

Sayings of Thomas Traherne

He who cannot see the invisible cannot enjoy or value temples. But he who sees them may esteem them all to be his own and wonder at the divine bounty for giving them so richly.

You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself flows 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.

Love proceeds of necessity from itself, for unless it be of itself it is not love. The love from which it flows is the fountain of love; the love which streams from it is the communication of love, or love communicated, and the love which rests in the object is the love which streams to it. So that in all love the Trinity is clear.

‘Our blessedness to see
Is even to the Deity
A Beatific Vision! He attains
His Ends while we enjoy. In us He reigns.’

I too am visited by angels and demons, but I get rid of them. When it is an angel I pray an old prayer, and he is bored. When it is a devil I commit an old sin, and he passes me by.

A Christian is an oak flourishing in winter.

‘God’s glory endless is and doth surround
And fill all worlds without or end or bound.
What hinders, then, but we in heaven may be
Even here on earth, did we but rightly see?
As mountains, chariots, horsemen all on fire,
To gaurd Elisha did of old conspire,
Which yet his servant could not see, being blind,
Ourselves environ’d with His joys we find.
Eternity itself is that true light
That doth enclose us being infinite.

Oh, give me grace to see Thy face, and be
A constant mirror of Eternity.
Let my pure soul, transformed to a thought,
Attend upon Thy throne, and, as it ought,
Spend all its time in feeding on Thy love,
And never from Thy sacred Presence move.
So shall my conversation ever be
In Heaven, and I, O Lord my God, with Thee.’

The means of grace are arteries to convey the Spirit to us. Well may we hope if we use them well, that he will come unto us, to inform us by his holy word, to sanctify us by prayer, to comfort us in the sacraments.

These three, prayer, the word and the sacraments are a little trinity which God will bless.

A complete obedience in the conscientious use of his means never went away empty.

O give yourself unto me, for without you no gift at all can satisfy. And because you yourself are the gift, O give me what you are, that I may give you what I am, and be made a partaker of the divine nature.

Long time before
I in my mother’s womb was born,
A God preparing did this glorious store
The world for me adorn.
Into His Eden so divine and fair,
So wide and bright, I come His son and heir.

In all love there is a love begetting, a love begotten, and a love proceeding. Which though they are one in essence, subsist nevertheless in three several manners. For love is benevolent affection to another; which is of itself and by itself relates to its object. It flows from itself and rests in its object.

It is a comfort to consider that the Holy Ghost did not descend this day for the apostles only but for all men, so that if we be concentrated all in one place, in unity, verity and concord, in one faith and one Church, he shall fill us with his gifts and give us utterance of them in our lives and conversation.

The most tempestuous weather is the best seed time.

He that loves prayer so fervently that in prayer he feels the vehemence and fire of the Holy Ghost, dwells in an everlasting Whitsunday with God Almighty.

How can he be unjust that loves others as himself? Yes, he is liberal and overflows with courtesy; modest and humble, and after all thinks he has done nothing, for love never remembers the benefits it has done, but is always bent upon doing more, yet is attended with an established confidence, because it injures no man, but is grateful to all.

When I see a little church environed with trees, how many things are there which my eye discerns not. The labour of them which in ancient ages built it; the conversion of a kingdom to God from paganism, its protection by laws, its subjection to kings, its relation to bishops, its usefulness and convenience for the entertainment of Christians, the divine service, the office of ministry, solemn assemblies, praises and thanksgivings, for the sake of which it was permitted, is governed, stands and flourishes.

Perhaps when I look upon it, it is desolate and empty almost like a heap of stones, none of these things appearing to the eyes which nevertheless are the spiritual beauties which adorn and clothe it.

The uses, relations, services and ends being the spiritual and invisible things that make any material to be of worth.

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 any thing in this world loved too much, but many things have been loved in a false way, and all in too short a measure.

Thomas Traherne

1637-1674

He is celebrated in the Anglican Church on October 10th.

