CHRISTINA ROSSETTI: THE TWO WAYS

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It is the object of this thesis to analyze the religious poetry of Christina Rossetti and to demonstrate that in this poetry, Christina rejected the earth and cleaved to heaven. Through an analysis of her religious poetry, the reader comes to a greater appreciation and understanding of her experience, for Christina's poetry is grounded in her life and moves in a pattern parallel to it. Such an analysis will reveal something of why she came to condemn all the uses of this world and to adopt heaven as her only worthwhile goal. And it will do so because much of Christina's work is a constant witness to her experience as a Christian who, while wishing to gain entrance into heaven, ever warred against her own doubts, imperfections, and failures and who ever felt compelled to investigate and question her particular position as a Christian. In fact, even much of her secular verse is essentially religious in nature, for she most often viewed experience from a Christian point of view. If she wrote of love, she frequently did so as a Bride of Christ who rejected earthly love for His higher one, and if she wrote of nature, she often wrote to condemn it as disappointing and sinful and to warn all not to be tempted by its brief but fatal beauties. Christina's poetry reveals that when confronted with the promises of heaven, she conceived of the earth as possessing nothing worthwhile.

Because Christina was such an astute observer of her

inner experience and because she could record it concretely and minutely with the gifts of a poet who knew how to fuse experience and expression into a meaningful whole, her religious verse tells the story of her life as a Christian who wished to follow God's will. With painstaking observation and unsparing detail, Christina recorded her spiritual experience. And she did so with the penetrating inner insight of one who conceives of the outer world as secondary to the spiritual realm, man's only proper concern. Thus, biographical data is seldom needed for a study of her inner life, for Christina's poems themselves poffer the most moving and vivid account. Because of the nature of her poetry, a chronological approach to an investigation of Christina's religious verse does not appear essential. Further, a chronological approach is hampered by the fact that Christina did not date much of her poetry. In many cases, the date of composition is only conjecture. Again, because her verse is spontaneous in nature and was written as her experiences occurred, the task here is to grasp the essence of Christina's spiritual life by investigating various themes in her poetry. It is the task of this thesis to analyze the major movements of her inner life and to avoid being overwhelmed by the seemingly chaotic mess of individual moments which she recorded.

A chronological approach to her religious verse is also not essential in that her experience is not that which can be termed a progressive one. Her poetry records no ascent toward a joyous achievement of Christian worthiness, no steady movement into the arms of Christ. Rather, her poetry tells of the never-ceasing battle of the Christian to achieve grace and eternal salvation and to eliminate those imperfections and sins which would condemn her to hell. Her Christian journey was painful and arduous every step of the way and was horizontal in movement; it was the weary march of the Christian who ever encounters temptation, spiritual paralysis, failure, and sin, but who will never spare herself on her quest for union with God.

And Christina deliberately chose this journey because it was her conviction that all the promises of beauty and love which earth offered to man would inevitably come to nothing. On an earth ruled by mutability, man can never find happiness nor peace, for beloved ones are scarred by illness, poverty, and failure, friends and family alike are snatched away by death, and love blossoms, but cannot provide permanent satisfaction and stable joy. Like nature's poor beauties, love is doomed to defeat by time's ruinous course. Love either burns itself out or is destroyed by a partner's change of heart, absence, or death:

> Returned or unrequited,
> 'Tis still the same;
> The flame was never lighted
> Or sinks the flame.

Again, while nature might furnish man with fleeting moments of insight into the nature of heaven's beauty and comfort, it is essentially alienated from man, for man cannot commune with nature in a meaningful relationship. The world of man and the world of nature are distinct entities, and as nature cannot sympathize with man's difficulties and hopes, man cannot partake of nature's joys and calm. Further, although nature's attractions might give man some solace and happiness, they will ultimately disappoint, for earthly beauties quickly fade and die. To place one's trust in earthly things is, Christina believes, a fatal mistake; all changes and dies in this mutable world. Worse yet, self-loathing, sorrow, emotional and spiritual sterility, and damnation await those who would put their trust in earthly pursuits. The search for earthly love, material riches, worldly power, and sensuous pleasure is doomed to defeat on earth because of time's destructive powers and in eternity because such pursuits are condemned by God Who wishes man to pursue Christian love and perfection.

Christina believes that God's way must be followed because it alone leads to eternal life and to fulfilment. Only in God's love, which unlike all on earth is beyond time and change, can man find completion and fruition. God so made man that unless his soul is satisfied and made complete by God's love and blessing, he remains an empty, dissatisfied shell. To follow God is to rise above and to reject those

earthly pursuits which leave man exhausted and incomplete because of their transient nature and offers of only momentary bliss. If this earth has any importance and meaning, it is in the fact that it acts as the testing ground for man's soul. Indeed, she believed that "time /is/ sole battle-ground of right and wrong". God will determine each man's eternal future on the basis of his earthly performance. On earth, man must war against worldly temptations and doubt as well as against his own instincts and desires, for the self will ever endeavour to seek sensuous pleasures and escape from difficult spiritual trials and suffering. Man must war against his own nature if he is to achieve Christian perfection and merit eternal life in heaven. Ironically, however, it is this same self which is the only possession of value which man can offer God. In order to be given God's grace and eternal love, man must overcome his own desires, put his will into God's, and make of his self something worthwhile. He must, with God's help and guidance, create a self which loves, praises, and obeys God and which is in harmony with his fellow man. In short, man must follow the ideal of Christian perfection established by Christ.

It was this task of making a worthwhile gift out of her self which Christina found so painfully difficult. Although she renounced the world, she found its attractions distracting and tempting, and although she wished to obey

God's will, she found her own will too often at variance with God's wishes. Her doubts, sins, failures, and imperfections often led her to despair of ever meriting God's grace, for she believed she was incapable of overcoming her own unworthiness. While she always kept Christian perfection as her end, its achievement often seemed an ever-receding goal. She could then be led into desperate moments of spiritual paralysis, moments when she could not find it in her heart to love Christ or sympathize with His suffering. During such a crisis, she was overwhelmed by guilt, for she was always aware that Christ suffered for her, as He did for all men, and chose to sacrifice Himself so that she could gain redemption. Nevertheless, although her sins often seemed too numerous and too hideous to be forgiven, and although her sense of failure, imperfection, and impotency could cripple her, Christina was sustained by a tenacious courage and an indomitable will. During moments of utter despair, both will and courage would flood her being, giving her hope, strength and perseverance. She would then begin the struggle anew and would again and again resolutely set out to defeat temptation and to achieve some measure of Christian perfection. She knew that the arduous journey upon earth was a life-long one and that only death would release her. With courage and determination, she wrote:

> Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
> Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

Further, her own Christian beliefs often gave her guidance and strength, for she could find consolation and assurance in them. For Christina, the essence of Christianity was to be found in God's eternal love for man. God so loved man that He sacrificed His only son for him and thereby secured eternal salvation for all humanity. And Christ's promise to man is an eternal one, for Christ is ever ready to sustain, to guide, and to strengthen as man endeavours to journey toward Him. Man can be assured that Christ's love for him is much stronger than His wrath. If man prays for Christ's aid and truly endeavours to lead a Christian life, Christ will help. Man's love for Christ must involve not only a desire to carry out His will and to emulate His virtues, but also a commitment to his fellow man. While on earth, man must serve Christ through his fellow man. God wishes all in the universe to be united in a common bond of love. Indeed, to deny Christ's call is to put oneself out of tune with the universe, for Christ's call is a call of love, and love is the principle upon which the universe was created and now operates. God, the embodiment of love, is the activating and sustaining agent of all creation. Love is thus the core of man's relationship with his fellow man and with God and is the principle upon which the universe rests.

And if man is successful in his endeavour to achieve

some measure of worthiness, Christina believed that through God's mercy and grace, he would enter paradise, his true home. There, at last, he will be granted rest and fulfilment. Surrounded by God's eternal love and an infinity of heavenly beauty, comfort, and peace, man will achieve true and final happiness. Unlike earth's, heaven's promises are fulfilled and are never left incomplete by the destructive powers of time and change. In heaven, in the company of his loving Saviour, all the disappointments, sorrows, and heartache of earth will fall away. Man will find complete fulfilment at last.

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CHAPTER I

THE EARTHLY JOURNEY

Christina Rossetti was born into a world which could never command her allegiance inspite of its many attractions. Never could she find fulfilment here, never the wholeness and the complete peace born of it for which she hungered and sought. At an early age, Christina turned her view heavenward, and although her soul and the world were often to war on an earthly battlefield, this warrior was ever aware that the battleground was a transient one over which hovered death. Throughout her life, she remained a seeker after a goal not to be attained on earth, a searcher who believed her existence here was momentary, although necessary for the determination of her soul's fate. At times, this earth offered consolation to her and provided momentary glimpses of the heaven for which she thirsted, and at times, its beauty could touch and delight her. But while the earth and all in it could tempt and charm, please and woo, they could never overcome her essential displeasure and dissatisfaction with everything. If the world's fleeting beauty could please and comfort Christina and if its attraction could start a myriad of agonizing conflicts in her soul, its disappointments, sorrows and sins tore her spirit and caused her endless grief, a grief which made her only more fervently desire the rest which heaven

brings. With all its sorrows and pains, delights and beauties, this earth was not for Christina Rossetti. For her who hungered for the ultimate perfection of heaven, for the complete and final fulfilment of the Christian soul, it was not enough.

A glimpse at Christina's life reveals at least something of why she could not remain at ease with this earth and why she felt compelled to turn her vision elsewhere. She was plagued by ill-health from an early age, for during her adolescence her health began to fail, and the Rossetti family did not expect Christina's life would be a long one. In fact, her brother, William Rossetti, has stated in his "Memoir":

> . . . any one who did not understand that Christina was an almost constant and often a sadly-smitten invalid, seeing at times the countenance of Death very close to her own, would form an extremely incorrect notion of her corporal, and thus in some sense of her spiritual, condition. She was compelled, even if not naturally disposed, to regard this world as a 'valley of the shadow of death' . . . .[1]

Further, her sister, Maria, was often unwell, while Gabriele, her father, was overtaken by ill-health and

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1. The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), p.1.

increasing blindness. His failing health soon led to financial crises, and poverty, that spectral horror of Victorian England, hovered above the Rossetti household. Possessing what Marya Zaturenska calls a ". . . high-strung temperament, so susceptible to shock, sorrow, sensation . . .,"[2] Christina, hearing her father's constant wish for death and being surrounded by the gloom of sickness and poverty, was often led to despair and perhaps to an unconscious desire to escape reality by her own illness. And as Lona Mosk Packer states, there were many repercussions:

> Is it any wonder, then that Christina's mind dwelt so persistently upon ideas of death, decay, and mutability, and that her poetry reflects the dark mood of hopelessness the conditions of her life suggested to her? Change was the chief enemy. Lost forever were the security and happiness of her pleasant childhood, when she was part of a large, warm, cheerful, and loving family circle that both protected and stimulated her. Change had come, and it had destroyed the well-being and the stability of her childhood. Perhaps that is the reason why Christina's poetry, mature as well as youthful, cries out against transience, change, mutability.[3]

Thus, because she found the world an essentially comfortless place where the demons of transience and death ever flung their arrows of sickness, pain, separation, and loss against

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2. Christina Rossetti: A Portrait with Background (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), p.38.

3. Christina Rossetti (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p.23.

the heart, Christina turned to the warmth, love, and permanence of God who promised stability, fulfilment, and protection.

