



## Traherne's devotion and idealization of the divinity of the 21th century: on rereading Traherne's hymnal chants

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Felicitation of divinity, Traherne's philosophical optimism, devotion in 17th century England, religiosity and salvation

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### Abstract

This paper aims to bring forth the idea of the relevance of Traherne's felicitation in the domain of the divinity of the 20th century world through his true and sincere hymnal rhyming canon. This paper also is trying to investigate the very relevance of the devotion and the divinity of the Traherne's such philosophical optimistic approach in shaping a new outlook of the concept of devotion and the divinity with its modern discretion. Though a lot has been said and discussed about Traherne's philosophy of felicitation, but its universal acceptance, through a detailed discussion in the field of literary canon, is still relevant and needs to be discussed to exculpate and acquit the ideas of religiosity and divinity in the domain of the post-modern eras. Traherne is basically a man with heavenly bliss, and without thinking of securing his financial hardship, though being born and brought up in the financial hardship of his family (of Traherne's biographers nothing is reliable known about his family background, about his mother except his father's business to meet the requirement of his family needs. He was a son of shoemaker, where financial hardship nettled and irked his childhood life with his entire family, of whose securing the financial goal was the primary concern), he manages himself to be stick on to finding the righteous path of salvation and demonstrates the importance of being a true felicitator to God through his utmost and sincere prayer to safeguard souls of entire human beings since from his time to the present ages. This paper aims to investigate the importance and relevance of Traherne's felicitation at this present age, and also to demystify and rekindle the idea that in what way his philosophical optimistic approach and outlook of devotion will help us to re-establish the religiosity and divinity of the 20th century world to have the route of soul's salvation.

## 1. Introduction

Thomas Traherne understood and felt the very devotional sensibility inside his heart, and respected the moment of unifying to God through his enormous and sincere prayer, which had forced him to be closer and devotee to his Master forever (Aubrey 143). Since the beginning of his mystical journey, unlike Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw who had founded out the routes to God based on their own experience and beliefs, Traherne became obsessed to which route he should start his mystical journey to wave out the untidiness faith and believe on devotion and the divinity during seventeenth century England (Salter 141). His way and expressing the mood and temper towards devotion and advocating the exegesis of the divinity during his time are simple and straightforward with evocative sensibility, with which he wanted to canonize the real zeal and sentiment to be profitable and worthy for the biggest purpose of salvation of the souls of entire human beings (Sherrington 156). Gladys I. Wade, in this regard, argued that "Spiritual zeal and sentiments chased Traherne to activate soul's spirit so that the very wave of this spirit would reflect the life of those who wanted to be devout sincerely at his time during the uncontrollable situation of religiosity" (155). Traherne's firm belief sensationalized and recommended a new dawn towards devotion and the divinity to make the people, after a long struggling controversies over the sacramental ardor, having been endowed with tranquility, peace and reformed spirituality, which would be simply and thereby governed by the true self of the devotee (Day 186). Traherne's philosophical optimism nominated a sense of exaltation up to that extent where one sincere follower and practitioner of the divinity will establish and vindicate the true self of soul and its purpose of why everyone should attain, praise and then devote oneself completely to God. The way he praised His creations, the way he advocated his argument and pleas, the way he tried to encounter God, and overall the way he propagated had been deriving a significant milestone and revolution at the height of genre of seventeenth century devotion. He hadn't encountered and experienced, in his mind to some extent, the overall geography and texture of the divinity and spirituality of his time, but rather wished to reinvigorate and revive a new sacramental and devotional identity amidst the humankind of the seventeenth century England to arouse and give them freedom to summon and sacrifice themselves to God to have the best way of salvation—the most discussed and controversial propaganda of his time (Day 182).

The religious and ecclesiastical revolution of the seventeenth century England had been owed, perhaps somehow to a great extent, to Traherne's religious and devotional sensibilities that made the common people aware and acknowledged to where they should go and to whom they should care for to solace their dejection and stoical circumstances due to the ongoing controversies in between the two apparent concepts of theology- Protestantism and Catholicism (Seelig 98).