Like so many of the mystics, little is known of Thomas Traherne's life. He was born in or near Hereford in 1637. His father was a shoemaker. It is believed that his parents died when he was young. At the tender age of 15 he entered Brasenose College, Oxford and graduated in arts and divinity in 1656. Aged twenty he became rector of Credenhill, a parish some four miles north-west of Hereford. He served there for about ten years when he was appointed private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman, the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, who lived in Teddington. It was here in the autumn of 1674 that Thomas Traherne died, aged thirty-seven. He was buried in Teddington church 'under the reading desk'. At his death he owned £12, many books and an old hat that he thought was worth bequeathing.

Like Julian of Norwich, he was barely known in his lifetime and, like Jean Pierre de Caussade, only one book of his - *Roman Forgeries* - was published whilst he was alive. His work on *Christian Ethicks*, subtitled *The Way to Blessedness*, was sent to the publishers just before he died. About the year 1700, one of the non-juring divines, - not William Law but possibly an associate of his - a Mr George Hicke, printed Traherne's *A serious and pathetic Contemplation of the Mercies of God*. Most of his works were not discovered until the 20th Century and the detective work involved at the Bodleian Library in Oxford is a story in itself. His *Poems* were printed in 1903 and the work for which he has justly become well-known, *Centuries of Meditation*, was published in 1908.

In Herefordshire, Traherne may have known the Christian mystical poet Henry Vaughan who lived about thirty miles away. He had much in common with Vaughan and his other contemporaries, the Cambridge Platonists.

Traherne was a man of many interests; a lover of countryside and city life, of solitude and company, of scientific discovery and poetry, of public worship and solitary praise. He was great company to be with and wrote long books. As 'Light' is to Henry Vaughan, so is 'Felicity' to Traherne; it is the keynote to his understanding of everything. Least he be accused of praising the randomness suggestive within felicity, a better word for today may be 'Beatitude'. He wanted everyone to cultivate an 'attitude of gratitude' as some now say. A friend gives a character sketch of Traherne thus; '...of a very comprehensive soul and very acute parts, so fully bent upon the honourable function in which he was engaged, and so wonderfully transported with the Love of God to mankind, with the excellency of those divine laws which are prescribed to us, and with those inexpressible felicities to which we are entitled by being created in and redeemed to the divine image, that he dwelt continually amongst these thoughts with great delight and satisfaction, spending most of his time when at home in digesting his notions of these things into writing...'.
F C Happold argues that Thomas Traherne is half Nature-Mystic and half Christocentric-Mystic. The following quote shows why: 'The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a Temple of Majesty, yet no man regards it. It is a region of Light and Peace, did man not disquiet it. It is the Paradise of God. It is more to man since he is fallen than it was before. It is the place of Angels and the Gate of Heaven.'

If one were to read only Traherne's writings and not of the man perhaps this would make sense. In fact he moves towards the spiritual in the common things of life: '...Air, Light, Heaven and Earth, Water, the Sun, Trees, Men and Women, etc., and others as common, but invisible: the Laws of God, the Soul of Man, Jesus Christ and His Passion... . To my unspeakable wonder, they brought me to all the things in Heaven and earth, in Time and Eternity, possible and impossible.... and discovered them all to be infinite treasures.'

From a basis not of theological thinking, but of direct experience, Thomas Traherne is fulfilling that famous reply to the first question in *The Shorter Westminster Catechism*: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.' 'To be the Sons of God is not only to enjoy the privileges and the freedom of His house, and to bear the relation of children to so great a Father, but it is to be like Him, and to share with Him in all His glory, and in all His treasures. To be like Him in spirit and understanding, to be exalted above all creatures as the end of them, to be present as He is by sight and love, without limit and without bounds, with all His works, to be Holy towards all and wise towards all, as He is. Prizing all His goodness in all with infinite ardour, that as glorious and eternal kings being pleased in all, we might reign over all for evermore.'

As the astonishing Charles Williams of St Alban's wrote, we are 'Companions of the Co-inherence'. In vain would one search for any of the angst, thunder and lightening of a St Augustine or a John Donne. This sweet and emotionally temperate man saw that 'no man can be in danger of loving others too much, that loves God as he ought.'

His is a clear understanding and picture of the fullness of God's endless love for all His creation. In these times of stress, family and personal breakdown, we may all be blessed and, to some degree, healed by soaking up the timeless glories of God as revealed by this largely forgotten Christian mystic.

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