evry thing” “his Face” – in being with a “Tender” and “Noble Sence” “Busy in the Work of Bliss” we are

Offering up in our selves an Acceptable offering, full of Endless Beauty and Pleasure, a living Sphere of Infinit Blessedness, a transelemented World of Glory, inspired with a Love as Infinite as a Creature can hold; that is Strengthened and Adorned with Eternal Gratitude.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, pp. 111-112.

⁴¹⁸ Rom 12:2.

⁴¹⁹ KG p. 418, ll. 391-392 (f. 285r.)

⁴²⁰ KG p. 470, ll. 115, 117-119 (f. 338r.)

⁴²¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, pp. 31-32.

⁴²² KG p. 276, ll. 278-283 (f. 164r.)

3. THE WORD INCARNATE: THE POETIC OF THE COSMIC CHRIST

What is, when all is said and done, the concrete link which binds all these universal entities together and confers on them a final power of gaining hold of us? The essence of Christianity consists in asking oneself that question, and in answering: ‘The Word Incarnate, Our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Le Milieu Divin

3.1. By Their Heavenly Names Doth Call

The five foregoing chapters have addressed Teilhard’s question in relation to “the true sap of the world” – the “sanctifying grace” of the divine and immense omnipresence which is promised to be “the only stable principle of natures and powers”:

What is, when all is said and done, the concrete link which binds all these universal entities together and confers on them a final power of gaining hold of us?

“The essence of Christianity,” he concludes, “consists in asking oneself that question, and in answering: ‘The Word Incarnate, Our Lord Jesus Christ.’”¹

We have put that question to Traherne and found that he explicitly places the Cosmic Christ of Paul – by whom “all things were created,” who is “before all things,” by whom “all things consist,” and in whom “all fulness dwell[s]”² at the centre of all worlds. He does this especially in the conclusion to the catalogue of creation that lies at the centre of *The Kingdom of God* – a work wherein Traherne claims we will find “all Truth and Nature explained.”³ At the centre of this chapter is also embedded the image of the phoenix – the ever incarnating, dying and rising Christ. Apart from such direct references to Christ, Traherne invokes the poetic of the Cosmic Christ to describe a Christic “Life” or heart that simultaneously beats in each body and soul that “allows it room”⁴ and at the centre of the infinite universe. The Eternal Generation of the Son is the creative principle of a God described as being in his very essence, infinitely communicative, restlessly active, and violently, avariciously, desirous of the creation; intricately bound to and “deeply

¹ Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin : An Essay on the Interior Life*, p. 110.

² Col. 1: 16-17, 19.

³ KG p. 331, l. 3 (f. 206v.)

entangled”⁵ with the world, ceaselessly circulating in it by systole and diastole, contraction and dilation; the centre that is “Everywhere Expanded,” that “fillest all things,” “piercest, and feelest their very Centre,” and is “present” with them “in a living manner”⁶ ; “a Living Substance, endued with Knowledg and Wisdom, Love and Goodness Power and Dominion”⁷ which “runs along every Channel” and is “the Air wherin we breathe.”⁸ This desirous, living, streaming, circulating, expanding, substance comprises the *divine milieu* and works triumphantly and in perfect liberty to conquer darkness and to reconcile all things to itself. Traherne weaves a poetic that, through the interplay of light and darkness, macrocosm and microcosm, centre and infinite circumference, expansion and contraction, conveys the inter- penetration, and deep concernment – each with the other - of Christ, the soul and “evry thing.”⁹ Into this complex of Light and Life, as we elaborated under “the Omnipresence of Action” is interwoven Love – an “Infinite love” that “whispers in every Gale of Wind”¹⁰ – a love that begets the Son,

the Light of all our Comfort, the Fountain of all our Wisdom and the Sun of all our
Consolation, whose Rays Spreading abroad throughout the univers, produce the
day of Glory ... The first Original, and Spring of things ...¹¹

The *Kingdom of God*, as a work of physico-theology, seeks to describe not only these divine attributes but the interior workings of the creation itself which is revelatory of the creator. In “The Omnipresence of Action” we identified as a fundamental tenet of Traherne that the creation is not the product of arbitrary divine design and command, but is the very bounty of God - that it is not holy because commanded, but overflows from, and is desired by God – is *of* God and therefore inherently holy. It is in this regard, however, that certain critics see a disjunction in Traherne, finding the lack of a sense of immanence in his description of the created world. The Wise Man, in the similitude of the Cosmic Christ, is porous to the world - “He feels, he sees, he tastes, he knows,” his “Fingers pierce, whatever

⁴ CM IV.61 ; See 2.4.5, “A Phoenix Nest, a Bed of Spices.”

⁵ KG p. 355, ll. 335-344 (f. 229r.) See 2.4.3, “The Matter is so Intricat, and Deeply Entangled.”

⁶ KG p. 417, ll. 369-377 (ff. 284v-285r.) See 2.4.4.

⁷ CB f. 33r.2 ; Klaaren notes from McGuire Boyles unpublished use of the Hebrew word *Makom* and Newton’s criticism: “when the Hebrews called God Makom, place, the place in which we live and move and have our being, they did not mean that space is God in a literal sense.” (Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science*, , pp. 157-158, fn. 31.) Traherne might have agreed with Newton in this criticism, but his metaphysics are far more incarnational than Newton’s.

⁸ KG p. 340, ll. 155-160 (f. 215r.)

⁹ This term is repeated throughout “The Wise Man.” “All Things” are the concern of *Commentaries of Heaven* and *The Kingdom of God*. See 2.4.1, “Christ and All Things.”

¹⁰ KG f. p. 313, ll. 143-146 (f. 192v-193r.) See 2.1.4 for a discussion of this passage.

