**TURNING THE DIAMOND: George Herbert on Prayer** *Dr. Stephen Noll 4-5-2020*

INTRODUCTION

The priest-poet George Herbert (1593-1633) was one of the Evangelists along the way of my pilgrimage to Christ as a university student. Sometimes one may go back to an early inspiration and be – for shame! – embarrassed by him. Not so with Herbert. I have continually refreshed my spirit by dipping back into Herbert’s [*The Temple*](https://www.amazon.com/Temple-Penguin-Pocket-Classics-Clothbound/dp/0241303079/ref%3Dsr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=george+herbert+the+temple&qid=1584093532&s=books&sr=1-2) in order to, as he puts it, “[relish versing](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50700/the-flower-56d22df9112c4)” and “suck every letter” of the [Holy Scriptures](https://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Scriptures.html) he so loved.

As a mid-Lenten devotion or perhaps “prayer in time of plague,” I am contemplating one short poem by Herbert called “Prayer” on weekdays up to Holy Week. Here it is:

Prayer the Church’s banquet, angels’ age,
God’s breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;

Engine against the Almighty, sinner’s tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The Milky Way, the bird of Paradise,

Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul’s blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

This poem is, like Jesus’ teaching, “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over into your lap.” It takes some unpacking. Fortunately, I have found such an unpacker. An Anglican priest named Dennis Lennon (1932-2007) has written a remarkable meditation on this poem titled [*Turning the Diamond: Exploring George Herbert’s Images of Prayer*](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Diamond-Exploring-George-Herberts/dp/0281054703/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=lennon+turning+the+diamond&qid=1584092959&s=books&sr=1-1).

Let me encourage you to purchase *Turning the Diamond* and read Lennon’s perceptive analysis in full. In the meantime I shall be presenting some extended excerpts, line by line, in fifteen installments.The following is from Lennon’s introduction “On Finding a Diamond”:

“If I read a book and I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry…is there any other way?” So Emily Dickinson described her own intuitive test of poetry. George Herbert can have a similar effect on people. For myself, I had not realized that biblical orthodoxy was allowed to be so beautiful, luminous with love and delight in God. Or that serious things could be expressed with such charm, and high doctrine considered with meditative playfulness. Neither had I been aware that a person’s relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ could be this robust, sincere and transparent, as between two dear friends….

Please read, a couple of times and slowly if you will, Herbert’s extraordinary sonnet “Prayer.” Doesn’t it leave you just slightly scalped? After years of pondering it, I still come away thinking, “If this is prayer, then I know nothing about prayer.” Its strange, exuberant, shimmering joy and the haunting imagery – isn’t this quite unlike anything else you have read on prayer? I promise you, it will refresh anyone’s jaded prayer-life.

The sonnet is made up of some 27 metaphors and images (a single word may be emblematic), each one a symbol of a point in our experience of prayer. It is like a diamond with 27 facets; 27 doors left on the latch for the seeker to enter and, following with a meditative imagination, to explore the prayer-country beyond; which is to say, to enter prayer from fresh directions….

As we explore his images it matters with what slant of mind we come to the task. Not with a problem-solving attitude as if we were attempting to demystify some of the exhibits in the Tate Modern gallery, or to solve tricky mental arithmetic. We will simply stand before each symbol and invite it to lead us. Therefore, no haste. Be ready for an image to reach out to you with a particular urgency because it coincides with your situation at that moment. Then drop all else and go with it….

Finally, and before we turn to exploring what “Prayer the Church’s banquet, Angels’ age” might mean for us, two suggestions: first that you keep a note-book record of how your thought and prayer develop, and, second, that you memorize the sonnet. Its unusual and vivid character makes it surprisingly memory-friendly; you will then “have it by heart” for life, which is even better than having it on the page. As your inward possession, written upon the walls of your mind and available to your imagination, “Prayer” will work for you as a spring of meditation and prayer. We will discover our brother George Herbert to be a master at prayer. We have his diamond. Turn it in the light.

PRAYER THE CHURCH’S BANQUET ANGELS’ AGE

**Prayer the Church’s banquet, angels’ age,**
God’s breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;

*Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High. Amen.* The Book of Common Prayer

Dennis Lennon, [*Turning the Diamond*](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Diamond-Exploring-George-Herberts/dp/0281054703/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=lennon+turning+the+diamond&qid=1584092959&s=books&sr=1-1), continues: “Prayer the Church’s banquet,” says George Herbert, at which a few of us will mutter, “Not in my experience, it isn’t.” A sense of duty, rather than a sense of feasting, is what drives our prayer. Sure, we have our champagne moments when heaven and earth touch, but for the most part we pray because Jesus says we should…. What more is there to say? Only this: experience reveals the downward spiral of duty. Duty can become *mere* duty, then *grim* duty, and even *empty* duty, as we routinely crank the prayer-mill over and over again.

