

Monday October 10th 2005 College Hall, The Cloisters, Hereford Cathedral
 THE 3rd ANNUAL TRAHERNE LECTURE
 in memory of Jeremy Maule

THOMAS TRAHERNE – THEN AND NOW

The Revd Denis Parry

In preparing this year's lecture, the title was suggested to me by a remark by Canon Allchin: "*It may be that Traherne, like Julian, is a writer whose hour has come.*" This will give us an opportunity to explore why it is that Traherne, like Julian and perhaps especially Francis of Assisi, seems to speak to us today in a relevant and necessary way.

I may be a dab hand at pumping organs (Brinsop on Trinity Saturday) but otherwise my qualifications for giving this lecture are perhaps not obvious or, indeed very cogent. I am not an academic, my career having been in the field of primary education as a headmaster and subsequently, after ordination, as humble Parish Priest and Adviser in the Diocese of St David's.

Indeed, my first acquaintanceship with Traherne and his work happened five years ago when we lived briefly in Credenhill. But I was immediately won over first by his attitude to nature and creation, so like that of St Francis, and secondly by his understanding of the nature of love, so reminiscent of Julian. These two saints have always mattered to me, both as a Companion of the Society of St Francis and as an erstwhile member of a Julian Meeting.

Why do we so urgently need the insights of, among others, Traherne, Julian and Francis? That is, I think, a question well worth considering.

TRAHERNE THEN AND NOW – A LECTURE IN SONATA FORM

SYNOPSIS

Introductory remarks. "The Vicar of Credall." (Song) Sonata Form.

1st Subject: Mysticism - Seeing
 Mysticism - Understanding
 Love
 The Cross
 Nature
 Myth (1)

2nd Subject: Myth (2)

Development: Modernism – the Age of Reason – isms and – ations.

Dominant: Hiroshima & Auschwitz.

Recapitulation: "The Salutation" (Song)

New Counterpoints of Great Beauty:

Postmodernism:
 Science.
 The Cross.
 Music and Liturgy.
 Culture and Education
 Nature.
 Love/Sex

Coda: The Challenge; Conclusion.

Introductory Remarks

It is an honour for me to be invited to give this Third Traherne Lecture in memory of the late Jeremy Maule, whom I think I never met, but about whom I have heard and read so much good. Both an honour, and a challenge, since my qualification would seem to be that I pumped the organ rather efficiently at Brinsop Church in May. But there we are, some have greatness thrust upon them!

You may know of the fishmonger who decided to put up a posh new notice in front of his shop. It was to read: FRESH FISH SOLD HERE DAILY. But on reflection, he decided to omit DAILY, for his shop was obviously open every day. Then he thought, why HERE? Everyone can see it's here and not somewhere else. And for that matter, why SOLD? It's not likely that I should be giving it away. And as for FISH, well, it's obviously fish, isn't it? That only leaves FRESH, and I suppose if it wasn't fresh we should know about it all right! So he was left with a beautiful new empty board!

Likewise, I recycled the couple of hundred pages I had prepared of Traherne biography, realizing that you probably knew all that anyway. But then I thought there might be one or two newcomers to Traherne present this evening, so I wrote a potted biographical note or two, a parody (Parry D) of a well known song. And here it is:

The Vicar of Credall (which is how Credenhill was once pronounced).

In good King Charles' golden days,
which saw the Restoration,
was passed the Act of Uniformity,
one Church one Nation.
To use the Prayer Book I agreed,
and signed without compunction;
as Vicar of Credall,
come what may,
be sure I'll always function.

*Though Parliaments should have their way
or Kings enforce their will, Sir,
I mean to continue many a day
as Vicar of Credenhill, Sir.*

My friend, Susanna Hopton, who
had wed a Parliamentarian,
her Romish faith put to review.
became Establishmentarian;
For her I wrote four Centuries
of pious meditation,
never intending that they should
be sent for publication.

(Chorus)

My life at Credall I resolved
should manifest my vision
to cultivate Felicity it was my firm decision;
to spend my time in praising God
by prayer and adoration,
enjoying and extolling all
the wonders of creation.

(Chorus)

My many written works were mostly
lost or went unheeded,
until the twentieth century
when they were greatly needed;
Miraculous the way that they turned up
or were discovered
three hundred years after my death
to be published, read and treasured.

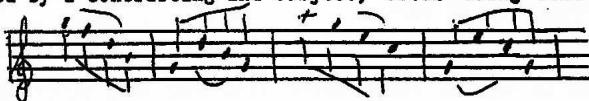
(Chorus)

Sonata Form.

This is a lecture in Sonata Form, a pattern which crops up everywhere and seems somehow to accord with the way things go. It starts with a 1st Subject, the basis of all that follows:



This is followed by a contrasting 2nd Subject, often using some material from the 1st:



Then there is a Development which takes us through various keys, some far removed from the original, but climaxing In the Dominant - like the A of a sung AMEN - bringing us back into the home key and the Recapitulation. And the sleeve of my old 33 recording of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony says "New counterpoints of great beauty are introduced here."

Salvation History follows this pattern: 1st Subject - Noah/Abraham, promise; 2nd Subject - Moses, law, Development - the prophets, climaxing in John the Baptist bringing us to Christ in whom, as St Paul says, "All things are recapitulated." New counterpoints of great beauty are introduced here!

Likewise Traherne's experience. 1st Subject - Eden, his primal vision; 2nd Subject, apostacy, developing until, Dominant –a religious experience: "Another time in a lowering and sad evening being alone in the field, when all things were dead and quiet, a certain want and horror fell upon me, beyond imagination..." (C.M.3.23) leading into the Recapitulation: "And now, O Lord, heaven and earth are infinitely more valuable than they were before... Thou hast restored me above all to the image of God." (C.M.1.76) New counterpoints of great beauty are introduced here.