¹¹ KG p. 310, ll. 10-14 (f.190r.) This passage has been relevant to several aspects of our argument: See 2.1.4, 2.4.3 “Shoud We Turn These Realities Into an Allegorie,” 2.5.3 “And Like the Sun Doth Shine.”

thing they hold” – “Be it Stone, or Steel, / Or wood, or Earth,” but in the listing of such earthly elements Ponsford finds a “disinclination to portray these vividly” as they are “not important in themselves, but merely representative of “all things... that ‘Drownd my Joys’”¹² Ross also mourns the loss of “the historical concrete” that prepares the way for what he terms the “extricationism of poets like Vaughan and Traherne and the Milton of *Paradise Lost*.”¹³ Goldknopf similarly sees in Traherne the “disintegration of symbol” and a “dissociation from nature” whereby natural images “congeal into emblems” organised around a “creedal core.”¹⁴

Ross and Ponsford however, as we have argued earlier, might be seen to hold a proscribed conception of the “historical concrete.” They connect Traherne’s Protestant sensibility with mere, as opposed to sacramental symbolism – seeing what they perceive as the “Protestant” view of the mass influencing his view of creation. It is ironic, therefore, that they should criticise Traherne for not focusing on a limited range of eucharistic symbols.¹⁵ Traherne sacramentally attempts, rather, to encompass, in the spirit of Paul’s Christ hymn, “All Things,” listing myriads of flowers, fish, birds, men, women, and children as objects of thanksgiving. The vivid description of nature belongs to a much later poetic, and Traherne’s lack of particularity does not necessarily imply a transcendent abstraction from the world. His reference to the material world is indeed emblematic, in the sense that his catalogues of creation, such as that given in Chapter 25, are inventories of generic terms. The recitation of Traherne’s catalogues, such as those centred on Infinite Love, the Celestial Stranger, the Flie and ‘Life it self,’ are sacraments of praise, litanies of delight. Against Traherne’s lack of specificity must be weighed his tireless efforts toward gathering the multitude of elements and species that make up the world into consciousness - the familiar psalmic elements of sun, air, moon, stars, trees, beasts of the earth, fowles of the air, fishes of the sea, together with generic items of Traherne’s more idiosyncratic observation - dolphins, sirens, household stuff, anklebones, and the fair cheeks and sparkling eyes of the people blessed to enjoy all these. Edward Thomas, who as we noted in the last chapter compared Traherne to the pantheistic Richard Jefferies,¹⁶ finds no sense of disengagement from the world in Traherne’s emblematic prose – though he himself is a fine observer of nature. His reading of *The Centuries*, as Constantine notes, “stirred him significantly.” Thomas does not confuse Traherne’s emblematic language with what Towers describes as a purely

¹² Ponsford, “The Poetry of Thomas Traherne in Relation to the Thought and Poetics of his Period,” p. 264.

¹³ Ross, *Poetry and Dogma*, p. 103.

¹⁴ David Goldknopf, “The Disintegration of Symbol in a Meditative Poet,” *College English* 30 (1968), pp. 59, 50.

¹⁵ See 2.4.5, “In Bloody Characters.”

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

emblematic “outlook on life”¹⁷ but rather finds that Traherne

seems to see the patterns which all living things are for ever weaving. He would have men strive after this divine knowledge of things and their place in the universe.”¹⁸

Traherne fulfills what Scott describes as the

deep yearning to find the essential structure of reality to be a sacramental pattern which grounds our relationship to the world – to persons and things – in a dialectic of sympathy and exchange ...¹⁹

Traherne’s emblematic language, then, points not to abstraction but to an incarnational patterning - a sacramental and participative act of cosmic ordering.

Through his simple and unadorned acts of naming, often completely bare of adjectives, Traherne promises to reveal the “naked Truth” and “inward Beauties” with “A Simple Light” and “transparent Words.” Echoing Herbert,²⁰ he eschews “curling Metaphors that gild the Sence.”²¹ ²² The perception of metaphor as a deceptive use of language has a long history which, as Gunton notes, has been traced back to Aristotle who defined it as “the application of an alien name by transference.”²³ Traherne’s poetic of transparency and rejection of concealing metaphors mirrors his rejection of those who regard the world as alien to the nature of God – those who “look upon his Creatures like strangers to himself. Wheras God knoweth they are his very Bowels, the Works of his own Hands, and the

¹⁶ See 2.5.3, “What Glory Lurks in All Things.”

¹⁷ Towers, “Thomas Traherne: His Outlook on Life,” p. 1024.

¹⁸ Thomas, “The South Country,” pp. 135-139.

¹⁹ Scott, *The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred*, p. 42.

²⁰ George Herbert, “Jordan (II),” l.5: “Curling with metaphors, a plain intention ...”

²¹ “The Author to the Critical Peruser,” l. 11.

²² This plain aesthetic was common to anti-Petrarchan poets and the conformists and language reformers of the Royal Society. Traherne does in fact use metaphor. In the very poem where he disavows it he is critical of those who admire the clothes rather than the man – who prize “woven Silks and wel-made Suits” over “Their polisht Flesh where whitest Lillies join / With blushing Roses and with saphire Veins ...” Traherne’s use of such simple metaphors is not inconsistent with his aesthetic – they are not “curling” – there are no clever disjunctions or conceits and few classical allusions. He uses such simple metaphors somewhat ironically to reveal the “naked truth” – the true value of the naked body as opposed to the bejewelled garb that covers it.

See also “Condescension” in the *Commonplace Book*, where Traherne notes from Gale Socrates’ advocacy of natural and familiar, as opposed to artificial, discourse.

For an in-depth study of Traherne’s style – comprising elements of both conformist ‘plain style’ and non-conformist exuberance, see Saenz, “Thomas Traherne's View of Language in Restoration England,”

Pleasures of his Goodness.”²⁴

As Clements observes, Traherne seeks a language suitable to his object of seeing the “numinous in the phenomenal” – a language that

reveals that rightly apprehended, the light of day is eternal, the grain of sand endless ... Traherne apparently intends to use language “literally” as a means of direct pointing to “The Naked Truth,” to the perfection of God’s universe as it is.²⁵

Because everything is “ev’n without a Change / Divine” the Wise Man

... by their Heavenly Names doth call
Them while on Earth they lie.²⁶

Lewalski describes how in Traherne’s transparent “Protestant aesthetic” there is “much naming of beauties or joys or glories (often in long incantatory lists ...) as if such naming will call forth the essence of the thing.”²⁷ Clements describes a “style of essences” in which Traherne “hopes that we will grasp without mediation, or with the least mediation, the Reality which is “just before our face.””²⁸ Clark makes a similar observation and relates this poetic to Traherne’s Christology:

[Traherne’s] avowed transparency does not call for a poetics of image and trope and figure. His style consists of repeating patterns of thought, referents, syntax, even diction, in hopes that by incantation they will fuse stylistically with the visionary transcendent Word.”²⁹

Stewart also refers to the “incantatory, almost numinous effect” of Traherne’s repetition:

²³ Aristotle. *Poetics* 1457b 7-8. Cited in Colin E. Gunton, "Metaphor and Theological Language," *The Actuality of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 28-29.