Mention banqueting and Herbert’s imagination leaps to the angels. Far older than human experience of it, prayer is as old as “Angels’ age.” Our banqueting takes place among glorious beings who have been at the business of prayer since their creation and long before ours. When God “laid the earth’s cornerstone – the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:6,7). We pray, and our words enter a cosmos already pulsating with angelic adoration. The sound of their voices rocked the great temple to its foundations and frightened the prophet out of his wits (Isaiah 6:1-4), a symbol of a universe set shuddering on its axis by their worship. With angels Herbert is sketching in the context, the environment within which we pray. “You have come to Mount Zion (now, already), to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come (now, already) to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly” (Hebrews 12:22)…. Not only after we die and move over into eternity but now, already, “you have come” into the angelic festival. Among such an irresistible company of friends prayer can only be a banquet….

“Angels’ age,” or Adam’s age – we are set the same exhilarating challenge for which both angels and humans were created and which justifies the existence of all things: how to adore God adequately; how to keep up with the runaway beauty and love of God…. Only love can rise to this challenge; duty will never do it, it hasn’t the motivation or the imagination. Duty will cause us to do things well, and to pray conscientiously, but only love will do it beautifully, totally. When love is in the ascendancy, prayer escapes from mere dutifulness, techniques and time-slots, like a bird flying its cage. Love confers on our praying the character of a banquet….

It occurred to me only quite recently, in a moment of maudlin reflection, that in my childhood every time my father looked at me he smiled. Even though for some of that time we were dodging bombs in the London Blitz, with half the neighbourhood going up in flames, I recall it in terms of complete security, within my parents’ love and commitment. A sense of banquet-in-the-Blitz!

Prayer will come out of the shadow and into the joy of the feast, when our insecurities and suspicions in relation to God are answered and laid to rest. George Herbert is still with us in this for in his own way he passed through the same crisis. His answer is exquisite in its courtesy, and profoundly satisfying to the clamouring conscience. Prayer will become banquet once we allow ourselves to be entertained at *another* feast. Not a feast of our making but one prepared, financed, hosted, and serviced by Christ. First, allow yourself to be welcomed and seated by him at his table. Again, love is the Master of Ceremonies, and this love will not take our refusal for an answer:

LOVE (III) George Herbert

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.

“A guest,” I answered, “worthy to be here”;
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth, Lord, but I have marred them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”
“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.

GOD’S BREATH IN MAN RETURNING TO HIS BIRTH

Prayer the Church’s banquet, angels’ age,
**God’s breath in man returning to his birth,**
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;

Dennis Lennon, [*Turning the Diamond*](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Diamond-Exploring-George-Herberts/dp/0281054703/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=lennon+turning+the+diamond&qid=1584092959&s=books&sr=1-1), continues: The first sparkle from George Herbert’s diamond gave exotic images of prayer as feasting, and as angelic longevity. The second facet of his stone could not be more different in its plain simplicity: prayer is like breathing. It is “God’s breath in man returning to his birth.” This is prayer as rejuvenation.

Nothing is more elusive than the over-familiar, well-worn thing. “Breathing” is a humdrum, thirty-thousand-times-a-day activity and thereby virtually impenetrable to the imagination….One breath comes to us as the Father’s gift and returns to him when freighted with our prayer, love and praise. The fact that we live in complete moment-by-moment dependence upon the vital power of “God’s breath in man” means that we will understand our existence when we see its giftedness. The fact that we are breathing, at this moment, is the ever-present reminder of our utter indebtedness to God. Thanksgiving becomes a driving force within us. We breathe, we lift up our voices in prayer; our breathing follows the great doxological contour: “For from God, and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever! Amen” (Romans 11:36).

Prayer is thus the most normal and natural use of our breath. The act of prayer throws open the windows of our interior world, ventilating our spirit, allowing our breath to surge through us and out on its short return journey to God. Here is the homing instinct of the prayers we breathe; like a child running to her mother’s arms; like a magnetic needle searching about until it settles on north….

So far, in following Herbert’s metaphor, we have thought of breathing as making speech, prayer and praise, possible for us. But of course breath is the vital power of our entire bodily life, and properly understood our entire bodily life comes into play when we pray. Prayer is the total response of the whole person to God within the full range of lived experience. In Abraham Kuyper’s words, “There is not an inch of any sphere of life to which Jesus Christ does not say ‘mine!’”….

