

Creation and Cross in the Anglican Spirituality of Thomas Traherne

The following is an essay I wrote for *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* [Vol. 25, No. 4, Fall 2016](#). This is based on a talk that I gave at the retirement of my Trinity School for Ministry colleague, the Rev. Dr. Rod Whitacre.



In the following essay, I intend to examine the relationship between theology and spirituality in the theology of Thomas Traherne. I proceed with three assumptions.

First, there is a direct relationship between doctrines or beliefs and practices, including spirituality, worship (or liturgy), and ethics. This has been a common theme of much theology in the last half century, but it is almost always worthwhile to examine how this works out in the writings of a particular theologian.

Second, there is such a thing as the subject matter of Christian faith, and this has both a center and a periphery. The center is expressed in the trinitarian and incarnational structure of the *Rule of Faith* appealed to by second century church fathers like Irenaeus, and in the ecumenical creeds of

the patristic era. This center is an essential summary of and hermeneutical guide to reading the normative text of the Christian Scriptures. Historically, the most enduring and helpful theologies have been those that have placed their focus on this center. We continue to read the works of Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Richard Hooker, Karl Barth and C.S. Lewis for this reason.

Third, there is no single correct way to articulate the subject matter of the Christian center. There are tremendous differences between the ways of doing theology that one finds in the writings of theologians like Athanasius, Thomas Aquinas or Karl Barth. Yet, arguably, the theologies of Athanasius, Aquinas, and Barth reflect a common center that is discernable across centuries and cultures. In this paper, I will try to make the case that the Anglican spiritual writer Thomas Traherne is such a theologian of the central subject matter of the Christian faith.¹

Who was Thomas Traherne? Broadly speaking, I would place Traherne among the Anglican Caroline Divines of the seventeenth century. The Caroline Divines were primarily high church Anglicans of the period following the death of Queen Elizabeth I, extending through the reigns of James I, Charles I and the English Civil War, James II, and more or less ending with the Glorious Revolution of William and Mary in 1689. Prominent Caroline Divines would include George Herbert, John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes. They lived in that period after Elizabeth when the Reformation break with Rome was a distant memory, and the Church of England was simply the “established church.” The Caroline Divines were marked by an integration of theology and what could be called a “two-book” spirituality. The King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer were the two books that together formed the center of the spiritual practice of this post-Elizabethan church.

Traherne belonged to the tail-end of the Caroline period, belonging as well to the beginning period of the next generation. He was the son of a shoemaker, born probably in 1637 in Hereford, a few years after the death of John Donne in 1631 and George Herbert in 1633. While Donne and Herbert died just before the English Civil War, Traherne was an Anglican priest during the period immediately following the Restoration; he was educated by Puritans, and he was familiar with and influenced by the writings of the Cambridge Platonists, who are sometimes seen as progenitors of latitudinarianism, but Traherne has enough characteristics in common with Anglicans like Herbert and Donne that I think he fits best with the Caroline Divines. He is also sometimes classified with the "Metaphysical poets," which would include John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and Richard Crashaw.

As is the case with George Herbert, we know very little about Traherne.² He began studies at Brasenose College, Oxford in 1652 at the age of fifteen, while the Puritans were in control. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1656, and his M.A. in 1661. Although not yet ordained, he was appointed rector at Credenhill, Herefordshire in 1657. He was ordained deacon and priest after the Restoration in 1660. It is likely that he spent the years from 1656 to 1661 at Oxford, not in his parish. In 1664, he settled into the parish at Credenhill. He became chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, Lord Keeper of the Seal in Teddington, probably in 1669, although this may have happened as late as 1673. Traherne published his first book, *Roman Forgeries*, in 1673, and died of smallpox a year later, in October 1674. His book *Christian Ethicks* was published posthumously in 1675, and a series of poems entitled *The Thanksgivings* in 1699. That should have been the last that history knew of Thomas Traherne, an obscure Anglican priest who died at the young age of 37, who published a couple of prose books and some poetry, and was soon forgotten.

This all changed when two hand-written manuscripts were discovered in a bin in a used book store in London in 1896, and purchased for a few pence by a Mr. William Brooke. Brooke's friend, William Dobbell, noticed that a poem in one of the manuscripts was identical to one in Traherne's *Christian Ethicks*, and the two volumes were identified as Traherne's work and published as *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* in 1903 and *Centuries of Christian Meditations* in 1908. Another volume of poetry was discovered and published in 1910 as *The Poems of Felicity. Select Meditations* was identified at Yale University in 1964, and published in 1997. The *Commentaries of Heaven*, a kind of theological dictionary or encyclopedia, was rescued from a burning rubbish heap in Lancashire sometime in the early 1960's, and was stored in a Canadian loft where a University of Toronto student who was helping to lay insulation recognized it as something important. It was identified as Traherne's in 1981, and published in 2007. An 1800 line poem entitled *The Ceremonial Law* was discovered in 1997 at the Folger Library in Washington, D.C., and, again in 1997, someone named Jeffrey Maule decided to visit the Lambeth Palace Library on a rainy day in London. While he was there, he discovered MS 1360, simply titled "Theology." The manuscript includes five theological treatises by Traherne, including a poem which also appears in Traherne's *Christian Ethicks*. A set of volumes entitled *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, edited by Jan Ross, began appearing in 2007. Six volumes have been published so far, and the projected set will be eight volumes.

Influences

A number of influences can be discerned in Traherne's theology. Foremost is Scripture, which he both quotes directly and incorporates by incidental quotations and paraphrases in both his prose and poetry. In addition, he regularly refers to or cites countless church fathers and other theologians and spiritual writers in the history of the church. Among the

church fathers, he refers to Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Great, Augustine, and John Chrysostom. As was Richard Hooker, Traherne was influenced by Thomas Aquinas. It is also evident that he had read and was familiar with the writings of Anglicans Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, George Herbert, and Jeremy Taylor. Finally, he read and had sympathy with the views of the Cambridge Platonists. He was also very interested in the current scientific ideas of his day.

I would like to say that I have read all of these newly discovered writings of Thomas Traherne, but I am going to have to leave that project to all of those graduate students who now have a newly discovered quarry for possible dissertation topics. In the following paper, I am going to focus on the relationship between theology and spirituality in Thomas Traherne's theology, and I will depend primarily on his *Centuries of Meditation*, first published in 1910, the work with which I am most familiar. From what I have been able to read of the newly published Traherne texts, I still believe that *Centuries* is the best introduction to Traherne's thought. The newly discovered texts may fill out and add to what he wrote in *Centuries*, but I do not believe that they depart from it in any way.

Central Themes: Creation, Happiness, Cross

I suggest that there are three central organizing themes in Traherne's spiritual theology, and these themes hold everything else together. My paper will summarize these themes, and show how they work together in Traherne's thought to create a spirituality that is grounded in theology.

The first key theme is a positive embracing of creation. Traherne rejects the *via negativa*, the tradition of spirituality that finds God through a process of leaving behind all created intermediaries and concepts.³ (Think, for example, of the Medieval mystical theology of *The Cloud of*

Unknowing or the post-Reformation Catholic St. John of the Cross.) Traherne insists that creation is God's good gift to his creatures. Created things are to be enjoyed, although not possessed. This focus on the positive aspect of creation has its mirror imagery in Traherne's notion of sin. Sin is defined as both ingratitude, ungratefulness for God's good gifts in creation, and idolatry, the attempt of the creature to possess rather than to enjoy God's good gifts.