And as her youth was ridden by disappointment, sadness, and loss, so was her entire life. From 1848 until 1850, she was beset with the difficulties of her engagement to the reticent James Collinson, an engagement unsuitable to her because of Collinson's Roman Catholic position and perhaps because of her unwillingness to devote herself to anyone or anything other than Christ. In 1853, her maternal grandparents, Anna Maria and Gaetano Polidori, died as did her beloved father in 1854. For some time, Christina suffered from ill-health herself, and then, in 1866, her refusal of Charles Bagot Cayley's offer of marriage caused her further sadness and pain. She was then severely stricken with Grave's disease and endured several years of acute pain and the knowledge that death was near. Unhappiness because of her inability to establish successful relationships with her sisters-in-law was then followed by the deaths of her sister, Maria, in 1876 and her brother, Gabriel, in 1882, the brother whose emotional intensity and vehemence of passion had often caused the family much heartache and concern. Death, indeed, seemed to follow Christina about, for in 1885, Cayley, who had remained one of her most intimate and valued friends, died, and was followed to the grave by her mother in 1886 and by her aunts, Charlotte and Eliza Polidori, in 1890 and 1893. Having suffered from

chronic ill-health for several years, Christina died on December 29, 1894, at the age of sixty-four.

It is little wonder, then, that the view of the world she established in her youth was to remain a constant one, for life was, as we have seen, never beneficent to Christina; it constantly snatched away those she loved and scarred those around her by poverty, sickness, and despair. Hence, although Christina often responded to the beauty of the earth and, at times, enjoyed nature's attractions, she could never give it whole-hearted devotion because she viewed it as being marred by lack of certitude and permanence. The poem, "Earth and Heaven", composed when Christina was fourteen years of age, strikes a chord which was to echo throughout her entire creative output and reveals poetic techniques which were to remain typical of her work. In simple couplets, she expresses a delight in nature's varied attractions. And her tastes are simple yet rich, for she is caught by calmly-flowing waters, swans riding a gentle river, sunlight "deeply glowing;"[4] and flowers whose colours and scents enchant. In these couplets, she piles image upon image until she has amassed a rich store of nature's gems. She then climaxes her simple but elegant

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4. The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, with Memoir and Notes, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), p.82, l.2. (All subsequent quotations are from this edition.)

inventory with the image of "seaweed / 'Neath the waters darkling" (ll. 11-12). Her sensuous appreciation of nature's treasures is seen in the use she makes of colour, for the poem abounds in warm coral, amber, green and rose. Christina is thus making use of the suggestive powers of colour, a device characteristic of much of her poetry, in order to suggest the wealth and fresh variety of nature. Again, here we also see her oft-employed technique of presenting the reader with concrete and clearly-defined images which fully outline and complete whatever she wishes to communicate to the reader. Little could be more definite than her simple but complete picture of nature's beauties, for the scene here is drawn in terms of water, swans, sunlight, flowers, and skylark, and each is qualified by some simple bit of description such as the river which is "gently gliding" (l.4). Further, her verse here is sensuous, a quality which gives a more concrete impression of the scene. In this poem, we are struck by the colours which suggest the richness and variety of this scene, encompassed by the scent of the flowers, and surrounded by the picture of the swans and water. We are also given a sense of movement, for Christina describes the "calmly flowing" (l.1) waters, the "riding" (l.3) swans, the "gently gliding" (l.4) river, and the "soaring" (l.9) skylark. Her choice of diction here aptly conveys the simple elegance and quiet richness of the scene.

But if the first section of the poem is a colourful description of nature's riches which ends in the affirmation, "All these are beautiful, / Of beauty earth is full" (ll. 16-17), the positiveness of her seeming belief in earth's loveliness is soon destroyed when she poses the question, "Say, to our promised heaven / Can greater charms be given?" (ll. 18-19). And this question seems to arise with that graceful ease indicative of so much of Christina's work. She achieves this charming spontaneity by posing the question after her conclusion that earth is fair; it is almost as though in completing one train of thought with a general conclusion, the poet is led to a natural and unforced contemplation of something greater than though analogous to this beauty. The ease is also achieved by the fact that she begins her question with the conversational "say" and completes it in a simple couplet. But this seemingly casual and innocent question provides a complete reversal of thought, another common technique of Christina's, for she often uses reversal and contrast to develop a presentation of her vision. The answer to this question, a resounding "yea," provides the reversal:

> . . . in heaven doth dwell,
> Glowing, indestructible,
> What here below finds tainted birth
> In the corrupted sons of earth:
> For, filling there and satisfying
> Man's soul unchanging and undying,
> Earth's fleeting joys and beauties far above,
> In heaven is Love.
> (ll. 20-27)

Although the ending of the poem is somewhat awkwardly contrived, Christina makes her message clear: man cannot be satisfied with earth, for its fleeting joys and transient pleasures cannot fulfill man's soul. On earth, whatever is born must die and is tainted by transience from the moment of its inception. To Christina, this earth is an apparently beautiful and rich, but ultimately ephemeral and poor, stopping place where she must dwell a space before reaching that permanent home where perfect love gives a fulfilment earth cannot give.

Indeed, at times, Christina believed the world and man to be of little consequence, and her poetry is full of reflections upon the utter uselessness of the world and of man's works and puny powers. Her rejection of the earth and all in it as vain, futile and worthless is seen in "A Testimony" (pp. 119-120), written when she was nineteen, where she gives vent to her scorn of this earth and those filled with earthly desires and hopes. Composed during illness, the poem states that man can never find fulfilment on this earth, inspite of his striving and restless energy, because of his own corruption and the essential worthlessness

and changeable nature of the world in which he lives. In fact, she conceives of man as an impotent fleeting shadow:

> Man flourishes as a green leaf,
> And as a leaf doth pass away;
> Or as a shade that cannot stay
> And leaves no track, his course is brief: . . . .
> (ll. 37-40)

Although the simile of man's time of growth being as brief and as inconsequential as a leaf which quickly fades is expressive of her view of man's brief time and paltry potential, the force of this vision is not fully felt until she grimly compares man to an unsubstantial shadow which has no inner essence and which flits across the world, leaving no mark or accomplishment. But she is quick to point out that while the individual beauties of the earth swiftly fade and die, the earth itself is a continually renewed entity; man's pitiful role is only to provide the fertilizer:

> The earth is fattened with our dead;
> She swallows more and doth not cease:
> Therefore her wine and oil increase
> And her sheaves are not numbered; . . . .
> (ll. 61-64)

Man's lot is thus a sad one, for he is given only the grave:

> Therefore the maidens cease to sing,
> And the young men are very sad;
> Therefore the sowing is not glad,
> And mournful is the harvesting.
> (ll.67-70)

And because of his transience and weakness, all that man strives for and builds swiftly fades away. Man's works may be outwardly beautiful and impressive, but like him,

they are weak and rotten underneath; in the face of storms, man's houses, built on sand, "perish, quickly overthrown, /Loose from the very basement stone" (ll. 23-24). Further, the material treasures which man ever pursues and amasses only to destroy himself in the process prove worthless in the end; "Our treasures moth and rust corrupt, / Or thieves break through and steal" (ll.13-14). And all our rushing about, gathering of wealth and care, and building and buying is to no purpose, for we "know not who shall be our heir" (l.48). All is futile; our labour, like our natures, is not good, and we succeed only in sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. All soon comes to nothing. And all mankind is included in this perpetual failure, for no one can escape the corruption of time and the mutability inherent in men's lives and works:

> Our fathers went; we pass away;
> Our children follow on our track.
> So generations fail, and so
> They are renewed and come and go.
> (ll. 57-60)

And further, for all our fury of activity, we are left dissatisfied and unfulfilled. Man plants and builds much, but can never find satiety and fulfilment:

> Our eyes cannot be satisfied
> With seeing, nor our ears be filled
> With hearing . . . .
> (ll. 43-45)

Man cannot satisfy his longings; his life is short, his strength small, and his works corrupt. Nothing ever reaches completion or fulfilment upon this earth; nothing completes

itself, for life is an endless round of continuous motion and change. Mutability is supreme:

> The things that were shall be again;
> The rivers do not fill the sea,
> But turn back to their secret source;
> The winds too turn upon their course.
> (ll. 9-12)

For all his great hopes, schemes, and passions, man will live only to die. The only certainty we know is death, man's common heritage.

It must be pointed out that Christina's vision is an intense one, for she deeply felt the futility of man's earthly pursuits. She conveys the force of her vision by an apt use of metre which in this poem is iambic tetrameter. The lines, with only four beats each, cause the poem to move along quickly and give the reader a sense of the swift movement of time and the quick hustle and bustle of man as he runs about buying, building, and gathering. Again, if her metre adds an urgency to the poem, so does her diction. In this poem, there is nothing of Christina's delicacy and gentleness, for her words, like her vision, are powerful and intense. For example, when speaking of man's treasures and works, she describes their disintegration with such terms as "break through", "steal", "perish", "overthrown", and "beat". These powerful verbs suggest how completely, even violently, man's works will crumble or be smashed. Both metre and diction thus add to Christina's urgent and powerful conviction that futility is

the lot of everything on earth.

The theme of the transience of the world is touched upon again and again by Christina, for she who hungered after wholeness and fulfilment could never find it on this time-tainted earth. In a simple, yet poignant poem, "Treasure plies a feather" (p.140), she gives expression to her sense of loss, but without the bitterness of "A Testimony". In this concise and straightforward poem, Christina is full of a gentle regret for the mutability of all things on this earth, and she employs bird imagery in order to suggest the delicate and transient nature of her earthly treasures:

> Treasure plies a feather,
> Pleasure spreadeth wings,
> Taking flight together, -
> Ah my cherished things!
> (ll. 1-4)

Her sense of regret is seen in the sigh she utters at the end of this stanza; when she utters "Ah" and calls her possessions and joys "cherished things", we begin to feel how much she sadly values these weak, but precious, treasures. But she graciously accepts their inevitable passing, for she dismisses them gently and sings softly:

> Fly away, poor pleasure,
> That art so brief a thing:
> Fly away, poor treasure,
> Thou hast so swift a wing.
> (ll. 5 - 8)

Her use of oxymoron, "poor treasure," is suggestive; earthly treasures, by their very nature are poor, for they stay for

such a brief time and make so swift a departure that they have little true wealth to offer. Pleasure and richness must come without wings and with permanence if they are to be of true value. Also, they must be spiritual things; they must be treasures which make rich the soul. Earthly riches and joys are of only superficial value. Thus, Christina quietly turns her vision away from the earth and states:

> Treasure without feather,
> Pleasure without wings,
> Elsewhere dwell together
> And are heavenly things.
> (ll. 13-16)

It is not on this earth that man will find permanence. Hence, in this poem, praiseworthy for its simplicity and grace, she reveals yet another aspect of her feelings - a nostalgic realization and acceptance of the poverty of the fleeting joys of earth, joys as delicate and as prone to swift flight as a fragile bird.

Yet, while realizing that the things of the earth pass away quickly, Christina was, as we have seen in "Earth and Heaven", acutely aware of the beauty around her. As C. Maurice Bowra has commented:

> Though she knew that the world passes away and that mortal things wither and die, she loved them too well to be insensitive to their destruction. In tones of agonizing sweetness she sings of her anxieties and fears, and in the same moment she knows that regret is useless . . . .[5]

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5. The Romantic Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p.262.

She expresses these emotions in "Summer is Ended" (p.410):

> To think that this meaningless thing was ever a rose,
> Scentless, colourless, this!
> Will it ever be thus (who knows?)
> If we wait till the close?
>
> Though we care not to wait for the end, there comes the end,
> Sooner, later, at last,
> Which nothing can mar, nothing mend:
> An end locked fast,
> Bent we cannot re-bend.

In this poem, Christina has employed a conversational tone with meaningful effect. It is as though the speaker, coming upon a prized rose which has decayed, suddenly voices her thoughts upon the mutability of the earth, and crossly rebukes nature for having betrayed her. Her disappointment is seen in the emphatic "this!" which aptly conveys the speaker's scorn and surprise at the now crumpled beauty. The conversational tone is further established by the use of question which also heralds a slight change of mood, for the speaker passes from surprised anger to contemplation as she wonders if our happiness will always end in disappointment if we follow things to their natural conclusion. And although no one ever desires this conclusion, it inevitably comes, and nothing can be done about it. The finality of this end of decay and death is seen in the last two lines, for the phrases "locked fast" and "bent we cannot re-bend" suggest the immovable hardness of time's grim course.

