

REGENT COLLEGE

**AN AGE THAT NEEDS PATTERNS:  
CONVERSING WITH NICHOLAS FERRAR, GEORGE HERBERT,  
AND EACH OTHER IN THE LOVE OF GOD**

AN ESSAY SUBMITTED BY

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Nicholas Ferrar was the deputy treasurer of the Virginia Company, the managing body of the colony of Jamestown, when the Company's charter was revoked in May 1624. This was the culmination of a long and bitter dispute among the leadership that eventually involved the king's Privy Council; the quarrels (and legal actions) became so acrimonious that the Crown took direct control of the colony's affairs.<sup>1</sup>

It was a watershed event for the Ferrar family, and it coincided with the moment that a business partner of John Ferrar (Nicholas' brother), a man named Thomas Sheppard, declared bankruptcy when his creditors called in their loans. The Ferrars bought Sheppard's country manor house in a small village in Huntingdonshire, near Cambridge, called Little Gidding. The sale provided Sheppard with a significant cash flow, discharged John's own obligation to the debts, and created the opportunity for the next chapter of the family's life.<sup>2</sup>

The shape of that next chapter was an unusual kind of spiritual community, neither a monastery nor a parish church, though Nicholas Ferrar was ordained as a deacon in 1626 so that he could lead services in the small chapel on the estate grounds. It was an extended family who lived, prayed, and worked together—and Ferrar had hopes that the devotion which they practiced would eventually set an example for their times. In a letter of May 1630 to his cousin Arthur Woodnoth, he wrote about his ideal vision for people to share of themselves, with the confidence that they accepted and loved each other, weaving “that Webb of freindhype which I hope might...proue a patterne In an adge that needs patternes.”<sup>3</sup> Leaving behind the secular,

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Ransome, *The Web of Friendship: Nicholas Ferrar and Little Gidding* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 2011), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Ransome, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Ransome, 80.

colonizing work of the Virginia Company, Ferrar instead devoted himself to birthing a spiritual community that he hoped would reshape his own conflicted land.

The pattern of Little Gidding was based on what Ferrar referred to in his letter as a “web of friendship.” Woven into his own web very closely was the poet and priest George Herbert, who became prebend of Leighton Bromswold (just a few miles’ walk from Little Gidding) in 1626 as a deacon, ordained the same year as Ferrar. He later became the rector of the parish of Bemerton down in Salisbury, where he died only three years later in 1633.<sup>4</sup> These two men shared a spiritual kinship as clergy in the Church of England at a time when that career decision normally thrust one into controversies that were slowly fomenting a civil war. But they also explicitly shared a desire to reset the pattern, to model a web of friendship while the nation was rapidly unravelling.

Since it was a friendship, their collaboration provides a window onto the heart of this new pattern. The journey to discover that heart involves a series of questions: Why did the age need a pattern? Where did they look for a pattern to follow? And ultimately, what sort of pattern did they weave? While George Herbert never lived among Nicholas Ferrar’s community himself, it was arguably his own poetic voice—born of their fruitful friendship—which has been Little Gidding’s most lasting legacy to this day.

## **I. The pattern’s context**

The age in which Ferrar and Herbert lived displayed very little of the ideal “web of friendship.” Even decades after the onset of the Reformation, English society was still defining

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Wilcox, “Herbert, George (1593-1633),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine (23 September 2004).

what its Christianity looked like. By the time that Little Gidding was being founded, the disputes made a battleground out of liturgical forms and church decoration—issues which naturally tie into theologies of worship and ecclesiology; how we worship is essentially an expression of what we believe about God’s relationship to us, and what God asks of us.

On the one hand was the camp that valued ceremony and ritual in worship, making use of symbols and bodily posture to show their inner devotion. The foremost champion of these ‘catholic’ practices was William Laud, the perennially controversial bishop who ultimately became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, and whose followers were called “Laudians.”<sup>5</sup>

Achsah Guibbory, in her study of the relationship between literature and religion in seventeenth-century England, portrays Laudianism as emphasizing the body, not only of the worshippers but also of God Himself, through the theology of Christ’s ‘real presence’ in the Eucharist.<sup>6</sup> The more Calvinist Puritans, however, saw ceremonial worship as ‘carnal’ and idolatrous, a betrayal of the Reformation; the sternness of their convictions did not help ease tensions.<sup>7</sup>

Just where Nicholas Ferrar and his Little Gidding community fit into these dynamics is an apparently simple task: to the end of his days Ferrar was devoted to the liturgy of the Church of England, the display of crosses, and the routine of hourly prayer. His status as a Laudian may

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Milton, “Laud, William (1573-1645),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine (21 May 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, religion, and cultural conflict in seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21-2.

