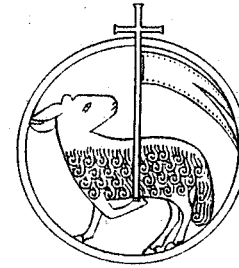


living, as we realise from his well-known poem/hymn: *King of Glory, King of Peace*. God is meant to be loved, praised, served at all times – with all the cream of our heart and our utmost art – because of the wondrous salvation he has wrought for us. Earthly once-a-week Sundays are not sufficient for this. *Every* day, in fact, must become a Sunday:

*Seven whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise Thee.
In my heart, though not in Heaven,
I can raise Thee . . .*

*Small it is, in this poor sort
To enrol Thee:
E'en eternity is too short
To extol Thee.*

Yes, eternity itself is to be an eternal Sunday of praise and thanksgiving, and how can we hope to be ready and prepared for this without a preliminary daily life of praise below? And how achieve even that, in however small a measure, if we let our God-given special day of weekly praise slip out of existence?



FAITH praying and believing ON THE EARTH

THE DAY OF ALL DAYS

George Herbert and Sunday

In studying the rise of a post-Christian era future generations may well look back on our present age with surprise. How did it all come about? Why this? Why that? How much did their faith mean to them, those so-called believers, who seem to have let so much slip so easily? A sobering thought since those believers are ourselves.

A chosen topic for a twenty-second century PhD (if they are still extant) might, for instance, be something like this: The rise and fall of the “Keep Sunday Special” movement in late twentieth-century Britain: reasons for the demise of Sunday. Or so it could run, unless *we* put the brakes on and begin to reverse the trend.

This is not a plea for a puritanical Sabbatarianism but a recognition that we are beginning to lose, bit by bit, one of the most central symbols and reference points of our faith – **THE LORD’S OWN DAY**, with all that these words richly imply. If we hope to stage some sort of rescue operation in time, we must firstly rekindle our enthusiasm and then begin to play our own part, insignificant though that may feel to be. It won’t of course be easy and comfortable, for standing out and being different never is. A glance back, however, at some of the writings of the seventeenth century Anglican priest-poet, George Herbert,

might perhaps inspire and encourage us.

There is firstly his poem entitled quite simply *Sunday*. Images tumble over each other there to describe this day of both rest and gladness, the day on which we celebrate our creation and redemption and look forward to the joys of heaven. What we lost in Eden through disobedience is now restored to us by Christ's blood shed on Calvary:

*O day most calm, most bright,
The fruit of this, the next world's bud,
The indorsement of supreme delight,
Writ by a Friend, and with his blood . . .
The week were dark, but for thy light . . .*

Yes, Sunday is meant to make the other days possible and manageable. Woe to us if we merge them into a drudgery of sameness and forfeit our space for wonder, worship and re-creation:

*The other days and thou
Make up one man; whose face thou art,
Knocking at heaven with thy brow;
The worky-days are the back-part;
The burden of the week lies there,
Making the whole to stoop and bow,
Till thy release appear.*

In these days of enforced leisure for so many in Western society, through lack of meaningful employment, it is folly indeed to take away the centuries-old pattern of the Christian week, leading up to and growing out of each successive Sunday as it does. The pattern is there even for those who do not understand its significance in the way that, hopefully, the Christian believer does. The unemployed can still dream of a share in the rhythm of work and rest, creating it for themselves as best they can – while the structure is in place, that is. But if every day becomes a same-day of monotonous repetition without break, then to be sure we have a recipe for despair.

George Herbert knew far better. Sundays were the high points of his life. He sees them as all strung together, forming a bracelet to beautify Christ's bride, the Church:

*The Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal glorious King.*

Indeed, on Sundays, rightly lived and savoured, earth and heaven are brought into closest union, and God's goodness overflows abundantly beyond all our imagining:

*On Sunday heaven's gate stands ope;
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope.*

On the Sunday before his death, we are told, George Herbert called for his lyre and sang the above words to his own accompaniment. But maybe it was the last stanza of the poem that he sang in his heart on the actual day of his passing:

*Thou art a day of mirth:
And where the weekdays trail on ground,
Thy flight is higher, as thy birth:
O let me take them at the bound,
Leaping with thee from seven to seven,
Till that we both, being tossed from earth,
Fly hand in hand to heaven!*

What a wonderful picture of Herbert's passage from Sunday to expanding Sunday, with the intervening days in oblivion, until he reaches the great and unending Sunday of heaven!

After all, this was how he sought to live in the day-to-day reality of ordinary