But with regard to the form of this lecture, Sonata Form shapes it like this: 1st Subject -mysticism, 2nd Subject; rationalism, developing through modernism and globalization to a Dominant event, Hiroshima and Auschwitz, which opens up the possibility of Recapitulation – postmodernism; which is where we are now with the rediscovery of mysticism in our own tradition, and the ever-increasing relevance and importance of, among others, Francis, Julian and Thomas Traherne.

New counterpoints of great beauty are introduced here.

1st Subject. Mysticism - Seeing.

And first I should perhaps try to make clear what I mean by mysticism. Several things need to be said. First, it is do with mystery, but not with the mysterious; and that is, mystery in the sense of wonder. I think of the 15 mysteries of the rosary or of cycles of mystery plays – nothing mysterious about those. Job, confronted by the wonders of God's creation, lays his hand upon his mouth, speechless with wonder. A mystery is not a puzzle or enigma as in a detective novel. Secondly, I don't think a mystic is the same thing as a visionary. Francis, Julian and perhaps Traherne were visionaries as well as being mystics. For mysticism isn't to do with the religious experiences so sought after by some today. And thirdly, mysticism is available to all; it is not elitist, as Francis Julian and Traherne make abundantly clear by their desire to be communicative, to borrow Traherne's word.

The distinctions drawn between apophatic (negative) and cataphatic (affirmative) mysticism need not concern us. Our three are in the affirmative tradition, after St Bernard, concerned with seeing and understanding; and Traherne is remarkable for keeping the light burning when Puritanism had well nigh extinguished it,

Some years earlier, George Hetbert had written in his poem "The Elixir" :

A man who looks on glass
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth through it pass
and then the heav'n esp.

Thomas Traherne shared this mystical way of seeing.

Mine infant eye,
above the sky
discerning endless Space,
did make me see,
two sights in me,
three eyes adorned my face;
Two luminaries in my Flesh
did me refresh, but one did lurk within,
beneath my skin, that was of greater worth than both the other
for those were twins, but this had ne'er a brother.

1st Subject: Mysticism - Understanding.

It was by the use of this third, inner eye, that Traherne saw God in all created things and his image in all people. And the one who sees in this way, is also the one who understands, that is, in the sense of standing under:

O Wisdom, Consort, Friend of God most High,
who span the universe most mightily
ordering chaos into harmony
make me a wise mind and a seeing eye,
an understanding heart for humbleness,
lest; joyous Spirit, wise beyond all telling,
I fail to see yourself in all things dwelling,
and all my wisdom prove but foolishness.

For, not content with knowing of this tree
the function of each part, bark, leaf and root,
branches, life-giving sap, bud, flower and fruit,
I would be subject have it look at me.

So might I greet all things in awe and wonder
as **Thou**, in understanding, standing under.

Traherne saw God "in all things dwelling;" the artist as having put a lot of himself into his work. This was not pantheism, in which the being of God resides in the natural order so that nature becomes God, but panentheism, God manifesting his being and his glory in creation, through nature, and receiving praise and thanksgiving in response.

"You never enjoy the world aright," says Traherne, "till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God." And we remember how another mystic, much later, keeping the light burning, I mean William Blake, saw eternity in a grain of sand; and how Julian, much earlier saw all that is, in a little hazel nut,

And this seeing and standing under brought about in them a kind of co-inherence with creation, so that they were not spectators, but part of it. The late Br Ramon, S.S.F. wrote of how, as a Celt, he shared this experience with Francis. "Before I had set eyes on St Francis' 'Canticle of Brother Sun,' he said, "I could say that the sun rose and set in my own soul; the moon waxed and waned in my changing moods; the sea ebbed and flowed in my own emotions; the cycle of the seasons and the fertility of the earth were all patterned within my body and psyche." Much the same experience as Traherne's. "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars."

1st Subject: Love.

"Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est." When my friend Br. Nathanael was asked by primary children about the second knot on his rope, he would try to explain the vow of chastity by saying he had promised not to give his love to a woman and get married so that he could give all his love to God. Did he mean by love the scriptural word "caritas-agape" or "amor-eros" – erotic love?

Mervyn Matthews reminds us in his book "Both alike to Thee", that for mediaeval mystics, God was Eros. "For them." he writes, "the very nature of God is expressed by this word. Eros is a force, the force or drive which animates all things and which comes from God. It is always at work. and we cannot avoid itthis force of yearning, this power of love which constantly wills unity and draws us to God, is what energises the whole of creation.... It is the yearning, desirous ecstatic outpouring of love. ..Moreover if God is Eros then the human task is to return by eros to God. The inner person has been created in God's image and must direct the inner erotic longing of the soul back to the one from whom it came. So the soul and God are subject to a mutual erotic longing which ...is not sexual, not simply to do with the joining of bodies, but is a passionate desire for unity."

I find this passage very refreshing; for it has always seemed to me that it was a love other than agape that poured out, pours out, creation; that planted seed in the Virgin's womb and that lifted Christ up onto the cross. And although eros is not a scriptural word, we would have to consider Jesus less than fully human if he did not experience it... in love of Lazarus, of Mary Magdalene, of John the beloved disciple. And in any case, the church recognised the erotic by including the Song of Songs in the canon, which was, from the time of Origen, and for a thousand year considered the text, when properly interpreted, in which the whole of the gospel might be found.