²⁴ KG f. p. 297, ll. 226-228 (ff. 180v -181r.) In a similar vein Blondel, as we noted earlier (2.4.1, *In him all things consist*) held that we cannot isolate Christ in the Cosmos or “represent Him as an intruder, an alien in the crushing and hostile immensity of the universe.” We can either, he observes, “fall back into a murderous symbolism, or go forward towards a realism which is self-consistent throughout ...” Teilhard de Chardin, Blondel and Lubac, *Correspondence : Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Maurice Blondel*, p. 23.

²⁵ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, pp. 37-38.

²⁶ “A Wise Man,” st. 9 ; KG p. 406, ll. 277-278 (f. 275r.)

²⁷ Barbara K. Lewalski, "Thomas Traherne: Naked Truth, Transparent Words, and the Renunciation of Metaphor," *John Donne and the Seventeenth-Century Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Views* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 355-356.

²⁸ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, p. 40.

²⁹ Clark, "God's Immanence in All and the Poet's Imitation of all Adams : Thomas Traherne's Transcendence of the Neotypological Lyric," pp. 154-155.

“Traherne piles up the words and phrases, taking pains to proliferate synonyms, as if the mere weight of the word itself ... were enough to summon forth the essence of the universe in this small part.”³⁰

In calling things by their “Heavenly Names,” Traherne’s Wise Man participates in the Logos that patterns and is manifest in the universe. In Patristic theology the Logos “produces, envelops and attracts to itself every creature” and is “is self-revelatory when humanity ‘names’ living things, like a poet on fire with love.”³¹ So the Wise Man who calls things by their “Heavenly Names” and sees a fire burning in every common bush is “Like fire that alters every thing,” bringing all objects “to his own Blest Nature” where they “also burn, and turn to fire.”³²

Words so Proper

Plain language was also promoted by the Royal Society as suitable to the aims of science. Sawday sees in the *Thanksgivings* and poems, Traherne’s attempted “appropriation of the methodology of the Royal Society, with its seemingly obsessive urge to form lists and taxonomies of nature” in his “(equally obsessive) catalogues of plenitude.” These, Sawday argues, are ultimately subversive of the “transgressive” aim of science as they are suggestive of the “endless complexity which reason would never succeed in refining into a system” - invoking instead a “divinely ordered disorder.”³³ Traherne’s adoption of the plain style advocated by the Royal Society, he continues, mirrors his ‘blazoning’³⁴ of the world and the human body – and in a similarly paradoxical way only serves to underline the persistence of divine mystery – however “naked” and stripped of metaphor, language, like the anatomized body, only serves to point to the “Glory” that eludes the anatomist’s gaze.³⁵ I think, however, that Sawday mistakes Traherne’s intent to some extent. His “naked” catalogues of “Naked Things” are only obfuscating in the sense that they suggest an infinite and insatiable plenitude; Traherne’s purpose is not to shroud the creation in mystery, but to ‘unveil’ or ‘reveal’ the “vast Pattern”³⁶ – the Word incarnate. Sawday’s interpretation implies a transcendent God imposing order from without, rather than an immanent Logos, transparent, at least in some degree, to human reason. God, writes Traherne, is “pleased for

³⁰ Stanley Stewart, *The Expanded Voice: the Art of Thomas Traherne*, (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1970), p. 71. Stewart refers specifically here to *Christian Ethicks*.

³¹ Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 217.

³² “A Wise Man,” st. 12.

³³ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, pp. 261, 262, 265.

³⁴ As Sawday notes, a ‘blazon’ is an “enumeration of parts.” A familiar trope in Renaissance poetry is the ‘blazoning’ of the female body. The term is linked to anatomical dissection. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 264. Sawday refers to “The Person,” st. 2.

our Sakes to clothe himself with some Visible Appearance; at least some Intelligible One, that may be objected, and made Visible as it were to the Understanding.”³⁷ We are to observe, and examine the sun, the moon the stars, the earth, and to ‘wade’ with Hooker “into the spring and fountain of Laws,” and ‘dig’ “neer unto the root of things”³⁸ for “piercing” whatever thing we hold, we will directly encounter, with the Wise Man, “his Face” and become possessors of Wisdom.

Traherne’s philosophy of language contrasts directly with that of Boehme, who in his *Signatura Rerum* describes a “high school of true magic and theosophy” in which “a parabolical or magic phrase or dialect is the best and plainest habit that mysteries can have to travel up and down in this wicked world.” He considers that those who would be “trained up by Sophia ... must be born again of and in the Word of Wisdom, Christ Jesus” so they may enter “within the veil, and see not only the literal, but the moral, allegorical, and anagogical meaning of the wise and their dark sayings.”³⁹ Traherne, however, endeavours to “rend the Vail; that at least by a Chink, (if we remove it not wholly) we may see into the Beauty of Holiness, and admire the secrets of the most holy place.”⁴⁰ He lifts the veil of Moses, the types and figures of the Ceremonial Law are “don away in Christ, the Skreen / Removd, the Cloud disperst, when he is seen.”⁴¹ “Truth,” writes Merton with reference to Heraclitus, “is what is common to all. It is the “fire” which is the life of the cosmos as well as of each man. It is spirit and logos. It is “what is right before your eyes.””⁴²

Traherne’s poetic of transparency reflects a logocentric philosophy of language. For Heraclitus, the *logos* is at once “the nature of language itself, the structure of the psyche and the universal principle in accordance with which all things come to pass.”⁴³ So Traherne is concerned to speak and to reveal the naked truth, with a Christic poetic which unveils mystery that has been “hid in GOD” and which “hath been from the Creation of the World, but hath not so been Explained, as that interior Beauty should be understood.”⁴⁴ For Traherne, this World encompasses both heaven and earth; they are tied together – heaven is present on earth and earth is celebrated in heaven. There are, therefore, two levels of reality

³⁶ CL “The Vail.” ; CL (Smith), p. 28: l. 69.