Think of the will of God for each of us as a piece of music, written personally by a composer who knows each one’s distinctive instrument. That instrument is your uniquely designed and gifted body, engineered by “God’s breath in man,” intended for communion with God in a relationship of love. Nothing else will serve as an instrument on which to interpret and perform the music. “Sacrifices and offerings you did not desire,” said Jesus, because they are less than the image of God….

Prayer lived out through the entirety of bodily life transcends those artificial partitions by which we divide up our discipleship (e.g., into Bible reading, church, witness, service, mission, etc.). Behaviour-prayer reintegrates our trivialized and fragmented personal world because now everything relates around the centre of Christ’s love.

But are we still missing something in Herbert’s words? By now we know enough of his thoughts to expect rich subtleties and depths within his apparent simplicities. The idea of breath returning to “his birth” is puzzling. Breath, after we have done with it, is normally exhaled to its “death” not its birth. When it has fulfilled its mission and spent itself delivering its oxygen to keep us ticking over a little longer, breath is finished. Exhaled, it is absorbed back into the atmosphere.

But prayer, Herbert says, reverses that natural process of deterioration and exhaustion, which leads to the “death of breath.” Prayer takes it back the other way to “his birth,” the place of regeneration and new beginnings. Prayer is the agent of rejuvenation because it puts the one who prays into communion with the risen Christ, the Lord of life. “He…set his seal of ownership on us, and put the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1:22). “What is to come” and is already at work among us, is the continual feast of resurrection life. To be a Christian is to be always young, in a sense far more profound than mere biological youthfulness…. Prayer is the language of Christian newness by which “God’s breath in man” goes one way, back to birth.

Even at his death, Jesus was a young man. His vision, words and acts were never entirely at home within the disenchanted adult world. Irenaeus said about Jesus, “Know that he brought all newness by bringing himself.” His heart was bursting with the paradoxes of God’s inventions, the exhilarating and subversive upside-down-ness of the kingdom: that we will find ourselves when we throw ourselves away on to the will of God, and so on. The rigid, conformist, and above all the self-centred mind (the aging mind) cannot cope with him. His newness is spliced into this present sin-damaged time of ours and is not an easy fit….

Jesus said on the secret of eternal young-ness, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). Prayer as a way of life, a way of the heart, as “God’s breath in man returning to its birth,” takes our essential life back and up, against the processes of “moth and rust,” into the inexhaustible, rejuvenating life of Christ.

This meditation recalls to me a great hymn of joyful dedication:

*Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in endless praise
Let them flow in endless praise.* Frances Ridley Havergal, “[Take My Life](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5nPdad2EEY)”

 THE SOUL IN PARAPHRASE, HEART IN PILGRIMAGE

Prayer the Church’s banquet, angels’ age,
God’s breath in man returning to his birth,
**The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,**
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;

*He who would valiant be ‘gainst all disaster
Let him in constancy follow the Master
There’s no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.* John Bunyan, “[To Be a Pilgrim](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yHJMPw8RHU)”

Dennis Lennon, [*Turning the Diamond*](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Diamond-Exploring-George-Herberts/dp/0281054703/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=lennon+turning+the+diamond&qid=1584092959&s=books&sr=1-1), continues his commentary: Another turn of the diamond, another image of prayer. How to unriddle “The soul in paraphrase”? Begin with the part we understand: “paraphrase” is a free rendering of a statement expressing its sense in different words. By analogy, your soul is your “statement” to God and to the world; prayer is the free rendering, the expansion and the amplification, of your soul-statement.

But not everyone will greet this news with unbridled enthusiasm for fear that “expansion” threatens serenity. Our two earlier explorations of prayer as banqueting among angels, and as “becoming younger than yourself,” honoured the interior life. But talk of “paraphrasing” suggests disruption and un-rooting. The soul as demolition site does not sit easily with inner calm….

The first thing to note is how in half-a-dozen words George Herbert gives the essence of Christian living as *movement*, with prayer as the engine room of that movement. Just as we cannot not breathe, so we cannot not move, and remain Christian. Static prayer is an absurdity, like a songbird afraid of heights. In the spiritual life standing still is already going back for it refuses the reason for our existence, our high calling in Christ (Philippians 3:12-14). Augustine suggested that our perfection consists in knowing that we are not perfect: we are people still in the making as we walk on.