"Yearning" was one of Julian's words in speaking about prayer. In Chapter 59 of her Revelations we read of God, described here incidentally as Father and Mother, "I am the supreme goodness of all manner of things. I am what causes thee to love; I am what causes thee to yearn; it is I the endless fulfilling of all true desires". Prayer, for Julian, is the "ground of her being" and its purpose is that we should be one'd with God. "And then we shall come unto the Lord, knowing ourselves clearly, and possessing God fully, and we being eternally completely hidden in God, seeing him truly, touching him fully, hearing him spiritually, and delectably smelling him, and sweetly tasting him."

Such love it seems to me, is better described as eros than as agape; Julian's writing typically – one could give many examples – is erotic, and seeks co-inherence with God and with Creation.

As does also the prayer of Francis. Bonaventure says of this. "No human tongue could describe the passionate love with which Francis burned for Christ, his Spouse; he seemed to be completely absorbed by the fire of divine love like a glowing coal..... He loved Christ so fervently and Christ returned his love so intimately that he seemed to have his Saviour before his eyes continually."

And Traherne, too, is possessed by an erotic love for God (and not, surely for Susanna Hopton as that Radio play suggested!) Take, for instance his poem "Desire."

For giving me Desire,
An Eager Thirst, a burning Ardent fire,
A virgin Infant Flame,
A Love with which into the World I came,
An Inward Hidden Heavenly Love,
Which in my Soul did Work and move,
And ever me Enflame,
With restlesse longing Heavenly Avarice,
That never could be satisfied,
That did incessantly a Paradice
Unknown suggest, and som thing undescribed
Discern, and bear me to it; be
Thy Name for ever praisd by me...

And in C. Med 1.42, part of a section which links him directly with the affirmative mystic tradition, he writes of God's **wanting** us; "He is from all eternity full of want or else he would not be full of Treasure." And in this same section he goes on to describe how this wanting is reciprocal. "You must want like a God that you may be satisfied like a God. Were you not made in his Image?" (C.M.1 44) And the Cross is the place where God's wanting meets ours.

While on this subject of erotic love, I must read you yet another of Traherne's poems, one in which he actually quotes (as indeed he does elsewhere) from the "Song of Songs."

As fragrant Mirre within the bosom hid
sents more delicious than before it did
And yet receives no sweetness from that brest
That proves the sweeter for so sweet a guest.
Even so the favour of my dearest spouse
thus prized and placèd in my heart, endowes
my ardent soul with sweetness and inspires
with heavenly Ravishment my rapt desires.

What greater Joy can blesse my soul than this,
that my Beloveds mine and I am his!
Our soules are knitt the world cannot untwine
the joyfull union of his heart and mine.
in Him I live, in him my soules possest
with heavenly solace and eternall rest.
Heaven only Knowes the blisse my soule enjoyes
Fond Earths too dull to apprehend such joyes.

"My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Words also set by Purcell in his verse anthem, "My Beloved spake."

1st Subject: The Cross.

For Francis, Julian and Traherne, the cross is truly the crux of the matter. Francis' call originated as he gazed in meditation at the Iconic crucifix in the ruined church of St Damiano; and such was his devotion to the cross that like Julian he prayed to experience the passion of his Lord, and towards the end of his life received the stigmata.

Julian's writings likewise originated in visions of the Passion of Christ on the cross which she prayed to share, and, as she all but died she says: "My curate was sent for to be at my ending, and by the time he came I had cast my eyes upwards and could not speak. He placed the cross before my face and said. 'I have brought thee the image of thy Maker and Saviour. Look thereon and comfort thyself with it.' After this my sight began to fail and it grew dark about me in the chamber as if it had been night, except on the image of the cross on which I beheld an ordinary light. and I know not how."

And among Traherne's many writings on the cross, these short extracts: (C.M. 60, 63, 64)

"That cross is a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that illuminateth all the world. The flame is love. The love in his bosom who died upon it. In the light of which we see how to possess all things in heaven and earth after his similitude." And: "Jesus I admire Thy love unto me also. O that I could. see it through all those wounds O that I could feel it in all those stripes O that I could bear it in all those groans! O that I could taste it beneath the gall and vinegar! O that I could smell the savour of thy sweet ointments even in this Golgotha, or place of a skull" And: "O thou that hangest upon this Cross before mine eyes, whose face is bleeding, and covered over with tears and filth and blows! Angels adore the Glory of the GODHEAD in the highest heavens."

And the love demonstrated in the cross, the point, says Matthews, "where our wanting is returned to its source, where our desire is melded with the desire of God," is, for Julian and Traherne especially, always Trinitarian:

Julian: "The Trinity is our Maker; the Trinity is our Keeper, the Trinity is our everlasting Lover; the Trinity is our endless joy and bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Traherne: "In all love there is a love begetting, a love begotten and a love proceeding... So that in all love the Trinity is clear."

1st Subject: Nature.

Benedict and Francis both figure in the first subject of our sonata, each presenting us with an attitude towards Nature urgently needed today. Benedict's can be summarised by the one word, "Husbandry". His Rule was concerned with administering the earth by making it yield intensively without, however, causing it to lose its fertility. It had wide influence throughout Europe, and his tradition represents the ecological aspect of the Christian attitude towards nature.

Francis, on the other hand, represents the aspect of praise and contemplation, summarised for us in his amazing "Canticle of the Sun". Traherne follows in this tradition. Like Francis he actually entered into creation and discovered God in a mystical relation of love. He found God deep in the heart of things created, manifesting his being and his, glory through them so that for him, as for Francis. they radiated and reflected his mysterious, transcendent and unutterable glory.