³⁷ KG p. 476, ll. 86-88 (f. 342r.)

³⁸ KG p. 369, ll. 1-3 (f. 241v.) C.f. 2.1.3.

³⁹ Jacob Boehme and Clifford Bax, ed., *The Signature of All Things and Other Writings*, The Classics of Mysticism. (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1969), “Signatura Rerum,” “Preface to the Reader,” pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰ KG p. 258, ll. 2-4 (f. 149v.)

⁴¹ CL “The Vail” ; CL (Smith), p. 28, ll. 27-28.

⁴² Merton, “Herakleitos the Obscure,” p. 263.

⁴³ Heraclitus and Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus : An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, p. 22.

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

which relate to each other, not analogically, or metaphorically, or hierarchically, but actually. There is a direct witnessing of the Word in this “Glorious Univers” and in our own words, activities, and lives. Just as Traherne transcends typology and insists on the unity of matter and form, he also, as Saenz observes, eschews analogy, because for him the spiritual and sensory realms “though different are one and the same. This cosmological and metaphysical view informs his linguistic theory ... Traherne maintains that there is a relationship of verisimilitude between a word, an object, and the essence of the object.”⁴⁵ We might also relate this linguistic theory to the paradigm of the hypostatical union - that “Mysterious Union” of body and soul which, “I dare boldly say, is the Greatest depth in the World.”⁴⁶ For Traherne the written word itself, has a quality of immanence. Just as he finds, “a Resemblance, that is fit and absolute” between “the Work produced”⁴⁷ and the “Act producing,” so Words are

so proper that one would think it Impossible to use them without being Informed by them, even of the Inward and hidden Nature of what they Signifie; And so Manifestly relating to, and So necessarily importing each other, that the thing must be one of which they are the Names.⁴⁸

Traherne absorbs Aquinas’ approach to language, which is informed by the idea that the world, and the human mind, are made in the image of God - they “shew the work of the law written in their hearts.”⁴⁹ All things, including language, are constructed on a Christic pattern and their existence bespeaks God.⁵⁰ Although Traherne associates the acquisition of speech with the infant’s fall from a state of grace in which he held an unmediated and silent conversation with the whispering world,⁵¹ he also maintains that by turning attention to the Word in the world again, seeing it “aright,” language can also be restored. “Once humanity can see well again, people will be able to speak well again.”⁵² A “naked” style, therefore, catches after the innocence of the “dumb” infant and the original song that he heard in “evry Gale of Wind.”⁵³

⁴⁴ CM I.3.

⁴⁵ Saenz, “Thomas Traherne’s View of Language in Restoration England,” p. 170.

⁴⁶ KG p. 483, ll. 106-107 (f. 348v.)

⁴⁷ KG p. 340, ll. 138-140 (f. 214v.)

⁴⁸ KG p. 384, ll. 134-137 (f. 254v.)

⁴⁹ Rom. 2:15.

⁵⁰ See Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 4 a. 10 ; See Ford, “The Natural Law Context of Thomas More’s *Utopia*,” p. 366.

⁵¹ See “Dumnesse,” l. 62.

⁵² Clark, “God’s Immanence in All and the Poet’s Imitation of all Adams : Thomas Traherne’s Transcendence of the Neotypological Lyric,” p. 158. See for discussion of “Dumnesse” and “the Circulation.”

⁵³ “Dumnesse,” l. 62. C.f. KG f. p. 313, ll. 143-146 (f. 192v.) See 2.1.4.

“Reality” in the Patristic tradition,⁵⁴ writes McIntosh, “has the quality of a word.” The world is “intelligible” and “hear-able” as divine speech.”⁵⁵

because there *is* in fact a deep pattern or recognisable truth inherent in all things, they are actually knowable, intelligible, and even the partial discovery and recognition of this truth by creatures capable of it is going to be an experience of profound joy; for it will be like hearing a recognizable word addressed to someone by the very source of one’s own life and existence.^{56 57}

“More amply than almost any other thinker in the early Modern period”⁵⁸ Traherne upholds the human vocation of

bearing other creatures up into a state of sharable, communicable existence by knowing them not as private objects but as elements in a common language, a common life. In this sense, humanity’s vocation is to intensify and realize the *relationality* intrinsic to creaturely existence in virtue of its creation from the self-sharing of divine persons. Humanity can do this insofar as it is capable of discerning the inherent sign-fullness, the *logikos*-quality, of the creatures and then offering the creaturely “words” in a conversation of praise and thanksgiving.⁵⁹

Traherne is very much immersed in the tradition of the legible word, seeing the creative and redeeming Christ inscribed into the very fabric of the universe. As we observed in “The Phoenix Nest,” he finds the world to be an “Epistle” of God’s love:

He had written it upon the Earth in knots of flowers, in Letters of Gold in the Sun, in Silver copies in the Stars, in Bloody Characters, in the Living Creatures which was in more Bloody ones afterwards copied in the Death of his Son ...⁶⁰

This epistle is for humanity to read – to decipher and unveil what is secret and hidden in all

⁵⁴ McIntosh refers to Augustine, Origin, Maximus the Confessor, Bonaventure, and Aquinas.

⁵⁵ McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, p. 215.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵⁷ See also Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 224: “The Logos is the divine subject of all logoi, of all the subsistent ‘words’ that support the world. The *logikos* man, personal image of the Logos, is called to become their human subject. The meeting is fully brought about in the God-Man who enables us to fathom the spiritual essences of objects, not in order to possess but in order to offer them to the Logos after having ‘given them their names,’ marked them with our own creative spirit. The world then becomes a momentous dialogue between the Logos and the *logikos* man.”

⁵⁸ McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth : the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge*, p. 237.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁶⁰ KG p. 492, ll. 193-197 (ff. 356v-357r.)

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

other visibles – in the knots and letters and the bloody characters of living creatures.

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.⁶¹

The epistle is written in our hearts – “He hath set the World in Mans Heart that we may Comprehend his Kingdom.”⁶²

⁶¹ 2 Cor. 3:2-3.