Before considering what “paraphrasing the soul” means, first a comment about paraphrasing words, especially the words of prayers printed in scripture…. Scripture serves like a thriving maternity-ward, producing prayers out of fertile mother-texts, that is, when our prayers come to birth out of (paraphrased out of) scripture…. When we do clothe our needs in biblical utterances it means we are not the first to do it. Somewhere in the ancient world a man or woman in a crisis coined a cry from the heart, which fits our own crisis…. We can trust scripture to be “on the right wavelength” and to be “getting through” as the Spirit reaches out to us from his side by his inspired revelation….,

But George Herbert speaks of prayer not as words in paraphrase but as “the soul” in paraphrase. What is this stuff called “soul”?

The first thing to note is that we do not, none of us, have a soul. We *are* a soul, a “living being” (Genesis 2:7)…. The soul is “man empowered by God.” It is “person” or personality, the radical force of character. Soul is mind, but not in our usual restricted sense of the reasoning faculty only…. Soul-mind includes everything that constitutes and colours the essence of a person: thought, felt-thought, emotion, perception, interest, and inclination. It is this essence which when paraphrased – expounded, amplified, extended in the overflow of a free rendering – becomes prayer….

We turn to our Lord Jesus for the definitive demonstration of prayer as the “soul in paraphrase.” The first thing we notice about him is his complete integrity. He is what he prays. He stands fully, in all his powers, behind the words he utters… With Jesus everything moves together in the same direction, will, emotion, intellect, decisions, action. Here is sublime paraphrasing, an expanding free rendering of this essence: his body broken as bread, his blood poured out as wine for the life of the world. His cross is his prayer in the language of wood and iron.

With us it is sadly different for not everything moves together in the same direction…. On the surface of the mind we utter our prayers, while beneath the surface our selfish energies and vanities move in their own very different direction. Only one power can save by healing and reintegrating our torn interior life: love. And only the Holy Spirit of love can reach under the root of our being and there pour in his life and love into our hearts….

Prayer is also “the ***heart in pilgrimage***.” The heart, like the soul is not a “thing” as in popular imagining. The heart is the soul, the living being, the person, in action…. The heart carries within it a feeling of something like homesickness. A sense of unease and impermanence in this world; fragments of a haunting memory of an enchanting place to which we belong. It is as though the Father sends a signal from out of eternity to his children in this world; we lock on to it and follow it home…. Therefore our most vital spiritual preparation each day will be to attune our hearts to the Father’s incoming rhythms….

Herbert is saying the pilgrimage *is* the prayer of the heart; prayer is “the heart in pilgrimage.” Prayer is not, as we are prone to think, one aspect of the pilgrimage along with numerous others. The act of a life walking through the world to the Father, step-by-step and day-by-day in Christian obedience, constitutes prayer. Everything in this journeying is prayer. Once again we sense Herbert’s ability to reconcile and heal the deeply felt split in our minds between the sacred and the secular. Everything in our lives is drawn into the walk, breathing its praise and prayer to the Father with every step taken.

Noah provides a striking example of the sacredness of the secular when rendered up to God. Noah “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9)…. In the act of cutting wood, in hammering nails, and with every lick of paint for the ark, Noah was walking with God. Receive the work before you this day, all your work, not just religious acts (that split again!) as your pilgrimage, and let the whole-hearted completion of the work be your prayer.

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In reading this verse about the heart in pilgrimage, I could not but think of John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bunyan, born five years before Herbert’s death, might seem an odd match: Herbert, the cultured Anglican Orator of Cambridge, Bunyan the non-conformist tinker of Bedford. Yet in the last years before his premature death, Herbert shed all those honors to become a humble parish priest in service of “[My Master](https://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Odour.html).” One might compare Bunyan’s soul in paraphrase in “[To Be a Pilgrim](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yHJMPw8RHU)” with Herbert’s “[Come my Way, my Truth, my Life](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzJNdXOHLIU).”

THE CHRISTIAN PLUMMET SOUNDING HEAVEN AND EARTH

Prayer the Church’s banquet, angels’ age,
God’s breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
**The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;**

Dennis Lennon, [*Turning the Diamond*](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Diamond-Exploring-George-Herberts/dp/0281054703/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=lennon+turning+the+diamond&qid=1584092959&s=books&sr=1-1), begins his examination of verse 4 by warning against a distortion of the previous verse about soul- and heart-prayer as being circumscribed by the “small circle” of immediate concerns, family and a few friends.

Our sympathies escape the pull of the small circle only with great difficulty, and then only if they come under the sway of a new, wholly superior dynamic. Hence the timeliness of this later metaphor. The challenge in this exploration will be to bring our present vision of prayer, its range and scope, to be scrutinized by the unusual idea of prayer as “the Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth.”

