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**THOMAS TRAHERNE'S PATH TO FELICITY:
THE MISSING CHRIST**

by

PETER KENNEDY MAITLAND, B.A. HONS.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

June 20, 1994

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**"THOMAS TRAHERNE'S PATH TO FELICITY:
THE MISSING CHRIST"**

**submitted by Peter Kennedy Maitland, B.A. (Hons.)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Traherne sought and found "Felicity" through a personal spiritual experience that informed the devotional works he wrote in his role as Anglican clergyman. Not unreasonably, critical evaluation of his works usually starts from an a priori acceptance of his orthodox Christianity. But Traherne's account of his own quest for spiritual illumination shows that it not only transcends Christianity, but also does not involve Christ. The account is given in two forms: metaphysically, in the 37 poems that make up the Dobell manuscript, and autobiographically, in the third book of the Centuries of Meditations. The nature of the experience as he describes it stands in marked contrast to the views expressed elsewhere in his works, particularly Christian Ethicks, which reflect orthodox beliefs. This suggests that Traherne had to struggle to accommodate his personal vision to the demands of his religion.

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CHAPTER I

Thomas Traherne: The Man and His Writings

Thomas Traherne was a devotional poet whose works as a whole reflect his dedication to Christian belief. His thought was "that to be a Philosopher, a Christian and a Divine was to be one of the most Illustrious Creatures in the World" (Centuries of Meditations, IV, 3). He sought and found his own form of a Pauline conversion, which seems to have taken place in the period between his ordination and the taking up of his living. His path to salvation is described metaphysically in the Dobell manuscript, a collection of 37 poems, and autobiographically in a small section of the third part of Centuries of Meditations.

The philosophical underpinnings of Traherne's conversion process have long been recognized as significant by critics because of his unorthodox position on the doctrine of original sin. The Dobell poems show, as Sharon Cadman Seelig notes, that he does not share the insistence of the Thirty-nine Articles that man is either born in sin or is by nature prone to it (114). The Cambridge Platonists, with whose philosophy Traherne is closely aligned, downplay the doctrine of original sin but, in the Dobell poems, Traherne denies it. While Traherne does believe that the world is generally sinful, it is sinful because human beings are individually distracted from their infant avarice for

God to the pursuit of more immediately successful worldly gain.

Traherne posits a closed model for salvation. Seelig points out that, for Traherne, human beings have the power within themselves to "make the good appear...Goodness is in the eye of the beholder; goodness is in the world if we will but see" (119). The self-induced return to innocence restores the vision of God. God is now visible in His Creation, and this vision of God constantly reinforces the faith and joy of the beholder. This view of God's immanence is consistent with that of the Cambridge Platonists but, in the Dobell manuscript, the process is circular, and the circle is complete without Christ, a point that seems to have escaped the critics.

The circle could not exist had Traherne believed that man was born into sin or by nature inclined to it. The innocence of infancy would always have been clouded and, as a consequence, the need for a redemptive agency, namely Christ, would have leaped into prominence. The Cambridge Platonists, for all their affirmation of the power of inborn reason to lead men towards the recognition of divine truth, nevertheless held that this end could not be achieved without the aid of Christian revelation.¹ By contrast, the Traherne of the Dobell poems attains felicity through a process that is devoid of specifically Christian elements, including Christ Himself.

That Traherne's departure from orthodoxy was observed at the time is confirmed by the changes made by his brother, Philip, to the 22 poems from Dobell that he incorporated into his own collection of Thomas's poems (the Burney manuscript). Philip seems to have intended this collection for publication and, though some of his emendations aim (usually unsuccessfully) to improve rhyme and metre, many other changes have the effect of minimizing Thomas's departure from conventional belief, especially in the area concerning original sin.²

Philip probably noted what the critics have not, that Traherne's path to salvation does not include Christ. Philip makes changes to, and even removes, passages that he disapproves of, but he does not, apparently, have the genius to add new material. If Thomas omits Christ, it seems that Philip cannot put him in, however much he was concerned about His displacement from the central role in the redemptive process. Such a displacement would, of course, have been impossible to accommodate within any framework of Christian belief.

Thomas also, committed as he was to an active life of Christian service, must have been profoundly aware of the unorthodox implications of his experience, and most particularly of the minimal importance it accords to Christian revelation. If Christianity could not accommodate his Christ-less vision of God, then his vision had to

accommodate itself to the requirements of Christianity. He had to place Christ in the centre of his religious life, and it is clear from the doctrinal differences between the Dobell poems and his last (and public) work, Christian Ethicks, that something of the kind occurred.

The Dobell manuscript has been the focus of much critical attention, but it has generally been considered within the context of the whole Traherne canon from which Traherne's religious position has been deduced. It is only by isolating the Dobell manuscript that the absence of Christ from Traherne's most important spiritual experience becomes conspicuous. Once noted, this absence leads to the conclusion that Traherne underwent a considerable change between the attainment of felicity of the kind recorded in the Dobell poems and the commitment to orthodoxy expressed in Christian Ethicks.

The precise mapping of the shift in Traherne's outlook is of too great a magnitude to come within the scope of this study, which is concerned mainly with presenting the nature of Traherne's conversion. Some passages in the Centuries of Meditations, however, which have puzzled critics because of their somewhat distant attitude to Christ, cry out for discussion here because they suggest not only the nature of Traherne's difficulties, but also his attempt to address them.

The Dobell poems, the Centuries of Meditations, and

Christian Ethicks are the principal works considered in this study. Before embarking on the examination of Traherne's shift of consciousness as reflected these works, it is useful to put them into the context of his total known oeuvre, as well as of his life, about which relatively little is known.

Only two of Traherne's works were published within the fifty years following his death, and neither was credited to Traherne. A series of psalm-like meditations, given the name A Serious and Pathetical Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in Several Most Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the Same, was brought out in 1699 by the Reverend George Hickes without attribution. In 1717, a short work entitled Meditations on the Six Days of Creation was published by Nathaniel Spinckes as part of a collection of devotional writings attributed to Susanna Hopton.

Over a century and a half were to pass before others of Traherne's works were to re-surface. The Centuries of Meditations and the collection of poems that came to be known as the Dobell manuscript were discovered in 1895 by W.T. Brooke in a second-hand bookstall in London. Neither the Centuries of Meditations nor the poems gave any indication of authorship. Bound in with the poems was a set of notes that is usually referred to as the Commonplace Book.

The poems were at first thought to be by Vaughan, but

Bertram Dobell's assiduous detective work eventually proved the Centuries of Meditations, and consequently the poems, to be Traherne's by matching a verse passage in the Centuries with nearly identical stanzas from a poem in Christian Ethicks. It appears that at about this time two other volumes by Traherne, one consisting of commentaries and devotions arranged according to the Church calendar, and the other of miscellaneous notes and quotations, came into the possession of the editor Alexander Grosart. They, however, remained in his library unrecognized until the 1930s.

About a decade later, the known Traherne canon grew again with the discovery of another manuscript collection of poems, which had lain unnoticed in the British Museum since 1818. This manuscript bore a title-page identifying Traherne as the author, but it was written, not in Thomas' hand, but that of his brother Philip. Dr. Idris Bell recognized it as Traherne's work and published it in 1910 under the name Poems of Felicity.

Two further works have been brought to light relatively recently. A small early group of meditations that seems to have formed the basis for the Centuries of Meditations was discovered in 1964 by James Osborn. Then, in 1981, fourteen years after it was rescued from a rubbish tip in Lancashire, a large manuscript, consisting of 97 poems and accompanying prose commentaries, was identified as being a probable late work by Traherne.

The rich interior life recorded in these works contrasts sharply with the poverty of biographical information that we have about Traherne. Scholars have relied extensively on informed guesswork to flesh out sketchy documented evidence and incidental contemporary references. It is known that he was born in Herefordshire in 1637, probably in the town of Hereford itself and probably into a family of modest means. According to Anthony à Wood (not always a reliable chronicler), he was the son of a shoemaker, and although Traherne never specifically mentions his father's occupation, he does allude in the Centuries of Meditations to the impoverished circumstances of his childhood.

Traherne and his brother Philip may have received their education from tutors through the generosity of a prosperous relative, Philip Traherne, a Hereford innkeeper and twice mayor of the town. On the other hand, there is indirect evidence that Thomas, if not his brother, attended Hereford grammar school. It is possible that a scholarship from that school could have provided him with the wherewithal to get to Brasenose College at Oxford. Yet the records at Brasenose indicate that he enrolled at the college as a commoner and paid the usual fees.

It is known that he went up to Oxford at age 15. This was at the height of the Protectorate, but the university, which during the Civil War period had been a Royalist

stronghold, continued to be essentially conservative and Anglican even under its Puritan governors. Traherne himself seems to have remained sympathetic to the Royalist cause, reflecting the loyalties of his home region. The education he received at Oxford, grounded as it was in the traditional curriculum, would have reinforced his attachment to conservative beliefs. But he also would have encountered some of the contemporary intellectual fashions that were inevitably making their presence felt. The Centuries of Meditations indicates that Traherne's university training may have included some exposure to the new science, and it is generally assumed that he first learned of the work of the Cambridge Platonists during his undergraduate years. His account of these years in Century III shows that he was enthralled by the new worlds opened to him at Oxford, yet he lamented that "There was never a Tutor that did professely Teach Felicity: tho that be the Mistress of all other Sciences" (Century III, 37). This suggests that his personal religious experience had not yet occurred.

He took his B.A. in 1656 and in the following year was appointed rector of the rural parish of Credinhill in Herefordshire. At this time, candidates being presented for ordination had to be vetted for their suitability by a Commission for Approbation of preachers established under the new state church. Traherne, whatever his adherence to the old ways, seems to have been able to satisfy the

Presbyterian commissioners as to the soundness of his views.

He did not take up his appointment immediately, as he had not yet reached the minimum age of 23 to occupy a rectorship. In the period between 1657 and 1660 he may well have continued at Oxford. In any case he was granted his M.A. by decree in 1661. It was probably during this fallow period that he found the joy in God that had long been his quest. The account in Century III seems to point to this:

When I came into the Country, and...had all my Time in mine own Hands, I resolved to Spend it all...in Search of Happiness, and to Satisfy that burning Thirst which Nature had Enkindled, in me from my Youth. In which I was so resolute, that I chose rather to live upon 10 pounds a year, and to go in Lether Clothes, and feed upon Bread and Water, so that I might have all my time clearly to my self: then to keep many thousands per Annum in an Estate of Life where my Time would be Devoured in Care and Labor. (Century III, 46)

In 1661, Traherne was confirmed in his appointment to the Credinhill parish by the bishops of the re-established Anglican Church, but another two or three years may have passed before he finally took up residence there. We know, however, from signed parish documents that he was there in 1664. His pastoral duties at Credinhill seem to have been few. He probably ministered to a small congregation, whose needs left him ample time for study and writing.