The second key theme is happiness: teleology and eudaemonism are at the heart of Traherne's thought. Traherne advocated a eudaemonistic spirituality, a spirituality concerned with happiness or well-being. God has created human beings for a purpose, and happiness comes with discovering and living out that purpose. God loves us and wants us to be happy, but there are right and wrong ways of being happy. Happiness is found in the right ordering of our desires, and unhappiness results from desiring the wrong things. There is, accordingly, a close connection between holiness and happiness. There are influences of both Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas here. Traherne's theology echoes Augustine's prayer at the beginning of *The Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."⁴

Finally, Traherne brings these themes together in his understanding of the relation between creation and redemption. Salvation is not merely pardon and forgiveness of sin, but also re-creation. The cross is the center of God's redemption. It is in the crucifixion of Jesus where we most transparently encounter God's goodness.

Creation

How does Traherne bring these three themes together? Let us begin first with creation. During different periods of church history, different theological doctrines have occupied the center of attention. During the patristic period, the doctrines of the incarnation of God in Christ and of the

Trinity were hammered out. The primary issues of debate during the Reformation period concerned soteriology and authority: justification by faith, the primacy and authority of Scripture in relation to church tradition, and the doctrine of the sacraments were key subjects of debate. At the same time, in any given period, other doctrines sometimes have been neglected. The doctrine of creation, which was central to patristic refutations of heresies like Gnosticism, is relatively absent from mainstream Reformation theology. The Anglican 39 Articles, for example, have articles on the Trinity, Christology, the canon of Scripture, justification, and the sacraments, but there is no article on creation.⁵ *The Book of Homilies* has one homily that touches on creation in reference to Rogation Days.⁶

Neglected themes of one generation sometimes are recovered later. The Caroline Divines quietly corrected the Reformation neglect of creation. Creation is a major theme in the writings of Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and John Donne. Creation is also a key theme in the theology of Traherne, and, like the church fathers, who were a major source of his theology, Traherne draws a close connection between creation and redemption. Creation provides the setting for Traherne's discussion of theological motifs such as the doctrine of God and the Trinity, the nature of goodness, love, and communion with God – the fundamental purpose of redemption. Traherne affirms that creation and redemption have the same purpose or end: communion with God. He writes:

The fellowship of the mystery that hath been hid in God since the creation is not only the contemplation of the work of His Love in the redemption, tho' that is wonderful, but the end for which we are redeemed; a communion with Him in all His Glory. For which cause St. Peter saith The God of all Grace hath called us unto His Eternal Glory by Jesus Christ. His Eternal Glory by the method of His Divine Wisdom being made ours; and our fruition of it the end for which our Saviour

suffered.⁷

Traherne makes the following points in the above passage. First, the work of redemption cannot be understood or appreciated apart from its final goal or purpose. Second, this goal or purpose of redemption is communion with God. Third, the goal of communion between God and humanity has been God's plan, beginning with creation itself. Finally, our communion with God is God's glory; he has shared that glory with us in Jesus Christ, and bringing about this communion with God is the reason that Jesus died on the cross.

Who is this God who has created the world, and intends to bring us into communion with him? For Traherne, God is goodness itself, and this goodness is evident in that God is Triune. That God is Trinity means that God's very nature is that of love. The Father begets the Son through love. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the love between the Father and the Son. Echoing the scholastic notion that God is simple, and that God is pure act, Traherne insists that we cannot distinguish between God's existence and his love. That God is pure act means that God is pure love. Traherne writes:

God by loving begot His Son. For God is Love, and by loving He begot His Love. He is of Himself, and by loving He is what He is, INFINITE LOVE. God is not a mixt and compounded Being, so that His Love is one thing and Himself another: but the most pure and simple of all Beings, all Act, and pure Love in the abstract. Being Love therefore itself, by loving He begot His Love. . . . So that in all Love, the Trinity is clear. . . . The Love that lieth in the bosom of the Lover, being the love that is perceived in the spirit of the Beloved: that is, the same in substance, tho' in the manner of substance, or subsistence, different. Love in the bosom is the parent of Love, Love in the stream is the effect of Love, Love seen, or dwelling in the object proceedeth from both. Yet are all

*these, one and the Selfsame Love: though three Loves.*⁸

This love between the triune persons is the motivation that leads to God's creation of the universe. In creating the universe, God shares with creatures the pre-existing love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the manifestation of this love is God's reason for creating the world. Unless we, who are creatures of this love, can be satisfied with God's love, we will never be satisfied.⁹

It follows that God should be an object of delight, and is to be loved rather than feared. Creation is God's gift to his creatures, reflecting the Triune love that is God's very nature. In creating the world, God demonstrates that he loves us and cares more about our happiness than we do ourselves. In another example of his poetic prose, Traherne states:

*To know God is to know Goodness. It is to see the beauty of infinite Love: To see it attended with Almighty Power and Eternal Wisdom; and using both those in the magnifying of its object. It is to see the King of Heaven and Earth take infinite delight in Giving. . . . He is not an Object of Terror, but Delight. To know Him therefore as He is, is to frame the most beautiful idea in all Worlds.*¹⁰

There is thus a close connection between Traherne's understanding of God's nature as the self-identical pure act of goodness itself, the doctrine of the Trinity as the ontological grounding of God's love and goodness, the doctrine of creation as the external expression of divine goodness and love, God's goal in the creation of humanity as a sharing in the divine communion between the Triune persons, and, finally, God's redemption in Christ as the means to bring about that communion. A passage in Traherne's *Kingdom of God* ties these themes together: "Infinit Wisdom Knoweth how by communicating to receiv Infinit Glory: to make it self the End of all things

by making others so.”¹¹

Desire

In most discussions of theology, this would be the place to discuss anthropology, the doctrine of the creation of humanity in the image of God, and of the fall. Reformation theologies, in particular, often focus here on human sinfulness, and, especially in the Reformed tradition, on total depravity, as the preliminary to redemption. It is only if we understand the depths of human sinfulness that we can appreciate the need for redemption.