<sup>7</sup> Guibbory, 25.

even be sealed by the fact that he was ordained a deacon by Laud himself, who at the time was bishop of St David's.<sup>8</sup>

But the most controversial political arguments he ever found himself in were during his time with the Virginia Company, not in holy orders. Even a Puritan pamphlet labelling Little Gidding as an "Arminian nunnery" did not appear until 1641, several years after his death.<sup>9</sup> It represents the most direct attack ever made against the community, but no response to it in print appeared at all. His family's retreat to the country was also in effect a removal from the fray.

Ferrar's biographers paint somewhat different pictures of the motivations behind that retreat. Since Ferrar refused valuable civil service positions, Maycock sums it up in the word renunciation: "He was, at the age of thirty, a man with the world at his feet. Quietly and serenely, without hesitation, he rejected all that the world had to offer him."<sup>10</sup> Ransome, however, sees more nuance, given that Ferrar still spent around half his time in London in the early years after the move, attending to the family's financial and business affairs, as well as ensuring that his nephews and nieces received a good education and opportunities for careers. His ministry to his family "was perforce a ministry to worldly as well as spiritual needs and to meet them Ferrar would draw on his business acumen along with his religious insights and pedagogical skills."<sup>11</sup>

Ferrar himself saw Little Gidding as a chance to provide a pattern for the age, one based on friendship and community. While it seems ironic that he tried to live this pattern deeply within

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas W.S. Cranfield, "Ferrar, Nicholas (1593-1637)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine (4 October 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Gaudio, *The Bible and the Printed Image in Early Modern England: Little Gidding and the pursuit of scriptural harmony* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 19.

<sup>10</sup> A.L. Maycock, *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 67. This biography was first published in 1938.

<sup>11</sup> Ransome, 57.

the Laudian camp, it may have been the ceremonial form of worship that offered the greatest help, as Guibbory outlines:

Where puritans saw separations and distinctions as necessary, Laudians and supporters of ceremonial worship promoted an idea of (comm)unity symbolized by the harmonious yet hierarchical relation of body and soul in worship and by a syncretic, “catholic” ceremonial worship, with deep ties to the past. It was because of the links between England’s worship and the Roman Catholic church—and ultimately the ancient Christian church as it had converted Jewish and pagan worship—that the English church could claim to be universal. The Arminian emphasis on the universal offer of grace neatly complemented the function of ceremony to bind people within a community.<sup>12</sup>

Precisely what Nicholas Ferrar hoped with regard to his country’s religious conflicts is difficult to say, but he clearly wanted Little Gidding to be a place of utter devotion to God, where people were unified in their purity of purpose, and that this light would shine out in a world beset by strife. Little Gidding, rather than a withdrawal from the world, was trying to serve the world better.

## **II. A pattern for the pattern**

One of Nicholas Ferrar’s attempts to serve the world was through a translation of *The Hundred and Ten Considerations* (also referred to as *Divine Considerations*) by Juan de Valdés, a Spanish theological and political writer of the early sixteenth century. Though a Catholic, Valdés promoted views on justification by faith alone that echoed the Lutheran reformers (he was born circa 1498-1500 and died in 1541, in the very thick of the Reformation’s beginnings and of his own era’s conflicts). Fear of the Inquisition forced him to flee his native land and ultimately settle in Naples.

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<sup>12</sup> Guibbory, 39-40.