Taherne was unaccustomed about how to decipher inherently to God to call Him upon, unbiased too to locate the very significance of life wished to be devout in a range which would be limitless immediate after a close connection to the Christ (Willett 94 & 95). He was speechless and meek too to advocate his inner devotional feelings and moods with which he would likely to be flourished and bloomed to perpetuate the actuality and very essence of his and entire humankind's souls (Margoliouth 67). Traherne's firm belief lies not only on God but also on His entire creations that, what Traherne proposed and suggested, must and shall be loved, cared and the matter of appreciation by humankind to proceed to the souls' salvation, which will successively lead us from obscurity (avidya) to tranquillity (vidya), establishing and acknowledging the true concept of soul and of how it can be used to mediate the love of God (Margoliouth 115). Robert Ellrod has justified the view that "the true importance of Traherne, however, is not in the history of poetry, but in the history of thought and religious sensibility. Along among the 'metaphysicals' he expounds a philosophy and delivers a message" (Cesare 364).

T. S. Eliot noted that "Traherne's overall virtue lies in his verse, canonizing the real taste and spirit of the divinity of the seventeenth century England, whose effects would never be faded" (91). Kenneth Mason aptly pointed out that "Traherne has proved that how the word felicitation clicked the route of devotion for those English people who wanted to be devout during his time as well as of ours. The taste, zeal and spirit of this word is not faded in terms of Traherne's overall outlook of the spirituality and divinity, and he proved that things" (133). That Traherne is essentially a good harbinger of the sacramental spirit, order and discipline is artistically depicted through his each hymnal verse, having been attributed with special charm and taste of devotional feelings and appeals (Salter 74). Traherne knew that purity and truthfulness to soul would lead it to its ultimate way from where no explanation would be required, and with this ideology, Traherne synchronized and measured the ethical and moral appeal of prayer, devotion amidst the religious

controversies, and successively established the importance and significance of the divinity and devotion inside the hearts of entire humankind (Wade 81).

The way he felicitate, love and devote himself to God and His creations is a matter of serious ongoing process of present devotional and spiritual situation, and thereby implementing these all he had tried his level best to get rid the entire humankind of from its eternal damnation, trying to throw them out from obscurity to tranquility just to have a good understanding the relationship in between soul and God.

## 2. Background of the study

The background of the study is truly relevant and significant to move forward in my study. The seventeenth century was an age of rapidity, a dashing and flashing snapshot of society, and of cultural beliefs, which was unbelievable. The stark effect of Civil war, discoveries of modern science, experimental fruitfulness relating to sciences, social and political changes all credit to the seventeenth century. Still the people hardly forgot to pray for the self and for others and to "believe in god and the existence of universe".<sup>1</sup> But by the excessive effect of their expectations they became characteristically mischievous too and gradually proceeded in the path of damnation which was uncontrollable. Writers of the seventeenth century realized the changing socio-cultural scenario as well as the psychological aspects of the people of England and finally started to compose devotional poetry in order to give some aroma of auspiciousness. And for the peasant as well as for the ordinary person, who had no time to read the written evangelical poetry, preaching of evangelical thoughts was the commonest method for them to adopt. During those days the act of preaching was to be treated as the style of prose writing and as a literary phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Preaching from Gospel and from Bible and from other sources at different churches and open halls was then regarded as the foremost form of propaganda to cherish their bewildered minds.

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<sup>1</sup> Bush, Douglas. English literature in the earlier Seventeenth century, 1600-1660. Oxford History of English Literature; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (OUP) 1945

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

### 3. Literature review

The research work already done relating to devotion of seventeenth century is not adequate and there is a need for it to be revisited. For instance, Robert Whiting's "The blind devotion of the people" focuses the matter of the conventional belief of the women relating to divinity, but fails to nominate the exact reason of proceeding towards divinity. Louis L. Martz's "The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century" derives the notion of deep meditation linked with the human soul at the time of remembering God. That kind of remembrance of human soul projects the views of the mind of the sender that is acclimatized by the works of Martz. Researchers have given a beautiful picture of traditional Christianity engaged by the local people of England in the seventeenth century but it is quite baffling to find that not much attempt has been made to find out the reason for people's journey towards divinity. In this context it is all the more important to study and reassess the devotional aspect of poetry and sermons because the contemporary world has seen a sort of revival of divinity.