It was during this period that he became involved with a religious coterie led by Mrs. Susanna Hopton, a member of the local gentry, who lived about fifteen miles from Credinhill. Susanna Hopton was married to a man who had

served as an officer in the Royalist forces, and she herself had converted to Roman Catholicism at the time of Charles I's execution, only to return to the Anglican Church following the Restoration. She was to play a large role both in the advancement of Traherne's career and in his philosophical development. She seems to have had ties not only with the Cambridge Platonists but also with the man who was to become Traherne's patron, Sir Orlando Bridgeman. It was to her that Traherne probably addressed his Centuries of Meditations as a book of spiritual guidance.

Traherne entered Bridgeman's household as chaplain in 1669. His appointment to this position may have been connected with his receiving his Bachelor of Divinity degree in the same year. (It is thought that his anti-Catholic polemic, Roman Forgeries, was based on the thesis that earned him that degree.) Bridgeman, then Keeper of the Great Seal, had residences at Teddington in Middlesex, and in London. The two men must have been philosophically like-minded, since the exemplar of the Christian gentleman whom Traherne describes in the appendix to his Christian Ethicks is clearly Bridgeman, and Traherne dedicated the Roman Forgeries to him. In any case, it is known that Bridgeman had decidedly latitudinarian views in Church matters, and that he was interested in the Cambridge Platonists, with whom one of his other chaplains, Hezekiah Burton, was affiliated.

Bridgeman was dismissed from office in 1672. The tolerance and even-handedness that Traherne so admired in him may have contributed to his downfall, for his detractors seem to feel that he was too eager to be accommodating in religious controversies. Traherne continued in his service and was still at Teddington when Bridgeman died in June 1674. A scant three months later, Traherne himself died and was buried at the church in Teddington. He had just sent Christian Ethicks to press, but did not live to see it published.

The circles of power and influence with which Traherne was brought into contact during these last years must have been a far cry from the sequestered life at Credinhill. The environment seems, nevertheless, to have stimulated Traherne's creative energies. It was during his service under Bridgeman that Traherne appears to have produced the great majority of his extant works³, although only one, the anti-Catholic treatise Roman Forgeries, saw publication during his lifetime.

CHAPTER II

Traherne's Thought and Its
Intellectual and Religious Context

Traherne lived during a time when English society was undergoing enormous social and cultural transformations. Despite the otherworldliness of his preoccupations, the intellectual tensions and controversies of the age did concern him. In terms of direct influences, we know that his work shows strong affinities with the theology of the Cambridge Platonists. Traherne most particularly shared the Cambridge Platonists' beliefs in the efficacy of right reason and the power of the human mind, i.e., the soul, to discover divine truths and to choose freely to seek the good that they represented.

REASON, which is the formal Essence of the Soul of Man, guides Him to desire those Things, which are absolutely supreme. For it is an Eternal Property in Reason to prefer the Better, above the Worse: he that prefers the worse above the Better acts against Nature, and Swervs from the Rule of Right Reason....[O]nely Reason should rectifie and direct his Instinct, inform his Sence, and compleat his Essence, by inducing those perfections of which it is capable. (Christian Ethicks, 14-15)

At the same time, Traherne drew heavily upon the common stock of older Platonist and Neo-Platonist writings, as numerous critics have demonstrated. Both his poems and his prose works are replete with the language of perception, knowledge and spiritual fulfilment found in writers from

Plotinus onwards through Meister Eckhardt and the author of the Pseudo-Hermes, to Ficino and Pico della Mirandola.

The overarching theme of all Traherne's work is the soul's attainment of felicity through the enjoyment of Creation. The soul seeks to overcome the separation between the self and God's created universe. For Traherne, the soul desires passionately to "possess the world" and, in so doing, to engage in a continuous process of replicating God's act of creation. In the terms repeatedly used by Traherne, the soul achieves fulfilment through "enjoyment" and "use" of the things made by God.

Traherne's theology is not that of the contemplatives for whom union with God meant annihilation of the self. What is striking is the vigorous affirmation of self that is evident throughout Traherne's work. Nor is there anything of the struggle that is exemplified by St. John of the Cross and the dark night of the soul. Traherne's journey of the soul never takes it to the edge of any moral or psychological abyss; the spiritual condition of despair does not figure as a present danger in Traherne's scheme. When Traherne stares over a precipice, it is only to see "A deep Abyss/ That sees and is/ The only Proper Place or Bower of Bliss" ("My Spirit," 77-79). Traherne affirms self by insisting on joy as a condition of his spiritual well-being.

It is also interesting to see that Traherne's quest for enlightenment does not rely upon any particular meditative

process or discipline, such as the Ignatian spiritual exercises. In fact, the attainment of felicity is marked by a conspicuous absence of intellectual exertion or struggle. This goes against the premises of most seventeenth-century meditations. Traherne emphasizes the condition of ease which is characteristic of the soul's movement towards bliss. To perceive God's goodness and the richness of His creation is the same as to know and love God. Understanding flows uninterruptedly from perception. Thought is the primordial condition of being for Descartes, but for Traherne perception is. Traherne can assert "Percipi est esse" because his perception is an active, intellectual faculty, having little in common with Locke's view of the mind as a passive recipient of sense data.

The insatiable longing of the soul for union with God is matched by God's inexhaustible energy to possess his Creation. The dynamic tension that is set up between the self, the universe and God is at the heart of Traherne's preoccupations. Traherne celebrates the Creation as the product of God's spontaneous act of love. The human soul is the pinnacle of that Creation, and, impelled by a desire to know God, is freed from the constraints of a closed, material existence. The soul expands its range of consciousness not only to embrace, but to become coextensive with, the Universe; it is at once an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and an "eye" whose perception is

limitless.

The notions of capacity and desire, as Traherne conceived them, meet in man's joyous acceptance of the created universe as God's supreme act of love. Unlike much of the mystical tradition to which Traherne was indebted, we do not see in his work a longing to annihilate consciousness of self through union with God. Nor does the soul's journey necessitate a repudiation and forgetting of the external world. Quite the contrary, fulfilment of the spiritual quest is inseparable from the right appreciation of the world as a palpable and independent reality.

For Traherne, desire animates the soul to seek and become like God. There can never be an excess of desire, only a mistaken choice as to its object. Sin arises from desiring the wrong things, and from valuing the wrong things, and the cause of human suffering since the Fall is not unbridled appetites, as the Calvinists would hold, but the erroneous directing of those appetites toward the works of man rather than toward the works of God.

This was radical thinking for the time, even in the climate of gradually increasing tolerance regarding doctrinal matters that marked the latter half of the seventeenth century. Traherne's concept of the Creation's essential goodness and innocence, embodied most vividly in metaphors that depict the pristine, uncorrupted vision of the child, goes well beyond the Cambridge Platonists'

arguments against the Calvinist position.

The place occupied by the sensible, material world in Traherne's scheme is interesting for that reason. His Platonism might have led him to the classical position of regarding the universe of tangible things as inferior to that of ideal forms, but it did not. As Carol Marks observes in her introduction to Christian Ethicks:

For all his Platonism he avoided the spirit-matter duality and more than most Neo-platonists he truly felt that the world was God's body. He never opposed the physical to the spiritual world, but rather distinguished between the works of GOD, and the works of men. Physical creation, especially the human body, was a source of infinite wonder to him (xliv).

Traherne professed a philosophy that was at odds with the materialist, spirit-denying aspects of the new scientific world-view, but it also challenged the traditional premises of Christianity which emphasized original sin and man's powerlessness to help himself without divine grace. It is difficult to determine the extent to which Traherne partook of the trends of what Patrick Grant, in The Transformation of Sin, calls the emerging "enlightenment culture" (17-39). There is evidence that he was influenced in some measure by contemporary developments in astronomy and cosmology, as Marjorie Nicolson points out in The Breaking of the Circle (173-79). His representations of the boundlessness of space and time have much in common with post-Ptolemaic conceptions of the immensity of the universe and the possibility of other worlds. Traherne's

positive delight in the idea of an infinite cosmos contrasts with the anxiety that it inspired in many of his contemporaries, perhaps best epitomized by Blaise Pascal in his Pensées: "Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie." As well, Traherne, with his notion of the mind's ability to create the perceived object within itself, anticipated prefigured Berkley's subjectivist epistemology.

Yet for all these possible connections with novel philosophical and scientific trends, Traherne belongs essentially to the ancient lineage of Christian-Platonic thought which was concerned with the nature of the soul and its journey toward union with God. Nearly all of his works, the polemical Roman Forgeries being the major exception, deal in some way with the spiritual quest for divine joy and enlightenment. Even as a poet, he was writing private verse meditations at a time when this genre had largely fallen out of fashion. John Donne and George Herbert had passed from the scene a generation and a half earlier. Henry Vaughan, though he outlived Traherne and survived into the 1690s, had spent himself by the early 1650s.

It is in his view of the nature of the quest for spiritual redemption that he breaks with tradition. The known facts of his life together with his writings reveal a man for whom the old formulas were not adequate and who was subject to the contradictory pull of new ideas. He could be staunchly Royalist and Anglican, yet clearly he yearned for

a more universal religion free of the baggage of accumulated dogma (which was the question he addressed in Roman Forgeries). The fact that he was found to be acceptable as a clergyman to both the Puritan authorities in 1657 and the restored Church of England in 1661 suggests not "the character of a trimmer," but a man whose essential religious beliefs were not circumscribed by hard-and-fast doctrinal positions.

His view of the path to God was not, it seems, readily contained within any formal discipline of Christian behaviour or interior meditation, either Catholic or Protestant. At the same time, his recognition of a fallen world suggested to him that humanity as a whole had a limited vision of what that path to God might consist of. To him, the Church and all its works were "occasion[e]d all by Sin" ("Silence," 20). It seems likely that, having achieved his own felicity through what we in the twentieth century would call a universalist path, he set about adapting his experience for use in the practical religious way that was available to him. It would, of course, never have occurred to him to be other than a Christian. His task, as his prose works and some poems indicate, was to ensure that his own faith incorporated the essential doctrines of Christianity, particularly that concerning the need for a Christ and the need for individual focus on that Christ.

CHAPTER III

The Dobell Poems: Their Structure and the Critics

The Dobell Manuscript is a collection of poems whose content demonstrates Traherne's personal path to Felicity, that is, to a state of joy realized through union with God. Some of the poems appear elsewhere; others do not. It is impossible to verify whether all, some, or none of the poems were written specifically for the collection. What is clear is that the poems in Dobell were carefully and deliberately selected, and systematically organized, to record Traherne's personal religious experience in metaphysical terms. The same religious experience is described autobiographically in the third book of the Centuries of Meditations, as will be shown in Chapter V.