"O what treasure is every sand when truly understood!" writes Traherne; "Who can love anything that God hath made too much? His infinite goodness and wisdom and power and glory are in it."

Br. Ramon says of Francis, as we might also say of Traherne, "He never lost that innocence and sense of wonder that used to be part of childhood. As we set our agenda for environmental renewal, a re-education of children and adults in wonder should be high on our list of priorities." Officially this now happens in our schools, since the National Curriculum requires Inspectors to comment on children's spiritual development.. not an easy task!

The word **ecology** derives from **oikos** = house. For Traherne, as for Francis, the whole cosmos was his house. "the city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine... . The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the world was mine, and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it."

The "Canticle of the Sun" praises God, too, for Sister Death "from whose embrace no mortal can escape." I must say that when I go round the geriatric ward in a hospital, or visit a nursing home, I'm totally with Francis here. It seems to me that death is one of God's greatest gifts to us. One of the most disgusting obscenities of modern times was surely the way in which that Japanese Emperor was kept alive only by daily blood transfusions.

The mystic way embraces the cross and takes death in its stride.

1st Subject; Myth (1)

And death was everywhere. While Julian lived in her cell in Norwich the Black Death raged three times through the city, and during Traherne's short life, the Plague decimated populations in towns and villages alike. Apparently half the population of Kington, including a vicar of St Mary's, was wiped out. Yet, as Sheila Upjohn writes in her book "Why Julian Now?" during this time Norwich was a hive of creative and artistic activity. And she goes on to list a huge catalogue of artistic and creative activities taking place.

"And as I looked, with new eyes," she says, "at the few glorious fragments that are left, it seemed to me that though the exterior world of the people who created it might have been as violent and unsettled as our own, they must have had a quite different interior world that helped them make sense of it."

That interior world, she suggests, was dependent on the foundational myth which sustained their culture and civilization. "No people," she writes, "can exist without a myth about their first beginnings."

Unfortunate it is that "myth" has come to mean something which is untrue, and "story-teller" someone who tells lies, for in fact "myth" is that which expresses and encapsulates profound truths. And the myth which sustained Francis, Julian and Traherne was the biblical one of Creation, Fall and Redemption: sonata form! And indeed, Traherne saw his own life, as we have seen. as a journey from Eden, through the wilderness of apostacy, to Paradise; and for him, the troubles of the nation, which included the orgy of destruction we have mentioned and the excesses of the court of Charles II, were to be understood in terms of the punishment of Israel for its sin. "Thy Turtle Doves O Lord to Dragons turn!" What a *crie de coeur* that poem is:

His image in themselves laid in a Grave,
 is Dead and Buried! The Treasure
 which they like dragons in them have
 Unknown's unknown! They feel not any pleasure,
 But Snuffe! Snuffe up the Wind
 and wallow in their filth like Adders Blind
 Their Skins Like Dragons clad with Golden Ore
 Shine Brightly, overcast with Greenish Gore.
 Their Scales Display
 a poysond Day.
 His image in them's laid within a Grave.

And in "A Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Nation, he writes.

Moses
 Make me a Nehemiah....to thee & them.
 Ezra, David

2nd Subject: Myth (2)

But we are citizens of a Brave New World. Secularization has set aside the Eden myth which was the theme of our first subject, and adopted a new myth - or should we call it a Creed. Sheila Upjohn finds it best expressed' in the words of that late eighteenth century document, "The American Declaration of Independence," part of which reads:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness....That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Is this simply a political statement, or is it a religious creed as I have suggested? Created equal.. endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights?

Created equal but, as George Orwell made clear, some, like ourselves, more equal than others, like those born in squalid shanty slums or Ethiopian poverty. Not that we would want perhaps to go as far as Mrs Alexander, who counted among her bright and beautiful things "the rich man in his castle" and "the poor man at his gate - God made them, high or lowly and ordered their estate"! - a problem we think we have dealt with by simply omitting that verse in modern hymnals. And as for rights, these have proved to be anything but unalienable, the ideology seems to have let us down here too. And the pursuit of happiness? Perhaps the high ideal and intention was to find Felicity, Shalom, but the happiness has turned out to be those very things that Traherne so vehemently deplored: "By corrupting themselves and turning after vanity they have Blinded the world and me in like manner. Thick darkness covereth the Nations and Gross Darkness the people, which is chiefly contracted by their Inventing and following other Treasures, for by magnifying Riches of their own Devising, they have covered the Treasures of Innocent Eden, forgotten the Delights of God, Buried in oblivion themselves and the world; Eclipsed the clear and open Joys of True Felicity" (C.M.2.11)

Things don't change, do they? If those words were relevant in Traherne's day, how much more in ours? They were truly prophetic!

And this quasi-religious creed of the Brave New World appears not to acknowledge human sinfulness or fallenness, dwelling on rights rather than on responsibilities, and offering no solution, no redemption.

Development: Modernism; Age of Reason: -isms and -ations.

The Development takes us through various -isms and -ations, modulating through keys far removed from the original, and yet the light of mysticism never quite goes out: there are always some who keep it glowing. But in this age of Reason and evolving Newtonian science, and breakthroughs in medicine, the old religion is severely challenged. In the popular imagination the one-time transcendent and wonderful God gradually degenerates into, on the one hand, Big Brother, watching and waiting to pounce and punish. and, on the others Sugar Daddy, promising pie in the sky when you die. The moral laxity of the Restoration court and the later strict reaction with its preaching of hell and damnation confused eros with epithumia - love with lust - so that the Song of Songs became problematic for the Church right up to the present day, and agape (caritas) became charity in the sense of philanthropy, or simply being kind to grandma and the cat, a social gospel, the horizontal bar of the cross without the vertical, erotic, creative outpouring of God's love given and returned to support it.

