



March 1

Commemoration: George Herbert, hymnwriter, 1633

George Herbert (3 April 1593 – 1 March 1633) was a Welsh born English poet, orator and Anglican priest.

Being born into an artistic and wealthy family, he received a good education that led to his holding prominent positions at Cambridge University and Parliament. As a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, Herbert excelled in languages and music. He went to college with the intention of becoming a priest, but his scholarship attracted the attention of King James I/VI. Herbert served in parliament for two years. After the death of King James and at the urging of a friend, Herbert's interest in ordained ministry was renewed.

In 1630, in his late thirties he gave up his secular ambitions and took holy orders in the Church of England, spending the rest of his life as a rector of the little parish of Fugglestone St Peter with Bemerton St Andrew, near Salisbury. He was noted for unflinching care for his parishioners, bringing the sacraments to them when they were ill, and

providing food and clothing for those in need. Henry Vaughan said of him "*a most glorious saint and seer*".

Throughout his life, he wrote religious poems characterized by a precision of language, a metrical versatility, and an ingenious use of imagery or conceits that was favored by the metaphysical school of poets. Charles Cotton described him as a "soul composed of harmonies". Herbert himself, in a letter to Nicholas Ferrar, said of his writings, "they are a picture of spiritual conflicts between God and my soul before I could subject my will to Jesus, my Master". Some of Herbert's poems have endured as hymns, including "King of Glory, King of Peace" (*Praise*), "Let All the World in Every Corner Sing" (*Antiphon*) and "Teach me, my God and King" (*The Elixir*). His first biographer, Izaak Walton, described Herbert on his death-bed as *composing such hymns and anthems as he and the angels now sing in heaven*. A distant relative was the modern Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert.

Art: Portrait of George Herbert (poet) by Robert White in 1674. From National Portrait Gallery (UK)