The structure and organization of the Dobell Manuscript has been the object of much interest among Traherne scholars. Critics have generally agreed that the poems are arranged into some type of ordered sequence. Dobell himself had a sense of this when he observed: "yet all the poems I have mentioned, fine as they are when standing alone, gain considerably when they are read as parts of a continuous poem, the subject of which is the history of the author's

progress in his pilgrimage towards the kingdom of perfect Blessedness" (Preface to The Poetical Works, p.lxx, cited in Clements, p.5).

Jean-Jacques Denonain (cited in Wallace, 78-79) was the first, in 1956, to call attention to specific thematic links between individual poems in the manuscript. Two years later, John Malcolm Wallace published an article maintaining that the collection as a whole was a complete five-part meditation based on the Ignatian model, with each of the formal elements of the spiritual exercise clearly represented by a sequence of poems. According to Wallace, the first four poems in Dobell constitute a "composition of place" and the next eight a "prelude"; this is followed by three groups of eight, ten and nine poems, corresponding respectively to the stages of memory, understanding and will that make up the analytical part of the meditation (81-87).

In his 1969 study, A.J. Clements took issue with Wallace's theory, claiming that it forces the poems into a strict meditative pattern at the expense of offering insight into the actual nature of the spiritual process they describe. Clements instead divides the Dobell poems into a three-part structure under the thematic headings of Innocence, Fall and Redemption. According to this plan, the focus of the first five poems is on the childhood Estate of Innocence; the next thirteen speak to the efforts required of the fallen man to regain Adam's original happiness; and

the final nineteen deal with the world and God seen through the eyes of the redeemed individual.

Wallace's meditative paradigm does not fit because it requires the poems to represent the active process of meditation, which moves from a condition of separateness from God to union with Him, whereas the speaking persona in Dobell is one who has already achieved such union. Clements recognizes this problem. The Innocence-Fall-Redemption model that he proposes proves ultimately, however, to be no more convincing than Wallace's scheme, since it similarly assumes a progression in time, while both the arrangement and internal make-up of the Dobell poems undercut any such temporal framework. "My Spirit," for example, which comes a third of the way through the collection, describes an experience that is symbolically linked to the "Naked Simple Life" of the infant, yet is at the same time intellectually complex and reflective of a mature consciousness.

There is another difficulty with the thematic categories that Clements proposes. While one cannot argue with his view that the first five poems ("The Salutation" to "The Preparative") are concerned with the Estate of Innocence, it seems to be forcing the evidence to assert that the next thirteen ("The Instruction" to "Speed") are focussed on man's fallen state.⁴ Furthermore, the grouping of the final nineteen poems ("The Designe" to "Goodnesse") under the heading of "redemption" is valid only if one

accepts the characterization of the preceding group; to be redeemed it is necessary first to have fallen.⁵

Barbara Lewalski, in her major 1979 study, deals with the Dobell poems in the context of the emergence of a uniquely Protestant sensibility among seventeenth-century English devotional poets. She finds that the poems describe a development that "conforms in broad terms to the classic Christian paradigm: initial innocence, a fall into sin and grief, a process of regeneration and restoration, and then a process of spiritual growth involving an expanding awareness of the privileges of adoption" (357). She is able to show this conformity, however, only by suppressing, in her commentary upon the poems, certain essential features of the paradigm as she herself has described it. An essential part of her thesis is the emphasis that Protestant meditation typically gives to the arduous nature of the path to salvation and the need for constant self-scrutiny. These features cannot be reconciled to Traherne's fundamental conceptions about the capacity and freedom of the soul to attain, at any time, a state of grace. Lewalski's failure to address this inconsistency substantially weakens her main thesis as to the structural design of the Dobell manuscript.

Stanley Stewart, in his study of Traherne, The Expanded Voice, seems content to conclude that there is an overall coherence to the Dobell poems that derives from the repetition of symbols and from a complex counterpointing of

related ideas, rather than from any clearly defined structure (170-207). Despite his perceptive readings of individual poems such as "My Spirit," his avoidance of a more definite characterization of their structure and meaning as a group underscores the incompleteness of his general interpretation.

It seems, then, that attempts to locate the Dobell poems within three of the major traditions of seventeenth-century thought--Catholic meditative (Wallace), Christian-platonic (Clements), and individualist Protestant (Lewalski)--all fail to afford a satisfactory basis for understanding the nature of Traherne's scheme of personal salvation. What these interpretations have in common is their a priori assumption of the basic elements of the Christian paradigm: an "historical" framework consisting of Adam's original innocence, the Fall, the intervention of Christ as redeemer, and the return of Christ at the Last Judgement, within which is placed the individual man's struggle to free himself from the taint of original sin through an acceptance of divine grace as mediated by Christ.⁶ These elements are well-represented in the Traherne canon. They are largely absent from the Dobell Manuscript.

A clue to resolving the problem may be found in the work of a fourth critic, Patrick Grant. Grant's study, The Transformation of Sin, examines the shift in sensibility over the seventeenth century as it is reflected in the

poetry of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne. He does not deal separately with the Dobell poems, but relates them to the larger corpus of Traherne's work, especially the Centuries of Meditations. Grant is concerned with showing that Traherne moves beyond what he terms the "guilt-culture" of the earlier Renaissance which had its basis in the Augustinian conception of man as innately corrupt because of the fall of Adam. He sees in Traherne's downplaying of the doctrine of original sin a reflection of the emerging "enlightenment" culture, with its optimistic view of the human potential for moral and intellectual progress.

Grant convincingly demonstrates that Traherne drew his ideas from the early Church Father, Irenaeus.⁷ Like Irenaeus, says Grant, Traherne believes that prelapsarian Adam was possessed of a childlike innocence that made him "a special creature of God whose fulfilment was to become godlike" (192). Also like Irenaeus, Traherne, in Grant's view, believes that the fall of Adam set in motion a decline of the world into a progressively sinful condition marked by disease and suffering. In turn, through the customs and usages of this world, the individual man is corrupted as he grows away from childhood innocence. Grant goes on to say that, although both Traherne and Irenaeus differ from the Augustinian position in holding that human nature is not innately flawed because of the fall, they both nonetheless believe that Christ's role is central and that man cannot

redeem himself by his own efforts alone, important though they be. Grant says that both Irenaeus and Traherne

of course, also agree on the necessity of the Atonement for the dispensation of grace, but in both we find a somewhat attenuated theory which leaves considerable responsibility with man himself. A theology of recapitulation is in consequence developed and stresses a particular closeness between Christ and Adam, so that for Traherne no less than Irenaeus the Atonement becomes a sign of the divinity of man as well as a reproach against his apostasy. (192)

Grant cites passages in the Centuries of Meditations to support the view that restoration to the Estate of Innocence is dependent on regeneration through Christ. For example, at Century I.55 Traherne describes Christ's cross as "That Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradice of GOD!"⁸

But the Christocentrism that is undeniably evident in the Centuries of Meditations, as well as in Christian Ethics, is conspicuously absent in the Dobell poems. In these poems, the events of Christian history, including Christ's incarnation, life and crucifixion, are secondary because they are part of a temporal scheme that the poet-speaker finds is not relevant to, and even militates against, his transcendent experience of timelessness and infinity. Adam is not linked to Christ; instead Christ recedes and Adam assumes centrality. The Estate of Innocence comes to represent not a "paradise lost," but an eternally present and constantly renewing condition of felicity.

Generally, the critics, by involving the whole Traherne canon in their interpretations of the Dobell poems, have

imposed on them artificial structures which the manuscript in isolation does not support. It is useful, at this point, to examine the design of the Dobell poems free from these biases.

The path that Traherne charts is not a linear one: the Dobell poems defy any attempt to correlate them tidily with a series of steps in time towards a final outcome. Throughout, the poems constantly both look back to the Estate of Innocence and forward to a mature vision, subsuming past and future time within the eternity of a single moment.⁹ It is possible, however, to abstract the principal elements of the process and locate them generally within sections of the Dobell group.

The four opening poems--"The Salutation," "Wonder," "Eden", and "Innocence"--present a remembered experience of childhood. This involves the speaker's putting himself in the condition of the child and equating it with that of the unfallen Adam. The speaker summons into the present his childhood apprehensions of the world and merges them imaginatively with the vision of prelapsarian Eden:

Only what Adam in his first Estate,
 Did I behold;
 Hard Silver and Drie Gold
 As yet lay under Ground; my Blessed Fate
 Was more acquainted with the Old
 And Innocent Delights, which he did see
 In his Original Simplicities.
 ("Eden," 29-35)

At the same time, in apparent contradiction to this simple and sensual perception of the external world, is a

seemingly unchildlike introspection:

A Serious Meditation did employ
My Soul within, which taken up with Joy
Did seem no outward thing to note, but
 flie
All Objects that do feed the Eye.
(*"Innocence,"* 13-16)

This introspective mode becomes dominant in the succeeding group of eleven poems, which describe what seems to be a rejection of externals and a withdrawal of self into inward contemplation. The accidental and impermanent attributes of the material world are left behind in the soul's flight to a realm of pure spirit. The process of spiritual empowerment through retreat from the world's contingencies begins with *"The Preparative,"* which continues the personal, experiential mode of the *"innocence"* group. Then follow several more abstract, discursive poems, like *"Dunnesse"* and *"Silence,"* which extol the virtues of the contemplative life. This section culminates in the poems *"My Spirit"* and *"Fulnesse."* These signal a return to the experiential mode and use Traherne's characteristic sphere/eye metaphor to present a state of consciousness paradoxically combining meditation on the inner self with the infinite extension of spiritual sight to encompass all worlds and times.