Although Christina could dismiss earth's pleasures

and philosophize about their inevitable death, she could, amidst poignant regret and bitter renunciation, feel a frustrated anger, an anger much stronger and more passionate than that suggested in "Summer is Ended." In "Symbols" (1849), another poem of her youth, she expresses this frustrated rage with an almost frightening intensity. Lona Mosk Packer says of this poem:

> The theme of 'Symbols' is that the potentialities for life and for beauty are often cruelly unfulfilled: the rosebud fails to blossom, the speckled eggs fail to hatch. The speaker feels a surge of anger against this waste in nature, but in the end disciplines her rebelliousness by the reminder of divine justice.[6]

Nevertheless, her attempt to discipline her rage must not be overemphasized. Christina's anger is not stoically borne, for she wrathfully rebels against this world with all its imperfections.

She begins the poem with a recognition of the promise of a rosebud daintily nursed by the dew, sun, and shower and expectantly awaits the "perfect flower" (l.3) and the fulfilment of the "green nest full of pleasant shade" (l.8) which harbours "three speckled eggs" (l.9). Her state here is a patiently passive one; as she waits for the fruition of promise and the unfolding of beauty, she watches, waits and thinks. And there is a gentle delicacy here as

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6. Christina Rossetti, p.50.

seen in the "rosebud" (l.1), "dew" (l.2) and "eggs" (l.9), while "matin hour" (l.5) and "evensong" (l.6) suggest contemplative quiet and serenity.

But after the flower dwindles to decay and the eggs are not hatched, the speaker's mood suddenly changes, and Christina employs her characteristic device of reversal and contrast. Patient expectancy becomes furious wrath, and instead of tending with care these fragile beauties, she crushes the eggs and breaks the bough bearing the faded rose; she "would have vengeance now" (l.18). Thus, frustrated and angered by this lack of fulfilment on an earth scarred by an endless round of smashed hopes and disappointing imperfections, she gives vent to anger. The patient tenderness and passive gentility of the first two stanzas have become active rage in the third, and such words as "wrath" (l.13), "broke" (l.13), "crushed" (l.16), and "vengeance" (l.18), convey the emotional force of her anger. And although she controls her anger with the thought,

> And what if God,
> Who waiteth for thy fruits in vain,
> Should also take the rod?
> (ll. 22-24),

we have seen something of Christina's disillusionment with and anger against a world sullied by unfulfilment and the heart-breaking failure of promise and potential.

Her frustration with a world which was not absolute and which could never provide the permanent wholeness for which she sought is given effective expression in "The half

moon shows a face of plaintive sweetness" (p.198) where we find her youthful ideas have carried on into maturity. Here she employs her oft-used device of suggesting emotion and thought by the use of concrete imagery. The half moon here is symbolic of man's state on earth. Like the half moon, man finds himself in a less than complete state, for on this changeable earth nothing is whole, nothing is finished. The half moon, like man, is characterized by hunger for something greater, but also like man, it is "A fire of pale desire in incompleteness" (l.3). It seems, however, that the half moon is the more fortunate, for while we gaze at her, she "rolleth on in fleetness / To perfect loss or perfect gain" (ll. 5-6). Man's state is indeed incomplete: "Half bitterness he knows, we know half sweetness; /This world is all on wax, on wane" (ll. 7-8). Faced with earth's lack of fulfilment and perfection, she cries out for completeness of anything be it pleasure or pain, but calms her agony with the thought that like the moon, man in time does move on to an end; "Lo, while we ask, life rolleth on in fleetness / To finished loss or finished pain" (ll. 11-12). The condition of the half moon has given Christina an opportunity to explore man's state on earth and the paradox of time which might give man instability and transience, but also brings him to an end in the midst of change. Again Christina has made penetrating and meaningful use of her symbolism.

But if Christina experienced anger, disappointment, sorrow, despair, resignation, and occasional happiness while contemplating the uses and the works of the world, she also felt fear and disgust, for the pleasures and attractions of this world, she believed, could tempt man and involve him in a dangerous flirtation with death and damnation. In "The World" (p.182), a poem of her young womanhood, she treats of the temptation theme, a common one in her work, and here there is none of her lyrical singing; rather, she is a soul on fire who would warn all of the overwhelming dangers of temptation. In this poem, she contrasts the false appearance of the world during the day with the reality to be found at night. William Rossetti explains:

> In Christina's sonnet the opposite aspects of the world by day and by night may call for a little reflection. The primary sense . . . appears to be that the world - like other devils, spectres, and hobgoblins - appears in propriâ personâ in the night-hours only; it is then that she is recognized for the fiend she actually is.[7]

The world is conceived of as a deceptive woman; by day, "soft, exceeding fair" (l.1), she woos the speaker to the "outer air" (l.5), a suggestion that she tempts man to look at the fair seeming surface of things and not the

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7. Poetical Works, p.471.

worthwhile inner spiritual reality which should be of utmost importance to all men. And her temptations are great, her feast plentiful; offering "Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety" (l.6), she thus assumes a false mask of seeming fulfilment, fertility, and natural wholesomeness. To Christina, the world is a fair Eve who offers the fruit of temptation to man and guides him down the path of destruction and hideous sin. Like her symbolic counterpart, the moon, another symbol of feminine charm and passion, she is a changeable creature who reveals her true nature at night when she is seen as something ugly and perverted. Corrupted, "loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy" (l.13), her evil and sinful temptations are revealed in the "subtle serpents gliding in her hair" (l.4). By picturing the world in terms of a deceiving temptress, which suggests Eve, and a snake, Christina thus condemns the world as being the very devil in disguise, a devil made frighteningly dangerous because of its seeming attractions and ready pleasures. But this animal imagery is carried further, for Christina uses it to characterize the terms on which this world would "love". Grinning like a beast ruled by animal passion and lust, she stands "a very monster void of love and prayer" (l.8). And by portraying her as being "void" of worthwhile things, Christina suggests, as she did by her use of "outer air," that the world is a hollow shell which lacks inner spiritual value and richness;

her feasts are empty and false. This world, we learn, is indeed the devil; she possesses "cloven" (l.14) feet and "pushing horns" (l.11) which suggest the devil and animal lust. Again, the world's "clawed and clutching hands" (l.11) are indicative of her animal nature, her greediness, and her essentially destructive powers. And her path does, in fact, lead to eternal damnation, for as the speaker states:

> Is this a friend indeed, that I should sell
> My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
> Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?
> (ll. 12-14)

As she tells us in "Foul is she and ill-favoured, set askew" (p.284), we must not allow ourselves to become hypnotized by her "dancing whirl" (l.9), for, along with her meaningless pomp and poor riches of "scarlet vest and gold and gem and pearl" (l.13), we will do so only to be "set on fire" (l.14). This world has nothing to offer man but the passion which would turn him into an animal, enmesh his soul in a fleshly chain, and destroy him with the sins of desire.

Yet, in the midst of her disgust for and fear of the world, Christina could see something of worth and could find consolation in this world if it was approached with the proper attitude. Lona Mosk Packer explains:

> Interpreted symbolically, Nature reflects the spiritual unity permeating the universe: sky, sun, clouds are 'terrene mirrors,' or 'earthly pictures with heavenly meanings' through which

man experiences a renewing unity with nature.[8]

She gives this Platonic conception of the earth as a shadow of non-sensuous reality in the early poem "Spring Quiet" (p.103) (1847) which contains an earthly picture which does have spiritual meaning and which describes a moment of insight into the nature of heaven because of an echo of it, a moment which affords Christina consolation and refreshment. The picture she draws is a simple but quietly rich and fresh one, and she outlines her scene with imagery drawn from the world of every-day nature. The sweet innocence and fresh fertility of this scene are suggested by the "white thorn" (l.5) and the colourful "holly bush" (l.8), the "fresh scents" (l.9) of the "budding boughs" (l.10), and the "cool green house" (l.12). Again, she has used colour, white and green, to indicate the natural innocence and fertility of this world. The harmony inherent in this scene is revealed by the perfect calm interrupted only by the simple singing of the robins and thrushes and the delicate whispering of the air. Again, calm tranquility is suggested by the "softly" (l.9) murmuring air while life and growth are symbolized by the water of the "clear stream" (l.19) and the "budding boughs." And, unlike her vision in "The World," there is no temptation here, for

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8. Christina Rossetti, p.316.

the very air promises safety, "We spread no snare" (l.16) and offers her shady quiet among nature's beauty. But more important, although this scene provides its own refreshment and is valuable in itself, it gives a higher form of comfort and strength:

> 'Here is heard an echo
> of the far sea,
> Though far off it be.'
> (ll. 22-24)

To Christina, nature possesses values other than its own inherent ones, for it could bring her into at least distant contact with heaven and spiritual fulfilment.

And if nature provided only momentary joy and consolation for Christina, so did the emotional fruits of life on earth. Love, like beauty, is soon dead, and the possessor left with nothing but the pains of separation and loss. At the age of fourteen, we see her placing love and nature in the same changeable camp and condemning them as transitory and unsatisfying. Like nature, love is subject to those eternal verities, decay and mutability, which destroy whatever joy it has to offer. In "Love Ephemeral" (p.84), written several months after "Earth and Heaven," love is seen as sweet as nature's flowers, waters, and breezes as well as the moon, but as essentially corrupt as they. If the moon, that "bright queen of heaven" (l.7), provides beauty, it also causes "madness in man's feeble seed" (l.10); love, too, shares nature's imperfections, and although beautiful,

"endures but for a day" (l.16). The woes caused by love were, however, given fuller expression several years later in "Love Attacked" (p190) where she once more presents love in a series of simple images which are drawn largely from nature and which suggest its ephemeral being. For example:

> Love is more sweet than flowers,
> But sooner dying;
> Warmer than sunny hours,
> But faster flying; . . . .
> (ll. 1-4)

And its powers are ultimately destructive:

> And like an inundation
> It leaves behind
> An utter desolation
> Of heart and mind.
> (ll. 17-20)

One way or another, its paths lead to sorrow; it is the very "essence / Of restless woe" (ll.23-24):

> Returned or unrequited,
> 'Tis still the same;
> The flame was never lighted,
> Or sinks the flame.
> (ll. 25-28)

Nevertheless, because she uses flood and flame images, we see that Christina realized something of the force of love which can sweep away all before it and engulf the possessor with the fury of its passion. Indeed, Christina, as we shall see, never once underestimates the powers of love either to redeem momentarily or to leave the lover with sorrows beyond description. In this poem, however, while she obviously respects love's powers, she decides it must be scorned, and

concludes that "'Indifference'" (l.40) will save her from "fear and weeping" (l.33).

In later years, this easy renunciation and almost careless resolve not to involve herself in love's twofold gifts of joy and sorrow did not come with such facility. After suffering the pangs of love unrequited and stunted in its growth, Christina's whole being at times cried out for emotional fulfilment as it had cried out for the earth to fulfill its promises of beauty and completion. In "Echo" (p.314), one of her most powerful poems, Christina presents a terrifying vision of her pain caused by separation and renunciation. Of her plight, C. Maurice Bowra comments:

> If Christina learned in imagination the joys of love, in life she felt its wounds, and at times we can see what her sacrifices cost her. In 'Echo' with its longing for something known and lost until it can be sought only in dreams, we can see what a deprivation she suffered in her innermost being and how she sought to find consolation in summoning her lost love back . . . . [9]

Thus, in her loneliness and pain, she cries out:

> Come to me in the silence of the night;
> Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
> Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
> As sunlight on a stream;
> Come back in tears,
> O memory, hope, love of finished years.
> (ll. 1-6)

Knowing that for some obviously unalterable reason her love

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9. The Romantic Imagination, p.258.

cannot return to her, she wishes he could at least come in a dream, anything to salve her pain and loneliness. The urgency of this desperate hope is given force by Christina, for she repeats the command "Come" four times and emphasizes its importance by placing it at the beginning of the lines.