⁶² KG p. 268, ll. 76-77 (f. 157r.)

3.2. What Tongue can Utter, What Pen Describe

The epistle is not only for humanity to read, but also for humanity to *speak* although that may, as Traherne acknowledges, seem impossible. Just how comprehensible is the Kingdom to the human heart? Traherne sets out in the grand and declamatory prose of the first chapter of *The Kingdom of God* to convey the majesty and immensity of God.

God having from all Eternity in himself the power of Reigning, and the desire of exercising that power with Delight; he determined for the Glory of his goodness, the Manifestation of his Wisdom, and the Communication of his Blessedness; as well as for the perfection of his power in its use and exaltation, to Create a Dominion: And therupon he Constituted a Kingdom answerable to the Excellency of the King its Author, in the perfection of its Beauty, Magnificence, Grandure, Duration, Glory.⁶³

This “Everlasting” Dominion “is the Subject of our Discourse, and the most Glorious object of our Contemplation. Of which the Great and proud Nebuchadnezzar himself was forced at last to confess the Sublimitie.”⁶⁴ Breaking off from the stately tone of the opening paragraphs to consider humanity’s relation to this all powerful immensity, Traherne declares:

But *who is sufficient for those things!* What Tongue can utter, what pen describe, the Glory of that Dominion, which is Infinit in Mysteries?

In the final of 42 chapters he similarly states the difficulty of the task he has been performing at such length – “The Excellency of God’s Kingdom is so Manifold and Various, so Great, and Multifarious, so Deep, and Endless, that no length of time or Discourse will Explicat all its Perfections.”⁶⁵ He laments the limitations of language –

The soul may faint with longing to Comprehend his power, and with Joy at his Greatness: But Omnipotence is a thing that is Incomprehensible, and the Tongues of Angels stammer in celebrating its praises.⁶⁶

Returning to the first chapter, we see Traherne turning to the psalms in his attempt to express the inexpressible:

⁶³ KG p. 255, ll. 1-7 (f. 148r.)

⁶⁴ KG p. 256, ll. 39-42 (ff. 148v-149r.)

⁶⁵ KG p. 499, ll. 183-185 (f. 361v.)

⁶⁶ KG p. 282, ll. 46-49 (f. 169r.)

It is higher than Heaven; What Canst thou doe? It is deeper than Hell; Whither Canst thou goe? It is broader than the Sea, How Canst thou Comprehend the Ways and Councils of him that is Incomprehensible? If David Crieth out upon their very Number, *how great is the Sum of them;*⁶⁷ well may we say for their Value, *How precious also are thy Thoughts unto me, O God, Many O Lord my God, are thy Wonderfull Works which thou hast done, and thy Thoughts to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.*⁶⁸

“All Words,” he despairs, “are but like sounding Brass, and Tinkling Cymbals.”⁶⁹ Coming, as this does, in the first of many chapters in but one of many extensive undertakings, the reader may begin to suspect that they have been led to this nadir of faith in the powers of human expression only to be ricocheted in the opposite direction. “But oh that God would speak, and show us the Secrets of Wisdom, that they are double to that which is!” Traherne is creating the expectation that God will in some sense speak. As he moves out of the realms of the Old Testament into the New, his protestations sound increasingly rhetorical:

And truly if the Apostle, having Discoursed of Gods Ways and Methods heer upon Earth, breaks out into that abrupt, but sweet Exclamation, in the Extasie wherof he pleaseth himself: *O the Depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out!*⁷⁰ What footing can we expect, what limit, what foundation, what Shore, what End or measure, where all is Infinit and Eternal?⁷¹

We Will Endeavour to Rend the Vail

Turning to Chapter Two we realise that Traherne has set the scene for something even more wondrous. Having said that God’s Kingdom is incomprehensible he immediately asserts “That it is not so Incomprehensible, but it may be understood.”⁷² As Maule observes, the pattern of Traherne’s rhetoric consists of “Raptures consistently at the edge of inexpressive song – negative formulations – what cannot be said but must be said; exclamations of debt, returns of praise.”⁷³ Traherne’s prose embodies the paradox of the

⁶⁷ Psalm 145:13.

⁶⁸ Psalm 40.5 ; KG p. 256, ll. 53-61 (f. 149r.)

⁶⁹ KG p. 256, ll. 66-67 (f. 149v.)

⁷⁰ Rom. 11.33.

⁷¹ KG p. 257, ll. 69-78 (f. 149v.)

⁷² KG p. 258 (f. 149v.), title chapter 2.

⁷³ Maule, *Traherne and the Restlessness of God : the New Lambeth Discoveries (audiotape)*.

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

Incarnation – the immortal made mortal - and the action of the Logos – the speech of God, the expression of the inexpressible. The “speech” and “motion” of God is evident in “the motion of the Sun, and the flowing of the streames” yet, paradoxically, “no Language can Speak his Glory.”⁷⁴

Did Words at all exhibit any measure of this Transcendent Joy, I should perhaps continue to shew the Glory of all in All. But since They are inept and dead or insignificant Shadows, when compared to such Powerfull and infinit Objects I shall rest after all, in Eternal Silence.⁷⁵

As two entries in *The Commonplace Book* neatly summarise, Traherne is caught between “Song” – the “Hymme” of Trismegistus “which he called the secret song, or the Holy Speech” – and “Silence” which describes the Pythagorean virtue of “govern[ing] your Tongue,” seconded also by Trismegistus who places silence above all other virtues.⁷⁶ There is in Traherne, as Clements notes,

a basic tension ... between exuberance and restraint, plenitude and economy – all seem a perfect reconciliation of the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*, Repetition can be seen as an impulse stemming from the positive way; and the catalog, the concentrated image or symbol, and paradox appear as a balance struck between both ways.”⁷⁷

It must be said that Traherne errs on the side of exuberance and plenitude. Although he insists that if he were to “enlarge” upon the theme of Infinite Goodness “in any Measure Answerable to its Greatness, no Volumes would containe our Discourses,”⁷⁸ he makes a most concerted effort.