The next group of four poems, from *"Nature"* to *"The Designe,"* concentrates on how the soul, thus prepared, is disposed to seek felicity, and how its operations easily and naturally lead it to realize its greatness as heir of God's

eternal kingdom. Again, there is a culmination of this process in the fourth poem, "The Designe," where personified Eternity acts upon the soul again to make manifest the divine truth that was "In Infancy and Tender Youth,/ So Obvious to/ Our easy view." (23-25)

In the ten poems from "The Person" to "Lov," the perspective shifts again. The speaker is now ready to re-engage with the world, having acquired the power and clarity of mind and spirit to see the physical creation as part of God's vital and enduring design instead of comprising partial, limited and transient objects. He realizes in "The Person" and "The Estate" that glorying in his own body and its faculties of sense is part of the means of enjoying God's treasures:

They ought, my God, to be the Pipes,
And Conduits of thy Prais.
Mens Bodies were not made for Stripes,
Nor any thing but Joys.
("The Person," 29-32)

In the five poems that follow, this theme of enjoying the world evolves into the idea of reciprocity between God's and man's actions in a harmonious universe. "The Circulation," "The Demonstration," "The Anticipation," "The Recovery," and "Another" are all concerned with the principle that God's supreme gift of the Creation is returned by man's celebration of and thanksgiving for that gift. The poem "Lov" is an ecstatic climax to this sequence, where the expression of mutual love between the

speaker and his God verges on the erotic:

His Ganymede! His Life! His Joy!
 Or he comes down to me, or takes me up
 That I might be his Boy,
 And fill, and taste, and give, and Drink
 the Cup
 (31-34)

"Lov" is a transitional poem leading to the final stage of spiritual progress: that of moving from "things" to "thoughts." Four poems with the title "Thoughts" and numbered I, II, III and IV, alternate with four other poems, one untitled, and the others, in the manner of "Lov," having the abstract titles "Blisse," "Desire," and "Goodnesse." Here Traherne shows how the regenerated soul, having exercised its capacity to love God and to enjoy the world properly, is able to re-create itself and the world through the power of thought. Thoughts are infinite in their extension in both time and space:

So can they even in the Brest,
 Rove ore the World with Libertie:
 Can Enter Ages, Present be
 In Any Kingdom, into Bosoms see.
 Thoughts, Thoughts can come to
 Things, and view,
 What Bodies cant approach unto.
 They Know no Bar, Denial, Limit, Wall:
 But have a Liberty to look on all.
 ("Thoughts I," 65-72)

It is the transcendent nature of thoughts that makes them the "Engines of Felicitie," by which man can "the Joys possess/ Of Yesterdays-yet-present Blessedness" ("Thoughts I," 13-14). Thus they are the means of restoring man to the estate of the child/Adam, and they are explicitly so

described in "[Ye hidden Nectars]":

Ye Pleasant Thoughts! O how that Sun Divine
 Appears to Day which I did see
 So Sweetly then to Shine.
 Even in my very Infancy! (11-14)

These last poems, then, complete the process of creating a paradise within the mind which began in "Innocence" with the child's "serious meditation." The power to be present in all places and times through the operations of the mind means, indeed, that Adam's blessed estate was, and is, ever accessible to one who rejects the limited and the contingent and embraces the infinite and eternal. The final poem in Dobell, "Goodnesse," makes it clear that Traherne believes this possibility to be open to all, and not dependent on special knowledge or election. Indeed, it is essential to the poet's own felicity that others share in it and, fittingly, this last poem links the personal and private spiritual experience with a broader public intention. In this way, the poet through his creative act duplicates God's plenitude. In the final two stanzas, the "Bliss of other Men" that is the poet's delight becomes one with the other glories of the Creation, and is symbolized by the sensuous image of ripening vines:

The Soft and Swelling Grapes that on Their
 Vines
 Receiv the Lively Warmth that Shines
 Upon them, ripen there for me...

 Their Eys are Stars, or more Divine:
 And Brighter Shine
 Their Lips are soft and Swelling Grapes,
 their Tongues

A Quire of Blessed and Harmonious Songs.
 Their Bosoms fraught with Love
 Are Heavens all Heavens above
 And being Images of GOD, they are
 The Highest Joys his Goodness did prepare.
 (49-51, 63-70)

The discussion so far describes rather than accounts for the overall structure of the Dobell poems, a structure which starts with a recollected childhood experience of the world; shifts to a rejection of the material and contingent; returns to a renewed perception of the world and enjoyment of its treasures; and finally culminates in a communion with God and all His works throughout all time. The critics, with the marked exception of Seelig (see pages 1-2), have generally looked for the key to interpretation in existing meditative forms. Superficially, these forms can often be imposed on the structure of the poems, but they do not accord with their actual content and internal dynamics.

CHAPTER IV

The Dobell Poems and the Absent Christ

It is remarkable that in Traherne's spiritual experience, both as described in Dobell and in the third book of the Centuries of Meditations, references to Christ as redeemer and mediator are conspicuously absent, and that this omission has apparently been overlooked by the critics. Yet, except for his insistence on the necessity of joy in a life that was frequently conceived of as a "vale of tears," Traherne's work as a whole is consistent with Christian orthodoxy. It is only by examining his spiritual experience in isolation that the reader begins to suspect that Traherne's orthodoxy was achieved after a not inconsiderable intellectual struggle.

The Dobell poems are an account of Traherne's personal religious path, a path that was not limited by, and possibly not consistent with, the Christian world view or the Christian path to salvation--surely a problem for a devout clergyman. His brother Philip seemed to find the difference troubling, since, in his manuscript, the poems are often modified to reflect a more orthodox position.

While Adam's role is significant in the Dobell poems, his fall is not. In fact, Adam is not actually mentioned as having sinned at all. He is a metaphor for man in the unfallen state, and thus provides the archetypal correlative

for Traherne's metaphor of the innocent child:

Those Things which first his Eden did adorn,
 My Infancy
 Did Crown. ("Eden," 36-38)

The early poems in the sequence do allude to the advent of sin in the world, but this sin is not ascribed to Adam. Sin is a condition that lies in the future of the child figure and is as yet unknown to him, both in relation to his own life or to the history of man:

I knew not that there was a Serpents Sting,
 Whose Poyson shed
 On Men, did overspread
 The World. ("Eden," 8-10)

In spite of the Eden-related metaphor, sin is not depicted as an act of disobedience to God, or, for that matter as a specific wrongdoing. It is described mainly in terms of its consequences, which tend to be psychological rather than moral:

Harsh ragged Objects ...
 Oppressions Tears and Cries,
 Sins, Griefs, Complaints, Dissentions, Weeping Eys
 ("Wonder," 25-27)

As opposed to the Estate of Innocence, which is presented as natural, whole and undivided, sin is variously portrayed in images suggesting artifice, fragmentation and lifelessness:

Cursd and Devisd Proprieties
 With Envy, Avarice
 And Fraud, those Feinds that Spoyl even
 Paradice,
 Fled from the Splendor of mine Eys.
 And so did Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds,

I dreamd not ought of those,
But wanderd over all mens Grounds,
And found Repose. (49-56)

There are further references showing the fallen state to be a concomitant of the mistaken interests and goals of human society. In "Eden," the objects of greed and the hurly-burly involved in their pursuit are captured in a series of images:

Vain Costly Toys,
Swearing and Roaring Boys,
Shops, Markets, Taverns, Coach-^{es} were
unshewn... (23-25)

Finally, there is a revealing passage in stanza 4 of "Innocence" that shows Traherne, if not to have rejected the doctrine of original sin, at least to have set it aside as having no practical significance for man's attainment of felicity. The Adam/child speaker says:

Whether it be that Nature is so pure,
And Custom only vicious; or that sure
God did by Miracle the Guilt remov,
And make my Soul to feel his Lov,

So Early: Or that 'twas one Day,
Wher in this Happiness I found;
Whose Strength and Brightness so do Ray,
That still it seemeth to Surround.

What ere it is, it is a Light
So Endless unto me
That I a World of true De'light
Did then and to this Day do see.
(37-48)

The implication here is that the intellectual arguments over the causes of sin--whether sin originates in society (the view Traherne seems to favour) or in man's inherently corrupt nature (the orthodox Christian view)--become

irrelevant in the face of the transcendent experience of God that is permanently available to the speaker. It is interesting to note the differences between Traherne's version of the first stanza and that appearing in his brother Philip's manuscript.

Whether it be that Nature is so pure,
 And Custom only vicious; or to cure
Its Depravation, God did Guilt remove
To fix me in a Sense of Joy...
 (37-40, emphasis added)

Philip seems to be intent on diffusing his brother's focus on the miracle of God's removing guilt in order to emphasize the state of man's depravation which God must "cure"--perhaps an echo of the God-as-physician motif that runs through the writings of Donne, Vaughan and others who hold to traditional original sin theology.

Just as the Dobell poems as a group displace the Fall from the pivotal position it occupies in the Christian myth, so too they bring the world of Edenic innocence to the foreground and set it in the frame of eternity. The first four poems--"The Salutation," "Wonder," "Eden," and "Innocence"--set the stage for the complex exploration in subsequent poems of various modes of spiritual awareness. They evoke a pristine and guiltless state that the speaker enjoyed in his own infancy but, in doing so, they identify this state with that of Adam at the Creation.

There are two effects of this merging of child and Adam as recollected by the adult Traherne. One is to negate the

historical consequences of the Fall, showing the speaker as infant to be as guiltless as Adam was. The second is to project the speaker into a reliving of the Edenic state of bliss, implying that it is directly accessible to the person who perceives God and Creation rightly. Both these effects, in terms of the speaker's own experience, militate against the need for a Christ as redeemer.

The first poem, "The Salutation," describes the emergence of a sentient self from the silence and emptiness of "non-time." The simplicity of diction belies a complex manipulation of images which is intended to recreate the developing consciousness of the infant, for whom perceiving sense and perceived object are all part of a unified experience of the world:

I that so long
 Was nothing from Eternitie
 Did little think such Joys as Ear or Tongue,
 To Celebrate or See:
 Such Sounds to hear, such Hands to feel, such
 Feet,
 Beneath the Skies, on such Ground to meet.
 (13-18)

But from the point of view of the child, it is the world which is new-born. He enters into a place of "New burnisht Joys," full of "Strange Glories" and "Strange Treasures." This duality of perspective has the effect of merging the child's birth with the original Creation. As God formed the world out of chaos and nothingness, so the child has awoken from where he has for so long lain, "Beneath the Dust in a Chaos." Temporal boundaries are

obliterated, and the child finds himself, as it were, a witness at the Creation. Moreover, as the use of present tense verbs in the poem implies, this experience is continuously re-enacted in the mature speaker's understanding of God's purpose in conceiving the world throughout eternity:

Long time before
I in my Mothers Womb was born,
A GOD preparing did this Glorious Store,
The World for me adorne.
Into this Eden so Divine and fair,
So Wide and Bright, I com his Son and Heir.
(31-36)

It is noteworthy that, in Philip's version, the stanza just quoted has been omitted altogether. Given the general trend of Philip's alterations, that is, towards the orthodox and conventional, it seems likely that something in this stanza jarred his sense of propriety. It may have been, as Margoliouth suggests, that he objected to the reference to "A GOD," which implies the possibility of other gods (II, 338, note on stanza 6). Perhaps, as well, he was troubled by the seeming egotism of the idea that God has prepared the Creation especially for the speaker.¹⁰

Traherne is not alone in modifying the orthodox Christian view of the Fall of Man. But his seeing the Fall as an individual matter for each human being, from which each human being has the ability to recover, is more radical than that of the Cambridge Platonists, who held that, after the Fall, man needed Christ as mediator (see page 2).