But such a dream, Christina confesses, would be "bitter sweet" (l.7), for after it reality would be too difficult to endure. The awakening from this dream should be in paradise:

> Where souls brimfull of love abide and meet;
> Where thirsty longing eyes
> Watch the slow door
> That opening, letting in, lets out no more.
> (ll. 9-12)

In the image of the eyes hopefully watching the door, we see how painful Christina's present state is; she must endure the agony of watching earthly doors for a lover who cannot come again and the suffering caused by the doors of earthly life which too often let out beloved ones. Again, the "thirsty longing eyes" suggest the yearning and the hunger which characterize her state, a state which is in painful contrast to that of the souls "brimfull" with contented fulfilment.

Nevertheless, Christina is willing to endure wakening to harsh reality if she can have a few moments of dreaming bliss; the life she is now living is merely a form of death: "Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live / My

very life again though cold in death" (ll. 13-14). In contrast to the rich life of those "souls brimfull of love" (l.9) in permanent bliss, she is "cold" (l.14) and in a form of death. She needs this dream which can give her jagged, torn emotions softness and ease and which can add the warmth, growth and fertility of "sunlight on a stream" (l.4) to her freezing lack and stunted emotional life. Indeed, she needs the pulse and breath of her lover to quicken her again: "Come back to me in dreams, that I may give / Pulse for pulse, breath for breath" (ll. 15-16). And her need causes her to beg her love to return: "Speak low, lean low, / As long ago, my love, how long ago" (ll. 17-18). And we see her desperate regret in the anguished cry, "how long ago" which suggests the heart-rending painfulness of her present state.

Indeed, in "Love Defended" (pp. 90-91), she is of the opinion that no matter how much pain love can cause, acceptance of it will yield greater profit than cost. Here Christina uses an interesting and convincing device, for she outlines her position by creating a neatly presented argument from analogy. She begins by chiding herself for believing that indifference to love is a desirable state; there are too many forceful arguments to convince her otherwise. For example, although the blind are not afflicted by "unsightly things" (l.10) and the deaf do not endure

"awful sound" (l.12), this ugliness is actually a small price to pay for the glories that are given. The beauties of the earth and heaven "Surely are a recompense / For a little pain" (ll. 15-16). Thus, she concludes, although love can and usually does cause suffering and is not free from "a taint of grief" (l.18), its state is a desirable one; "If its sting is very sharp, /Great is its relief" (ll. 19-20). And, indeed, this is her feeling in "Echo".

The relief and happiness which love can give is seen in her masterful poem, "A Birthday" (p.335). There, in a rapturous vision, her beloved comes to her. The ecstatic fulfilment and emotional wealth of this meeting is vividly presented by a series of concrete, sensuous images. There is no lack of fulfilment here, for she sings, "My heart is like a singing bird / whose nest is in a watered shoot" (ll. 1-2). In this image, we have a sense of Christina's joy, for the bird in song suggests a happy heart and the water fertility. Again the nest is safely tucked away, a fact which hints at the emotional safety and comfort of the moment; there are no lurking dangers here. She then states, "My heart is like an apple-tree /Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit" (ll. 3-4). Again, the abundance of fruit and the suggestion of growth indicate the emotional fertility of the moment, a fertility also seen in the image, "My heart is like a rainbow shell / That

paddles in the halcyon sea" (ll. 5-6), for the rainbow here suggests richness of colour and hence, emotional wealth. The "halcyon sea" also reinforces the feeling of emotional safety and comfort given in the image of the nest tucked away in the watered shoot. In the second stanza, she uses grapes, pomegranates, leaves and fleur-de-lys to substantiate and complete the suggestion that this moment of love is full of natural fertility and growth, while the colours gold, silver, and purple again give a sense of emotional fulness and wealth. And the supreme nobility of this love is given expression in this stanza, for the purple colour, the vair and the peacocks as well as the dais of rich silk and down establish her queen-like state. Again, like a queen, she issues commands and decrees that a dais must be raised to her, hung with rich cloths and worked in fine metals. Indeed, this moment is supreme, for it is the very birthday of her life, an idea which reinforces her conception that love adds life and growth to the possessor, a conception which we have encountered in "Echo". Thus, to Christina, love's bounty could give her richness, comfort, fulfilment and soaring ecstasy.

Nevertheless, love did not seem to be Christina's permanent lot any more than did an unhedging enjoyment of the other pleasures life has to offer. In fact, she often felt isolated and alone in the midst of plenty; if there

was joy to be had on earth, it seemed to be for others and not for her. She gives expression to these feelings in "At Home" (p.339) where she imagines herself as a dead person whose spirit visits a familiar house, her home, where friends and love are present. L.M. Packer explains:

> In 'At Home' . . . the desolation and loss following the renunciation of love are described as a death of the spirit. And yet the renunciation is not complete because the spirit still yearns earthward, still hovers near the warmth of the much-frequented house where it has once known shelter and love.[10]

The poor ghost of yesterday sees her friends enjoying merriment and love:

> Feasting beneath green orange boughs;
> From hand to hand they pushed the wine,
> They sucked the pulp of plum and peach;
> They sang, they jested, and they laughed,
> For each was loved of each.
> (11. 4-8)

Here she employs characteristic imagery; she uses the image of the feast to symbolize the emotional wealth of the lovers. The rich food, wine, green orange boughs, pulp, plum, and peach, is indicative of the wholesome fulfilment of the lovers while the colours, rich in emotional value, suggest the warmth and wealth of their love. The verbs, too, such as feast, sing, jest, laugh and love, intimate the

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10. Christina Rossetti, p.125.

pleasant merriment and lively happiness of love's encompassing warmth and joy. Further, the image of the wine being pushed from hand to hand amidst the general gaiety shows the conviviality and infectious joy of this society where all is pleasant and merry. And the people speak pleasantly of the tomorrows they will enjoy. Indeed, a happy future seems theirs, for their lives are "full at blessed noon" (1.21). Here the use of "full" and "noon" suggests the completeness and fulness which characterize these people.

And in the midst of plenty, the speaker feels her loss in that while all look forward to sweet tomorrows and enjoy a pleasant today, no one remembers her; she is of yesterday, the unremembered past. Against their warmth, she shivers, and against their happiness, she is sad. She has absolutely no place amongst the merry-makers of love, and in the finality of her vision here, she shocks the reader with an unsparing description of her desolate sterility and emptiness:

> I shivered comfortless, but cast
> No chill across the tablecloth;
> I all-forgotten shivered, sad
> To stay and yet to part how loth:
> I passed from the familiar room,
> I who from love had passed away,
> Like the remembrance of a guest
> That tarrieth but a day.
> (ll. 25-32)

Her acquaintance with love is so brief that love does not

even remember her. Like a casual guest in a house of busy love and warmth, she is forgotten. At the age of twenty-seven, after one bankrupt engagement and no promise of future bliss, Christina seems to feel she has no chance for earthly happiness; she would, she believed, always remain the onlooker, the lonely figure who watches the houses of other's love from a position of emotional coldness and disappointment. Thus, by employing contrast, her own state as compared to that of the lovers, Christina fully outlines her own condition and sharply defines her conception of the emotional feast which love can bring.

But although Christina was a woman who yearned for love in youth and maturity, knew some and imagined more of its pleasures, and felt the bitter torments of renunciation, isolation, and loneliness in the midst of others' joy, she was, as we have seen, often suspicious of its pleasures and wary of its comforts. Love, like all else on this changeable earth, disappoints because it partakes of earth's inherent incompleteness. Also, because it is of this earth, it can turn the possessor away from things of the spirit and lead to sin. In "Soeur Louise de la Misericorde (1674)" (p.411), Christina has the Duchess de la Valliere, Louise XIV's mistress turned nun, speak her own thoughts upon the desirability of love. Here again, we hear Christina's characteristic cry that all the uses of this world, including love, are merely vain pursuits, ruinous diversions which enmesh

the soul in flesh and rob it of much spiritual growth and richness. Now that the hey-day of the blood is past, the woman is left with nothing but bitter regret and painful lack of fulfilment; love has turned her vision from the worthwhile things of the spirit, and its end has left her with nothing. She possesses "dust and dying embers" (l.3) which are but a mockery of past fires, and a handful of memories which are nothing more than "a bottomless gulf of mire" (l18). Filled with "The dross of life, of love, of spent desire" (l.13), Soeur Louise believes there is nothing worthwhile left. Passionate love has ruined her life. And it is here again, although in fuller form, that we see the destructive powers of love which Christina suggested earlier in "Love Attacked." If in "A Birthday" and "Echo", love is seen as a vital life-giving force, in this poem, it is seen as a destroyer which can ruin the possessor. The running out of love has left her "rose of life" (l.14) in a state of dissolution and decay. In fact, even if the end of love causes pain, its very false bloom is murderous, for it turns the speaker away from heaven and spiritual gain:

> Oh vanity of vanities, desire!
> Stunting my hope which might have strained up higher,
> Turning my garden-plot to barren mire; . . . .
> (ll. 16-18)

She thus conceives of herself in terms of potential growth and fertility gone to waste because of the ruinous fire of

passion. The garden of self, which might have been culled for spiritual fulfilment, has been made barren and desolate by a love which has died, as love always will on this mutable earth.

Thus, to Christina, the earth and all in it could never fulfill and complete the self. The self could not be made whole by anything on earth; man must instead endeavour to develop the self by spiritual insight and a vital, dedicated relationship with God. Neither love nor nature could provide the self with essential food for growth and joy although both possess comforting attractions and distracting temptations. The fact that love was simply not enough for her is given expression in "The Two Pursuits" (pp. 108-9), a poem which embodies much of Christina's life-long attitude toward love. In this poem, she hears a call from a disembodied voice, presumably representative of earthly love. Turning her back upon an unnamed "pleasant light" (l.3), she is led by the voice to "where the bluest water flows" (l.4) and "where the corn grows" (l.5). Although these images suggest fertility and growth, such gifts are not given to this follower who is not allowed to drink the water and who finds herself "uncheered by sight / Or touch" (ll. 6-7). The pursuit of this earthly love which can neither satisfy nor fulfill leaves the speaker confused and wearied by sadness and frustration. The saving call comes,

however, when she hears the voice of a higher love which will fulfill. She returns to the "pleasant light" and finds that upon her broken night of woe and futile love has dawned the "blessed star" (l.12), Christ. And this heavenly love provides all: "Kind steady hands my sinking steps sustain, / And will not leave me till I shall go hence" (ll. 13-14).

And nature carries with it the same imperfections as love; it can neither satisfy nor sustain the heart and soul which seek perfect wholeness and completion. In the three sonnets entitled "The Thread of Life" (pp. 262-3), Christina concludes that any attempt on the part of man to find true growth and fulfilment through nature is futile and impossible, for nature and man are inextricably separated, and every man must live within the bounds of self. No more is given to him, and no more must he expect. Indeed, in The Face of the Deep, she had written:

> Concerning Himself, God Almighty proclaimed of old: 'I AM THAT I AM,' and man's inherent feeling of personality seems in some sort to attest and correspond to this revelation: I am who am myself cannot but be myself. I am what God has constituted me: so that however I may have modified myself, yet do I remain that same I; it is I who live, it is I who must die, it is I who must rise again at the last day. I rising out of my grave must carry on that very life which was mine before I died, and of which death itself could not altogether snap the thread. Who I was I am, who I am I am, who I am I must be for ever and ever.
>
> I the sinner of to-day am the sinner of all the yesterdays of my life. I may loathe myself or be amazed at myself, but I cannot unself myself

for ever and ever.[11]

In the first sonnet of "The Thread of Life," she notes the basic separation of man and nature; nature is essentially "irresponsive" (p. 262, l.1) to all man feels, is, and does. Nevertheless, she seems to desire to communicate with nature and to partake of its cheerful beauty. In the second sonnet (pp.262-3), she states:

> Everything,
> Around one free and sunny and at ease:
> Or if in shadow, in a shade of trees
> Which the sun kisses, where the gay birds sing
> And where all winds make various murmuring;
> Where bees are found, with honey for the bees;
> Where sounds are music, and where silences
> Are music of an unlike fashioning.
> (ll. 1-8)

And while she gazes on this happiness and loveliness, she wonders wistfully, "Why can I not rejoice with you?" (l.11). But she quickly dismisses the possibility of gaining happiness and fulfilment through nature:

> But soon I put the foolish fancy by:
> I am not what I have nor what I do;
> But what I was I am, I am even I.
> (ll. 12-14)

Even if she could possess nature and somehow find great joy in its beauties, she would still remain herself; she herself would be essentially the same.