Traherne’s poetic, then, mirrors the action of the Logos – the speech of God, the expression of the inexpressible. This paradox is evident in the image of the overflowing abyss - the “Abyss of Joys”, the “Abyss of Wonders.” He engenders an overwhelming sense of unimaginable repletion, of fathomlessness fullness. He accepts the infinity of the cosmos made in the similitude of God, and also that the capacity of the soul is correspondingly “vast” and capable of being the receptacle of “all things.” Ultimately, he rejects the void

⁷⁴ SM IV.34.

⁷⁵ CH f. 84r.

⁷⁶ CB, f. 90r.2 ; c.f.: Everard, *Divine Pymander*, VII, 65. CB f. 88r.1 ; c.f.: Gale, *Court of the Gentiles. Pt. II*, p. 139-140, 153-154, 221, Everard, *Divine Pymander*, VII, 99.

⁷⁷ Clements, *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ KG p. 285, ll. 200-202 (ff. 172r -172v.)

and silence. The abyss must resound with song. As Fox infers from Aquinas, silence is a form of the much despised sin of pusillanimity.⁷⁹ Traherne is never content to rest in the “cloud of unknowing.” Amazement fuels his intrepid desire to see and to reveal:

Nevertheless, because the Kingdom of God is Infinit in Beauty, Light and Glory, we will Endeavour to rend the Vail; that at least by a Chink, (if we remove it not wholly) we may See into the Beauty of Holiness, and admire the Secret of the most holy place: for that which discourages Timorous Spirits, animates the Courageous; and the very Incomprehensibleness of its Nature, which seemeth to reprov us, shall be the Allurement, Inviting us to Consider it all.⁸⁰

That Traherne’s intrepid attempt to communicate and “consider it all” is essentially incarnational and Christic is confirmed, as we have previously noted,⁸¹ by his typological interpretation of the veil of Moses “that concealed the Light / He had receiv’d” and which is “don away in Christ, the Skreen / Removd, the Cloud disperst, when he is seen.” This light, which Traherne goes on to describe as “Dwelling in us,” is concealed but also revealed in the “Hieroglyphicks,” the “vast Pattern of the World.”⁸² Having alluded to Christic revelation in the rending of the veil, Traherne moves into an extensive series of quotations from the Epistle to the Ephesians that emphasise the participative comprehension, fullness, and knowledge of the soul indwelt by Christ:

For which cause also the Apostle prayeth, *that he, of whom the whole Familie in Heaven and Earth is named, would grant us according to the Riches of his Glory, to be Strengthened with Might by his Spirit in the Inward Man: That Christ may dwell in our Hearts by faith, that we being rooted and grounded in Love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, What is the Breadth and Length, and Depth and Height; and to Know the Love of Christ which passeth Knowledge, that we might be filled with the fullness of God. And again ... That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of Glory, may giv unto you the spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, in the Knowledg of him, the Eys of your Understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the Hope of his Calling, and what the Riches of the Glory of his Inheritance in the saints:*⁸³

Traherne prefaces these texts by saying: “For the Kingdom of God, is *as full of Riches, as it is of Mysteries*: In it are *hid all the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge*: And he that is able

⁷⁹ Fox, *Sheer Joy*, pp. 280-281. See 2.2.2.

⁸⁰ KG p. 258, ll. 1-7 (f. 149v.)

⁸¹ See 2.4.5, *In Bloody Characters*.

⁸² CL “The Vail” ; CL (Smith), p. 28, ll. 27-28, 63-70. See 2.4.5, *In Bloody Characters*.

⁸³ KG p. 258, ll. 10-23 (f. 150r.) ; Eph 3:15-19 ; Eph 1:17-18 (Traherne continues to v. 23.)

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

to do more for us, than we are able to ask or think⁸⁴ is able to reveal even this unto us.” Christ is characterised as the revealer of the treasures of the Kingdom; but there is also a sense in which Christ is seen as being the mysterious treasure itself – the source and being, as well as the bestower, of divine Wisdom. Traherne casts himself as a “Couragious” unveiler of this mystery. Despite the initial modesty of his phrasing, it is not his desire to merely part the veil by a “Chink,” but to “remove it wholly.”

⁸⁴ C.f. Col 2:3, Eph 3:20

3.3. I Dare Boldly Say

Traherne therefore emulates David, his archetypal Wise Man, not only in contemplating the works of God in “sweet and heavenly Peace,” but as he “proceedeth to Speak of the Works of God over and over again.”⁸⁵ While Traherne often distills his thoughts with vivid and economic precision, it must be said that in the course of *The Kingdom of God* and over the whole of his voluminous and often ambitious oeuvre, there is much that is said “over and over again.” This propensity is remarked upon in marginal comments in *A Sober View* by the same reader who, as we have noted, was also ruffled by Traherne’s endorsement of ambition, and his bold “examination” of God’s ways.⁸⁶ He suggests that Traherne’s case “might be exprest a little more Briefly”⁸⁷ and complains of a convoluted passage on the communication of Infinite Goodness in which the words “infinitt” or “infinitely” are used some twenty times in a single paragraph, that “This Ring and Circle of Infinity varies more, in Excess words, then in real Sense: many of those Infinities being much more pertinently Comprisd into more Succinct and distinct heads.”⁸⁸ “All this is Good and true,” he remarks at another point, “but you have said it over and over.”⁸⁹ Traherne’s ardency, which such comments seek to curb, also seems to have unsettled some of his acquaintance. In the unsigned preface to the *Thanksgivings* he is described as being

so wonderfully transported with the Love of God to Mankind ... that he dwelt continually amongst these thoughts, with great delight and satisfaction, spending most of his time when at home, in digesting his notions of these things into writing, and was so full of them when abroad, that those that would converse with him, were forced to endure some discourse upon these subjects, whether they had any sense of Religion, or not. And therefore to such he might be sometimes thought troublesome ...⁹⁰

Traherne himself confesses his garrulousness in *Select Meditations*:

Profound Inspection, Reservation and Silence; are my Desires. O that I could attain them: Too much openness and proneness to Speak are my Diseas. Too easy

⁸⁵ CM III.92.

⁸⁶ See 2.5.3, “As Spotless Even as the Deitie.”

⁸⁷ SV p. 64, fn. 4.

⁸⁸ SV p. 59, fn. 1.