In the *Considerations*, Valdés saw faith as the gift of God, one that could come by degrees instead of all at once. But at the heart of his message was the question of how Christians could have assurance that their faith was genuine. To this he answered that what we needed was the spiritual experience of God found in self-examination. Daniel Crews summarizes: “Through proper prayer seeking to glorify God, one will comprehend the will of God. Consideration meant reflecting on one’s personal spiritual experience to understand the work of the Holy Spirit, which leads to ‘justification by the justice of God executed in His most precious flesh.’”<sup>13</sup> The irony of his philosophy, which privileged this spiritual experience even above Scripture, is that while the Catholic Church labelled him as a heterodox reformer, the Calvinist reformers suspected him of Anabaptist tendencies.<sup>14</sup>

Nicholas Ferrar began the work of translating the *Considerations* in early 1632, from an Italian version rather than the original Spanish. When he had finished, he sent his work to George Herbert who approved of the idea of publishing Valdés and contributed commentary to the text. The translation would not appear in print until 1638, after both men had died, with Herbert’s letter to Ferrar as part of the preface.<sup>15</sup> Both of them took warmly to Valdés’ theology of justification, as well as to his emphasis on the spiritual practices of mortification, but their enthusiasm was tempered by his views on Scripture. Herbert’s cautionary praise tells us something of how he saw the spiritual life, an important thread in the pattern.

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Crews, *Twilight of the Renaissance: The Life of Juan de Valdés* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 156.

<sup>14</sup> Gary Kuchar, *George Herbert and the Mystery of the Word: Poetry and Scripture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 125-6.

<sup>15</sup> Maycock, 271-2. Just when Ferrar heard of Valdés, or when he acquired the book, is unclear, but it was most probably during his travels on the Continent during 1613-1617.

Valdés preferred finding the objective meaning of the text, rather than reading it through an allegorical lens, in an early form of historical-critical exegesis. But for him this method was born of the assumption that the Bible contained writings about God by people who had undergone a spiritual experience. Instead of the mystery of revelation, Scripture was information on ethics.<sup>16</sup>

For Herbert, however, the Word of God was never to be severed from God Himself. In his commentary he returns over and over again to criticizing Valdés' view of Scripture as simply a moral catechesis. He writes on Consideration 3:

[The] holy Scriptures have not only an Elementary use, but a use of perfection, and are able to make the man of God perfect. . . All the Saints of God may be said in some sence to have put confidence in Scripture, but not as a naked Word severed from God, but as the Word of God: And in so doing they doe not sever their trust from God. But by trusting in the word of God they trust in God. Hee that trusts in the Kings word for any thing trusts in the King.<sup>17</sup>

Responding to Valdés' Consideration 63, where he says that a man who "enjoyes the light of the holy spirit" may in a sense 'graduate' from the study of Scripture and leave it behind, Herbert writes that

he opposeth the teaching of the spirit to the teaching of the scripture, which the holy spirit wrot. Although the holy spirit apply the scripture, yet what the scripture teacheth, the spirit teacheth, the holy spirit indeed sometime doubly teaching both in penning and in applying. I wonder how this opinion could befall so good a man as it seems *Valdesso* was. . . Yet his owne practice seemes to confute his opinion, for the most of his Considerations being grounded upon some text of scripture, shewes that he was continually conversant in it, and not used it for a time onely, and then cast it away, as he sayes strangely.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kuchar, 125.

<sup>17</sup> George Herbert, "Briefe Notes on Valdesso's *Considerations*," in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F.E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 306-7.

<sup>18</sup> Hebert, *Works*, 317-8.



A primary theme running through these critiques is that Scripture itself can be a place to encounter God. Where Valdés sees it as a tool that is only useful for a time in the cultivation of holiness, Herbert sees it as the ground in which we must be planted so that we grow in holiness. Where Valdés sees the Spirit and Scripture as different steps in a process, Herbert not only gives them equal footing but virtually conflates them into one, and he saw a danger in Valdés' approach: "Once scripture is perceived primarily in terms of message and promise rather than teaching and mystery, one can take hold of it as though it had the status of an account book rather than experiencing it as a living context in which one moves."<sup>19</sup>

Despite this serious reservation about Scripture, Herbert had three reasons for commending the book as a whole, which he outlined in his letter to Ferrar:

First, that God in the midst of Popery should open the eyes of one to understand and expresse so clearly and excellently the intent of the Gospell in the acceptation of Christs righteousness (as he sheweth through all his Considerations)...Secondly, the great honour and reverence, which he every where beares towards our deare Master and Lord... Thirdly, the many pious rules of ordering our life, about mortification, and observation of Gods Kingdome within us, and the working thereof, of which he was a very diligent observer.<sup>20</sup>