The newer discoveries of Traherne’s writings show that he discussed theological anthropology at length, but, in the same way that Traherne’s positive focus on creation provides the foreground to his doctrine of redemption, so an equally positive anthropology is preliminary to his doctrine of sin. It is not that Traherne is a Pelagian. However, as noted above, Traherne’s doctrine of creation is teleological, and he does not believe that sinfulness can be understood apart from the end and purpose for which humanity was created. Traherne draws a close connection between his Trinitarian understanding of God, God’s gift of creation as a communication of love between the Triune persons, and the creation of the human being in the image of God. In a newly discovered work entitled *Seeds of Eternity*, Traherne understands the meaning of being created in the image of God quite literally. The human being is a mirror: “For as in Water, the face of Heaven is represented; so is the Nature of God in the Soul of Man, where the Cause and End of His Creation, together with the Beauty of Religion, the Nature of Blessedness, and the Excellence of Nature in general as well as Mans in particular are unfolded.”¹²

Traherne’s anthropology is located at the crossroads between fullness and emptiness. The human being is created as a lover,

as a reflection of God's love, and so, the human being represents the fullness of the love which is the divine image. However, as a lover, the human being also represents emptiness. Insofar as it is created, created love is insufficient; its very capacity to love points to a fullness beyond the self, and a need that it cannot fulfill for itself. Thus, to be created in the image of God means to experience need, to desire a happiness that the created self cannot produce for itself. Traherne writes in *The Kingdom of God*:

*For such is the Nature of Man, that being a lover of himself, and Conscious of his own Emptiness, he Eagerly pursues a Happiness somewhere; and cannot rest without a Clear and apparent Treasure. If he hath not possession in another World, he will Scarcely be persuaded to let goe his possessions here. He will Cleav to his Enjoyments upon Earth, till he be sure of the Joys of Heaven. Neither does he rest satisfied, unless he be surrounded with Joys in this present Life, and see the Lov of God, apparently shining in all his Ways; a present felicity being Earnestly desired, and grasped by evry one.*¹³

Thus, desire plays a fundamental role in Traherne's anthropology. If other theologies place the image of God in rationality or stewardship over creation, Traherne says that the human being is created in God's image because we lack; we do not know for sure what it is that we want, and we are driven in all our actions by the desire to fulfill a need for we know not what. According to Traherne, we find ourselves attracted by desires for all kinds of created things. We are mistaken, however, in presuming that these things in themselves can fully satisfy our desires. Rather, our desire for created things is at bottom a desire for the God who created both us and the things that we desire. God's intention in creating us is not only to give us the gift of created things, but also to draw us to himself. Through our desire for

created things, God draws us to himself without our being aware that it is God that we desire. Traherne writes:

I have found that things unknown have a secret influence on the soul, and like the centre of the earth unseen violently attract it. We love we know not what, and therefore everything allures us. As iron at a distance is drawn by the loadstone, there being some invisible communications between them, so is there in us a world of Love to somewhat, though we know not what in the world that should be.^{[14](#)}

In another passage, Traherne states that our wants, our desires, are that which bind us to God. Our obligations to God are rooted in our infinite wants. Our desires indicate that we are made to love God:

Wants are the bands and cements between God and us. Had we not wanted we could never have been obliged. Whereas now we are infinitely obliged, because we want infinitely. From Eternity it was requisite that we should want. We could never else have enjoyed anything: Our own wants are treasures. And if want be a treasure, sure everything is so. Wants are the ligatures between God and us, the sinews that convey Senses from him into us, whereby we live in Him, and feel His enjoyments. For had we not been obliged by having our wants satisfied, we should not have been created to love Him. And had we not been created to love Him, we could never have enjoyed His eternal Blessedness.^{[15](#)}

There are similarities here to Augustine's doctrine of creation. As mentioned above, Augustine's *Confessions* begins with the famous prayer, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." And there is a famous passage in Augustine's *Confessions* where he questions the creatures, asking "Are you God?," that is, "Are you the one that I am seeking?" And each creature responds, "No, but he made me."^{[16](#)} A similar passage

occurs in Traherne:

*But God being infinite is infinitely righteous. His love therefore is righteous to itself and all its works as well as its object. . . . They daily cry in a living manner, with a silent and yet most loud voice. We are all his gifts: We are tokens and presents of His love. You must therefore esteem us according to the beauty and worth that is in us, and the Love from whence we came.*¹⁷

However, there is a crucial difference. Perhaps because of the influence of Neoplatonism, Augustine's spirituality is that of an ascent in which the transitory beauty of the creature leads beyond itself to point the soul toward a transcendent unchanging beauty.¹⁸ In contrast, Traherne believes that creatures should be enjoyed *for themselves* precisely because they are God's gift. Accordingly, the problem of sin (which will be discussed at more length in a bit) is not that we love created things too much, but that we love them in the wrong way. Traherne writes:

*We are made to love, both to satisfy the necessity of our active nature, and to answer the beauties in every creature. By Love our Souls are married and solder'd to the creatures and it is our Duty like God to be united to them all. We must love them infinitely, but in God, and for God and God in them: namely all His excellencies manifested in them. When we dote upon the perfections and beauties of some one creature, we do not love that too much, but other things too little. Never was anything in this world loved too much, but many things have been loved in a false way: and all in too short a measure.*¹⁹

Traherne's writings abound with descriptions of the glory of the created world. Creation is God's good gift to us, whether we recognize and appreciate it or not. At the same time, the

purpose of creation is that the fulfillment of our desires might lead to appreciation and gratitude, and that we might see the hand of God's love in the gifts that he gives us. The following three quotations, while lengthy, are typical:

You never enjoy the world aright, till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God: And prize in everything the service which they do you, by manifesting His glory and goodness to your Soul, far more than the visible beauty on their surface, or the material services they can do your body. Wine by its moisture quencheth my thirst, whether I consider it or no: but to see it flowing from His love who gave it unto man, quencheth the thirst even of the Holy Angels. To consider it, is to drink it spiritually. To rejoice in its diffusion is to be of a public mind. And to take pleasure in all the benefits it doth to all is Heavenly, for so they do in Heaven. To do so, is to be divine and good, and to imitate our Infinite and Eternal Father.

Your enjoyment of the world is never right, till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys: having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels. The bride of a monarch, in her husband's chamber, hath no such causes of delight as you.

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: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world.²⁰

Traherne's understanding of God's goodness manifest in creation coordinated with our infinite desires, which are set

in motion by our encounter with created things, is the foundation of both his spirituality and his ethics. For Traherne, spirituality means thinking about the world as God does. God's love and wisdom are manifested in created things. God's love is known by meditation, which is both thinking well of God, and also thinking God's thoughts after him, thinking about the world as God does. We thus accomplish the purpose for which we were created by thinking God's thoughts after him. Traherne writes:

What is more easy and sweet than meditation? Yet in this hath God commended His Love, that by meditation it is enjoyed. As nothing is more easy than to think, so nothing is more difficult than to think well. . . . Is it not easy to conceive the World in your Mind? To think the Heavens fair? The Sun Glorious? The Earth fruitful? The Air Pleasant? The Sea Profitable? And the Giver bountiful?²¹

We please God when we are like him. We become like God by thinking his thoughts after him, and we know God's thoughts by his works:

For then we please God when we are most like Him. We are like Him when our minds are in frame. Our minds are in frame when our thoughts are like His. And our thoughts are then like His when we have such conceptions of all objects as God hath, and prize all things according to their value. For God doth prize all things rightly, which is a Key that opens into the very thoughts of His bosom.²²

There is, accordingly, a close connection between holiness and one's created end. As noted above, teleology is central to Traherne's theological vision. By prizing creation, by esteeming things as they deserve, we enjoy God as well:

All things were made to be yours; and you were made to prize

them according to their value: which is your office and duty, the end for which you were created, and the means whereby you enjoy. The end for which you were created, is that by prizing all that God hath done, you may enjoy yourself and Him in Blessedness.^{[23](#)}

The temptation at this point might be to place Traherne in the tradition of those spiritualities that order the contemplative and active lives hierarchically, preferring the contemplative life of cloistered Marys over the worldly Marthas who get their hands dirty in the workaday world. Traherne specifically rejects this evaluation. Rather than contrasting the contemplative and active life, he insisted that spirituality involves not only thinking or meditation, but also action. Contemplation leads to action, and the tasks of the active life are necessary to contemplation:

For besides contemplative, there is an active happiness, which consisteth in blessed operations. And as some things fit a man for contemplation, so there are others fitting him for action: which as they are infinitely necessary to practical happiness, so are they likewise infinitely conducive to contemplative itself.^{[24](#)}

As there is, then, a close connection between a positive appreciation for the created world, so there is also a positive connection between a spirituality focused on appreciation for God's good gifts in creation and Christian ethics – our active life in and amongst created realities, including not only the natural creation, but our fellow human beings.