And in the last sonnet (p.263), she draws out the

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11. Quoted by L.M.Packer, Christina Rossetti, p.323.

meaning of this conclusion; the self is the only thing of value which man possesses and is his only hope for possible fulfilment and joy:

> Therefore myself is that one only thing
> I hold to use or waste, to keep or give;
> My sole possession every day I live,
> And still mine own despite Time's winnowing.
> Ever mine own, while moons and seasons bring
> From crudeness ripeness mellow and sanative;
> Ever mine own, till Death shall ply his sieve;
> And still mine own, when saints break grave and sing.
> And this myself as king unto my King
> I give, to Him Who gave Himself for me;
> Who gives Himself to me, and bids me sing
> A sweet new song of His redeemed set free;
> He bids me sing, O Death, where is thy sting?
> And sing, O grave, where is thy victory?

And this relationship between the self and God is a creative one; man presents his self to God who in turn provides man, through the quickening of faith and hence, self, with an effusion of creative activity. The self, in Christina's case that of the poet, thus sings of the eternal salvation and life which God provides for the one who would give himself wholly unto God. Thus, in contrast to the destructive and stunting powers of the world and all in it including love, God gives man creative growth and life as well as eternal happiness and salvation. If man involves himself in a one-to-one relationship with God and gives Him his essence, he will be fulfilled and completed. To give the self to anything else is only to meet with frustration, denial and sorrow, and death, for all save God in this time-torn universe is corrupted by change and mutability. Indeed, in

"When all the overwook of life" (p.194), she concludes we cannot find "'enough'" (l.8) "in this world of hope deferred, / This world of perishable stuff" (ll. 1-2). The call of the earth, in whatever form it is embodied, disappoints, for in this changeable world:

> Everything that is born must die;
> Everything that can sigh may sing;
> Rocks in equal balance, low or high,
> Everything.
> Honeycomb is weighed against a sting;
> Hope and fear take turns to touch the sky;
> Height and depth respond alternating.
> (p.141, ll. 1-7)

Thus, Christina rejected the world and stood alone confronting her Maker. Her life, she believed, must consist of a perpetual struggle to win that Christian perfection, to achieve that state of grace, by means of which she could gain that heaven which would give her the fulfillment and perfect life for which she ever hungered, but could not find on earth. But the journey to this supreme goal was not an easy one for Christina; it was one full of regret, failure, struggle, and constant self-examination. It was one upon which the singer often faced doubt, personal limitation, guilt, and sin, but it was also one which gave her a joy and a comfort not to be found by a pursuit of more earthly stars. It is to her spiritual journey that we will now turn in an attempt to discover her Christian position and to analyze the poetry which was born of it.

CHAPTER II

THE HEAVENLY JOURNEY

Christina Rossetti believed that the only possession she could possibly offer God was her self, and it is with this self that Christina often wrestled in her religious verse, for she continually sought to polish and to perfect her self in its relationship with God. Hers was, indeed, the never-ceasing struggle of the Christian who seeks to present the self to God, but is ever aware of the imperfections and failings of this self. On her quest for Christian salvation, she stood a ready watch on her self and ever probed it for evidence of virtue or of sin. Her religious verse is full of a goodly number of moods, struggles, and conflicts, for her poetry is spontaneous. As she quested for Christian perfection and plumbed her own inner depths, she never made any attempt to approach her problems systematically, but rather fathomed their depths and searched for answers as they presented themselves to her or as a moment of insight into the meaning and nature of her difficulties flashed upon her. With her gifts of fine perception and delicate sensitivity, she went about ceaselessly investigating her own inner movements, her self, and her faith, but ever with a courage and an insistence upon truth which comes from the soul of one who will not rest until Christian worthiness

and perfection have been attained and a satisfactory relationship with God achieved. Much of her finest religious verse consists of the story of her Christian struggle, and it is the goal here to outline and to investigate the major issues of Christina Rossetti's spiritual journey.

Often when she contemplated the state of this self, Christina was overwhelmed by despair and grief, for how could she merit eternal salvation when she was merely an unworthy sinner who possessed a self seemingly incapable of being a proper gift to God, a gift of perfect obedience, adoration, and love? This problem, although always with Christina, seemed to overwhelm her during her early maturity, for her poetic output during her late twenties and all of her thirties shows her continually grappling with the problem of an unworthy self. Indeed, "Who Shall Deliver Me" (p. 238), written in March, 1864, shows her overcome by a sense of guilt and complete unworthiness. She pleads:

> God strengthen me to bear myself;
> That heaviest weight of all to bear,
> Inalienable weight of care.
> (ll. 1-3)

Although she has shut out the "turmoil, tedium, gad-about" (l.6) of the outside world on her quest for eternal salvation, she does not know how to cope with her sinful self which is preventing her from reaching that state in which, with joy, she could strive for Christian perfection. She seems to be searching for a key by which the self can be redeemed.

Envisaging no way out of her desperate problem, however, she can only fervently wish that she can somehow escape her present self and begin the quest anew:

> If I could once lay down myself,
> And start self-purged upon the race
> That all must run!
> (ll. 10-12)

Then, and only then, could she begin to achieve the desired perfection.

The picture she draws of this self is, indeed, an unpleasant one; the self is a coward who ever craves, with pathetic voice, "ease, and rest, and joys" (l.18). Instead of courageously confronting the difficulties of winning salvation and seeking to travel the narrow road of Christian perfection, this self turns her vision away from heaven because it is overwhelmed by earthly desires:

> Myself, arch-traitor to myself;
> My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
> My clog whatever road I go.
> (ll. 19-21)

But the problem here is soon resolved. The self alone cannot solve the difficulty. The self is an obvious enemy in the sense that, without some form of outside strength, it has neither the courage nor the power to achieve inner redemption. Left alone, the self will ever involve man in sin and hence, despair. God must help to make of it something worthwhile; only through God's help can the self achieve redemption. She concludes:

Yet One there is can curb myself,
Can roll the strangling load from me,
Break off the yoke and set me free.
(ll. 22-24)

As we have seen, Christina believed man's powers to be paltry, indeed. Faced with such a momentous crisis of the soul, man can do nothing by himself and must turn to God. Only God can provide him with the necessary strength and continuing support if he is to overthrow and rise above a self often incapable of nothing more than a desire for pleasure and rest.

In "Long Barren" (p.244) written eleven months later, we see just how unworthy of presentation to God she believes her self to be. In this poem, Christina uses subtle yet concrete imagery to outline her meaningless state and to suggest a way by which this state can be remedied. If Christ hung upon "a barren tree" (l.1) in order to redeem man's sins and give him eternal salvation, perhaps He can suffer upon the barren tree of her individual self and bearing the thorns of her imperfections and sins, redeem her. Although she can offer Christ only the thorns of imperfection and failure, she prays that He will help her achieve redemption:

Thou who didst bear for me the crown of thorn,
Spitting and scorn;
  Though I till now have put forth thorns, yet now
  Strengthen me Thou
That better fruit be borne.
(ll. 6-10)

She thus asks that Christ endure yet more of man's sins and scorn as He did when upon the Cross and that He help her, as He has always helped man, to achieve worthiness.

In fact, she points out, Christ is as capable of helping man now as He was when He walked on earth, for He is the supreme life-giver without whom spiritual growth and fruition are impossible. In contrast to the barren fruit tree of her self, which does nothing but wound, Christ is the "Rose of Sharon" (l.11), the embodiment of love and spiritual fertility whose strength and inner fortitude are seen in the image of Christ as the "Cedar of broad roots" (l.11). He is also the "wine of sweet fruits" (l.12), for out of His suffering and passion have come the gifts of comfort on earth and eternal salvation in heaven. And if man is, in Christina's scheme of things, conceived of as being a quickly-fading leaf, Christ is seen as the "Lily of the vale with fadeless leaf" (l.13). He is eternal and exists beyond all time with perfect virtue. And because He is the complete opposite of fallen man in virtue, strength, and spiritual love, He has the resources which can help man to achieve redemption. Hence, she who sees herself as a barren fruit tree, pleads the epitome of spiritual fruition, "Feed Thou my feeble shoots" (l.15).

Christina's self was thus often an unbearable weight from which she wished redemption and from which she often

desired escape. Instead of working towards a remoulding of herself in view of the ideal of the faithful Christian who ever desires to love and to obey God and to achieve Christian perfection, she could occasionally beg Christ to allow her to make an easy leap into His arms. Overcome by the seeming hopelessness of straightening the crooked self which ever fails and wanders off the demanding road of Christian salvation, Christina wishes Christ's whole embrace. Such a desire is present in "Ash Wednesday" (p.217), written in 1859 during the era of her most painful feeling of unworthiness, where the contemplation of failure and imperfection leads her to cry for a mystical union with the heavenly lover. As H.N. Fairchild explains:

> She is asking Jesus to woo her into mystical love of Him not as the final reward of struggle against the flesh but as a substitute for that struggle. She wants the Crucified to assure her that she need not climb her personal Calvary.[12]

She begins the poem by picturing Christ as being surrounded by a myriad of saints and angels who offer, amidst heavenly light and glory, eternal praise and adoration. Hosts of Seraphs, Cherubs, and glorious martyrs throng about Christ in perfect love. And while contemplating the gifts

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12. Christianity and Romanticism in the Victorian Era: 1830-1880 in Religious Trends in English Poetry. Vol. IV. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p.311.

they bestow upon Christ, she more acutely feels her own shortcomings. In the midst of angelic perfection, she believes she is full of failure and defeat. Christ's love and sacrifice have not been wasted upon the heavenly host as they have upon her. She states, "I show as a blot / Blood hath cleansed not" (ll. 13-14). And again she uses the imagery of a barren fruit tree in order to represent her state; in contrast to the heavenly beings' "fruitful lot" (l.16), she is a "barren spot" (l.15), a "fig-tree unbearing" (l.17). If they have blossomed and fulfilled themselves as Christians, she has remained sterile and can offer Christ nothing. His sacrificial, life-giving blood has not fertilized the wasteland of her soul.