Logically, Traherne's view diminished or even eliminated the need for Christ.

If Traherne's personal religious experience was marked by the displacement of Christ from the central role of mediator and redeemer, then one would expect that displacement to be reflected in the poetic rendering of his experience in the Dobell poems. And indeed it turns out that Christ is mentioned only once directly and once indirectly in 37 poems.

The direct reference comes in the penultimate poem, "Thoughts IV." That the figure of Christ is present in this important culminating poem, and nowhere else, invites a detailed examination of the meaning of this reference within the poem's larger message.

The poem begins by showing that thoughts have the power to carry us to the next world as it is conventionally pictured in Christian terms. God sits enthroned in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, surrounded by hosts of angels and the communion of saints: "Thousands of thousands Kneel before his face/ And all his Benefits with Joy embrace" (21-22).

At line 23, however, the perspective shifts from God, the object of worship in the afterlife, to God the immanent creator of the glories of this world:

His Goodness makes all Creatures for his Pleasure,
And makes itself his Creatures chiefest Treasure
Almighty Power doth it self employ
In all its Works to make itself the Joy

Of all his Hosts, and to compleat the Bliss
Which Omnipresent Eternal is. (23-28)

The implication of "compleat" is that the projection of one's thoughts into the heavenly world (or the world to come) is not all that is involved in the attainment of felicity and that, indeed, there is an additional means which God, through His endless bounty and power to create all worlds within an "Endless sphere," affords to man while man is here on earth. At line 35, Traherne puts the question directly: "What hinders then, but we in heav'n may be/ Even here on Earth did we but rightly see?" (35-36). Had he had an orthodox Christian viewpoint, Traherne would probably have referred here to Christ, as the means to happiness. But he does not.

Traherne then invokes the story in II Kings 6, 17 of Elisha's act of opening up the eyes of his servant to the vision of the fiery chariots and horsemen sent by God to intervene against the threat from the Syrian armies. This resonates with the earlier reference at line 3 to Elijah's fiery chariot translating him heavenwards, a symbol of the soul winging its way to the celestial realms. Elisha was Elijah's son, but his work, as the Old Testament account shows, consisted of a series of miracles attesting to God's actions not in heaven but here in the world. The biblical allusion at this point in the poem thus counterbalances the initial focus on the supernal with a recognition of God's earthly blessings.

God's power as expressed through the abundance of his Creation is then summarized in lines 42-70 by a long recitation of the glories of nature, catalogued in typical Trahernian fashion:

The Stable Earth which we beneath behold,
Is far more precious than if made of Gold.
Fowls Fishes Beasts, Trees Herbs and precious
flowers,
Seeds Spices Gums and Aromatick Bowers
(45-48)

Seen in the true light of eternity, these treasures that "All in his Omnipresence still/ As Living waters from his Throne they trill" (67-68), become the very means by which the soul is exalted. In this transcendent vision of the world, men are themselves transformed into cherubin, illuminating every part of the universe with the thoughts that God's love has inspired. Paradise is achievable on earth, and, as far as the poem is concerned, Christ so far has played no part.

It is at this point that the reference to Christ comes:

We drink our fill, and take their Beauty in,
While Jesus blood refines the Soul from Sin.
His Grievous Cross is a Supreme Delight,
And of all heavenly ones the greatest Sight.
(75-78)

The reference seems out of place here, as if awkwardly interpolated. Nothing in the sequence of ideas presented to this point necessitates the introduction of Christ as an agent of redemption. The theme has had entirely to do with the capacity of man's thoughts to unite with God, and this capacity is implied as being sufficient to achieving bliss.

Traherne may have realized, however, that a complete account could not omit the most central Christian symbol. The unclear logic of the conjunction "while" in line 76, which attempts to link the idea of the refining of the soul by Jesus' blood with the preceding notion in which man is already in a state of achieved communion with God, suggests such a difficulty. Moreover, the idea of the "Grievous Cross" as the greatest of all heavenly sights pulls the reader back to the earlier vision of paradise in the next world, and does not seem to belong here. The lines themselves do not suggest that Christ is God, the second person of the Trinity. The use of the name "Jesus," rather than "Christ," emphasizes his human, as distinct from his divine, aspect, and the word "refines" is less powerful than, for example, "redeems."

Finally, line 79, "His Throne is neer," seems simply to pick up the theme of God's omnipresence that had been developed by line 74. The "his" in that line refers logically to the "deity" as described before line 74, rather than to the Christ in line 76. The poem ends by affirming the soul's ability to discover that all God's treasures lie before our eyes in the here and now, and that the pure soul, transformed into a "thought," can attend upon God's throne in this life as fully as in the next.

The indirect reference to Christ, if it is one, is less easy to interpret. It occurs in the poem "Another," one of

the group in the last one-third of the collection that is concerned with the reciprocity of God's and man's love. The poem as a whole is strange, striking a sombre note in contrast to the joyous affirmation in "The Recovery," which precedes it, and the even more rapturous outpourings in "Lov," which follows. It presents an uncharacteristically bleak view of the individual's stature and capacities, and it is the only poem in the collection that dwells on what can be inferred to be man's innately sinful nature:

We cold and Careless are, and scarcely think
 Upon the Glorious Spring whereat we Drink.
 Did he not lov us, we would be content.
 We Wretches are Indifferent! (9-12)

Having chastised humanity for its indifference to God, the speaker says,

Set forth thy self to thy Extent,
 And all the Glory of his Passion prize,
 Who for Thee lives, who for Thee Dies (17-20)

The word "Passion" in the poem literally refers to the love God feels to human beings. But the image of the crucified Christ may have been subconsciously introduced as the concomitant to the idea of inherently sinful humanity, which, rather than the image of Christ, is the real anomaly of this poem. This association of ideas has several parallels in Century Three at least, as Chapter V will show.

There are points in the Dobell poems where other figures or symbols appear in the role that Christ might normally be expected to occupy. In the Platonic scheme of "The Designe," for example, Traherne replaces God the Father

and God the Son with the personified abstraction Eternity and its "daughter," Truth. Instead of the difficult passage of repentance and self-denial leading to salvation through Christ, Traherne here promises

That being Truth, and Fair and Easy too,
 While it on all doth Shine,
 We might by it becom Divine
 Being led to Woo
 The Thing we view,
 As chast Virgins Early with it joyn,
 That with it we might likewise Shine.
 (37-45)

Such examples, together with the absence or downplaying of other traditional elements of the Christian paradigm, suggest that in the Dobell collection at least, Traherne was attempting to conceive of a radically different approach to the attainment of spiritual fulfilment.

In Dobell, Traherne, as a clergyman, shows surprisingly little interest in the Church as a community of believers. There are only two mentions of churches in Dobell, and neither accords the Church, as institution, any place of significance.

In "Silence," Traherne says that Adam in his innocence performed acts that "carry all the Excellence," and was not concerned with "Outward Busy Acts," that is, "meaner Matters of a Second or lower Sphere" (8-10). He includes among these:

Building of Churches, giving to the Poor
 In Dust and Ashes lying on the floor
 Administering of Justice, Preaching Peace...
 (11-13)

Because "neither Ignorance,/ Nor Poverty, nor Sickness
did advance/ Their Banner in the World, till Sin came in,"
Traherne asserts, these endeavours in the social and
religious sphere were "occasiond all by Sin" (17-20).

Traherne's position would be correct and conventional
were the poem not in Dobell, where sin is not defined in
terms of Adam's fall, but in terms of individual choice. In
the conventional view, had Adam not fallen, there would have
been no need for the institutions of church and society,
which strive to maintain order and well-being in an
imperfect world. But the phrase "occasiond all by Sin"
implies that these institutions are part and parcel of the
sinful world, rather than a response to it. Philip's
emendation of line 20 suggests that he was troubled by its
connotation. He replaces "these therfore were occasiond all
by Sin" with "these to be needful did begin," leaving no
doubt that man's "Outward Busy Acts" exist as a necessary
counteractive force against the "Oppressions Tears and
Cries" that resulted from the Fall of Man.

Indeed, Philip's alteration of line 8 indicates his
difficulty with the underlying premise of the poem as a
whole. Thomas's assertion that "Those Acts, which Adam in
his Innocence/ Performed, carry all the Excellence" becomes,
in Philip's version, "Those Acts which Adam in his
Innocence/ Was to perform, had all the Excellence." The
change from the completed action of "performed" to the

uncompleted future of "was to perform" is significant, as is the weakening and change in tense of the verb "carry" to "had." Philip's wording implies that Adam's excellence was past, and furthermore that the good things that he was supposed to carry out he did not do because of his fall--in other words, the conventional Christian view. For Thomas, Adam's excellence is still valid and attainable in his own contemporary world. In other words, Adam's innocence is the model, and the "Outward Busy Acts" (including churches and good works) are part of the Fall, "occasioned by Sin". Philip's changes remove any subtle impropriety in such an idea.

It is noteworthy, though, that changes of this kind suggest that Philip (another clergyman) was troubled by the possibility of his brother's being perceived as unorthodox. Unlike most of the critics, Philip does not try to explain away what might be perceived as unorthodox. He changes it to reflect a more acceptable position.

Churches draw a passing reference in one other of the Dobell poems, "Speed." In this poem, Traherne speaks of the glory of "Useful" and "Precious Things" shown to him at his birth. He is inundated with "True Living Wealth" that crowns his soul and feeds his body. As a result, he is as "High and Great" as a king:

All other Things were mine.
The World, my House, the Creatures were my Goods,

Fields, Mountains, Valleys, Woods,
Floods, Cities, Churches, Men, for me did shine.
(16-19)

While his list may not be in any particular order of precedence, it is clear that the idea of the church has no greater significance than any other idea. The church is simply part of the earthly world to whose beauty he is alive.

By contrast, the poems that Thomas excluded from Dobell, but which appear in Philip's manuscript, mention churches several times. Generally, as in Dobell, these references are to churches as physical structures with their external trappings, and not as a spiritual body of believers beyond that of being a place of congregation. For example, in the first part of the poem "Churches" the speaker waxes:

Those stately Structures which on Earth I
view
To GOD erected, whether Old or New;
His Sacred temples which the World adorn,
Much more than Mines of ore or Fields of Corn,
My Soul Delight: How do they pleas mine Ey
When they are fill'd with Christian Family! (1-6).

In the few places where Traherne is concerned with the Church as spiritual community he adopts a universalizing perspective. In the second part of "Churches" he laments, first, that there is not one "sole Altar" (16) encompassing all people, and second, that despite the ubiquity of churches in his own country, "we/ Those blest Abodes neglected see" (39-41).