Law

This would be the place to discuss Traherne's notion of "law." Unfortunately, modern and post-modern people are uncomfortable

with talk of law for two reasons. First, modern and post-modern people see a disconnection between divine law and human flourishing. I would suggest that, historically, the reasons for that stretch back to a divorce that took place in the late Middle Ages between divine law and teleology, between law and creation, between law and human happiness, and between law and God as our Chief Good. (I would lay the blame here at the feet of William of Ockham, but John Duns Scotus prepared the way.) In one of her essays, Dorothy Sayers uses the example of making an omelet to suggest two kinds of law. There are arbitrary laws, such as insisting that anyone who makes an omelet must wear a top hat while doing so. And then there are laws that are inherent to the nature of what is being done, such as the law that states that anyone who makes an omelet must break eggs.^{[25](#)}

When we lose the relation between divine law and the order of creation, of God's nature as the Chief Good, and our own good as being found in conformity to God's intentions for our happiness, we end up thinking that God's law falls into the top hat-wearing category rather than the egg-breaking category. Then we will view God's law as a case of the biggest bully on the block pushing his weight around. However, it makes a big difference if we understand there to be an inherent connection between divine law and divine Goodness, between law and creation, and between divine law and human happiness. Divine law is, then, like the law about breaking eggs when we make omelets.

Thomas Aquinas illustrates this principle that Divine Law is about sharing God's goodness with creation.^{[26](#)} According to Thomas, divine law is about an ordered universe, and about what creatures need to do to get along in that universe. For human beings, divine law means that God has created us for friendship with himself, and we can only be happy when we obey God's law because God's law is just the way things are. God is not a bully; God is more like an artist.

The second reason that divine law makes us uncomfortable is that we are post-Reformation Christians. We live on the other side of the great divide between Law and Gospel. Law, we know, always condemns. Law reminds us that we are guilty. If an arbitrary divine law is an affront to our autonomy, a perfect divine law is an affront to our dignity. A God who is wholly Good is not much better than a God who is an omnipotent bully if we don't measure up to his perfect standards. We know that we fail to keep the law, and, the law reminds us continually of that failure. A God who threatens and judges us is a God we resent.

Here I suggest that we turn to Phillip Melanchthon, Martin Luther's disciple. In the "Apology for the Augsburg Confession," Melanchthon suggests that we cannot love God if we do not first see God as a lovable object. The human heart cannot love a God whom it perceives as angry and threatening or giving commands of the law. God can only be loved if we first see that God is merciful, that God loves us, and is for us. Only then can we experience the gratitude that enables us to respond to God's love with love of our own. If we understand God's command as an expression of his love, we can respond with love in kind.^{[27](#)}

As I mentioned above, Traherne was influenced by Aquinas, and by Richard Hooker as well, who follows a similar teleologically oriented notion of law. Law, for Traherne is not about a series of commands, of duties that we have to fulfill in order to achieve God's favor, but about the principles by which God creates and runs the universe. But Traherne also echoes the kind of understanding of the connection between divine love and divine command that we see in Melanchthon. Because we know that God loves us, we are able to respond with love in return.

Traherne draws a connection between divine law and the order of creation, which is rooted in God's love. Accordingly, the

first object of divine law is that we love both God who created us, and our fellow creatures, who are equally loved by God. When we love our fellow creatures, we serve them. When they love us in return, they serve us. According to Traherne:

*The laws of GOD, which are the commentaries of His works, shew them to be yours: because they teach you to love God with all your Soul, and with all your Might. . . . They command you to love all Angels and Men. They command all Angels and Men to love you. When you love them, they are your treasures; when they love you, to your great advantage you are theirs. All things serve you for serving them whom you love, and of whom you are beloved.*²⁸

And, in a manner similar to Melanchthon, Traherne notes that there is a close connection between God's love and God's laws. God's laws are founded in God's love, and God's love is demonstrated in God's gifts to us in creation. Accordingly, divine law means first that God loves us, and our fellow creatures. Second, from our point of view, law means returning God's love, as well as loving whatever God loves. We love God and our fellow creatures not as the fulfillment of an arbitrary demand, but because love irresistibly creates love in its object, which loves in return:

God loved thee with an infinite love, and became by doing so thine infinite treasure. Thou art the end unto whom He liveth. For all the lines of His works and counsels end in thee, and in thy advancement. Wilt not thou become to Him an infinite treasure, by loving Him according to His desert? It is impossible but to love Him that loveth. Love is so amiable that it is irresistible. . . . By Love alone is God enjoyed, by Love alone delighted in, by Love alone approached or admired. His Nature requires Love, thy nature requires Love. The law of Nature commands thee to Love Him: the Law of His nature, and the Law of thine. . . . His nature requireth that thou love all those whom He loveth, and receive Him in all

*those things wherein He giveth Himself unto thee. Their nature loveth to be beloved and being amiable require love, as well as delight in it. They require it both by desert and desire. Thy nature urgeth it. For without loving thou art desolate, and by loving thou enjoyest. Yea by loving thou expandest and enlargest thyself, and the more thou lovest art the more glorious.*²⁹

To love God means also to love our fellow creatures, who are equally objects of his love, including especially our fellow human beings. We serve God by loving others as God has loved us:

*Your enjoyment is never right, till you esteem every Soul so great a treasure as our Saviour doth: and that the laws of God are sweeter than the honey and honeycomb because they command you to love them all in such perfect manner. For how are they God's treasures? Are they not the riches of His love? Is it not His goodness that maketh Him glorious to them? Can the Sun or Stars serve him any other way, than by serving them? And how will you be the Son of God, but by having a great Soul like unto your Father's? The Laws of God command you to live in His image: and to do so is to live in Heaven. God commandeth you to love all like Him, because He would have you to be His Son, all them to be your riches, you to be glorious before them, and all the creatures in serving them to be your treasures, while you are His delight, like Him in beauty, and the darling of His bosom.*³⁰

Sin

Every Christian theology draws a connection between its doctrine of God and creation, its understanding of sin, and its corresponding understanding of redemption. For theologies that understand law primarily in terms of "divine command," sin is understood as disobedience. For Augustine, with his

focus on a close relation between goodness and will, sin was understood as pride, the placing of one's own will before that of others, especially God. For many of the Reformers, sin was understood as "unbelief," a negative corollary to the doctrine of justification by faith. For Traherne, there is a direct connection between his understanding of God and creation, and his understanding of sin. The fundamental nature of sin, according to Traherne, is rooted in ingratitude. Sin is ungratefulness and lack of appreciation for God's good gifts, but sin is also idolatry, the attempt to seize hold of created things and make them one's own rather than appreciating them as the good gifts of God and sharing them with others. Ironically, although the sin of ingratitude is founded in a desire for pleasure and possession, ingratitude leads inevitably to unhappiness, and discontentment with those things that one seeks to possess. Concerning the sin of ingratitude, Traherne writes:

For there is a disease in him who despiseth present mercies, which till it be cured, he can never be happy. He esteemeth nothing that he hath, but is ever gaping after more: which when he hath he despiseth in like manner. Insatiableness is good, but not ingratitude.^{[31](#)}

Ingratitude is inherently paradoxical in that it is a sin that cannot exist without the very gifts that it fails to appreciate. The ungrateful are showered with God's benefits; yet they misuse God's creation in an attempt to find in created goods a happiness that can only come from the Creator. The ungrateful are consequently miserable rather than happy because they seek happiness in that which cannot satisfy and miss the genuine happiness that would be theirs if they were grateful to the Giver.

