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George Herbert: The Country Parson And The Temple (Classics Of Western Spirituality)



Synopsis

George Herbert (1593-1633) lived in England during the tempestuous reigns of James I and Charles I that saw the nation racked by conflict among Catholics, Hugh Churchmen, and Puritans. A member of a politically-active family, Herbert rejected a promising career as a member of Parliament for the simple life of a country parson. While busily involved in his pastoral duties he produced works of poetry and prose that have earned him a long-established place in English literary history. Collected here are two works originally published after Herbert's death at Bemerton in 1633: *The Country Parson*, a prose treatise on the duties, joys, and hardships of a pastor's life; and *The Temple*, a collection of poems. In them the literary genius of this humble priest whose spirituality was a synthesis of Evangelical and Catholic piety is revealed. Herbert's appeal for today is summed up by A.M. Allchin in his preface to this volume: "Without glossing over the fragility and brokenness of man's experience of life in time, he managed to reaffirm the great unities of Christian faith and prayer. These are the unities which draw together the separated strands in the Christian heritage, which draw together past and present in a living and creative appropriation of tradition."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

George Herbert (1593-1633) has long been respected as a clergyman, poet, and spiritual master. Like many clergymen of his day, Herbert owed his position to a certain extent to his political connections - his family had some influence, and indeed, Herbert himself was probably destined for a parliamentary/political career, had another calling not seized him. He became a country parson,

which was an ideal setting for Herbert, for it afforded him the time and the environment he needed to delve deeply into the human spirit, and produce works of depth and inspiration that make him an important figure in literary history. Herbert's peaceful musings come at a time when the church in England was going through a tempestuous time. Herbert's poetry and prose strikes a chord with Catholics, Anglicans high and low, and Puritans, in different ways. Herbert's personal devotion and humility shines through his writings, and his works provide material for spiritual direction to a wide range of people to this day. This volume includes two of Herbert's best known works - 'The Country Parson', a prose reflection of Herbert's own work as a pastor, which provides insight into his own spiritual work as well as a snapshot of life in the early seventeenth century, and 'The Temple', a collection of Herbert's poetry. Both works were published only after Herbert's death in 1633. The underlying sensibilities in both prose and poetry are many of the same sources of much of English literary works: the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the works of Shakespeare, and the rapidly developing English language itself.

Born in 1593 into an aristocratic English family, George Herbert was educated at Westminster School and Cambridge University. After graduating from Cambridge, Herbert served in the Parliament for one term (1624) as the representative of Montgomeryshire in support of King James's peaceful policies towards Spain. Once that term was over, Herbert returned to his original career goal of becoming a priest in Church of England. Accordingly, Herbert was ordained as a deacon in the fall of 1624 and a priest in 1630. Shortly before his ordination into the priesthood, Herbert had married Jane Danvers on March 5, 1629. Together they moved to Bemerton, a small rural village in the south of England, where Herbert was the parish rector until his death in 1633. Both of Herbert's works ('The Country Parson' and 'The Temple') were published after his death, making it hard to determine the actual date in which they were written. In the intro to 'The Country Parson,' Herbert writes that he 'resolved to set down the Form and Character of a true Pastor, that I may have a Mark to aim at' (page 54). With this in mind, it is assumed that Herbert pinned most of the work in the five years between when he was ordained as a deacon and then a priest. The content of the work carries with it the assumption that everyone living in England at the time was a member of the Church of England. The goal of a parish pastor was then to be 'the Deputy of Christ for the reducing of Man to the Obedience of God' through teaching and personal example (page 31). The second major work of Herbert is a collection of religious poems written at various points in Herbert's life. Combined into one volume, 'The Temple' is divided into three sections with individual poems fitting the tone of their section.

George Herbert's poetry is, to my ears, some of the best religious poetry ever written. I studied a lot of poetry in grad school, but Herbert remains at the very top of my own personal literary canon. In Herbert, the best of godly devotion and exquisite craftsmanship are married, and that is a rare thing. This Paulist Press edition of the works of George Herbert includes Herbert's 2 major works: "The Temple" and "A Priest to the Temple." "The Temple" includes Herbert's beautiful church poetry. Although English metaphysical poetry may not be to everyone's taste, and it will be difficult for many modern readers, it's perfectly suited to mine. I love the whimsical word play and the delight in the English language that Herbert manifests. The form matches the matter, and it always seems as if the poems end when they should on a note of satisfaction and having said just what one wanted to say. Most important of all, Herbert's poetry assists me in my praise of and devotion to my Lord. One of the most excellent aspects of Herbert's poetry is that it is not merely the individual meditations of a solitary Christian but is intimately connected to the life of Christ by being connected to His Bride, the Church. The structure of Herbert's collection, "The Temple," is aptly named. In summary, Herbert's poetry is a delight to my ears, my tongue, my mind, and my soul! Herbert's poetry also has a very personal connection with me: I used to read it to my wife when we were courting and early in our marriage. Not only did it move her, but it also raised her estimation of me. Thank you, George Herbert!

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