The pious yearning for a single faith, coupled with

regret at the indifference of nominal Christians is a commonplace and may seem trite, (though, in the absence of Thomas's own version, whether the triteness is due to Philip's intrusions cannot be ascertained). Nevertheless, if Traherne's private faith had not found fulfilment within Christianity's limits, as the Dobell poems suggest, this poem, whose ideal church transcends both the Christian era and Christ himself, is revealing:

Were there but one alone
 Wherin we might approach his Throne
 One only where we should accepted be,

 we then should see
 A numerous Host approaching it,
 Rejoicing in the Benefit:
 The Queen of Sheba com
 With all her glorious Train,
 The Pope from Rome,
 The Kings beyond the Main...("Churches II," 1-12)

It may be inferred from the Dobell poems that Traherne's spiritual experience, which brought him such happiness, transcended both the tribal and doctrinal limits of Christianity. In addition, it is clear that the philosophy underlying the nature of his quest, at the time that he made it, does not conform to key doctrines essential to a Christian. Paradoxically, perhaps, to twentieth-century eyes, his achievement of felicity intensified his commitment to give his life to God in the Christian fold.

CHAPTER V

Echoes of Dobell in Century III

As the previous chapter has shown, the virtual absence of Christ from the Dobell poems flows naturally from Traherne's attenuated view of the Fall, and in particular from his position that individuals are completely capable of spiritual regeneration. Any human being, at any moment, has the innate capacity to achieve union with God. Hence, the need for Christ's historical sacrifice and atonement, and the need for individuals to repent and realize the meaning of Christ's role, cease to occupy the central position that they occupy in orthodox Christianity.

The Centuries of Meditations, written at about the same time as the Dobell poems, fall, as one would expect, into a Christian framework. The work is both private and public. It was written for other eyes, those of Susanna Hopton, with whose spiritual community Traherne was connected during his Credinhill period. The context of their relationship was that of their shared Christianity. At the same time, Mrs. Hopton was a close friend with whom Traherne was prepared to share precise details of his own religious experience.

Century III, as a whole, is written in autobiographical mode and provides the context in which Traherne's focussed spiritual experience--the realization of felicity--takes place. His general stance is that of a Christian divine

sharing details of his early spiritual history with a friend. "These Liquid Clear Satisfactions were the Emanations of the Highest reason, but not achieved till a long time afterwards" (III, 22).

In Century III, Traherne describes the manner of his achievement of felicity, casting in autobiographical mode what, in the Dobell poems, he presents metaphysically. The specific passages dealing with his experience of interior illumination and joy are marked by the same qualities as the Dobell poems. Like the poems, these passages describe a process that is carried forward on the strength of the individual's own internally generated desire for spiritual truth. They are seemingly not dependent on the action of prevenient grace through Christ. Indeed, Christ's absence in these passages, once observed, is perhaps even more conspicuous than it is in the poems, since the surroundings, superficially at least, are conventional.

By its nature, therefore, neither Traherne's experience of felicity nor his confirming and extending of that experience through divine study require him to pass through the stages of redemption in the traditional Christian paradigm. "Nothing," he says is "wanting to my Felicity but mine own Perfection" (III, 30). Having reached that state, he is able to see God's creation from the divine, and eternal, perspective: "As Hair to the Whole World alone, I was to walk in it, as in a Strange Marvellous and Amiable

Possession" (III, 30). Moreover, he can derive happiness even from the "Disorders" around him: "I also should have a Wisdom, whereby I could draw Order out of Confusion."

(III, 31)

This is quite different from the threefold way of Bonaventure, to which, according to Louis Martz, the Centuries of Meditations correspond. Martz describes the first part of the Bonaventuran journey of the mind as proceeding "through the creatures of the external world." It was essential, however, that this stage be preceded by desire kindled by Christ, since the way to God lies "only through the most burning love of the Crucified" (56).

While approximately the first two-thirds of Century Three generally describe Traherne's spiritual progress from infancy, the process by which he sought and achieved felicity, that is, his Pauline conversion equivalent, forms only a small part of the autobiographical segment, sections 27-35. Other sections, however, provide relevant comment on the event.

His quest for felicity is prompted by his "observing all things to be rude and superfluous here on Earth" (III, 27). Always intensely spiritual, Traherne earlier describes how his development led him to this position. After the customs of men eclipsed the "first Light which shined in my Infancy in its Primitive and Innocent Clarity" (III, 7), he makes the first tentative inquiries that guide

him, in youth, to an intuitive apprehension of God's infinite greatness and love. It is an awareness of the absence of knowledge of God and the cosmos that is at the root of his youthful alienation, rather than a consciousness of his sinfulness. And it is the intellectual thirst for that knowledge, and not an emotional recognition of his condition as fallen man, that prepares him for his spiritual experience.

Happiness, for Traherne, is an essential part of religious experience, and he indicates that this view was formed when he was a child. He says of his youthful self, "I was som times tho seldom visited and inspired with New and more vigorous desires after that Bliss which Nature Whispered and suggested to me. Evry New Thing quickened my Curiosity and raised my Expectation" (III, 22). Again, listening to stories of "any New Kingdom beyond the seas, the Light and Glory of it pleased" him (III, 24), and he received news "with Greediness and Delight, because my Expectation was awakend with som Hope that my Happiness and the Thing I wanted was concealed in it" (III, 25).

As a child, he had found joy in the Bible, and his pleasure came from Old Testament accounts of the "land of Canaan, the Israelites entering into it, the ancient Glory of the Amorites, their Peace and Riches, their Cities Houses Vines and Fig trees, the long prosperity of their Kings, their Milk and Honie, their slaughter and destruction, with

the Joys and Triumphs of God's people, all of which Entered into me and GOD among them" (III, 24). The story of Christ is not mentioned among those named as stirring his childish imagination, although, commenting on the early impressions he had received, he adds "Tidings from a far Country brings us our Salvation. In Jury was Jesus killed and from Jerusalem the Gospel came" (III, 25). Reservations about the centrality of Christ may be partly revealed in the next sentence: "I was very Confident that evry Kingdom contained like Wonders and Causes of Joy tho' that was the fountain of them" (III, 25). Christ is the source, he concedes, but equally marvellous events happen everywhere.¹¹

As he grew up, his need to find felicity intensified. At Oxford, he was intoxicated by the new knowledge made available to him. The "Glorious Secrets and Glorious Persons" were beyond his imaginings. "I saw into the Nature of the Sea, the Heavens, the Sun, the Moon and Stars, the Elements, Minerals and Vegetables. All which appeared like the Kings daughter, All Glorious within" (III, 36). Spiritual felicity still eluded him, however. He sensed that "Some things were Defectiv" (III, 37). The objects of his study were "Aliena, which we ought to have studied as our own Enjoyments. We studied to inform our Knowledg, but knew not for what End we studied" (III, 37). In Traherne's view, there should have been "a Tutor that did profess to Teach Felicity" (III, 37).

It was not until later, "being seated among silent Trees" with "all my Time in mine own Hands," that he was able to pursue his quest "whatever it cost me, in Search of Happiness, and to Satisfy the burning Thirst which Nature had Enkindled in me from my Youth" (III, 46).¹²

It is clear from this passage that Traherne set out to find God. His spiritual experience did not burst on him unasked for and unannounced, as with St. Paul. In keeping with his temperament and learning, he proceeded rationally, though he writes:

I knew not where to begin or End; nor what Objects to chuse, upon which most Profitably I might fix my Contemplation....I made it my Prayer to GOD Almighty, that He, whose Eys are open to all Things, would guid me to the fairest and Divinest" (III, 52).

It might have been expected that, for a Christian, the obvious object of contemplation would be the Cross of Christ, but this, apparently, does not occur to Traherne. Instead, he writes, "I saw myself like some Traveller...resolved to spend his Days visiting Strange Places" (III, 52).

At first, his quest was unsuccessful. "I thought the Ways of Felicity to be known only among the Holy Angels: and that unless I could receive information from them, I could never be Happy. This Thirst hung upon me a long time" (III, 27). He does not seem to think of Christ as the way to spiritual happiness. He felt, instead, "a most infinit Desire of a Book from Heaven." Traherne then realizes that

God "had sent the Book I wanted before I was Born" (III, 27). The book, of course, is the Bible:

You will not believ what a World of Joy this one Satisfaction and Pleasure brought to me. Thenceforth I thought that the Light of Heaven was in this World: I saw it Possible, and very Probable, that I was infinitely Beloved of Almighty God, the Delights of Paradise were round about me, Heaven and Earth were open to me, all Riches were little Things, this one Pleasure being so Great that it exceeded all the Joys of Eden (III, 27).

It is important to note that, since the Bible was not new to Traherne, the essential Christian truths contained in it must not have previously provided the keys to his happiness. In fact, having rediscovered the Bible, he needs to put it to the test in accordance with scholarly method. "This put me upon two things: upon Enquiring into the Matter contained in the Bible, and into the Maner wherein it came to me" (III, 29). It is only after he has satisfied himself on both these concerns that he can feel the joy expressed in section 27.

Traherne had no difficulties with the "Matter" in the Bible. He found it convincing and exhilarating. "All the World being adorned with Miracles Prophets Patriarchs Apostles Martyrs, Revelations from Heaven, Lively Examples, Holy Souls, Divine Affairs, for my Enjoyment" (III, 34). Christ may be implied in the "Apostles" and "Martyrs", but as a central figure, he is absent.

His concern about "maner" relates to "the Maner of God's Revealing Himself unto Mankind" (III, 35), and by this

he means, God's revealing himself not through Christ, but rather through the Bible, which, as has been noted, he does not directly perceive as focussed on Christ. It concerned him that God had not "Ascertained me more carefully that the Bible was his Book from Heaven" (III, 32). He would, he thought, have been more readily persuaded "if the Angels in Heaven had brought it" (III, 32). In other words, his rediscovery of the Bible ought to have been attended by more display. He becomes satisfied with the "maner" when he argues that "Had it been revealed at no other Time, God had now only been Good unto me, whereas He hath Manifested His Love in all Ages, and been Carefully and most Wisely Revealing it from the Beginning of the World" (III, 33). Christ, and the need for Christ, are again absent, as it becomes clear that Traherne's attainment of felicity through the Bible hinges on the universality of biblical truths throughout time rather than on the importance of a single historical act of redemption.

While Christ Himself is minimized in the conversion process, Traherne's vision of himself united with God is, of course, rooted in Christian tradition. He says that he "found that there was an Eternal God who loved me infinitely, that I was his Son, that I was to overcome Death, and to live forever, that he Created the World for me, that I was to Reign in his Throne, and to inherit all Things" (III, 29). In spite of these Christian echoes, Christ, as the second

Adam, as Redeemer and Mediator has not proved to be, at the time of his search for felicity, either effective or necessary.