Can any ingratitude be more damned than that which is fed by benefits? Or folly greater than that which bereaveth us of infinite treasures? They despise them merely because they

*have them: And invent ways to make themselves miserable in the presence of riches. They study a thousand newfangled treasures, which God never made: and then grieve and repine that they be not happy. They dote on their own works, and neglect God's, which are full of majesty, riches, and wisdom.*³²

As shown in the above passage, a correlate of the sin of ingratitude is the sin of acquisitiveness, which is, at bottom, a form of idolatry. A key distinction in Traherne's analysis of sin is that between appreciation and ownership. God's gifts in creation are free to all, and freely to be appreciated, and gratitude is our proper response to creation. Traherne writes:

*All things are ours; all things serve us and minister to us, could we find the way: nay they are ours, and serve us so perfectly, that they are best enjoyed in their proper places: even from the sun to a sand, from a cherubim to a worm.*³³

Desire in itself is a good thing, the corresponding human condition to God's free gift of his goodness in creation. Traherne writes:

*It is of the nobility of man's soul that he is insatiable. For he hath a Benefactor so prone to give, that He delighteth in us for asking. Do not your inclinations tell you that the World is yours? Do you not covet all? Do you not long to have it; to enjoy it; to overcome it?*³⁴

The corresponding object of this desire is an appreciation of God's gifts, all of which are given freely: ". . . as God's love, which is the fountain of all, did cost us nothing: so were all other things prepared by it to satisfy our inclinations in the best of manners, freely, without any cost

of ours.”³⁵ Conversely, human beings sin and are made miserable when, rather than esteeming or appreciating God’s free gift of creation, they latch hold onto some part of creation and attempt to make it their own, especially when they attempt to find happiness in what we would now call consumerism – the acquisition of humanly manufactured possessions which we want to claim as exclusively ours. It is this attempt to claim things for ourselves and to find ultimate happiness in the products of our own hands that leads to human conflict:

*The riches of darkness are those which men have made, during their ignorance of God Almighty’s treasures: That lead us from the love of all, to labour and contention, discontentment and vanity. The works of darkness are Repining, Envy, Malice, Covetousness, Fraud, Oppression, Discontent and Violence. All which proceed from the corruption of Men and their mistake in the choice of riches: for having refused those which God made, and taken to themselves treasures of their own, they invented scarce and rare, insufficient, hard to be gotten, little, movable and useless treasures.*³⁶

Traherne’s understanding of sin is a kind of theological commentary on the statement in 1 Timothy 6:10 that the love of money is the root of all evil or the assertion in James 4:1-3 that human conflicts are caused by warring passions.³⁷ Again, there is an irony here. According to Traherne, desire is a sign of being created in the image of God, but it is also the characteristic that makes sin possible:

The noble inclination whereby man thirsteth after riches and dominion, is his highest virtue, when rightly guided; and carries him as in a triumphant chariot, to his sovereign happiness. Men are made miserable only by abusing it. Taking a false way to satisfy it, they pursue the wind: nay, labour in the very fire, and after all reap but vanity. Whereas, as

*God's love, which is the fountain of all, did cost us nothing: so were all other things prepared by it to satisfy our inclinations in the best of manners, freely, without any cost of ours.*³⁸

The Cross

The recent discovery of more Traherne texts has cast a great deal of light on his understanding of creation, the fall, Christology, the atonement, and redemption. The *Commentaries of Heaven*, his theological encyclopedia, is particularly helpful here. The article on "Human Abilitie" as well as Traherne's essay "A Sober View of Dr. Twisse" make clear that Traherne was aware of debates between Calvinists and Arminians, and he was certainly no Pelagian. In the article on "Human Abilitie," he distinguishes between the "Estate of Innocence" and the fall. In the "Estate of Innocence," human ability was "yong and florid," and "Apt for all things." However, Traherne continues, "But by Sin it was so Maimed, that it hath ever since been lame and defectiv." Neither could human ability be restored without a miracle. Which miracle?, he asks. "It was our Saviors Incarnation. By which we are Advanced to greater Abilitie than we had before . . ." Traherne states: "The more is forgiven the more we shall lov, the more is don for us we shall rejoyce the more. The greater Price hath been paid, the Dearer are our Persons, the more we lov, the more Amiable; the more we rejoyce, the more Delightful, the greater Dangers we are Snatched from, the more Glorious."³⁹

Traherne's article on "Assumption" focuses on the incarnation. Traherne writes that "The Assumption of the Human Nature is that Act, whereby CHRIST took upon him the Body and Soul of a Man, uniting it Personally to his Divine Nature." Traherne appeals to the book of Hebrews and Philippians 2, focusing on Christ taking on the form of a servant; he quotes Athanasius,

and Chalcedon, affirming that Christ is fully God and fully human: “so GOD and MAN is one CHRIST.”⁴⁰ Traherne’s discussion of the end (that is, teleological goal) of the incarnation shows, again, the close connection he draws between creation and redemption:

The Condescension of the Eternal GOD to the low Estate of an Instant, was like that of his Stooping down to Nothing for the Creation of the World; and must have an End proportionable to it. Man, being the only Creature to whom the Visible Worlds were made, had frustrated the Designe of God in the Creation of them. For the End of the Creation was Mans Happiness, and Gods Glory in the Greatness of his Felicitie; the Sweet and Continual Exercises of Lov and Amitie between the Creator and his Creatures; the Harmony whereof Mans Sin had broken and interrupted with jarring Discord. To the End thereof that Man might be restored, and God and Man delivered from that Horrid Enmitie and the bitter Exercises and Torments of it, that Sin had introduced, GOD the Son was Incarnate . . . that he might become a Sacrifice, and make Satisfaction to Divine justice for our Sin, that without any Dishonor to GOD we all might be saved.

Traherne speaks here of the satisfaction of divine justice, but a few lines later, he writes: “that his Love might be satisfied, and his Mercy Glorified in the Welfare of his Great and Principle Work, in the Honor due unto his Name, and in the Continual Delight which the Soul of his Redeemed taketh in him for ever.”⁴¹ Traherne regularly oscillates between describing the atonement as a satisfaction of divine justice and as a satisfaction of divine love.