The pious rules for ordering life were certainly forefront in Nicholas Ferrar's mind: it was a core component, perhaps *the* core component, of Little Gidding's rhythms. The family took it in turns to pray a short office hourly and—the practice that drew the most comment from friends and those who knew about the community—took up the duty of "night watches," praying the Psalms for four hours until 1am, then waking up Nicholas who would rise to pray for the rest of

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<sup>19</sup> Kuchar, 131.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert, *Works*, 304-5.

the night.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars indicate that Herbert himself recommended the night watches as a practice.

This devotion to a pure faith is clearly one that Ferrar and Herbert shared with Valdés, shown by the extremity of their disciplines and, of course, by their work on translating his book. Valdés' *Considerations* held “a message on which to meditate and a message, furthermore, that Ferrar thought not only matched his own inner experience but was one that his contemporaries needed to hear.”<sup>22</sup> But more than this was probably in Ferrar's thoughts, because Valdés was also known to gather around him like-minded friends to both learn languages and revitalize their spirituality, and “Valdés' group became one of the first *spirituali* centres, reform groups that sprouted across Italy after the creation of the Reform Commission in 1537.”<sup>23</sup> While Ferrar, curiously, makes no mention of the ‘Valdésian sodality’ (as it is called), Ransome points out that he must have known some of its members by their historical reputation (and the *Considerations* itself is dedicated to one of them). “Had Ferrar known that Valdés had gathered around him an informal community...he could have seen in it a model for his own leadership of Little Gidding, an example of the Holy Spirit working not only to justify and mortify individuals but also to build a sense of community that could reach out to the world.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Regina L. Walton, “Liturgy at Little Gidding,” *Studia liturgica* 43 (March 1, 2013): 151-2. Walton's article contains a detailed account of what we know of Little Gidding's spiritual disciplines, as well as of Edward Lenton's visit in 1634, whose cautious but approving letter describing their life was wildly reappropriated into the pamphlet *The Arminian Nunnery*.

<sup>22</sup> Ransome, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Crews, 91.

<sup>24</sup> Ransome, 126. Ransome has also authored an article that comprehensively details Little Gidding's efforts at providing education—both secular and spiritual—for the local children. The community's spirituality was lived out in real, practical work among the wider parish. See Ransome, Joyce, “‘Courtesy’ at Little Gidding.” *The Seventeenth Century* 43, no. 4 (2015): 411-431.

### III. The pattern of *The Temple*

We have been seeing the pattern of Little Gidding take shape in the form of community, a web of friendship that tried to help the world beyond itself. But what is it that builds that friendship? What is the heart of the pattern? Evidence for it is found in Little Gidding's most widely known contribution to human culture: a book of Herbert's poetry called *The Temple*.

As Herbert lay dying, he sent the manuscript of his poems to Ferrar through a mutual friend. Ferrar then saw the poems to print in 1633, providing a preface titled "The Printers to the Reader" where he introduced *The Temple* as a window into the poet-priest's character: "As God had enabled him, so he accounted him meet not only to be called, but to be compelled to this service: Wherein his faithful discharge was such, as may make him justly a companion to the primitive Saints, and a pattern or more for the age he lived in."<sup>25</sup>

Here is the phrase which has been our focus, apparently the only other time Ferrar used it in writing. The 'pattern for the age' was meant to be a community; why is it here applied to an individual? Arguably, because an individual must also be able to live out the pattern, for it is individuals who become friends and thus build community. It is individuals together who can have conversations.

Ferrar, we note, also applied the phrase in the context of the way Herbert lived and ministered. Herbert, as we have noticed in his views on Scripture, saw the Christian life in terms of growing in holiness, with Scripture itself as the ground in which we grow because it is where

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<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Ferrar, "The Printers to the Reader," in *The Complete English Works*, ed. Ann Pasternak Slater (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 7.

we can encounter God and live in the light of that encounter. This is *The Temple's* overarching theme, its vaulted ceiling. Its pattern.