Her thoughts then become darker, for in view of her unworthy state, she imagines His wrath will be strong. She thus asks Him, "What canst Thou do more to me / That shall not more undo me?" (ll. 19-20). Whatever Christ's justice pronounces, it will simply add further destruction. But although Christ's unsparing judgment asks of her self, "'Why cumbereth it the ground?'" (l.22) and questions why it does not become a worthy entity, His love has "stirrings stronger" (l.24) and pleads, "'Give it one year longer'" (l.25) to grow. She believes that it is not by fear of Christ's justice that she will be saved, but rather through the power of His love:

> . . . who,
> Save Thou shall give me dew,
> Shall feed my root with blood
> And stir my sap for good?
> (ll. 26-69)

She then utters the paradox, "oh by Thy gifts that shame me / Give more lest they condemn me" (ll. 30-31). Although Christ has given much, if she is to be brought to fulfilment, He must give even more. He must furnish her with further love and support, for she cannot help herself. Christina realizes that without Christ's help, she is as nothing and can achieve nothing. If He does not give more, His previous gifts will be wasted and will succeed only in shaming her. And she ends with a prayer that Christ give her complete love and force her to love Him:

> Good Lord, I ask much of Thee,
> But most I ask to love Thee:
> Kind Lord, be mindful of me,
> Love me and make me love Thee.
> (ll. 32-35)

But Christina was too good a Christian to expect that the arduous journey toward Christian perfection could be avoided by one simple leap into Christ's fulfilling embrace. H.N. Fairchild explains:

> In her best moments, however, she knows that she is not to be let off so easily. From her 'perpetual church goings and communions, her prayers and fasts, her submission to clerical direction, her oblations, her practice of confessions,' she gained firmer assurance of Christ's love than from begging Him for spiritual privileges and exemptions. Leaping to the top of the hill at a single bound was out of the question. She must begin with the remorse and dread in which

she now actually stood and toil upward from it,
painful step by painful step.[13]

There were Christian duties to be performed, virtues to be perfected, vices to be weeded out, sins to be repented, and worthiness to be achieved. The road to salvation and desired union with Christ was a long and arduous one where every step was costly and painful. With mystical leaps out of the question, Christina believed man must make a heavenbound journey before eternity with Christ could be won. Man must struggle for perfection and determine his future on earth. The battle is a necessary one, for as she states in "Time seems not short" (p.198), man's time on earth is essential for the determination of his soul, for "time /is/ sole battle-ground of right and wrong" (l.13).

Indeed, the idea of the Christian's progress toward heaven as a long and narrow road is seen throughout Christina's work. This idea, with its many ramifications, is present in the poem, "Lord, by what inconceivable dim road" (p.208), where she states:

Lord, by what inconceivable dim road
  Thou leadest man on footsore pilgrimage!
  Weariness is his rest from stage to stage,
Brief halting-places are his sole abode
Onward he fares thro' rivers overflowed,
  Thro' deserts where all doleful creatures rage;
  Onward from year to year, from age to age,
He groans and totters onward with his load.
(ll. 1-8)

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13. Christianity and Romanticism in the Victorian Era, p.311.

Man's heavenly journey is a sacred but wearisome "pilgrimage" toward a most holy goal. And it is a journey which includes little opportunity for comfort or rest. Around those heavenbound, there are only floods and deserts, images which suggest the overwhelming forces of the world and those passionate spiritual crises which ever beset frail man whose strength is so impotent, he can only "totter" and "groan" beneath the weight of these conflicts. And all he carries with him which might give him comfort and strength is "His goal of hope deferred, his promised peace" (l.11). If man's way upon this earth is "inconceivable" (l.9) in its agonies and torments, then "how tenfold inconceivable the goal" (l.10). Upon this earth which offers little but pain and sorrow, how can man envisage a heaven of eternal rest and bliss? Nevertheless, she believes this hope will be realized. She concludes:

> Yea, but behold him sitting down at ease,
> Refreshed in body and refreshed in soul,
> At rest from labour on the Sabbath Day.
> (ll. 12-14)

In the poem, "In Patience" (p.238), written during her most acute awareness of what she viewed as her unworthiness, Christina succinctly states this view which remained with her throughout her life:

> I will not faint, but trust in God
> Who this my lot hath given:
> He leads me by the thorny road
> Which is the road to heaven.
> Though sad my day that lasts so long,
> At evening I shall have a song:
> Though dim my day until the night,
> At evening-time there shall be light.
> (ll. 1-8)

Although Christina could, because of her sense of imperfection and failure, prostrate herself before God, she could also summon up her vast reserves of will and courage and emphasize again and again that every Christian must ever strive toward the goal of Christian perfection. In fact, in "Why" (pp.260-1), she cries that because she so detests this wearisome, sin-ridden earth and so loves her Saviour, she wants to be allowed into heaven immediately, but is reminded that she must work out her salvation on earth. The words which she gives to Christ are typical of Christina:

> 'Bride whom I love, if thou too lovest Me,
> Thou needs must choose My Likeness for thy dower:
> So wilt thou toil in patience, and abide
> Hungering and thirsting for that blessed hour
> When I My Likeness shall behold in thee,
> And thou therein shalt waken satisfied.'
> (ll. 9-14)

She, and every Christian, must perfect Christian virtues and weed out those qualities which prevent her from leading the perfect Christian life which is one lived in total emulation of that of Christ.

And Christina had very definite reasons for wishing to follow the narrow road. She tells us:

> Friends, I commend to you the narrow way;
> Not because I, please God, will walk therein,
> But rather for the Love Feast of that day,
> The exceeding prize which whoso will may win.
> (pp.226-7, ll. 1-4)

Christina believed that all the pains and griefs which the Christian will necessarily incur upon earth will be rewarded

in heaven by an eternal feast of love. In fact, not only is the narrow way therefore a desirable one, but it is the only course which is worthwhile and meaningful. All other ways yield nothing but frustration and lack of fulfilment, for everything on earth is corrupted by transience and death:

> Earth is half spent and rotting at the core,
> Here hollow death's heads mock us with a grin,
> Here heartiest laughter leaves us tired and sore.
> Men heap up pleasures and enlarge desire,
> Outlive desire, and famished evermore
> Consume themselves within the undying fire.
> (ll. 5-10)

Earth's feasts, so unlike the supreme one in heaven, cannot satisfy man. On this earth, man's desires and hopes will be mocked by death and transience, and his earthly journeys will prove futile in the end.

Earthly feasts are, in fact, unnatural ones for man; Christina is convinced that "not for this God made us: not for this / Christ sought us far and near to draw us nigher" (ll. 11-12). And if we can turn our backs upon God and disobey His command to follow and to love Him, we cannot refuse when we are asked by Christ Who, out of His eternal love for us, sacrificed all and took upon Himself our multitude of sins so that we could gain eternal life in a paradise of love. When we hear Christ call and contemplate the wounds He endured for us, we cannot but choose the better part: "Who shall say 'Nay' when Christ pleads all He is / For us, and holds us with a wounded Hand?" (ll. 15-16).

And in many poems, we see just how strenuous for Christina was this Christian journey in which she so strongly believed. For her, the Christian life journey was a toilsome one whose narrow path offered continual battles for salvation and eternal fulfilment. But although the cost was great and every step painful, she never doubted the righteousness of the course. In "Weary In Well-Doing" (p.242), another poem written during the difficult 1860's, we see what a tortuous struggle the Christian must involve himself in and how difficult is the battle. In a series of swift thoughts, Christina deftly exposes how her own wishes and desires are often at odds with what God has planned, and how difficult complete obedience is for her:

> I would have gone; God bade me stay:
> I would have worked; God bade me rest.
> He broke my will from day to day;
> He read my yearnings unexprest,
> And said them nay.
> (ll. 1-5)

In the next stanza, however, she expresses just how completely she opposes God's will, for now that she desires the rest and passivity He once ordered, God demands that she be active. She wishes to stay and to rest, but God commands her to go and to toil. Completely confused and exhausted, she states:

> He breaks my heart tost to and fro;
> My soul is wrung with doubts that lurk
> And vex it so.
> (ll. 8-10)

Obedience to God thus involves a complete surrender of the heart's wishes and the will's desires, for both heart and will are wrung and broken by God. She cannot seem to fathom God's plan for her, for in this process, He has seemingly caused her only confusion and sorrow. Nevertheless, Christina is too devout a believer not to possess at least some understanding of the process in which she is involved. She then realizes the necessity for obedience even in the face of God's seeming contrariness and concludes, "I go, Lord, where Thou sendest me; / Day after day I plod and moil" (ll. 11-12). Christina knows too well that the goal of heaven is to be won only at the cost of continual obedience, sacrifice, and struggle.

But at times, the despair of doubt and lack of necessary love overwhelmed her; hope and faith seemed to fail, and she was plunged into an abyss of spiritual darkness consisting of an alienation from Christ and all that is meaningful in Christianity. During such a time, even when directly confronted with evidence of Christ's love for her and all men, she could not reach out to Him because of a heart crippled by a spiritual paralysis and sterility. Such a desperate crisis is portrayed in "Good Friday" (p.234), written in 1862, where she cannot, although faced with the supreme manifestation of Christ's love, His sacrifice on the Cross, weep for Him. In a state of feeling opposite to that

of "Friends, I commend to you the narrow way" where she cannot imagine how anyone could not love and obey Christ when he contemplated His suffering upon the cross, she remains unmoved in the face of Christ's sacrificial blood. In fact, she wonders if instead of being a sheep of Christ's fold, she is not merely an inanimate stone. She then reflects upon the reaction of other Christians in the same situation and is thereby made shameful. The Marys who remained by Christ's side and the faithful Peter were stricken by "exceeding grief" (l.6) and bitter weeping. And, as her vision moves upward, she contemplates the thief who also was "moved." But when her vision mounts higher yet, she finds the entire universe was touched and made grievous by Christ's supreme sacrifice, for even the sun and moon "hid their faces in a starless sky / A horror of great darkness at broad noon" (ll. 10-11). Thus, in the face of universal grief for the painful drama being enacted upon the Cross, she alone remains untouched. And as the realization of the great measure of her unfeelingness and lack of Christian sympathy and love descends upon her, she cries out, "I, only I" (l.12). She is isolated in the midst of universal pain.

But although left unfeeling by a spiritual paralysis, she endeavours to reach out toward an affirmation and to end the totally negative state in which she finds herself. Perhaps with God's help, she reflects, she can be saved from this

spiritual death. Deftly picking up the imagery of the first stanza, she asks Christ to treat her not as the stone she is but as a sheep from His fold. If Christ, the "true shepherd of the flock" (l.14), would seek out His sheep, she might be saved. If Christ, being greater than Moses who called forth life-giving water from a stone, could somehow move her, the stone who cannot feel, there might be hope for her. Christina thus musters enough feeling to beg Christ to end her dead state and to take her into the Christian fold from which she feels herself isolated.

This spiritual paralysis seems, at times, to have crippled Christina to the point where she could not even weep and repent. Indeed, her being seems frozen by a spiritual sterility which she cannot overcome, and in "What Would I Give" (p.363), written early in 1864, she claims her heart is the "worst of all" (l.3) hearts, and cries, "What would I give for a heart of flesh to warm me through, / Instead of this heart of stone ice-cold whatever I do!" (ll. 1-2). She again uses the imagery of the stone in order to characterize her inanimate state and adds that it is a frozen one, for it lacks any warmth towards self, man, or God. She further demonstrates how totally unfeeling and how completely defeated her present state is by stating she is so crushed she cannot utter words, for "in its misery my spirit has fallen dumb" (l.5). She also bitterly dismisses

her merry friends; she never desired to have any commerce with them and remains isolated in her personal suffering. But such an unfeeling state is an intolerable one for Christina, and she prays for repentant tears to wash away her sins and sense of guilt which have caused her present misery:

> What would I give for tears! not smiles but scalding tears,
> To wash the black mark clean, and to thaw the frost of years,
> To wash the stain ingrain, and to make me clean again.
> (ll. 7-9)

If she could only be involved in an active grief which would lead to repentance, she could perhaps be saved. In her present state, her being is merely a mass of negatives; it is composed of spiritual sterility, despair, and death.

But perhaps even worse than these desperate moments of spiritual paralysis were the incessant and completely exhausting struggles to remain on the narrow path which leads to heaven and to turn deaf ears to the call of the world. Indeed, as we have seen, although Christina was ever disenchanted with the uses of the world and often looked upon them as sinful temptations full of inherent evil, she could also feel the tug of the earth upon her heart, a tug which often turned her vision from heaven and subsequently caused her endless sorrow and remorse. She, like anyone, could be torn by a desire for earthly pleasures, for as she admitted, "my flesh is weak, / A trembling fawning tyrant unto me" (p.230, ll.8-9); to Christina, the heavenly journey was one

made in the dark storms caused by the conflicts between flesh and conscience.