In a similar manner, Traherne closely coordinates divine righteousness and divine love. It is because God’s love is righteous that he cannot tolerate that which dishonors his gifts:

But God being infinite is infinitely righteous. His love therefore is righteous to itself and all its works as well as its object. To itself in requiring that it be infinitely esteemed, of which it is infinitely desirous. The contemners of it therefore it infinitely punisheth. To its works not only in making them the best that may be, but in requiring an exact and due esteem, from the enjoyers of them. Is not Love jealous of the honour of its gifts? Doth not a contempt of its presents, rebound upon itself?⁴²

Traherne writes that “Love can forbear, and Love can forgive, though it can never be reconciled to an unlovely object. . . . Love can never be reconciled to an unlovely object, and you are infinitely unlovely by despising God and His Love so long.”⁴³ At the same time, Traherne’s view of the atonement does not play off against one another divine love and divine justice, but holds them tightly together. If sin is the despising of God’s love, the atonement is the uniting of God’s love and God’s justice:

By how much the greater His love was, by so much the greater may His sorrow be at the loss of His object: and by so much the greater His desire also of its restoration. His Love therefore being infinite, may do infinite things for an object infinitely valued. Being infinite in Wisdom, it is able also to devise a way inscrutable to us, whereby to sever the sin from the sinner and to satisfy its righteousness in punishing the transgression, yet satisfy itself in saving the transgressor.⁴⁴

Traherne’s article on “Atonement” focuses on the English compound meaning of “at-one-ment.” Atonement has to do with setting aside the division between God and humanity. It signifies the “Union between GOD and man,” “Mans Acceptablenss that had been displeasing,” and the “Pacification of GODs

Mind, that had been displeased.” Traherne uses the traditional language of “sacrifice,” “satisfaction,” “redemption,” debt payment, and “imputation,”⁴⁵ but, as elsewhere, his primary focus is on God’s love made effective in Christ’s incarnation and death on the cross:

*Surely then CHRIST our Pass Over is Sacrificed for us, and GOD in CHRIST is sacrificed for us, for no Lov but the Lov of GOD is so Broad so Long so Deep so High, that it passeth Knowledg; no Lov, but the Lov of GOD, can fill us, when comprehended, with all the fullness of GOD. The Lov of GOD imputed to us, maketh us to become the Righteousness of God. . . . by how much the more the father loveth us, and setteth his Heart upon our Welfare, by so much the more he delighteth in his Son for being Lov unto us, and so much the more esteemth his Lov toward us. Lov unto the Death in our Undertaker paying more than Divine Justice then could possibly be required by any other, from any other. Only GOD could command so great an atonement, only GOD was able to pay it.*⁴⁶

The fullest discussion of the atonement and its close connection to the rest of Traherne’s spirituality and theology is found in *The Centuries* where he closely connects Jesus’ atoning death on the cross to the central themes of desire and happiness:

*The Cross is the abyss of wonders, the centre of desires, the school of virtues, the house of wisdom, the throne of love, the theatre of joys, and the place of sorrows; It is the root of happiness, and the gate of Heaven.*⁴⁷

The cross of Christ reveals both divine love and human sinfulness. The God who created the world, giving us his goodness in both creation and in his coming to us a fellow creature in Jesus Christ, encounters human ingratitude – the

root of human sin – most fully on the cross. The cross is the place where all of Traherne's themes come together: God's love and goodness; human desire and happiness, sin and misery, eternity and creation. As the image of God in humanity is a mirror of God, so the crucified Christ is a mirror of both heaven and of all creation. Traherne writes:

*Of all the things in Heaven and Earth it is the most peculiar. It is the most exalted of all objects. . . . There we may see God's goodness, wisdom and power: yea His mercy and anger displayed. There we may see man's sin and infinite value. His hope and fear, his misery and happiness. There we might see the Rock of Ages, and the Joys of Heaven. There we may see a Man loving all the world, and a God dying for mankind. There we may see all types and ceremonies, figures and prophecies. And all kingdoms adoring a malefactor: An innocent malefactor, yet the greatest in the world. There we may see the most distant things in Eternity united: all mysteries at once couched together and explained. . . . It is a Well of Life beneath in which we may see the face of Heaven above: and the only mirror, wherein all things appear in their proper colours: that is, sprinkled in the blood of our Lord and Saviour.*⁴⁸

Echoing the story of Jacob in the book of Genesis, Traherne tells his reader that the cross is the ladder that bridges heaven and earth by divine love:

*The Cross of Christ is the Jacob's ladder by which we ascend into the highest heavens. There we see joyful Patriarchs, expecting Saints, Prophets ministering Apostles publishing, and Doctors teaching, all Nations centering, and Angels praising. 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 on it.*⁴⁹

As Traherne had stated throughout his writings that we can discern God's presence in all of creation, he now insists that it is in the cross of Jesus Christ where we can most distinctively discern God's presence. There are echoes here of Julian of Norwich, and anticipations of Karl Barth:

*These wounds are in themselves orifices too small to let in my sight, to the vast comprehensions of Thine eternal love. Those wounds engraven in Thy hands but shady impressions, unless I see the Glory of Thy Soul, in which the fullness of the GODHEAD dwelleth bodily. These bloody characters are too dim to let me read it, in its lustre and perfection till I see Thy person, and know Thy ways! 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 Thy GODHEAD in the highest heavens.*⁵⁰

The cross is not only the center of the revelation of God's love for humanity; it is also the paradigm for Christian virtue, as well the prime example of Christian love:

*Here you learn all patience, meekness, self-denial, courage, prudence, zeal, love, charity, contempt of the world, penitence, contrition, modesty, fidelity, constancy, perseverance, contentation, holiness, and thanksgiving: With whatsoever else is requisite for a Man, a Christian, or a King.*⁵¹

The cross is the paradigm of Christian love for others. As Christ loved us unto death, so also the cross provides the exemplar of the love that we are to show to one another. Traherne prays that Christians would engage in an imitation of Christ's love that we may sympathize for others' suffering and promote their genuine happiness:

Why, Lord Jesus, dost Thou love men; why are they all Thy

*treasures? What wonder is this, that Thou shouldst so esteem them as to die for them? Shew me the reasons of Thy love, that I may love them too. O Goodness ineffable! They are the treasures of Thy goodness. Who so infinitely lovest them that Thou gavest Thyself for them. Thy Goodness delighted to be communicated to them whom Thou hast saved. O Thou who art more glorious in Goodness, make me abundant in this Goodness like unto Thee. That I may as deeply pity others misery, and as ardently thirst for their happiness as Thou dost.*⁵²

Participation

Although the cross is at the center of Traherne's theology of the atonement, his theology of redemption does not conclude with the cross. In a manner similar to the way that Traherne draws a close connection between creation and redemption, so he also ties together the christological themes of incarnation, cross, and resurrection. The atonement is not only about pardon and forgiveness of sins, but also about re-creation and union with the risen and ascended Christ. What is salvation? Salvation is union with and communion with the risen and ascended Christ; it is God's love indwelling us through his Holy Spirit who unites us to communion with the entire Trinity. Traherne prays in the *Centuries*:

O Thou who ascendedst up on high, and ledst captivity captive, and gavest gifts unto men, as after Thy ascension into heaven Thou didst send Thy Holy Spirit down upon Thine Apostles in the form of a rushing mighty wind, and in the shape of cloven fiery tongues; send down the Holy Ghost upon me: Breathe upon me, inspire me, quicken me, illuminate me, enflame me, fill me with the Spirit of God; that I may overflow with praises and thanksgivings as they did. Fill me with the riches of Thy glory, that Christ may dwell in my heart by faith, that I being rooted and grounded in Love may speak the wonderful Works of God. Let me be alive unto them: let me see them all, let me feel them all, let me enjoy them