To those who value physical spaces as places of spiritual encounter—such as Laudian high churchmen—this is obvious from the structure of *The Temple*. It is divided into “The Church-porch,” “The Church,” and “The Church Militant.”<sup>26</sup> The first and last of these are lengthy single poems in themselves, while the “The Church” contains the many short verses that make up the bulk of the book. “The Church-porch” is titled as though one is standing at the entrance of the church, being sprinkled from a “Perirrhanterium” (the poem’s subtitle; it is the instrument used to sprinkle holy water) of spiritual advice to prepare one for worship. From there, the reader turns the page to find the brief “Superliminare” (the Latin word for the lintel over the door), and you are then inside the sacred space. This is the central conceit of *The Temple*, where the poet and reader both are worshippers going to church, and where parts of the church building itself also become in some of the verses a metaphor for the worshippers.

This is best illustrated by the next poem, the first in the main section of “The Church.” It is called “The Altar”:

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<sup>26</sup> This way of organizing the book is nicely consonant with the fact that both Ferrar and Herbert had to renovate their churches; the architecture of worship was something they both invested in.

A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant rears,  
 Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:  
     Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;  
     No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.  
         A H E A R T alone  
         Is such a stone,  
         As nothing but  
         Thy pow'r doth cut.  
         Wherefore each part  
         Of my hard heart  
         Meets in this frame,  
         To praise thy name.  
 That if I chance to hold my peace,  
     These stones to praise thee may not cease.  
 O let thy blessed S A C R I F I C E be mine,  
 And sanctify this A L T A R to be thine.<sup>27</sup>

For Guibbory, such an opening poem—that shouts its emphasis on personal sacrifice by being shaped as something like an altar itself—at once thrusts us into the thick of England's seventeenth-century religious conflict. To have an east-facing altar in a church, as in the Catholic tradition, would be the locus of a major controversy that erupted in 1637, but was already an issue in the 1620s.<sup>28</sup> But instead of standing firmly with the Laudians, Herbert occupies a tense middle space, nuancing the poem's form by making it a metaphor for his own heart which “No workman's tool hath touch'd,” thus highlighting the work of God over human craft. “Herbert shares this puritan fear of framing or fashioning an idol. Yet his suspicion of art and invention in worship is at odds with his hopes for the poem's legitimacy and his claims for its devotional function. Pulled between distrust and belief in art, ‘The Altar’ reenacts the tensions involved in the contemporary religious conflict over worship.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Herbert, *Complete English Works*, 23. The poem is difficult to reproduce in a common word processor, since lines need to be precisely justified and spaced for the shape effect to work.

<sup>28</sup> Guibbory, 46-7.

<sup>29</sup> Guibbory, 48.

“The Altar” is only the first poem in a short series that link together to create a ‘shape’ of their own. Immediately following Herbert’s prayer to “let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,” comes a responding poem in the voice of Christ on the cross, called “The Sacrifice.” It is too long to be quoted in full, but opens:

*Oh all ye, who pass by, whose eyes and mind  
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blind;  
To me, who took eyes that I might you find:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

And the fifth stanza runs:

For thirty pence he did my death devise,  
Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,  
Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice:  
Was ever grief like mine?<sup>30</sup>

That insistent question is the poem’s constant refrain, driving home a kind of rebuke to the voice in “The Altar”: you have asked for my sacrifice to be yours, but do you know what you are asking? It rather shows up the poet’s expression of sacrifice, as if to remind him of who the real focus of worship ought to be. Herbert’s voice returns in the next poem, “The Thanksgiving,” to accept the rebuke and wonder what he might do in the face of such a Passion, such a victory, such a sacrifice:

Oh King of grief! (a title strange, yet true,  
To thee of all kings only due)  
Oh King of wounds! how shall I grieve for thee,  
Who in all grief preventest me?<sup>31</sup>

The shape that these first few poems form, then, is of a conversation between two people: one is George Herbert, and the other is Christ. Most of the poems in the book which follow are written

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<sup>30</sup> Herbert, *Complete English Works*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Hebert, *Complete English Works*, 32. “Preventest” here means ‘goes before’ or ‘surpasses.’



