

Thomas Traherne

Though not as well known as John Donne or George Herbert, Thomas Traherne was one of the seventeenth century's most searching, inventive poets and theologians.

Traherne was among about twelve Anglican lyricists dubbed by the rather prosaic Samuel Johnson as "the Metaphysical Poets." Johnson meant this to imply that their poetry was pretentious and obscure. What he missed was not only their erudition but their subtlety and their profound awareness of the depths of Divine Mystery through which they tried to articulate the Christian Faith in a world which was changing from the sure faith of the Middle Ages to the bewildering maze of conflicting opinion which was the "Modern".

Born in 1637, the son of a humble shoemaker in Hereford, Traherne went to Oxford thanks to the generosity of a prosperous relative. He was awarded the B.A. in 1656 and later the M.A. and B.D. He was ordained priest in 1660. From 1667

on he was the chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Keeper of the Great Seal. At 37 he died in his patron's house.

Traherne's poetry was unpublished and unknown until it was found in manuscript in a London bookseller's stall at the beginning of the twentieth century. In all the Metaphysical Poets we find the attempt, often through startling images and seemingly contradictory metaphors, to express the inter-penetration of the sacred and the profane, the mortal human and the immortal divine, the verities of the new sciences and the eternal verities of God's revelation in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Traherne was particularly taken with the paradox that the naive grandiosity and self-centeredness of a small child was, in fact, a kind of window into the Divine Being. In reading his poetry it is sometimes not clear whether he is speaking of himself as a small child or of the Christ-Child. In fact, he is often inferring both, by which he means us to understand that in the Incarnation, God assumed our humanity and so our humanity is in fact, our blessed access to God.

Leader: Peace on each one who comes in need,
All: ***Peace on each one who comes in joy.***

Leader: Peace on each one who offers prayers,
All: ***Peace on each one who offers song.***

Leader: Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,
All: ***Peace of the Spirit, the triune one.***

Psalm 119:129-136

The opening of your word gives light.

129 Your testimonies are wonderful; ♦
therefore my soul keeps them.

130 The opening of your word gives light; ♦
it gives understanding to the simple.

131 I open my mouth and draw in my breath, ♦
as I long for your commandments.

132 Turn to me and be gracious to me, ♦
as is your way with those who love your name.

The opening of your word gives light.

133 Order my steps by your word, ♦
and let no wickedness have dominion over me.

134 Redeem me from earthly oppressors ♦
so that I may keep your commandments.

135 Show the light of your countenance upon your servant ♦
and teach me your statutes.

136 My eyes run down with streams of water, ♦
because the wicked do not keep your law.

The opening of your word gives light.

Prayer

Leader: O God, for your love for us, warm and brooding, which has brought us to birth and opened our eyes to the wonder and beauty of creation,

All: ***We give you thanks.***

Leader: For your love for us, wild and freeing, which has awakened us to the energy of creation: to the sap that flows, the blood that pulses, the heart that sings,

All: ***We give you thanks.***

Leader: For your love for us, compassionate and patient, which has carried us through our pain, wept beside us in our sin, and waited with us in our confusion,

All: ***We give you thanks.***

Leader: For your love for us, strong and challenging, which has called us to risk for you, asked for the best in us, and shown us how to serve,

All: ***We give you thanks.***

Leader: O God we come to celebrate that your Holy Spirit is present deep within us, and at the heart of all life. Forgive us when we forget your gift of love made known to us in Jesus, and draw us into your presence.

Reading: **John 3:1-8**

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’

Prayer

Leader: We bring to God someone whom we have met or remembered today and for whom we want to pray -----
Holy One, ***We ask your blessing.***

Leader: We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer -----
Holy One, ***We ask your blessing.***

Leader: We bring to God a troubled situation in our world tonight -----
Holy One, ***We ask your blessing.***

Leader: We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to like or forgive or trust
Holy One, ***We ask your blessing.***

Leader: We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit,
clarity of mind, and warmth of affection. Holy One, ***We ask your blessing.***

Hymn 490

I want to walk as a child of the light
I want to follow Jesus
God sent the stars to give light to the world
The star of my life is Jesus

*In Him, there is no darkness at all
The night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus*

I want to see the brightness of God
I want to look at Jesus
Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path
And show me the way to the Father

Refrain

I'm looking for the coming of Christ
I want to be with Jesus
When we have run with patience the race
We shall know the joy of Jesus

Refrain

Closing responses

Leader: O Trinity of Love, You have been with us at the world's beginning,

All: ***Be with us till the world's end.***

Leader: You have been with us at our life's shaping,

All: ***Be with us at our life's end.***

Leader: You have been with us at the sun's rising

All: ***Be with us till the day's end. Amen.***

*All: Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is sadness, joy.*

O Divine Master.

*grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying that we are born again
to everlasting life. Amen.*

Leader: And now may the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in believing that you overflow with hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. ***Amen.***