*all: that I may admire the greatness of Thy love unto my soul, and rejoice in communion with Thee for evermore. How happy, O Lord, am I, who am called to a communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in all their works and ways, in all their joys, in all their, treasures, in all their glory! Who have such a Father, having in Him the Fountain of Immortality Rest and Glory, and the joy of seeing Him creating all things for my sake! Such a Son, having in Him the means of peace and felicity, and the joy of seeing Him redeeming my soul, by His sufferings on the cross, and doing all things that pertain to my salvation between the Father and me: Such a Spirit and such a Comforter dwelling in me to quicken, enlighten, and enable me, and to awaken all the powers of my soul that night and day the same mind may be in me that was in Christ Jesus!*⁵³

This notion of salvation as re-creation and union with and participation in the humanity of the risen Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit shows Traherne's familiarity with and dependence on the church fathers, but it has also been a key theme in traditional Anglican theology. Thomas Cranmer's "Prayer of Humble Access" in the historic book of Common Prayer concludes with the words: "Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us." Participation in and union with the humanity of the risen Christ is a key theme in the theology of Anglicans such as Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes. In historic Anglican theology, union with Christ is closely connected with the theology of the sacraments, and Traherne echoes this tradition. In his article on "Assimilation," he writes:

For GOD Himself is an infinit and Eternal Object of Mans Knowledge, and is pleased to becom the food of the Soul to

*which the H. Sacrament of the Eucharist is a Type and Symbol: wherein we feed on the body and Blood of CHRIST by which we feed on his GODHEAD, and dwell in Him, and he in us, and are made one with him and he with us, as the Scripture saith.*⁵⁴

Union with Christ is, once again, a way of sharing in the Triune love, a communion with the God who made all of creation in order to communicate to creatures the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Traherne's theology of union with Christ thus ends where he began, with the love of the Trinitarian persons. Our present participation in God's love anticipates and points to an eschatological future in which all creation will reach its final teleological goal. All that mars God's creation will be defeated, and death and suffering will be no more:

*When I see myself beloved of the Father; when I know the perfection of thy love, when the Father and the Son loveth me, and both manifest themselves unto me; when they are near unto me and abide with me for ever and ever, little harm can death do, or sickness and poverty. I can never be alone because the Father and Son are with me. No reproaches can discomfort me, no enemies can hurt me. O let me know Thee Thou Spirit of Truth, be Thou always with me, and dwell within me. How is it possible, but Thou shouldst be an infinite Comforter; who givest me a being as wide as eternity; a well-being as blessed as the Deity; a temple of glory in the omnipresence of God, and a light wherein to enjoy the New Jerusalem!*⁵⁵

The concluding point of Traherne's theology is then that we are made to love. In a manner similar to the structure of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Traherne's theology is built around a pattern of exit and return. At the beginning of the journey is the love expressed between the persons of the Triune God. This love freely overflows in that the Trinity

creates a world in which the Triune love can be shared with others. As created in the divine image, the human being is a mirror of divinity, created for love and communion with both God and with other human beings. To be created for love means to be incomplete, to be lacking in wholeness without a corresponding object of one's love. Thus, seeking and desire are at the heart of what it means to be human. The numerous objects of the created world in which we live are gifts from God to us, and are meant to be enjoyed and appreciated, but not possessed in an exclusive manner. In our search for fulfillment and happiness, the gifts of creation are meant to draw us to know and appreciate the Divine Giver. Ingratitude and idolatry – the hoarding of created gifts for ourselves – are together the primary sins that lead not only to our own misery, but cause conflict between us and those other creatures whom we also are meant to love. In the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, God has taken upon himself our ingratitude and idolatry in the suffering of the cross. It is in the atoning work of the cross that God's eternal love reaches its fullest extent, as God in Christ gives not only being and creation, but his own self, for his creatures. The cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ provide not only forgiveness of sin, but also re-create fellowship and communion with the Triune God, as through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are united to the risen Christ through the created gifts of water, bread and wine, in the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. The love which God has shared with us in creation, and restored and re-created in the incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ, itself overflows to be shared with others. Traherne writes:

His nature requireth that thou love all those whom He loveth, and receive Him in all those things wherein He giveth Himself unto thee. Their nature loveth to be beloved and being amiable require love, as well as delight in it. They require it both by desert and desire. Thy nature urgeth it. For without loving thou art desolate, and by loving thou

*enjoyest. Yea by loving thou expandest and enlargest thyself, and the more thou lovest art the more glorious.*⁵⁶

In the end, Traherne's is a teleological spiritual theology that centers on the creedal subject matter of Christian faith – the Trinity, creation, fall, incarnation, atonement, grace and eschatology – viewing all through the central eudaemonistic themes of desire and happiness. But, primarily, Traherne's theology centers on love: God's triune love shared with creatures in creation and redemption, the love of the creature returned to God and leading to a shared communion with both God and one's fellow creatures:

*Miraculous are the effects of Divine Wisdom. He loveth every one, maketh every one infinitely happy and is infinitely happy in every one. He giveth all the world to me, He giveth it to every one in giving it to all, and giveth it wholly to me in giving it to every one for everyone's sake. He is infinitely happy in every one as many times therefore as there are happy persons He is infinitely happy. Every one is infinitely happy in every one, every one therefore is as many times infinitely happy as there are happy persons. He is infinitely happy above all their happiness in comprehending all. And I, comprehending His and theirs, am Oh, how happy! Here is love! Here is a kingdom! Where all are knit in infinite unity. All are happy in each other. All are like Deities. Every one the end of all things, everyone supreme, every one a treasure, and the joy of all, and every one most infinitely delighted in being so. All things are ever joys for every one's sake and infinitely richer to every one for the sake of all. The same thing is multiplied by being enjoyed. And He that is greatest is most my treasure. This is the effect of making Images, and by all their love is every Image infinitely exalted. Comprehending in his nature all Angels, all Cherubims, all Seraphims, all Worlds, all Creatures, and GOD over all Blessed for ever.*⁵⁷

1 In *Centuries of Meditation*, Traherne describes the “objects” of “Divinity” as: “God in the unity of His essence, in the trinity of persons, in His manifold attributes, in all His works, internal and external, in His counsels and decrees, in the work of creation, and in His works of providence. And man, as he is a creature of God, capable of celestial blessedness, and a subject, in His Kingdom, in his fourfold estate of innocency, misery, grace and glory. In the estate of innocency we are to contemplate the nature and manner of his happiness, the laws under which he was governed, the joys of paradise, and the immaculate powers of his immortal soul. In the estate of misery, we have his fall, the nature of Sin, original and actual; his manifold punishments, calamity, sickness, death, &c. In the estate of grace; the tenour of the new covenant, the manner 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 or 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. In the state of Glory, the nature of separate Souls, their advantages, excellencies and privileges, the resurrection of the body, the day of judgment, and life everlasting. Wherein further we are to see and understand the communion of Saints, Heavenly joys, and our society with Angels.” Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditation*, Bertram Dobbell, ed. (London: 1908), 3.43; <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/traherne/centuries>.

