

Prayer George Herbert

PRAYER the Churches banquet, Angels age,
Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;
Engine against th' Almightye, sinners towre,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-daies-world-transposing in an houre,
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;
Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

I The Church's Banquet

Not some strict modicum, exact allowance,
Precise prescription, rigid regimen,
But beauty and gratuitous abundance,
Capacious grace, beyond comparison.
Not something hasty, always snatched alone;
Junkets of junk food, fuelling our dis-ease,
Not little snacklets eaten on the run,
But peace and plenty, taken at our ease.
Not to be worked for, not another task,
But love that's lavished on us, full and free,
Course after course of hospitality,
And rich wine flowing from an unstopped flask.
He paid the price before we reached the inn,
And all he asks of us is to begin.

2 Angel's Age

How might my prayer partake the *angels' age*?
Theirs is no age at all, but all in one;
My moments pass, as steps in pilgrimage,
But they begin where my dark journey's done.
They see all things at once: each point in time
For them is radiant with eternity.
Mine are the twists and turns, the long road home,
Theirs is the over-view, and flying free
They brush me with their feathers, with the rumour
Of their flight, and something in me sings
Into their passing light, till my prayer-murmur,
Circled in the slipstream of their wings,
Is lifted up in grace to join with theirs,
Who sing a *Sanctus* into all our prayers.

3 God's Breath in Man Returning to his Birth

Breathe in and in that breathing be created,
Wake from the dust, be conscious and inhale
Fresh from the Word and Light of God, delighted,
You find you have become a living soul.
But soon you must breathe out. What's to be done?
Who will be with you then? And will you dare
To trust the breath of life back to the one
Who breathed it into you? Christ comes to share
Your letting go; you hear him sigh and say
Father into your hands receive my spirit
And find that he has opened up the way
For you as well. He takes your breath to bear it
Deep into heaven with him in his death,
That you might be reborn with every breath.

4 The Soul in Paraphrase

A fledgling hidden in an ancient tree,
Singing unseen and darkling to the stars,
The fount and spring of meaning, just upstream
Of every utterance, unsullied, free,
A prisoner who grips and bends her bars,
The one who begs to differ, dares to dream,
A child astray, still calling to your heart,
A pattern, personal as all the swirls
In fingerprints on hands that hands have held,
Wholeness that knows itself within each part,
A flag whose emblem every breath unfurls,
A chasm bridged, and an old heartache healed,
A new day at the end of all your days,
A mystery you'll never paraphrase.