With the coming of a Welfare State to attend to this social agenda, the Church was left with something of a vacuum. Add to all this the -isms and -ations: rationalism, secularism, modernism, Darwinism, communism, capitalism, paganism, materialism, consumerism, mechanisation, industrialisation, globalisation, spiritualism, exploitation, humanism, nihilism, existentialism - to name some of the keys through which the themes modulate - and we begin to ask which of the two foundation myths seems more aptly to fit the human situation. Were we created equal and with unalienable rights? Or were we created In the image of God and inheritors of a fallen world?

Dominant: Hiroshima:

Clifford Longley, in his Radio 4 "Thought for the Day" on 8th August this year (2005), looking back 60 years, said this:

"What really shook people was the sense that a line had been crossed, and humanity had gone through a forbidden door. Scientists had taken apart the fundamental building blocks of the Creation, undone God's handiwork, so to speak; and if ever the old cliché was true that the world would never be the same again, it was true in this case."

Later, he continues. "Two key words of the twentieth century are Hiroshima and Auschwitz, and I would say it is not possible to believe in a benevolent God any more unless you have some way of dealing with what those two words stand for." Which climactic Dominant leads us into the Recapitulation in the home key, for, "One way," he concludes, "is to go right back to Genesis, and the story of Adam and Eve picking the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The point is not whether it is literally true. It is a myth containing profound insight into the human predicament. We have free will: we have chosen to pick the ultimate fruit off the tree, committed the ultimate act of hubris, and now we can destroy the world. But the world is not ours to destroy. What stands in the way of our doing so is a feeling of amazement and respect mixed with fear and trembling, what the dictionary describes as awe. We need that little word, and the big thing it stands for. Our survival depends on it.

And so we salute the Recapitulation with a song: "The Salutation". set to music specially for me by my big brother, John. Welcome Traherne - From the dust of three centuries he rises again!

13.

THE SALUTATION

John Parry

(11)

Tbos. Tromone *Moderato*

C

p

From dust I rise

con fed.

poco crescendo

And out of nothing now a- wake

These brighter

poco

me-gions which sa- lute mine Eye

A Gift from God I take

poco a poco crescendo

The earth, the Seas, the Light, the lofty

(1.)

(2)

Skins,

The Sun and Stars, the Sun and Stars are mine;

if these, if these I prize

mp

A stranger here Strange things cloth meet, strange Glo-ry

see Strange treasures lodg'd in this fair

(3)

15

World appear; Strange all and New to me

poco a poco crescendo

But that they mine should be who nothing was

That strangest is, that strangest is of all: yet brought, yet brought

molto rallentando

sempre diminuendo

to pass

Recapitulation: Postmodernism - New counterpoints of great beauty.

Our failure to live up to the ideals of Modernism have left us with a malaise of corporate guilt which erupts from time to time when it finds something to latch onto, such as the death of Diana Princess of Wales. And, faced with a spiritual vacuum some have turned to the East for an answer, some to magic, witchcraft, spiritualism, and the occult and others to alcohol and drugs. But others, thankfully, have begun to reexamine our Christian Faith.

So that, the Recapitulation is already underway, and in recent years, we have seen an explosion of interest in the spiritual, if not in the religious aspects of life. A new book on Francis comes out almost every year, and the life and works of Friars and other Religious today, whose existence has long been the Anglican Church's best kept secret, are now becoming, as in the recent T.V. Series on Worth Monastery, a powerful counter-cultural witness. Lady Julian's "Revelations of Divine Love" has spawned numerous Julian Groups at home and abroad, where silent meditation is practised. what the late Lord Hailsham called "spiritual sunbathing", and a new interest has sprung up in Celtic Christianity, where the light of mysticism continued to burn more brightly. Gregorian Chant has come into its own, angels have been rediscovered, and many have turned to the Orthodox churches with their emphasis on the numinous, their wonderful icons – windows into heaven, painted prayers – and their music and liturgy. In addition we must not forget the amazing lure of the late Brother Roger's Taizé community, catering for the spiritual searchings of thousands upon thousands of mainly young people. And the current edition of "Retreats" lists over 200 retreat centres offering everything from Ignatian Exercises to Manual – Work – and - Prayer events, and whose business is booming. In the "Enfolded in Love" series, edited by Robert Llewelyn one time warden of the Julian Shrine, the booklet on Julian has sold over 90,000 copies and Traherne has become widely known through Canon Allchin's "Landscapes of Glory" in the same series. And there are other signs of hope which resonate with the lives and teachings of Francis, Julian and Traherne. As the record-sleeve says, "New counterpoints of great beauty are introduced here."

Counterpoint: Science.

To start with, Science and Theology are no longer at loggerheads, but are beginning to be seen as complementary disciplines. Consider, for instance, the writings of men like John Polkinghorne, and Norman Pittenger's explanations of Process Theology, which seems to fit nicely with the new physics and gives us a concept of God as Cosmic Lover.

Traherne was in at the beginnings of modern science and to him it was no great threat, but a source of wonder. In the "Kingdom of God" in particular, there is his "Treatise of Atoms" and "Of the Nature of Light and of the prodigious Wonders that are hidden in its Nature."

"This little Atom, great in Value and in the Glory of its uses, was made Immortal and. immutable within, yet Subject to changes, that in many Forms and Appearances in all Generations, it might Minister before GOD, Angels and Men, for The Manifestation of his Wisdom and power, in Services done for their Joy; his Glory, and my Happiness. What I speak of one Atom may be Said of all." (K.19). But John Powell Ward dealt with this in last year's lecture.