2 Biographical information on Traherne depends primarily on Denise Inge, *Happiness and Holiness: Thomas Traherne and His Writings* (London: Canterbury Press, 2008); *Wanting Like a God: Desire and Freedom in Thomas Traherne* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

3 Traherne writes of the “philosophers” of the *via negativa*: “[G]reat offence hath been done by the philosophers and scandal given, through their blindness, many of them, in

making Felicity to consist in negatives. They tell us it doth not consist in riches, it doth not consist in honors, it doth not consist in pleasures. Wherein then, saith a miserable man, doth it consist? Why in contentment, in self sufficiency, in virtues, in the right government of our passions, &c. Were it not better to show the amiableness of virtues, and the benefit of the right government of our passions, the objects of contentment, and the grounds of self sufficiency, by the truest means? Which these never do. Ought they not to distinguish between true and false riches as our Saviour doth; between real and feigned honours; between clear and pure pleasures and those which are muddy and unwholesome? . . . Contentment and rest ariseth from a full perception of infinite treasures. So that whosoever will profit in the mystery of Felicity, must see the objects of his happiness, and the manner how they are to be enjoyed, and discern also the powers of his soul by which he is to enjoy them, and perhaps the rules that shall guide him in the way of enjoyment. All which you have here, GOD, THE WORLD, YOUR SELF, ALL THINGS in Time and Eternity being the objects of your Felicity, God the Giver, and you the receiver." *Centuries* 2.100.

[4](#) Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.

[5](#) Anglican theologian Oliver O'Donovan points out the neglect of creation in *On the Thirty-Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 63-74.

[6](#) "An Homily for the Days of Rogation Week: That All Good Things Cometh From God," *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches*, John Griffiths, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859).

[7](#) *Centuries* 1.5.

[8](#) *Centuries* 2.39,40.

[9](#) "The very end for which God made the world, was that He

might manifest His Love. Unless therefore we can be satisfied with His Love so manifested, we can never be satisfied.” *Centuries* 3.62.

[10](#) *Centuries* 1.17.

[11](#) *The Kingdom of God*, 7.97-98; *The Works of Thomas Traherne: Volume 1*, Jan Ross, ed. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005) 283.

[12](#) *Seeds of Eternity*, 25-28, *Works* 1, 233. A similar statement is found in *The Centuries*: “But man is made in the Image of God, and therefore is a mirror and representative of Him. And therefore in himself he may see God, which is his glory and felicity. His thoughts and desires can run out to everlasting. His love can extend to all objects, his understanding is an endless light, and can infinitely be present in all places, and see and examine all beings, survey the reasons, surmount the greatness, exceed the strength, contemplate the beauty, enjoy the benefit, and reign over all it sees and enjoys like the Eternal Godhead. Here is an invisible power, an indivisible omnipresence, a spiritual supremacy, an inward, hidden, unknown being greater than all, a sublime and sovereign creature meet to live in communion with God, in the fruition of them.” *Centuries* 2.23.

[13](#) *The Kingdom of God*, 3.19-27; *Works* 1, 261.

[14](#) *Centuries* 1.2.

[15](#) *Centuries* 1.51.

[16](#) Augustine, *Confessions* 10.9; Augustine uses similar language in Sermon 241.2: “Question the beauty of the earth, question the beauty of the sea, question the beauty of the air They all answer you, ‘Here we are, look; we’re beautiful.’ Their beauty is their confession. Who made these beautiful changeable things, if not one who is beautiful and unchangeable?” *The Works of Saint Augustine: Part III, vol. 7: Sermons (230-272B) On the Liturgical Seasons*, ed. John E.

Rotello, O.S.A., trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 71. An anonymous reader suggests that Traherne is “deeply Augustinian.” See especially David Lyle Jeffrey, “The Beauty of the Cross in Augustine’s Aesthetics,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 12, No. 3(2014):769-789. Jeffrey’s discussion of Augustine on the love for divine beauty exhibited not only in the creation but also in the cross certainly points to themes in Augustine that anticipate Traherne.

[17](#) *Centuries* 2.28.

[18](#) “[L]et us praise God because he has given such a great good even to this beauty, though it is the least. Yet let us not cling to it as lovers of it, but let us pass beyond it as lovers of God, in order that, situated above it, we may judge concerning it and may not be entangled in it and judged with it. And let us hasten to the good that is not spread out in time, and does not pass in time, and from which all natures in places and times receive beauty and form.” Answer to the “Letter of Mani,” known as “The Foundation” (*Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti*) 42.8; cited by Jeffrey, 774.

[19](#) *Centuries* 2.66.

[20](#) *Centuries* 1.27-29.

[21](#) *Centuries* 1.8.

[22](#) *Centuries* 1.13.

[23](#) *Centuries* 1.12.

[24](#) *Centuries* 4.1.

[25](#) Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (NY: Harper & Row, 1979), 15-16.

[26](#) *Summa Theologiae*, “Treatise on Law,” 1.2.90-108.

[27](#) "The Defense of the Augsburg Confession," *Book of Concord*; http://bookofconcord.org/defense_5_love.php#para5.

[28](#) *Centuries* 1.20.

[29](#) *Centuries* 1.71,73.

[30](#) *Centuries* 1.39.

[31](#) *Centuries* 1.21.

[32](#) *Centuries* 1.32.

[33](#) *Centuries* 4.16.

[34](#) *Centuries* 1.22.

[35](#) *Centuries* 1.23.

[36](#) *Centuries* 1.33.

[37](#) "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." (ESV)

[38](#) *Centuries* 1.23.

[39](#) "Human Abilitie," *Commentaries of Heaven*, 265-287; *Works* 2, 28-29.

[40](#) "Assumption," *Commentaries of Heaven*, 52-55, 84; *Works* 3, 278, 279.

[41](#) "Assumption," *Commentaries of Heaven*, 285-304; *Works* 3, 284.

[42](#) *Centuries*, 2.28.

[43](#) *Centuries* 2.29.

[44](#) *Centuries* 2.31.

[45](#) "Atonement," 15-20, 41-50, 159-189, *Commentaries of Heaven; Works 3*, 364, 365, 368.

[46](#) "Atonement," 241-247, 287-293, *Commentaries of Heaven; Works 3*, 370, 371.

[47](#) *Centuries* 1.58.

[48](#) *Centuries* 1.59; As noted above, there is a similar emphasis on the paradoxical beauty of the cross in Augustine: "Christ's deformity is what gives form (*form, formosa*) to you. If He had been unwilling to be deformed, you would never have gotten back the form you lost. So He hung on the cross, deformed; but the deformity was our beauty (*sed deformitas illius pulchritudo nostra erat*). (*Serm. 27.6*); cited by Jeffrey, 787.

[49](#) *Centuries* 1.60.

[50](#) *Centuries* 1.64.

[51](#) *Centuries* 1.61.

[52](#) *Centuries* 1.63.

[53](#) *Centuries* 1.95.

[54](#) "Assimilation," 165-169, *Commentaries of Heaven; Works 3*, 264.

[55](#) *Centuries* 1.98.

[56](#) *Centuries* 1.73.

[57](#) *Centuries* 1.74.