Such a problem is outlined in "A Shadow of Dorothea" (p.216), where as William Rossetti points out, " . . . the speaker is a human soul, not as yet confirmed in saintliness . . . ."[14] Nevertheless, the speaker is desirous of a saintlike state, for she asks Christ to help her achieve it. She begins, however, by asking Christ to describe the nature of heaven and in this very question reveals that as yet she is not quite confirmed as to the desirability of possessing it. Christ's reply is reassuring, however, for heaven is portrayed as a paradise of bliss. Christ stands in heaven, surrounded by "lilies and roses red" (l.10) symbolic of the perfect virtue and love to be found therein. Amidst this growth and fulfilment, He offers perfect love and wisdom as well as peace:

> 'Love makes me wise:
> I sing, I stand,
> I pluck palm-branches in the sheltered land.'
> (ll. 13-15)

Although the state of those in paradise seems enviable, indeed, a crisis soon comes when the speaker asks after the nature of the path to heaven and demands to know

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14. Poetical Works, p.474.

how she might travel this path. Christ replies that there is a heavenward stair which, with effort and much "strain", (l.25) can be mounted. But the steps taken up these stairs must be final ones and necessitate the exclusion of all else: "Each step will crumble to your foot / That never shall descend again" (ll. 26-27). But the speaker is not prepared to make this complete renunciation of the earth, and she states she asks Christ to bring the fruits of His love down to her:

> 'I have a home on earth I cannot leave,
> I have a friend on earth I cannot grieve:
> Come down to me, I cannot mount to you.'
> (ll. 32-34)

Nevertheless, the speaker receives the inevitable reply:

> 'Nay, choose between us both,
> Choose as you are lief or loth:
> You cannot keep these things and have me too.'
> (ll. 35-37)

Indeed, at times Christina seemed fearful of the power of the earth to capture her soul and enmesh it in those pleasures which lead only to damnation. In fact, in "The World, Self-Destruction" (pp. 283-5), she prays Christ to surround her with His protective love so that she can be strengthened against temptation. She states:

> Be Thy Love before, behind us,
> Round us, everywhere:
> Lest the god of this world blind us,
> Lest he speak us fair,
> Lest he forge a chain to bind us,
> Lest he bait a snare.
> (ll. 12-17)

Although the problem is outlined in "A Shadow of Dorothea" and "The World, Self-Destruction", it is not until we read "The Convent Threshold" (pp.340-2) that we are given an opportunity to see just what price Christina had to pay in order to choose the path Christ pointed out for her. As Edith Birkhead has explained, "Through the lips of an imaginary nun leaving her lover for the convent's narrow room she utters her own struggle between earthly love and heavenly love, the creature and the Creator."[15] In the first section of this poem, the speaker states her resolution to mount heavenward. "I choose the stars that mount above" (l.4). She is painfully conscious of the sin and guilt in which she has involved herself by indulging in earthly passion, and she cries:

> My lily feet are soiled with mud,
> With scarlet mud which tells a tale
> Of hope that was, of guilt that was,
> Of love that shall not yet avail; . . . .
> (ll. 7-10)

Her lily feet, once symbolic of her purity, are now tainted by the sins of passion and are covered by the gross mud of earthly desire. What she now seeks is "the sea of glass and fire" (l.13) which can regenerate and cleanse her. But this grief is not her only one, for she is tormented by the

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15. Christina Rossetti and Her Poetry (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1930), p.53.

state of her lover's sinful soul and pleads with him to repent and seek resurrection with her. She cries out to him, "Mount with me, mount the kindled stair" (l.16).

Although her eyes are fixed upon heaven, her lover's eyes look earthward. She has a vision of a brilliant land where the saints dwell in perfect peace and bliss. And she adds that although they are now at ease among sheltering branches and sweet music, their struggle to achieve this goal was not an easy one: "They bore the Cross, they drained the cup, / Racked, roasted, crushed, wrenched limb from limb" (ll. 25-26). Nevertheless, they have been given the glory of heaven as a reward for their painful renunciation and patient suffering. Their glory is such that "The sun before their face is dim" (l.29). Eternal life and peace are their rewards for sacrifice and sorrow upon earth.

The lover sees, however, a banquet of earthly love, youth, and life; young men and women frolic in the joys of love and sensuous pleasure and are surrounded by seeming fertility, fulfilment, and wealth:

> Most glad, most full, made strong with wines,
> Blooming as peaches pearled with dew,
> Their golden windy hair afloat,
> Love-music warbling in their throat,
> Young men and women come and go.
> (ll. 33-37)

Although the scene abounds in rich colour, wine, and gold, suggestive of the emotional wealth present and the youthful beauty in their possession, death and destruction are near,

for their ways are brief and sinful. Time is short, and instead of pursuing earthly pleasure, man must endeavour to win eternal salvation. And although the shadows of death are near, her lover lingers. Thus, she cries:

> To-day, while it is called to-day,
> Kneel, wrestle, knock, do violence pray;
> To-day is short, to-morrow nigh:
> Why will you die? why will you die?
> (ll. 47-50)

The speaker's urgency is conveyed by the force of the verbs employed for while begging her lover to overthrow his present ways, she uses such words as "wrestle" and "do violence" which suggest how difficult and strenuous such a transformation is and how desperately she wishes him to perform this overthrow. Again, her desperation is conveyed also by the twice-repeated "Why will you die?", for she is here literally begging him to make the heavenly journey.

The novice then outlines her own state and again laments the sinful pleasures in which she has indulged:

> Woe's me the lore I must unlearn!
> Woe's me the easy way we went,
> So rugged when I would return!
> (ll. 53-55)

And with the painful days of repentance and remorse stretching endlessly before her, she cries:

> How long until my sleep begin,
> How long shall stretch these nights and days?
> . . .
> How long must stretch these years and years?
> (ll. 56-57, l.60)

The very phrases "nights and days" and "years and years" show

she is conscious of the long process she must undergo while the cry "How long" indicates how fervently she wishes her present misery of difficult renunciation and painful repentance to be over. But, in her concern for her lover, she cannot dwell long upon her own difficulties, and she makes yet another attempt to turn his eyes to heaven. She begs him to consider her, for if he will not repent their "pleasant sin" (l.51) for his own sake, perhaps he will do so for hers. She tells him she could not rest easy in paradise if he were not there with her, and she cries, "Oh save me from that pang in heaven!" (l.77).

The first section of the poem has outlined the nature of her sin and its pleasures and has expressed the desperation of her present state of guilt and repentance as well as sorrow for her unrepentant lover. The second part of the poem sets forth two dream visions which expand the theme of guilt and repentance. In the first vision, a figure with an insatiable desire for knowledge is present. Although this figure is an ambiguous one, some of the ambiguity may be removed by William Rossetti's note. He suggests that this poem tells of a situation something like that of Heloise and Abelard:

> . . . it is difficult to believe that the passage beginning 'A spirit with transfigured face' would have been introduced unless the writer had had in her mind some personage, such as Abélard, of

exceptionally subtle and searching intellect.[16]

This figure screams for knowledge, and although he is given more and more, he is not satisfied and still thirsts. But this passionate and frenzied search for knowledge is yet another form of sin, for when the figure takes his crown of knowledge from his head, "His locks writhe like a cloven snake" (l. 102). Both "cloven" and "snake" suggest the devil and sin. And, like the devil, he is forced to "grovel down / And lick the dust of Seraph's feet" (ll. 103-4). He finally learns that knowledge is a futile earthly pursuit which can involve the sinner in the sin of an earthly goal; knowledge for its own sake has nothing to do with the heavenly journey and succeeds only in turning the possessor away from the essential spiritual truth which lies at the heart of Christianity:

> Yea all the progress he had made
> Was but to learn that all is small
> Save love, for love is all in all.
> (ll. 107-9)

The sins of passionate love seem not to have been the only ones in which the lovers were involved.

In the second vision, we are presented with a horrifying picture of the pain of the speaker's renunciation and guilt. Left with the ashes of previous passion, "'My

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16. Poetical Works, p.482.

heart was dust'" (l.115), the speaker must reject the lover who appears to her in the dream. She tells him to find a "warmer playfellow" (l.120) and a "kinder love" (l.122), for she can no longer love him. But the cost of this renunciation is great on both sides:

> You wrung your hands: while I, like lead,
> Crushed downwards through the sodden earth:
> You smote your hands but not in mirth,
> And reeled but were not drunk with wine.
> (ll. 123-6)

Her sense of guilt and her pain for her lover crush her like a leaden weight, and although she rejects him, the renunciation is difficult, for she dreams of him and is thus forced to pray for strength. We see she desperately wants to return to her lover, for she prayed against her will. The cost of her struggle with guilt, repentance and renunciation is seen in the picture:

> When this morning broke,
> My face was pinched, my hair was grey,
> And frozen blood was on the sill
> Where stifling in my struggle I lay.
> (ll. 134-7)

The struggle has sapped her very life sources, for her hair is grey and her blood has been spilt.

The poem ends, however, on a note of hope. As Lona Mosk Packer explains:

> Love on earth can be renounced, but preferably for the recompense of reunion in heaven. Lovers who in this life have given up the love that fails to satisfy will win each other through Christian love in a newer, completer, more rapturous and

intense life, to which this one is but a prelude.

> There we shall met as once we met
> And love with old familiar love,

is the unexpected ending to this strange and powerful poem.[17]

But, although the novice, and Christina, buried this hope deep in her heart and obviously found at least some consolation in it, it did little to make the pain of her present struggle any less. Guilt and repentance were the painful burdens Christina had to endure, and it is through the speaker in this poem that we discover just how deeply and painfully Christina suffered.

And it was often that Christina believed her sins and subsequent guilt erected a barrier between her and that complete devotion to Christ for which every Christian must strive. In fact, as Margaret Sawtell points out, there are many poems full of a despair born out of the knowledge that she has lost her originally pure love for God.

> They speak for themselves -- of a love grown cold, and yet ardently desired and thirsted for -- of a sense of past sin committed or contemplated raising up a barrier to the fulfilment of earlier hopes . . . .[18]

Her sense of regret for such a time is seen in "Come

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17. Christina Rossetti, p.130.

18. Christina Rossetti: Her Life and Religion (London: A.R. Mowbray and Co., Ltd., 1955), p.62.

Unto Me" (pp.237-8) where she outlines her former state. She cries:

> Oh for the time gone by when thought of Christ
> Made His yoke easy and His burden light!
> When my heart stirred within me at the sight
> Of altar spread for awful Eucharist: . . . .
> (ll. 1-4)

Thus, in times now irrevocably gone, a mere thought of Christ or a glimpse at some religious ceremony was enough to cause her to bear her Christian burdens ungrudgingly or to stir her heart to love of Christ. At such a time, her hopes were enough to sustain her while awaiting the promises of bliss and ease Christ holds out to the true believer, and her soul stood steady watch for Him by day and by night; her Christian vigil never ended when her "robe was white" (l.7) with her own purity. Indeed, in her virtuous state, there seemed to be no temptations, and she did not feel the attractions of sin; "And all seemed loss except the pearl unpriced" (l.8). Only Christ had any attraction for her.

But although she has changed and is, as she says in "Dost Thou Not Care?" (pp.242-3), "worn with pain" (l.12) and in possession of a "fainting heart" (l.16), Christ remains the same. Although she has half forgotten Christ as she wars with the temptations of the earth and involves herself in sin, Christ ever remembers and calls to her as He always has. Sustained by the knowledge that Christ still promises the same rewards as He did when her heart was pure, she decides she must ever pursue Him in spite of the sins which

stand between her and Christ, for she can still possess the faith which was strong enough to smash the walls of Jericho and which can still unite herself with Christ. She also has hope, hope that she will achieve Christian perfection and merit eternal salvation, and this hope ever "holds forth a crown" (l.13) of eternal bliss for those who would undertake the journey to heaven. And the thought of Christ and His everlasting love also sustains her, for although she may have sinned and ruined forever the purity and total devotion of her previously innocent heart, Christ's love is there for both the innocent and the sinner. And with Christ standing by her, she needs nothing else, for "Christ is all in all" (l.14).