Counterpoint: The Cross.

Of course, whatever we say about God is inadequate as mediaeval mystics knew only too well; but we need to break away from the dogmatism of the second subject and to review his image in the light of the terrible evils and suffering which bedevil our world, especially bearing in mind the horrors of the Dominant which introduced this Recapitulation. Consider Julian's Revelations, especially the 13th, for example, where sin is explored through the

metaphors of the Lord and the Servant on whom he looks "with pity, not with blame". and the emphasis on the centrality of the cross, common to Francis, Julian and Traherne, of which I have already spoken, and which, if heeded, might transform it from its popular function as a piece of costume jewelry or lucky talisman to that which offers a new understanding of incarnation, namely, that God, being in creation, as these three affirm, is also in the suffering and the pain. One recalls that episode in one of the German concentration camps, where the inmates are made to parade and watch a young man's death throes, as he is hanged before them all. "Where is your God now?" asks a skeptic: "Why, hanging there," comes the reply.

"For God is in man," says Julian, "and God is in everything. And by the grace of God I hope that anyone who looks at it in this way will be taught aright, and greatly comforted if need be." (Chapter 9) It is good, in connection with this place of the cross, to find devotion to it being reinstated in Good Friday liturgies today, as here in the Cathedral. Francis, Julian and Traherne would have approved. Traherne echoes Julian's experience when he writes:

"I admire to see Thy cross in every understanding. Thy passion in every memory, Thy crown of thorns in every eye, and Thy bleeding, naked wounded body in every soul. Thy death liveth in every memory, Thy crucified person is embalmed in every affection, Thy pierced feet are bathed in everyone's tears, Thy blood all droppeth on every soul ... (C.M.1.86)

Counterpoint: Music and Liturgy.

Here, too, the Mystic Way is being rediscovered. A recent week of "Composer of the Week" on Radio 3, centred on mysticism in music from John Taverner, 1495-1545 to John Tavener, b.1944. Included among others were works by Vaughan Williams (5 mystical songs) Elgar (Gerontius) Finzi (guess what!)." And we have Ireland's "Many waters cannot quench love," Hadley's "My Beloved spake" and Bairstow's "I sat down under his shadow" - words from the "Song of Songs".

And even in the liturgy and services of the church, account is being taken of this thirst for a more spiritual religion; for here, with luck, you may now find Felicity being taught, in place of hellfire and damnation. And as well as Taizé services and meditation times, periods of silence are now included in liturgical services, as in the new Evening Prayer, an opportunity for us to be aware of the Presence of God.

Traherne again:

A quiet silent Person may possess
All that is Great or High in Blessedness...

and then:

No Melody in Words can equal that,
the sweetest Organ, Lute, or Harp, is flat
and dull compar'd thereto...

Traherne also found much inspiration in the Psalms, and it is a great pity that the Lectionary's provision for the Eucharist is, in my experience, celebrating in some 30 local churches, seldom used except here in the Cathedral.

And is not the Church's worship impoverished by its all too common failure to observe Saint's and Holy Days, which Traherne describes as "the ornaments of time and the beauty of the world, the days of heaven seen on earth, the seasons of melody, joy and thanksgiving, the lucid intervals and lights of the year?" He calls them "Market days of Heaven" and "Landscapes of glory, Golden links uniting ourselves and all things together."

And what of the Angels which fill Traherne's thoughts and pages? Has the Age of Reason meant that, in spite of our official recognition in, for example, the liturgy, where we laud and

magnify God's Holy Name with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we have become skeptical, relegating them to realms of superstition and make-believe as in nativity plays? Could the renewal of the mystical way make them real for us again, as they were for him, and for Francis of course, who received the stigmata through their mediation? There was a lovely article in this week's "Church Times" by the Chaplain of Trinity College, commanding a beautiful prayer of John Keeble. Did you see it? How many of us, I wonder, have, like Tobit, entertained an angel unawares?

Recapitulation: Counterpoint - Culture and Education.

"When I came into the country," writes Traherne, "and being seated among silent trees, had all my time in my own hands, I resolved to spend it all, whatever it cost me, in search of happiness." And he regretted that in the colleges of Oxford he had found no teaching of Felicity.

I wonder what he would think of our present educational curricula. Would he find Felicity taught in our schools, colleges or universities - even in our theological colleges? He would perhaps find lip-service paid it in the requirements of the National Curriculum, but little more. The modernity myth still prevails with our objective being to prepare students to hold their own in our brave new world.

And Traherne continues, "I chose rather to live upon ten pounds a year, and go in leather clothes, feed upon bread and water so that I might have all my time clearly to myself, then to keep many thousands per annum in an estate of life where my time would be devoured in care and labour." In our education system he would find that the pursuit of monetary wealth still comes before the discovery and pursuit of Felicity and of vocation. Traherne, and of course, Francis, present us with a much needed counter-cultural challenge.