⁸⁹ SV p. 141, fn. 1.

⁹⁰ cited in H. M. Margoliouth, ed. and Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*, Corrected ed., 2 vols. (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1965), p. xxxi-xxxii. Hopton also published *A Collection of Meditations and Devotions* (1717.) The preface indicated her to be the

and complying a Nature. Speaking too much and too Long in the Best Things.”

Milton also has Samson Agonistes bewail: “My crime, Shameful garrulity”⁹¹ ; Traherne’s repentance, however, is a little disingenuous, for he goes on to say - “The vices of men have made those Things vices that are the Perfections of Heaven ... There it is the Joy of all to be Communicativ and he most Happy that is Infinitely So.” Traherne also defies those who censure him for “Speaking in the Singular Number, and Saying I” – for claiming all things as being done for “me” – in heaven “it Shall be our Glory and the Joy of all to Acknowledge, I.”⁹² Although not a confessional work there is, in *The Kingdom of God*, a lively sense of the “I” shaping the text - “if I may speak my Mind freely”⁹³ ; “but this I shall say”⁹⁴ ; “I shall note but one Glorious Miracle in the Sun more”⁹⁵ ; “which, I dare boldly say”⁹⁶ ; “If I may produce my own Experience.”⁹⁷ At one point Traherne speaks of himself, as he does in the *Centuries* at one remove: “I know a Stranger upon Earth in his infancy...”⁹⁸ The “I” of such passages speaks not only as a theologian concerned to confront a possibly critical audience, but as a man who is eager to communicate his personal response – who sees an atom “representing my GOD unto me.”⁹⁹

The catalogue which speaks of the giving of the Son as the “first Original, and Spring of things,”¹⁰⁰ and as an “Infinite Love” that “whispers in evry Gale of Wind” and “Speaketh in our Tongues”¹⁰¹ concludes with a paraphrase of Psalm 71, shifting the emphasis from the activity of Infinite Love in the world to the individual activity of praise and thanksgiving:

O GOD thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto hav I declared thy
Wondrous Works ... When I am old and Gray Headed O God forsake me not, untill
I hav showed thy Strength unto this Generation, and thy power to Evry one that is
to come ... My Lips shall greatly rejoyce, when I sing unto thee, and my Soul

author, although the first part contained the poems *Meditations on the Six Days of the Creation* [or *Hexameron*] which are now attributed to Traherne.

⁹¹ “Samson Agonistes,” ll. 489-490.

⁹² SM III.65. He subsequently speaks of being so “Ravished and Transported” upon first seeing the “Endless Comprehension of my Immortal Soul” that “I could Scarsly Think or speak or write of any other Thing. But like a man Doteing with Delight and Extasie, Talk of it Night and Day as if all the Joy of Heaven and Earth were shut up in it.” (SM IV.3.)

⁹³ KG p. 439, ll. 26-27 (f. 308r.)

⁹⁴ KG p. 349, l. 78 (f. 223r.)

⁹⁵ KG p. 361, l. 270 (f. 234r.)

⁹⁶ KG p. 483, l. 107 (f. 348v.)

⁹⁷ KG p. 445, ll. 11-12 (f. 314v.)

⁹⁸ KG p. 391, ll. 144-145 (f. 261v.)

⁹⁹ KG p. 348, ll. 17-18 (ff. 221v-222r.)

¹⁰⁰ KG p. 310, l. 14 (f.190r.)

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

which thou has Redeemed. My Tongue also shall talk of thy Righteousness all the
Day long ...¹⁰²

In his aim to “becom what David was a Man after Gods own Heart,” Traherne is infinitely desirous to speak of the “Ring and Circle” of Love infinitely communicated, infinitely enjoyed. Though he did not survive to be “old and Gray Headed,” this “mad” and “troublesome” priest’s own “Life and Business” was “Exprest / In Joy and Melodie.” Exasperating as his prolixity might be to his sometimes censorious tutor, the overflowing, restless and often ecstatic desire to communicate is of course also productive of his most striking and moving prose and expressive of his expansive Christology. Traherne’s theme of the delight taken by Infinite Goodness in eternally communicating itself is reflected in the bounty of his words; his propensity to speak is like the Fountain of Love, “a spring running always out of it self ... delighting to utter and Express it self.”¹⁰³ Although he at times hollowly promises to “study Brevitie,”¹⁰⁴ or “not to detain you any longer,”¹⁰⁵ or hopes that “we would not be voluminous,”¹⁰⁶ Traherne actually, as Esther De Waal describes, “wastes time with words, piling them up in cascading excitement.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, records Lyons, Origen wrote of St. Paul that he spoke of Christ “incessantly, and, as it were, superfluously.” Henri de Lubac applied this comment to Teilhard, and we might equally apply it to Traherne.¹⁰⁸

The repetition and circularity of argument within *The Kingdom of God* and between all of Traherne’s texts also reflects the relational dynamic of the “all in all” ; his texts strain to be as fully augmented, and replete as the kingdom he seeks to describe, and each subject, be it the attributes of God, the material elements of the universe, Love as the form of the kingdom, or the free will of man, is seen to be intimately tied up in all other concerns – a complex but rationally ordered web of relation. Related to thematic repetition is verbal repetition – appropriately, the encompassing words “evry” and “all” appear ubiquitously in many contexts, as do the words “infinite” and “love” and their variations. Like the closely woven fabric of all things that Traherne holds the world to be, *The Kingdom of God* at first appears to be of an impenetrable bulk – opening at any page one is confronted by a wall of

¹⁰¹ KG p. 313, ll. 145ff. (f. 193r.)

¹⁰² KG p. 314, ll. 182-194 (f. 193v.) ; Psalm 71:17-24.

¹⁰³ KG p. 298, l. 28 ; p. 299, l. 44 (f. 182r-182v.)

¹⁰⁴ KG p. 500, l. 240 (f. 362v.)

¹⁰⁵ KG p. 484, ll. 139-140 (f. 349r.)

¹⁰⁶ KG p. 499, ll. 176-177 (f. 361v.)

¹⁰⁷ Esther de Waal, *Lost in Wonder : Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness*, Norwich: Canterbury Press (Mulgrave, Vic.: John Garratt, 2003), p. 134.