Traherne gives a hint of his problem in a discussion of Christ's passion among the other elements of his faith. He says that he was able to believe in these elements "by the General Credit they had obtained in the World" (III, 54). This "general credit" is important to him because the events which make up the Christian story are remote in time. "For the Ways of God were transeunt¹³ things, they were past and gon; our Saviors Sufferings were in one particular Obscure Place, the Laws of God were no Object of the Ey, but only found in the Minds of Men" (III, 54). The historical truth of Christian doctrine, however, is not in and of itself sufficient to fulfil Traherne's quest:

As yet I did not see the Wisdom and Depths of Knowledge, the Clear Principles, and Certain Evidences wherby the Wise and Holy, the Ancients and the Learned that were abroad in the World knew these Things, but was led to them only by the fame they had vulgarly received. Howbeit I believed that there were unspeakable Mysteries contained in them, and though they were Generly talkt of their value was unknown. (54)

Traherne's Book from Heaven showed him the whole world. "Had it been revealed in no other Way, all the World had been Dark and Empty round about me: Whereas now it is my Joy and my Delight and Treasure, being full of Knowledge, Light and Glory." This world is his guide to felicity. He knows God, not through Christ, but by "the Universality of His Lov

unto Mankind; and the Perfection of His wisdom to evry Person" (III, 33).

His reaction to the mystic experience is made clear. Even if God had been revealed to him alone, "I must have gon abroad and Published this faith to others, both in Lov to God, and Lov to Men" (III, 33). Traherne had been granted a glimpse of a Creation that transcended Christianity, but his experience had to be used and propagated within the Christian context, the only one that was available to him, or that would occur to him.

The Centuries of Meditations, themselves, as works of Christian devotion, confirm his commitment. They do, however, show the uneasy coexistence of dissonant ideas, some of which have been noticed by the critics.

Seelig, for example, alluding to a meditation on the crucified Christ (I, 60), comments that it is a "strangely unemotional, one is tempted to say oddly insensitive, view of the Crucifixion" (153). Martz, in reference to the same, and surrounding, sections, writes that "Traherne's approach to the Cross remains theoretical and distant....he insists that we must see the Cross - but as something there, not here" (63).

Martz goes on to show that in the following sections, Traherne does describe the Cross as "here", but he notes that Traherne "declares the difficulty of proceeding in this ancient way: the wounds of Christ...cannot in themselves

arouse an adequate sense of God's love. And in the very middle of this favourite theme of the Counter Reformation, Traherne abruptly turns away from the Cross to consider the Creation" (64). It is clear that Traherne is here showing evidence of his old trouble with Christ's sufficiency, and that he must, as usual, turn to his old sources to achieve the desired object. Martz resolves the problem he has found, and so did Traherne, in Martz's eyes, because "the Cross becomes the ligature of all Creation" (66).

Traherne describes the Cross-Creation-Cross process again in Century II, 6:

"How can I believe that He gave his Son to die for me, who having Power to do otherwise gave me nothing but Rags and Cottages? But when I see once that He gave Heaven and Earth to me, and made me in His Image to enjoy then in His Similitude, I can easily believe that He gave His Son also for me."

The words "gave Heaven and Earth to me" echo Traherne's views on the gifts of God to the pure infant, his recognition of which is the heart of his achievement of felicity in Dobeil. In other words, the passage says that Traherne could find Christ only after he had found God.

As so often with Traherne, the impression initially created by the passage differs from its meaning. A first reading suggests the orthodox view that the gift of Christ was beyond price - too valuable to have been given to Traherne. The present reading is confirmed, however, in Century II, 3: "Till you see that the World is yours, you

cannot weigh the Greatness of Sin, nor the Misery of your fall, nor Prize your Redeemers Lov." Again, joy in God through Creation precedes recognition of the value of Christ.

In the above, Traherne hints at his method of integrating his religious experience with the principal tenet of his faith. Yet, somehow, the magnitude of his problem with Christ has escaped critical observation. The reason may be that Traherne deliberately obscures his lack of orthodoxy, though he makes no attempt to conceal it. The evidence is there to be found, but, as the above paragraph shows, the first impression of his words can differ from their meaning.

As discussed in Chapter IV, the one direct reference to Christ in the Dobell poems seems to have been awkwardly interpolated. A similar awkward interpolation in Century III suggests that Traherne could have inserted the passages expressly to leaven what might otherwise have been perceived more readily as unorthodox.

Sections 46 and 52 both begin "When I came unto the Country" and describe Traherne's quest for felicity. Logically, they follow each other, though, because of the intervening sections, there is some repetition in section 52, presumably to refresh the reader's memory.¹⁴

The inserted sections provide Century III's most direct references to sin and to Christ's redemptive role. The

emphasis on sin, particularly, is at odds with Traherne's view in the Dobell poems of his own spiritual condition. The passages, consisting of three poems and two short prose paragraphs, are marked by a vehemence of tone that is entirely out of keeping with the sections that precede and follow them. Traherne denounces sin and wallows in self-castigation in a manner that seems almost bathetic:

Sin!
O only fatal Woe,
That makst me Sad and Mourning go!
(III, 49)

He minces no words in asserting the necessity for Christ in section 51:

I cannot meet with Sin, but it Kils me, and tis only by Jesus Christ that I can Kill it and Escape....One Sin is a Dreadful Stumbling Block in the Way to Heaven....There is no Calamity but in Sin alone.

Preceding Traherne's first "When I came into the Country" (46)--itself part of a "flashback" to the sections dealing with his achievement of felicity--is a series of sections (41-45) concerning the proper areas of study for aspiring Christians. These sections are overtly didactic and, in that sense, interrupt the ebullience of his personal narrative. Nevertheless, their purpose is to show the way to happiness in God.

Many Men study the same Things, which have not the Taste of, nor Delight in them. And their Palates vary according to the Ends, at which they Aim. He that Studies Politie Men and Maners, meerly that He may know how to behave Himself and get Honor in this World has not the Delight in his Studies, as He that might see the Ways of God among them: and

Walk in Communion with Him. The Attainments of the one are narrow, the other Grows a Celestial King of all Kingdoms. Kings Minister unto Him, Temples are His Own, Thrones are his Peculiar Treasure. Governments Officers Magistrates and Courts of Judicature are His Delights in a way ineffable, and a manner Inconceivable to the others Imagination. (III, 41)

The remaining four sections deal, respectively, with what is to be studied: Humanity, Divinity, Natural Philosophy and Ethics. Though all are directed at achieving joy in communion with God, only the section on Divinity (43) makes any reference to the Christian dispensation. Both its mood and content are less exuberant and spontaneous than the others, while the group as a whole is less exuberant than the sections surrounding it.

The Divinity section frequently uses an imperative verb form: "We are to contemplate God," "we are to contemplate the Nature," "we are to see," giving the impression that Traherne carries a self-imposed burden. This imperative form is never used in the surrounding sections on the other areas of study, which have verb forms like "he may be," and "we come to know", suggesting a spontaneous advancement through learning, rather than a command to study.

Conventionally enough, Traherne writes that the purpose of studying Divinity is "to Contemplat GOD, and to Walk with Him in all His Ways." His statement, "We are to Contemlat GOD in the Unity of His Essence, in the Trinity of Persons" (III, 43), is a necessary injunction for Traherne himself, it would seem.

The Divinity section also catalogues in fairly conventional terms the constituents of the estates of Innocency, Misery, Grace, and Glory that are the requisite parts of the Christian way. Indeed, in describing the Estate of Misery, Traherne iterates the doctrine of original sin, so conspicuously absent in the Dobell poems and in his autobiographical account of his experience: "we hav his [man's] Fall the Nature of Sin Original and Actual, His Manifold Punishments Calamity Sickness Death &c." Similarly, the estate of Grace consists entirely of the standard features of Christian doctrine:

the Tenor of the New Covenant, the maner of its Exhibition under the various Dispensations of the Old and New Testament, the Mediator of the Covenant, the Conditions of it Faith and Repentance, the Sacraments and Seals of it, the Scriptures Ministers and Sabbaths, the Nature and Government of the Church, its Histories and Successions from the Beginning to the End of the World. &c. (III, 43)

In summation, then, where a conventionally Christian scheme of salvation is acknowledged in Century III, it is often awkwardly integrated into the experience of gaining felicity. Furthermore, it is possibly significant that the apotheosis described in the last one-third of Century III centres not on Christ the redeemer, but on the Old Testament figure of David, whose celebration of God and His creation in the Psalms reflects Traherne's preoccupation with a direct, unmediated communion with the Deity.

While Traherne's first profound religious experience

was at odds with orthodox Christian doctrine, there is enough evidence in the Centuries of Meditations to show not only his determination to bridge the gap but also to suggest how he did it. Finding Christ insufficient, he took other roads to felicity which, having been achieved, enabled him to recognize and value Christ. His last writings make clear that he attained orthodoxy while retaining felicity, though often with a somewhat diminished manifestation of joy.

CHAPTER VI

The Shift to Orthodoxy

Christian Ethicks, Traherne's last completed work, was certainly long in preparation and was aimed at leading Christians to felicity through orthodox paths.¹⁵ It rigidly follows the conventional Christian paradigm. It is a work that could not have been conceived, planned or executed without the incorporation of the Christian myth of the Fall, the need for Christ the Redeemer, and the Trinity.

According to Marks, the real subject of Christian Ethicks was Christian virtue, and she speculates that the existing title was given after Traherne's death by the printer or publisher. She notes that Traherne "made no pretence of writing a comprehensive philosophical dissertation" and that he scarcely mentioned "the principles of human actions, human actions themselves, the passions, and the vices" (xxx1).

Christian Ethicks is a sombre work compared with the Centuries of Meditations, and it seems impossible that the mind that composed the Dobell poems could also have written this last work. Though prelapsarian Adam represents the estate of Innocence, he is not emphasized as a metaphor for a still attainable state of bliss. Rather, he is the bringer of the grief and guilt of the Fall, and the estate of Misery that the fall occasioned. "The glory and

Blessedness which he [man] lost was his Torment; the Honour which he had before, was turned into shame; the Love of GOD which he had offended, increassd his Guilt, Eternity was a Horror to him, his Conscience a Tormentor, and his Life a Burden....The express declaration of God assured Adam, that his Recovery was impossible" (101). The Fall is "wholly to be fathered on Adam's fondness to please his Wife, and to be mothered upon her Lightness and Credulity" (146). "When Adam fell, and brought more Hazzards and Difficulties on himself God might justly leave him to them" (168).