And not only in schools, but also in the home. On Christian upbringing, Traherne writes (and I quote this delightful passage in full): "By this let Nurses and those Parents that desire Holy Children learn to make them possessors of Heaven and Earth betimes, to remove silly Objects from before them, to Magnify nothing but what is Great indeed, and to talk of God to them and of His Works and Ways before they can either Speak or go. For Nothing Is so Easy as to teach the Truth because the Nature of the Thing confirms the Doctrine. As when we say The Sun is Glorious, A Man is a Beautiful Creature, Sovereign over Beasts and Fowls and Fishes, The Stars Minister unto us, The World was made for you, etc. But to say This House is yours, and these Lands are another Man's and this Bauble is a Jewel and this Gugaw a fine Thing, this Rattle makes Musick etc. is deadly Barbarous and uncouth to a little Child; and makes him suspect all you say, because the Nature of the Thing contradicts your Words. Yet doth that Blot out all Noble and Divine Ideas, Dissettle his foundation, render him uncertain in all Things, and Divide him from GOD. To teach him those Objects are little vanities, and that tho GOD made them, by the Ministry of Man, yet Better and more Glorious Things are more to be Esteemed, is Natural and Easy." (Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings Vol.1. Oxford, P.117)

In connection with my work as Adviser for E.E. in the Diocese of St David's I hosted Br. Nathanael for two or three weeks each year in order to take him into our Church Schools. For primary children he was a walking visual aid with his habit, capuce, knotted rope and big smile; and the talk and discussion was always most felicitous - spiritual, moral, social and cultural, as the National Curriculum puts It. And on one occasion I took him to speak to the Upper Sixth General Studies Group in a local Comprehensive. His presence and talk came as a real cultural shock to the students, presenting as it did the possibility of a completely different lifestyle. And in spite of the usual questions about "opium for the people" and one or two naïve ones such as whether Nathanael believed the story of Noah's Ark, which made one wonder what they did in Religious Education the students were seriously challenged by

answers about the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; and we subsequently received a letter saying that this session had been the best they had had.

Traherne would have approved. For we have much to answer for in the way we have taught the young, cultivating in them a stultifying Sunday-School mentality which turns biblical myths into fairy-stories, a "gentle-Jesus-meek-and-mild" understanding which so often persists into adulthood.

Traherne, as we have seen, would have it otherwise, planting in children a sense of awe, having them stand under the wonders of creation, the fall, the redemption and the fact that they are each made in the image of God. And he would teach then Felicity, following his "Instructions Teaching us how to live the Life of Happiness" in twelve parts, of which he writes, "The seeds of all wisdom, happiness and glory are here included. And these Instructions so great that I would have given in my childhood Millions of worlds to have met with one teaching them, so earnestly did I long after them." (S.M.3.31).

We may not go so far as to describe modern education, as Malcolm Muggeridge did, as "casting artificial pearls before real swine" but we might agree with Traherne that we are "spending our money on that which does not satisfy." How desperately we need his vision!

In C.M.1.34. he writes: "Would one think it possible for a man to delight in gauderies like a butterfly, and neglect the Heavens? Did we not daily see it. it would be incredible. They rejoice in a piece of gold more than in the Sun; and get a few glittering stones and call them jewels. And admire them because they be resplendent like the stars. and transparent like the air, and pellucid like the sea; but the stars themselves they disregard. Nor shall the air itself be counted anything though it be worth all the pearls and diamonds in ten thousand worlds ...

Recapitulation: Counterpoint - Nature

Our attitude towards nature has been changing over the past few decades, with much more concern being shown towards animal welfare, bio-diversity, ecological and environmental concerns, and the challenge is now for us to relate this to the recapitulation of the Genesis myth and, with the help of Francis and Traherne, to reinstate God as the Author and Creator who inspires these good movements in us. Traherne should be preached from our pulpits (for church people are not exempt from the taint of fallenness; see, for example, how difficult it is even to impress on them the need to use Fairtrade coffee and tea in church functions!) And Traherne should be taught in our schools, Centuries included as a set book in R.E. and/or Literature. I regret personally not to have been acquainted with him earlier.

There's so much of relevance and beauty to quote; where should one begin? Perhaps with the Sun, almost an obsession with Traherne:

"It raiseth corn to supply you with food, it melteth waters to quench your thirst, it infuseth sense into your members, it illuminates the world to entertain you with prospects, it surroundeth you with the beauty of hills and valleys, It moveth and laboureth night and day for your comfort and service; it sprinkleth flowers upon the ground for your pleasure; and in all these things sheweth you the goodness and wisdom of God that can make one thing so beautiful, delightful and serviceable, having ordained the same to innumerable ends. It concocteth minerals, raiseth exhalations, begetteth clouds, sendeth down the dew and rain and snow, that refresheth and repaireth the earth. And is far more glorious in its diurnal motion, than if there were two suns to make on either side of a perpetual day: the swiftness whereby it moves in twenty-four hours about so vast an universe manifesteth the power and care of a Creator, more than any station or quiet could do. And producing innumerable effects it is more glorious, than if millions of Angels diversly did do them."

I don't apologise for quoting this passage in full; it is Traherne at his most typical.

"All praise to you, my Lord, through all that you have made, And first my lord Brother Sun, , brings the day; and light you give to us through him. How beautiful he is, how radiant in all his splendour! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness." So writes Francis in his Canticle of Brother Sun."

Not that the Sun is to be worshipped; rather, it is to praise God along with all created things. Francis and Traherne are in tune with the early Celtic Missionaries who christened the sun with a cross to make the Celtic Cross their emblem.

Agriculture, farming, has dragged its feet in recognising the Recapitulation; in fact its worst excesses of exploitation have taken place since the Dominant events of the middle of the twentieth Century: the ripping up of miles of hedgerows, the advent and growth of factory farming and reliance on chemicals and the waste resulting from the power of multi-national supermarkets in selecting and rejecting produce. Traherne, living as he did when farming was as we have recently been shown in the Television Series "Tales from the Green Valley", could not have foreseen these developments which are inimical to his and Francis' attitude towards nature and creation. As Christians today we have a great opportunity as part of our witness to our Creator God to support every movement towards a recapturing of that vision and towards the Benedictine concept of husbandry.. local produce, farmer's markets, organic, low chemical culture, local sustainability along with a respect for nature in all its beauty and diversity. Traherne and Francis would be right behind us there.