Imagine you are located at the mid-point between heaven and earth. You are hang-gliding there, perhaps, or magically floating. In your hand you have the gift of prayer in the shape of a plummet, a plumb-line, the sort sailors in small boats use to “sound” the depth of water under the keel. Your plumb-line/prayer-line possesses several unusual properties: first, it can go vertically up, lead first, to sound height, as well as in the more usual direction, down, to gauge depth. Second, its string is limitless in length. And third, it is a thinking plummet. Just let it go, down or up, into any subject and it will run to the farthest limits. It is a “getting-to-the-bottom-of-things” plummet.

By this picture George Herbert suggests the real business of prayer: penetration into the heart and essence of things, into origins and root-causes of whatever prayer is concerned with; like a friend who, if you mention a headache, or lack of money, will not leave it there but wants to know the full story in order to help. “Sounding-prayer” is quite incapable of being superficial. It isn’t in its nature to deal with the outside of things. It transcends, or transfixes, the merely material and visible, touchable world to reach into its centre where the outcomes are decided….

Christ *is* the prayer sounding heaven and earth. At their very best and penetrative, our prayers merely ride on his. He emerged with his findings, which he presents in the form of “The Lord’s Prayer.” All that the world yearns for in her deepest heart, is answered by all that heaven longs to bestow of herself….

“On earth as it is in heaven” amounts to nothing less than God’s practical reign among us. Whatever practical matter engages our prayer, and however we frame our petitions, we are asking for the Lord to hold sway in that situation. We can ask for nothing greater, we are not permitted to ask for anything less. Jesus said, “This, then, is how you should pray…”

Therefore sounding-prayers, which reach to the heart and essence of heaven and earth, must go behind the screens of the senses to see by faith what is the truth of things. The Book of Revelation goes behind visible history to tell the story from the perspective of the kingdom of God. “Revelation” is world theatre; the unveiling of Jesus Christ as Lord of history and of current events. The visible story as experienced by Christians living under the Roman Imperial authority in first-century Asia Minor was bleak. Persecution and the real possibility of cruel martyrdom were boiling up over the heads of the young churches. Yet every Lord’s Day they went to celebrate the fact that Jesus is Lord over all, including Caesar. Would their vision of Jesus be exalted and compelling enough to keep them faithful to him regardless of the consequences? Remember, a simple action like a pinch of incense into the flame at Caesar’s shrine could save a Christian. Sincerity was not required! The series of visions, which is the Book of Revelation, was given through John to convince the churches where the truth lay. It took them, and it takes us today, behind the scenes. Nothing could more strengthen and excite our prayer-life, as well as increasing its scope and range, than meditation in the visions of “the throne” in Revelation chapters 4 and 5….

The stunning throne-vision compels our prayer, up and out, in intercession for the peoples of the world. The extraordinary upheavals and movements of peoples around the globe are as much news of God as they are world news. The scroll in the hand of the One on the throne is open and streaming into the life-blood of the nations. God is not their puppeteer. He allows the nations their freedom while drawing all things to serve his purposes. “The nations” are the theatre of his activity and the vehicle of his purposes. Grasping the significance of this, we attend to world news more carefully and prayerfully; we become habitual world-watchers, more global-minded…. But if world affairs are not significant in our thinking and praying (not reflected in our church programmes) we imply an empty throne or a sealed scroll, an absentee or powerless God, or that “salvation” is essentially a disembodied “spiritual” programme floating clear of the messy round and tumble of “the nations.” In which case we are back in the happiness of the “small circle” fallacy.

But sounding-prayer will, by its nature and by its dynamic connection with “the throne” of Revelation visions, make us cosmic people.

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May I conclude with a modest reflection on this theme in a time of worldwide plague. Despite the efforts and assurances of the experts, no one know precisely how this pandemic will end and what enduring social, economic and political effects it will have on our life or that of our nation and the nations of the world. What we do know from Scripture and Christ’s Reign is that God is the Lord of history even through war, famine, pestilence and death (Revelation 6:1-8). We also know that He calls us to pray and responds to the prayers of His people in distress, even if the answer is to wait a little longer (verses 9-11; cf. the BCP Litany). Our call today may be to plumb the significance of this time of trial in prayer even as we also intercede for those in authority and for workers on the ground who are responding to the exigencies of the crisis.

We have now finished the first stanza of Herbert’s sonnet and five chapters of Lennon’s commentary (again, consider ordering a copy of his book). I hope this first week has been illuminating and rewarding to you, perhaps loosing some of the burdens of prayer while expanding its vision into eternity. This certainly was Paul’s desire when he prayed:

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21)*