### 4. Methodology

The methodology with which I wish to start my research work first is to read the primary texts of the selected authors exhaustively and arrange the sources relevant for my thesis. Besides reading the primary texts, I would like to investigate the secondary texts related to my work for references through catalogue searching in libraries in order to supply more referential materials in my final thesis.

#### Research question and objective

My principal aim, in my research, is to find out how far devotional poetry of the seventeenth century manages to express the devotional outburst of the mind of the people and thus lead them to the path of the soul's resurrection. Additionally, I also wish to investigate in what way is the sermon preaching by preachers reciprocate the socio-cultural atmosphere and ecclesiastical aspects of England at that time. The aim of this work is to explicate the manifestation of the devotional outburst inside the mind of the people of the seventeenth century, and to redefine the

relevance and importance of both preaching and preacher in shaping the socio-cultural mentalities of the people of England who went through the age then.

## 5. Detailed discussion

In this poem "The Preparative" Traherne is expective to prepare, present and thrive his soul to have a graceful ambiance of divine essence till the end of his life so that he will not fail to secure his position in heaven by his unending prayer and devotion during his living in this earth. The opening line of this poem is too shocking to understand his central view of the philosophy of life having without devotional blessings, which will substantiate to constitute his fundamental ideas of devotion during and after seventeenth century English Church history of the divinity and sacramental identity. Traherne directly noted, without compromising his mind, through the first stanza of the poem "The Preparative", that he seems he is dying without altering the fact that he is living the moment, and his body does not respond him to be a bodily man of nature, even he doesn't understand the fact whether he is still leaving or not. His transformation to the path of divinity throws forward to remain beyond physics, terrifying the fact of his mind:

My body being dead, my limbs unknown

.....  
I was within

A house I knew not, newly clothed with skin (lines 1 & 9-10)

He wished to be contacted and attributed the effects and beauty of the divinity to unfold the eagerness of his soul, and wanted to demystify the object of the human phenomenon, and trying to achieve the fullest spiritual and religious impulse to keep the soul acknowledged with such thoughts. By telling soul 'the inward Sphere of Light' (line 15), he manages to demonstrate the actuality of the soul among the people of his time to know its identity so that they might allow their souls to be encountered with the sense of divine pleasure with which they would attain the path of salvation at the end of their journey. Additionally, having identified the true self of soul, he manages to prioritize the very being of the soul's self among his country people, and trying to mould the shape and attitude of the mentalities towards the divinity and sacramental

identity and a new outlook of devotion to safeguard their route of souls' salvation. The moment he realized his soul's true self, he dazzlingly changed his mind:

Then was my soul my only all to me,  
 A living endless eye,  
 far wider then the sky  
 Whose power, whose act, whose essence was to see.  
 I was an inward *Sphere of Light*,  
 Or an interminable orb of Sight,  
 An endless and a living day, (lines 11-17)

Traherne was preoccupied with, since his journey towards the divinity, the notion of existence of God and soul that are inseparable from one another, and finally addressed it 'sphere of light' which is reflecting the light of days and nights since its creation to commemorate the values of life given by the grace of God. He called the soul's spirit an authentic being, formulating entire sources to others to make us combined to others.