altar has also been transformed into a table—a more Puritan kind of note to strike for this poetic evocation of the Eucharist, which is also less of a ritual and more of a meal. The poem seems to quote one of the exhortations in the 1559 prayer book’s liturgy for Holy Communion, which compares it to “when a manne hath prepared a riche feaste: decked his table with al kynde of provisyon, so that there lacketh nothings but the gestes to site downe...”<sup>34</sup>

Kuchar, in his reading of this poem, sees yet more nuance in its plainspoken expression of something awesome and mysterious, which

dissolves the distance between human and divine more fully than perhaps any other poem in “The Church.” Most importantly, the plain language used for the poem’s elevated scenario has the paradoxical effect of engendering wonder and estrangement while nevertheless conveying a sense of spiritual comfort and religious readiness. Maintaining such tension is a delicate task. Even more, it is a pressing cultural exigency for Herbert, hence the placing of “Love (III)” at the climax of “The Church.”<sup>35</sup>

Christopher Hodgkins also sees this ‘pressing cultural exigency’ in *The Temple*, which he describes as teaching not through explicit precepts but by illustrations of spiritual pilgrimage.

“The individual speaker of the poems, while not the Protestant Everyman, nevertheless is typical of the ‘church’ as a whole—that is, the invisible church, the entire body of the elect struggling to trust God in the face of a hostile world. Furthermore, these lyrics often portray virtues and vices that contribute, respectively, to societal edification or disintegration.”<sup>36</sup>

Nicholas Ferrar wished readers to see in Herbert’s *Temple* a spiritual example, and he almost certainly saw it as an embodiment of his “patterne In an adge that needs patternes.” If the

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 130.

<sup>35</sup> Kuchar, 47-8.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Hodgkins, *Authority, Church, and Society in George Herbert: Return to the Middle Way* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 200-1.



pattern is displayed by a “web of friendship,” then I would argue that *The Temple* shows the heart of that pattern: a person in conversation with God. It is conversation which builds relationship, friendship, and the acceptance of one another that Ferrar saw as vital to life—the very thing which his age seemed to lack. But Ferrar and Herbert, with their ideals of spiritual and godly living, both went further: the conversations we have with each other must take place in the context of our conversations (individual and communal) with God. It is the God who converses with us who helps us converse with each other, and binds us together into the Church, His body, which He came to create.

#### **IV. The pattern of our conversations**

Daniel Nayeri’s *Everything Sad is Untrue* is his lightly fictionalized memoir of becoming a refugee from Iran as a child, trying to explain himself in his new context of Oklahoma. He asks the question, “Would you rather a god who listens or a god who speaks?” and explains that it is really asking about the dichotomy of love and justice—and that of course, God is both. “Love is empty without justice. Justice is cruel without love.”<sup>37</sup> He has framed the entire book as a conversation he has with the reader, as a search for a friend, and then he uses the terms of conversation—listening and speaking—to name who God is. “Reading is the act of listening and speaking at the same time, with someone you’ve never met, but love. Even if you hate them, it’s a loving thing to do.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Daniel Nayeri, *Everything Sad is Untrue (a true story)* (New York: Levine Querido, 2020), 216-7.

<sup>38</sup> Nayeri, 333.

The refugee crisis, immigration, racism—these are only some of the issues that our age has found to quarrel over. It has become commonplace to talk about society's divisiveness and polarization, and these conflicts have come to split even global Christianity; Ferrar's and Herbert's Anglican tradition no less than any other denomination. If we let ourselves succumb to the polarization of our age, we unravel the pattern and the web that they worked so hard to weave. Trying to reshape the world while believing that God is only on our side, we lose sight of the truth that perhaps no one is entirely on His—including us.

There are certainly necessary conversations we must have, about difficult and thorny realities. Even more crucial to our age than speaking boldly is listening humbly. Because we have a God who does both, so both will be evident in us when we grow in holiness. Just as how we worship is an expression of what we believe, so how we have conversations displays the pattern we are living in.

Nicholas Ferrar and George Herbert tried to live within the conflict of their times out of their conversations with God. And although they did not entirely succeed—the Little Gidding community had its own quarrels and personal arguments, and its practices were not always beneficial or effective—they would probably see that as spurring them on to further humility, to enter into the sacred temple of worship, sit down at the table, and seek help in conversation with the God who is Love.

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