¹⁰⁸ Origen, *Frag. in Eph.* 8, 11. 8-9 ; H de Lubac, *Teilhard missionnaire et apologiste*. Cited in Lyons, *The Cosmic Christ*, p. 78.

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

text, with long and densely argued paragraphs and frequent and lengthy paraphrases of scripture. The text, however, is not as monolithic as this first impression would suggest; it is eclectic and varied in tone and subject – alternating between theological and scientific reflections, descriptions “of ...” and demonstrations “that ...” - by turns formal, personal, discursive, speculative, factual, scholastic, Hermetic, argumentative, benign, caustic, ecstatic and poetic. (It is notable that in describing Traherne’s prose style one is also drawn into the composing of lists.) In *The Kingdom of God* Traherne exhibits a vast repertoire of prose styles. As Stewart observes of *Christian Ethicks and the Centuries* Traherne employs a

plentiful use of periodic sentence, the quotation, the proverb, the aphorism, the fragment. We find, too, increasingly mannered syntactic structures, a wide variety of prose techniques, all used with a mind toward restatement: above all, repetition is the primary stylistic underpinning of Traherne’s art.¹⁰⁹

The text reflects the unity of the great pleroma - the many parts that make up the body of Christ, with each element restating and (to the chagrin of voluntarist readers) *augmenting* the “vast” Christic pattern.

A Light to the World

What Sittler says of Paul’s “expanded” vocabulary might also be said of Traherne’s immense project:

cosmic in scope, so vastly referential as to fill with Christic energy and substance the farthest outreach of metaphysical speculation ... All is claimed for God, and all is Christic.”¹¹⁰

True to his word in the second chapter, Traherne has not been “Timorous” but intrepidly “Couragious” in his bid to “Consider it all.”¹¹¹

It is a large field we are tracing over, wherein Holiness and Glory and Peace and Blessedness are to be discovered all Wisdom and Goodness unfolded all Truth and Nature explained, the foundations of Religion disclosed, and all the Concerns of

¹⁰⁹ Stewart, *The Expanded Voice: the Art of Thomas Traherne*, p. 73.

¹¹⁰ Sittler, "Called to Unity," p. 178.

¹¹¹ KG p. 258, ll. 4-7 (f. 149v.)

3. THE WORD INCARNATE

God Angels and men revealed.¹¹²

Traherne is emboldened by his co-heirship with Christ to become a seeker and speaker of wisdom, to learn “all such things as are either secret or manifest,” to become “the brightness of everlasting light.”¹¹³ Uncovering God in “all things” he finds him “infinitely Great” in even “the Smallest Things” and, echoing Matthew declares that “there is Nothing hid, but it shall at last be opened.”¹¹⁴ As in the meditation from the *First Century* with which we introduced the theme of the Cosmic Christ at the outset of this thesis, Traherne has undertaken in *The Kingdom of God* to utter “Things that have been Kept Secret from the foundation of the World. Things Strange yet Common” and urged his reader to see, to understand, to claim and to treasure their inheritance - “Is it not a Great Thing, that you should be Heir of the World?”¹¹⁵ There is poetic irony in the fact that the main body of Traherne’s work, whose Design was “in such a plain maner to unfold” the “interior beauty” of that Mystery, has itself lain hidden for centuries. A note on the flyleaf of *The Kingdom of God* records one unknown early reader’s own exasperation at such prolonged obscurity:

Why is this soe long detained in a dark manuscript, that if printed would be a Light to the World, and a Uniuersal Blessing.

¹¹² KG p. 331, ll. 1-4 (f. 206v.)

¹¹³ Wis. 7:21, 26.

¹¹⁴ KG p. 382, ll. 68-70 (f. 253r.) Cf.: “... there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed ; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light : and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye from the housetops.” (Matt. 10:26-27.)

¹¹⁵ CM I.3.

ABBREVIATIONS & NOTES ON REFERENCES

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- CB *Commonplace Book*. Bodleian, MS Eng. poet. c. 42.
- CE Carol L. Marks, introd., comm., and George Robert Guffey, ed. *Christian Ethicks*. Cornell Studies in English ; v. 43. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- CH *Commentaries of Heaven. Wherein the Mysteries of Felicitie are opened, and All Things Discovered to be Objects of Happiness*. British Library, MS Add. 63054.
- CH Poems D. D. C. Chambers, ed. *Commentaries of Heaven: The Poems*. Salzburg studies in English literature. Salzburg: Institut fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1989.
- CH (Pritchard) Pritchard, Allan. "Traherne's Commentaries of Heaven (With Selections from the Manuscript)." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 53.1 (1983): 1-35.
- CH (Smith) Ridler, Anne, introd., Julia Smith, ed., and Thomas Traherne. "Thomas Traherne (1637? - 1674): Some extracts from *Commentaries of Heaven*." *PN Review* 18.6 (1992): 14-20
- CL *The Ceremonial Law*. Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a. 70.
- CL (Smith) Julia Smith. "The Ceremonial Law: A New Work by Thomas Traherne (1637?-74) with Extracts from the Manuscript." *PN Review* 25.2 (1998): 22-28.
- CM *Centuries of Meditation* in H. M. Margoliouth, ed. *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*. Corrected ed. 2 vols. London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1965. First edition 1958.
- CYB *Church's Year-Book (or The Book of Private Devotions)*. Bodleian, MS Eng. th. e. 51.
- KG *The Kingdom of God*. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1360.
Page references are also given to:
Jan Ross, ed. *The Works of Thomas Traherne*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005.
- RF *Roman Forgeries*. London: Printed by S. & B. Griffin for Jonathan Edwin, 1673.
- SE *Seeds of Eternity*. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1360.
Page references are also given to:
Jan Ross, ed. *The Works of Thomas Traherne*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005.
- SM Julia J. Smith, ed. *Select Meditations*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1997.
- SV *A Sober View of Dr Twisse his Considerations*. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1360.
Page references are also given to:
Jan Ross, ed. *The Works of Thomas Traherne*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005.

Line numbers for poems & the Thanksgivings are cited from H. M. Margoliouth, ed. *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*. Corrected ed. 2 vols. London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1965. First edition 1958.

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