The poem that appears in Chapter 25 of Christian Ethicks explicitly ascribes to Adam the responsibility for bringing sin into the world:

Mankind is sick, the World distemper'd lies,
Opprest with Sins and Miseries.
Their Sins are Woes; a long corrupted Train
Of Poyson, drawn from Adam's vein,
Stains all his Seed, and all his Kin
Are one Disease of Life within. (201)

This is in sharp contrast to the Dobell poems where no such causality is indicated:

I knew not that there was a Serpents Sting'
Whose Poyson shed
On Men, did overspread
The World...("Eden," 8-10)

Correspondingly, the role of Christ assumes central importance in Christian Ethicks. He is "to take away all the filth and Deformity of Guilt" (100), to dispel the

"Black and Horrid Condition" (101) resulting from the Fall of Man, as he "pacified the Wrath of God by his Death" (100).

Christ is essential to man's redemption. "And there is no other name given under Heaven among men whereby we may be saved, but only the name of Jesus, who offered up himself a sacrifice for us" (100). "Thus are we in Christ restored to the Exercise of that Power which we lost by Sin: But without Him we can do Nothing" (102).

As was shown in the analysis in Chapter IV, the one clear reference to Christ in Dobell defines him as present in Heaven but not necessarily part of God. In Christian Ethicks, however, Christ, in orthodox fashion, is inseparable from "God, who died for Sinners, in the Person of his Son" (196).

As an intellectual exercise, and in its goal, Christian Ethicks is very different from either the Dobell poems or the Centuries of Meditations, and it is evident that Traherne had changed in the intervening years, and that his vision of infinity was by that time firmly contained within the Christian world view.

It has already been noted in Chapter V (page 58) that Traherne's religious experience, as described in the Centuries of Meditations, enabled him to accept Christ in a way that had not previously been possible for him. Furthermore, his "conversion" led him to an intensified

commitment to teach his faith (page 57). Again as previously noted (page 1), he proclaims "that to be a Philosopher, a Christian and a Divine was to be one of the most Illustrious Creatures in the World" (IV, 3).

If further evidence of Traherne's path after his religious experience is needed, it can be found in the Commentaries from Heaven, a manuscript of poems accompanied by lengthy prose commentaries, grouped under alphabetically arranged headings. There are altogether 94 entries, starting with "Abhorrence" and ending with "Bastard."

The indications are that Traherne intended the Commentaries to be part of a larger work, but that its completion was cut short by his death. To date, only the poems have been edited and published, but they are sufficient to reveal Traherne in essentially the same cast of mind as is evident in Christian Ethicks.

In the poem "Advocate," for example, there are abundant references both to Christ's passion and to the necessity of seeking redemption through Him.

O GOD, my GOD, remember on the Tree
Who said, Why hast thou (now) forsaken me!
An Advocate disguis'd in flesh and blood!
And bath'd in tears my Soul to do thee Good! (1-4)

The speaker's self-abnegation before God is unlike anything in Dobell or in most of the Centuries of Meditations, and his consciousness of his, and mankind's, sinfulness is entirely in accordance with the orthodox view:

like Lucifers thy Fall and fate
 Were Dreadful and as great, so desperate;
 Beyond all hope or Remedie; no Cure
 Could in all Worlds be found...

.
 Then Jesus came, even the Essential Word,
 And spake for thee, His Help he did afford...
 (128-31, 134-35)

Generally, it can be said that these poems do not reflect joy as did those in Dobell. This more orthodox Traherne not only believes in sinful man, he also feels sinful. An exception to the pattern is "The Second Adam," a poem which seamlessly integrates the ecstasy of the Dobell poems with adoration of Christ. Traherne has moved a great distance from the time when he had had to experience joy before he could believe:

A Second Adam, Greater than the first!
 In whom, while in the other we were Curst,
 We blessed are! The LORD appearing here!
 A GOD that is, in Flesh, an Endless Sphere
 of Light and Glory! Open Lord mine Eys!
 And now, as if I were above the Skies,
 O let me see Him! Mingle with Him! Bee
 A Glorious Sphere of Light as well as He!
 (1-8)

Another poem on Adam, however - "Adam I" - may encapsulate the inner struggle that preceded the joy expressed in "The Second Adam." The poem can also be read as a parable for Traherne's recognition that his duty lay in integrating his personal vision of felicity into the Christian framework.

There was a Man two Children had most Dear
 The Elder was a Strong and lustly Lad
 The yonger Weak and Sear
 To trie their Lov
 One Burden he proposed to the two

And either must the same remove
 As first they saw their father do.
 The Stronger easily removed the Weight
 And set it in another place
 As if [i]t had been no Burden, but most leight
 And down he laid it with a Comely Grace.
 The yonger heavd and toyld in vain
 And when he got it up at last with pain
 He reeld and staggerd as he went a long
 His Body weak, Affection being strong
 But yet more pleasure in his father movd
 And far more pittie being more belovd. (1-18)

There seems little doubt that a more intensive study of Traherne's works outside the Dobell poems would yield more details of the intensity of the struggle by which Traherne integrated Christ into his own vision of God. The scope of the present study is limited to showing that Christ was, at least at one time in his religious life, missing as a central figure. Following Traherne's successful quest for felicity, however, Christ's centrality was assured. It is conventional to find God through Christ; Traherne found Christ through God.

ENDNOTES

1. Carol Marks cites, as an example, the views of John Smith on this point. "Because, as Smith explained, 'the inward virtue and vigour of Reason is much abated' since the Fall, God has supplemented the 'Truth of Natural inscription' with 'the Truth of Divine Revelation'." ("Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism", 526)
2. Margoliouth, Stewart and Lewalski agree that in compiling the Burney poems, Philip worked from the Dobell manuscript, or another fair copy of the same collection, and from another manuscript that has been lost. He retained the poems incorporated from the Dobell group in their original order, but interspersed among them poems from the lost manuscript. It is arguable that the Burney collection also has a loose thematic unity, one which, however, reflects Philip's intentions rather than Thomas's.

In any case, the tenor of the Burney poems as a totality is quite different from the Dobell group. Seelig observes this, pointing out that the Burney poems "tend to be more one-dimensional than the Dobell poems, lacking the kind of complicated double perspective, the simultaneous sense of two kinds of experience that emerges in 'The Salutation' or 'Wonder'" (144). She indicates too that they "are also somewhat more conventional--whether as the result of Philip's revisions or of his selection we do not know--and they place a greater emphasis on religious institutions." (144-45) This concurs with the comments made in Chapter IV (page 45) on "Churches," a poem that appears only in the Burney Manuscript.

3. While the Dobell poems may have been written a few years previously, it seems that they were collected and organized during this period.
4. "The Instruction" is an exception; its rather harsh exhortation ("Spue out thy filth, thy flesh abjure") clashes with the ecstatic tone of the neighbouring poems, "The Preparative" and "The Vision," suggesting that Margoliouth was right to think that it was spatchcocked in at the last minute.
5. Clements's three-fold division actually applies more demonstrably to the poems in the Burney MS, which are suspect, since they have been subject to the modifications of the orthodox Philip. There, following six introductory poems which deal, as in Dobell, with childhood innocence, appear four poems in which the grown man's fall from grace is explored from several angles: "The Apostacy," "Solitude," "Poverty" and "Dissatisfaction". The remaining poems trace a more linear progression towards felicity than is apparent in

Dobell, starting as they do with the elements that are the visible foundations of the Christian life, presented in "The Bible," "Christendom" and "Churches", and moving towards various accounts of the inner spiritual experience.

6. Seelig, as was noted on page 1, seems to be alone in insisting on Traherne's unorthodoxy.
7. Grant provides as direct evidence Traherne's reference to Irenaeus in Roman Forgeries. Traherne quotes, in support of his own cause, the Pre-Nicene father's warnings against those who threatened to undermine the purity of the early Christian church by the introduction of obfuscating doctrines.
8. See pages 40-41 for a discussion of "Thoughts IV", in which Traherne presents a similar image of Christ--the only one in the Dobell poems.
9. The concept is well encapsulated in Centuries, V, 7, where Traherne describes eternity as "a Mysterious Absence of Times and Ages: an endless Length of Ages always present, and for ever Perfect. For as there is an immoveable Space wherein all finit spaces are enclosed, and all Motions carried on, and performed: so there is an Immoveable Duration, that contains and measures all moving Durations....All ages being but successions correspondent to those Parts of that Eternitie wherein they abide, and filling no more of it, then Ages do."
10. This is Philip's most flagrant and damaging intrusion into Thomas's text of the poem, but he made numerous other changes to individual words and phrases. These indicate a certain literal-mindedness behind his bowdlerization. In the first stanza, he alters "These Rosie Cheeks" to "This panting Heart," thereby destroying the delicate evocativeness of Thomas's synecdoche, and replacing it with one that makes the obvious association between the beating of the heart and the beginning of life. In the last line of stanza 5, he shows a similar heavy-handedness in changing Thomas' "More Wealth include, then all the World contains" to "than the dead World contains [sic]". Philip probably could not appreciate the subtle modulation of meaning that Thomas effects when he makes what is surely a part of the world ("the Lims in Boys") more valuable than the world itself. Philip's cruder sensibility has to make the antithesis one between living things and material objects.
11. Seelig is also perturbed by this passage. She writes "for Traherne the news from 'Jury' is only an initial stage, the 'pledge' of 'like wonders and Causes of Joy' elsewhere in the world, as if the sacrifice of Christ might elsewhere be equalled." (154)

12. As the section references indicate, the events leading to Traherne's "Felicity" are not presented consecutively. He discusses the spiritual experience, then fills in the details in a "flashback" mode.
13. The term "transeunt" as Traherne uses it is not exactly synonymous with "transient." It means "passing outward," as opposed to "immanent," and describes the visible manifestations of the spiritual in the temporal world. Thus, in the poem "My Spirit," Traherne writes:

My Substance and my Mind
 Ny Spirit Shind
 Even there, not by a Transeunt Influence.
 The Act was Immanent, yet there,
 The Thing remote, yet felt even here. (64-68)

14. Martz also comments on this digression, or "parenthesis" as he calls it, but he draws the opposite conclusion as to its significance. He identifies it with the second stage of the Bonaventuran process, wherein "the action of grace received through Christ, [leads] to the renewal of inward vision" (91). This argument is difficult to accept. There is, in fact, no logical or experiential link between the animadversions against sin in sections 47-51 and the progress towards divine understanding that is recorded in the immediately following sections.
15. The preface "To the Reader" insists: "Perhaps you will meet some New notions: but when they are examined' he hopes it will appear to the Reader, that it was the actual knowledge of true Felicity that taught him to speak of Virtue: and moreover, that there is not the least tittle pertaining to the Catholick Faith contradicted or altered in his Papers. For he firmly retains all that was established in the Ancient Councils, nay and sees cause to do so, even in the highest and most transcendent Mysteries." (5)

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