Not that one would want to return to the conditions of seventeenth century farming. In this recapitulation, there are new counterpoints of great beauty, things we have learnt and invented, which can be incorporated for the common good.

And our two mystics would rejoice to see the countryside and wildlife being looked at afresh, where conservation and restoration is being implemented: Credenhill Wood, for example where the pernicious pines are being replaced by indigenous deciduous trees, the establishment of National Parks and Sites of Special Interest..

God is able to bring good out of evil, Redemption after Fall, resurrection after crucifixion as Julian discovered in her visions, when she saw that "sin is behoverly," and that "all shall be well." And as Traherne asserts:

"He that knows not to what he is redeemed cannot prize the work of redemption – but when (he) does, then all things receive an infinite esteem, and an augmentation infinitely infinite, that follows after." He found his rediscovery of Eden after his apostacy a place enriched with many new beautiful counterpoints.

Remember the mediaeval words of a carol we sing at Christmas:

"Ne had the apple taken been, The apple taken been, Ne had never our lady Abeen heavenè queen. Blessed be the time that apple taken was. Therefore we moun singen Deo gracias." Words rediscovered and set to music in our own time.

Traherne challenges us again, as does Julian, to revisit the Genesis myth and to find new counterpoints of great beauty therein.

Recapitulation: Counterpoint – Love/Sex.

At my theological college we students were one day each given a lump of plasticine and asked to make a model of sin. Perhaps on account of a rather prudish upbringing, mine, a brick wall, was, I believe, about the only decent one. For in modern society sin mostly equals sex and sex sin, even though the Bible does not say so and is indeed full of it! There are pages and pages of begettings after all, with God himself getting involved, and, as we have seen there is a whole book devoted to erotic love.

It may be that the teachings of St Paul, coloured by his conviction that the end was imminent, and Psalm 51 v.5 - "Behold I was shapen in wickedness: and in sin hath my mother conceived me, along with the Prayerbook Service, "The Churching of Women" have combined to suggest that there is something unclean about erotic love, sex and childbirth, leading to a misunderstanding of the doctrine of original sin. Traherne would correct this by confidently claiming original innocence for all, for we are born into Eden. Julian in a way goes further when she says: "But I did not see sin. I believe it has no substance or real existence. It can be known only by the pain it causes." (Ch.27) And although the state of celibacy which the mediaeval church commended meant, to put it crudely, no sex, it did not mean no erotic love. Indeed, it may be that Francis loved Clare erotically, and the Freudian sex-drive is not easily sublimated, as all the lewd mediaeval drinking songs about monks and maidens make plain. And we have the example, too, of Abelard and Heloise, who succumbed to its power. So what of Traherne?

"Suppose a curious and fair woman," (So he begins C.M.2.68.- and surely he cannot mean Susanna Hopton, who is, after all, ten years his senior?) "Some," he continues, "have seen the beauties of Heaven in such a person. It is a vain thing to say they loved too much. I dare say there are ten thousand beauties in that creature which they have not seen. They loved it not too much but upon false causes... They love a creature for sparkling eyes and curled hair, lily breasts and ruddy cheeks: which they should love moreover for being God's Image, Queen of the Universe, beloved by Angels, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and heiress of Heaven, and temple of the Holy Ghost: a mine and fountain of all virtues, a treasury of graces, a child of God, But these excellences are unknown. They love her perhaps. but do not love God more: nor men as much: nor Heaven and Earth at all ... "

For Traherne it is of supreme significance that we are made in the image of God, which means that if God is Eros, then the eros which is his image in us is there to be reflected back to him through the cross: "Thou hast restored me above all to the image of God," he writes, "O let thy love be in me that thy joy may be fulfilled in me for evermore." (C.M.1.61) And again: "And he will so love us, when all this beauty of love is within us, that though we by our love to Him seem more blessed in His blessedness than He, He is infinitely more blessed than we even in our blessedness. We being so united to each other by living in each other that nothing can divide us for evermore."

This understanding of God as Eros is very important, says Melvyn Matthews. I quote: "The new science reveals the universe as passion, a need to love and have something to be loved, which comes from the aching and overwhelming **passio** at the heart of God. And he warns us, "We shall find ourselves outpaced, as indeed the Church has been, and find ourselves in a situation where the erotic is enshrined in secular literature while theology is left with meagre categories of action and moralization. This will ensure that the Church is increasingly marginalized and has little to do with a – if not the – major preoccupation of the so-called secular world. We will have banished the erotic into the secular and thereby curtailed our capacity to speak with and for the world which we inhabit."

Coda: Conclusion.

So, from our Christian perspective, Francis, Julian and Traherne have much to offer us. An intelligent reexamination of the Eden myth; the meaning of the cross; a fuller understanding of love; the meaning of worship; the value of silence and meditation; a rethink about the purpose of education; a healthier attitude towards creation, animal welfare, nature and farming; the importance of, to borrow the title of a great book by Bishop John Taylor, "Enough is enough"; the assurance that "All shall be well"; and that the mystic way is available to all.

Melvyn Matthews sees the demise of Newtonian Science and the arrival of postmodernism as an opportunity for the Church. "No longer," he writes, "Should it feel the need to state the faith in such a way as only rational people can understand it... No longer are pre-modern realities automatically assumed to be superstitious realities ... The modern **reasonable** way," he says, "is only one of the two ways by which we can understand our faith. the **mystical** being the other."

And it seems to me that with the discoveries of the new physics we can find fresh counterpoints of great beauty leading us into a coda in which Traherne redresses the balance for us in favour of the mystical way.

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