Traherne's subjectivism supports the Christianity and Hermetic notion that the prime function of human beings is to contemplate the creations and the Creator to have the full fidelity of souls' journey to salvation. Seelig's apparent and close observation of Traherne's option of devotion and divinity keep us variable with the fact that Traherne knew nothing but securing the soul's salvation through the midst of utmost devotion and felicitation. This gives him what Wade believed so, "to set up every wrongood towards the good one to proceed to the path of devotion without compromising the effect and result of soul's position during the Judgment Day" (87). A strong notion of felicitation is manifested in this poem to arouse the feeling and sentiments of Traherne's age where he belonged, indicating its gradual changes towards the notion of the divinity and sacramental identities amidst the people of the seventeenth century England:

Without disturbance then I did receive  
 The fair Ideas of all things,  
 And had the honey even without the stings.  
 A meditating inward eye  
 Gazing at quiet did within me lie  
 And ev'ry thing  
 Delighted me that was their heav'nly king (line 24-30)

Traherne's strong understanding of devotion and the divinity heightens a deep feeling of the existence and temperament of soul immediate after its encountering with the sacramental and ecclesiastical identity, with which people having mystical sense would glorify the lives of devout in a true sense of 'heav'nly king' (30). Traherne is preparing to give in detail the concept and very identity of soul with the sincerest ease and temperament associated and understood by his heart. To Traherne, soul is the ultimate and the purest aspect of "I", and it can only be accessible and understandable when one will be able to define the connotation of "I", because the concept of "I" is resulted and being germinated through the direct proposition of soul- the cosmic aesthet adding substances of God around and beyond the whole universe. Traherne is elevating this idea through his philosophical optimism:

Divine impressions when they came,  
Did quickly enter and my soul inflame.  
'Tis not the object, but the light  
That maketh Heaven; 'tis a purer sight.  
Felicity (line 55-59)

An uniqueness of Traherne's soul in mapping the cultural as well as religious stance of seventeenth century England is tuned through his detail encountered with the concept and actuality of the soul's existence, and with this notion and concept Traheren is able to germinate the very essence of the sacramental temperament and devotion inside the minds of the people of his era and its next periods to amalgamate themselves with the very identity of soul's self to find out the salvation from eternal emancipation. Traherne's overall mastery of projecting and establishing this very notion in front of the conformists of his era might have been able to change their mentalities and outlook of the divinity and religiosity, and thereby proceed them to the new track of spirituality and the divinity with its full spectrum. Traherne notified the readers by his true divine sense about the ambiance of soul:

Is that where beauty, excellence,  
And pleasure keep their court of residence.  
My soul retire,  
Get free, and so thou shalt even all admire. (line 67-70)

Traherne (1637/38-1674)'s principle aim and objective of life is to go in detail about every creation to accomplish the reason behind creation, and by knowing so he moved forward and proceeded closer even



more closer to God to perpetuate and vindicate the creation of his soul too, and thereby wanted to know how to protect them from its eternal damnation by its trim course of time (Ellrodt 91). The concept of felicitation was first attributed to God by Traherne, one of the seventeenth century mystics of divine sensibility, during the time of religious and ecclesiastical apocalypse hovering since the prior era of Restoration before the accession of Charles II by three kingdoms- England, Ireland and Scotland.

## 6. Conclusion

Traherne neutralized the fact of the divinity and religiosity of the seventeenth century at a new pace and dimension to feel and have the full fidelity of the newly cosmos devotion with which they would be able to rearrange their beliefs and relevance of the divinity towards transcendentalism. Traherne was supposed to believe the new manifested cosmos and had been rendered to propose the humankind about his new concept of felicitation with a new pack, quite different to that of his other contemporaries who also established the different philosophies to rectify and vindicate the new taste of the religiosity and the divinity for the better understandings by the entire humankind of different genres. He was obsessed and preoccupied with the vision of the whole transformation of the world into the citadel of the true divine milieu where felicitation, love and care for the entire creation would bear an equal importance, significance and relevance for the betterment of the spiritual and sacramental outlook of the coming future. Additionally, Traherne also propagated us with the importance of love to God, for it constitutes the basic and fundamental aim of human beings- the greatest creation ever made by God for the better understanding of Him by men.

Traherne's philosophical optimism towards his idealization of the seventeenth century devotion and the divinity for the removal of the conditions of human beings is bearing a close significance to the arena of the present religious situation with a new outlook and attitude.

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