But at times this lack of pristine love and desperate sense of sin seemed to crush her beneath an unbearable weight of guilt, and all she could do was beg for Christ's mercy. Indeed, in "For Thine Own Sake, O My God" (p.252), published in 1881, she seems without the assurance of hope and steadfast faith that she possessed in "Come Unto Me." Her sins and her constant struggles against temptation and spiritual paralysis, so painful and so frequent, have left her wearied with self-loathing and continual repentance. Several decades of spiritual torment have caused her to become "Wearied of sinning, wearied of repentance, / Wearied of self" (ll. 1-2). All she can do is plead that God be

"pitiful" (l.6), for upon His judgment of her hangs her eternity. And we see how ugly her sins are to her, for exhausted by her self and her continual sinning, she views these sins as "stains" (l.8) and "festering sores" (l.8) which make of her self something unnatural and unwholesome. In her despair, all she can do is plead that Christ, whose love for all men was so great that He took upon Himself the shape of man and with it, his "infirmity" (l.16), will love her: "Love made Thee what Thou art, the love of me, - / I plead Thyself with Thee" (ll.17-18). She can only remind Christ of His promised everlasting love for man, for in her sinful state, she can do nothing to merit Christ's love.

Her consciousness of sin and subsequent grief are also seen in "A Better Resurrection" (p.191) where her despair nearly overwhelms her. But it is also in this poem, written in 1857 during her most difficult spiritual struggles, that we are made aware of that strength of will which remained stronger than the earthly desires of her being. We see also the courage with which she confronted the reality of her own being and by which she could move from spiritual negation to affirmation. Also, as L.M. Packer states, "'A Better Resurrection' displays the steady control of the artist whose critical capacity is at work shaping the molten

materials of experience into aesthetic design."[19] And this design is, Packer goes on to explain, a twofold one:

> Here . . . are two movements, the centric and the counter movement . . . /and/, they blend into dissonant harmony. The negative or countercurrent which initiates each stanza is expressed in a series of rapidly shifting images, sharp, dynamic, bold - clear as black shadows on a sunlit wall. But the positive or centric current seizes and transforms the imagery at the conclusion of each stanza, so that by means of the varied refrain, a crescendo effect rising to a climax in the third stanza is achieved.[20]

In the first stanza, she conceives of herself as essentially lifeless, for overwhelmed by grief and pain for her sinful state, she feels nothing. In fact, her grief is so complete that her heart remains as dead and as dumb as a stone. Thus using her familiar device of portraying an emotional state by the use of a concrete image, she goes on to state that like a stone, she is "numbed too much for hopes or fears" (l.3). And, looking about her, she finds there is no outside comfort; she dwells utterly alone. Thus she is led into a despair so deep that she loses all hope, and is bereft of even a vision of possible help and comfort: I lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief / No everlasting hills I see" (ll. 5-6). And in the image, "My life is in the falling leaf" (l.7), she reveals she is in a state of

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19. Christina Rossetti, p.109.

20. Ibid., p.111.

spiritual sterility and near death. The decay of grief and guilt are sapping her spiritual state. Nevertheless, although she lacks necessary fertility and even hope for growth, she manages to summon up enough courage to move sufficiently away from a state of negation to make a positive cry for help, and she pleads, "O Jesus, quicken me" (l. 8). In the midst of images of spiritual inanimateness and sterility, her cry for life from Christ shows how great was her effort to move toward a state of spiritual affirmation.

This imagery drawn from nature is immediately picked up in the second stanza where we are plunged into the midst of an even deeper negation than that present in the first. In contrast to the falling leaf of the first stanza, her life is now like a "faded leaf" (l.9). What little fertility and life she possessed have now passed away and even the process of dissolution seems to have ended. And as the leaf, so the entire harvest, for she declares her harvest has "dwindled to a husk" (l.10). "Void and brief" (l.11), her life lingers in the "barren dusk" (l.12), another image which suggests the passing of fertility and growth and the beginning of a long night of spiritual death. But the horror of this overwhelming death is not completely felt until we are given the simile, "My life is like a frozen thing" (l.13). In the midst of this spiritual death, her life

seems to be a "thing" without any real substance or meaning. Its only quality is death. And again she emphasizes that there is no hope for future fruition, for she states, "No bud nor greenness can I see" (l.14). But once more she manages to make what is, this time, an even stronger affirmation. In the first stanza all she could make was a short prayer, but now she utters a prayer and a positive statement about future promise; "Yet it shall rise the Sap of Spring; / O Jesus, rise in me" (ll. 15-16). Jesus is thus seen as the spring which can and will redeem the winter of her soul. Thus, if there was greater despair in this stanza, there is also a more confident hope for future fulfilment.

In the third stanza, she pictures her life as

> A broken bowl that cannot hold
> One drop of water for my soul
> Or cordial in the searching cold.
> (ll. 18-20)

She is without the fertilizing water which could bring her to life again and without the cordial which could give warmth in the midst of freezing sterility. But again the leap toward an affirmation is made and she states:

> Cast in the fire the perished thing;
> Melt and remould it, till it be
> A royal cup for Him, my King:
> O Jesus, drink of me.
> (ll. 21-24)

Thus, the self must be remoulded so that it can win that Christian perfection which will please and be worthy of Jesus. If an inner cordial, a drop of faith or hope, might

warm and comfort her, perhaps a fire, a burning desire to search God out and travel the road of Christian perfection, would enable her to reform this self and make of it something worthwhile to offer to Christ. And in her last line which asks Christ to come and drink of her, to include her in His comforting self, we again have the conviction which has been present throughout the entire poem, that the sinner must, in order to transform the meaningless and dead self into a shining Christian soul, be guided and helped by God. Thus, in this last stanza, we are given the most positive affirmation, for a definite solution has been postulated. And the struggle toward this solution has been a most strenuous one, for she has gone from negative to positive and back again until a resolution has been achieved. Indeed, as Lona Mosk Packer has stated:

> As we read 'A better Resurrection,' we sense the labour involved in such a process - the strain, the effort, the summoning of vast reserves of spiritual energy in order to build of suffering a bridge over which to make the perilous crossing to an unknown bank.[21]

Indeed, at times, Christina could willingly embrace the struggle against inner failure and outer temptation, for

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21. Christina Rossetti, p.110.

she could become a militant Christian bent on defeating temptation and making of her self a worthy gift to God. In fact, William Rossetti has said of Christina,"The narrow path was the only one for her, and a lion in the same path made no difference."[22] In the sonnet, "Sorrow of saints is sorrow of a day" (pp.141-2), we see her ready, indeed anxious, to do battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. She begins the octave by stating that she fully understands the place this battle has in the plan of things: "Sorrow of saints is sorrow of a day, / Gladness of saints is gladness evermore" (ll. 1-2). The sorrow born of this struggle is but a momentary necessity when compared to the eternal glory which will be granted if the battle is successful. Thus realizing what is at stake, Christina issues instructions for the plan of battle. If the flesh sways, the tempted should "Stir up His praises" (l.5). And if the battle intensifies and the world presses sorely, one should struggle more fiercely and instead of merely stirring up His praises, should "exalt" (l.6) Him. Further, "if black Satan roar" (l.7), the combatant must "Peal out His praises" (l.7). The greater the temptation, the more hardily should the combatant fend it off by continuous thought and praise of God.

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22. Poetical Works, p. lxvii.

If in the octave she sets forth the plans of the battle, in the sestet she expounds upon the strength of the tempters and gives further exhortation to battle, but this time with a definition of the essence of the Christian's struggle. She states that the "Devil and Death and Hades, threefold cord / Not quickly broken" (ll.9-10) are ready enemies who shamelessly confront the sinner face-to-face. No reluctant combatants are they. But then, neither should the Christian be; instead of running and seeking escape, he should meet them with "a face of tenfold flint" (l.11). One must be resolute and steel-like in the will to wage victorious battle. Thus, she commands, "Shout for the battle, David!" (l.12), for one must readily confront the enemy and take the offensive. In the reference to David, however, Christina tells us something about the tempters, for the world, the flesh, and the devil are Goliath-like opponents who seem to have the many advantages of power on their side. Nevertheless, the Christian can overcome by openly facing his formidable enemies and possessing immovable faith. And as David did, one must call all resources into play, for she orders, "never stint / Body or breath or blood" (l.13); both resolution and act must be complete. In fact, the commitment must be so absolute that one must be willing to give up even life itself. She commands, "Die for thy lord, as once for thee Thy Lord" (l.14). This final line implies

that to forfeit life is not too great a cost, for Christ sacrificed His life so that we could gain everlasting salvation. This statement also reveals even more about the nature of the struggle in that it is eternal life we are warring for whether or not we give up our lives in the process.

But Christina had even more to say about the battles which every Christian must wage as he travelled the straight and narrow way. The torments which the Christian must endure are in themselves evidence of God's love, for the epigraph to "'One sorrow more? I thought the tale complete'" (p.140) reads "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth". Indeed, these torments are the means by which she can reach heaven, for elsewhere she has stated, "none may be / Without a cross yet hope to touch the goal" (p.127, ll.3-4). Nevertheless, in this poem, the speaker is surprised that God has willed that she must endure yet another onslaught of pain, for she "'thought the tale complete'" (l.1) and her sorrow at an end. Such is not the case, however, because the Christian's life is a continual journey toward eternal salvation. Further, what we give in this struggle must be freely given: "He bore amiss who grudges what he bore" (l.2). We must give all to God, and what we give we must give with unhedging heart and spirit. She commands, "Stretch out thy hands and urge thy feet to meet / One

sorrow more" (ll. 3-4). In fact, one must be ready to meet not just one but several additional sorrows, for the Christian's suffering is never done as he travels to heaven.

And throughout our suffering, Christ will be with us. Christ is the "kind Physician" (l.6) who "will not slack to treat / His patient while there's rankling in the sore" (ll. 6-7). Although we suffer anguish and pain, a comfort infinitely sweet will be with us now and in the future. Even though we must "Bear up all day" (l.9), the night of our death which is descending will have rest to assuage our sorrow and grief. Thus she again makes the affirmation, for she tells the struggling Christian, "Christ bears thy burden with thee, rise and greet / One sorrow more" (ll. 10-11). Hence, in contrast to the disappointed and somewhat bewildered, "One sorrow more?" of the first stanza, the same phrase present in the last line has an entirely different meaning to it; in fact, it is a ringing, almost joyous affirmation, for the context has changed. We now understand both the meaning of the suffering and the promise and nature of both present and future relief and comfort. And again, we also know that we are partaking, in a small measure, of Christ's suffering and that we must emulate His free acceptance of sorrow given because God loves us. In fact, the epigraph is now most meaningful: suffering and sorrow are given to us so that we may become

completer, fuller Christians.

Christina thus accepted the suffering she was continually forced to endure because she believed that through this suffering, she could become a better Christian and could make of her self a proper gift to God. The heavenly journey was, to her, a necessarily difficult one fraught with anguish and sorrow every step of the way. But, Christina was always quick to point out, suffering and strenuous efforts to remake the self were not enough if one did not possess the proper love for and faith in God and did not carry out His word and will. On earth, the true Christian must possess a loving and faithful self devoted wholly to God and His wishes. While suffering can help remould and redeem the self, there is much else this self must confront before it can be granted eternal salvation. We must now explore the tenets and injunctions of Christina's faith in order to discover upon what beliefs she based her Christian devotion and to seek out what she believed man must do upon this earth before he could win the kingdom of heaven. Although she swung from total unfeelingness to doubt, then to guilt, on to repentance, and back to unfeelingness, there remained with her a hard core of beliefs as to what constituted Christianity and the Christian. While her emotions ranged from calm to despair and to hysteria, somewhere in her soul existed rocklike convictions which seemed to sustain

her and feed her will and point the way whenever she seemed lost.

CHAPTER III

LOVE: THE ESSENTIAL CORE

Although Christina Rossetti's heavenly journey was one torn by continual spiritual conflict, and although her moods ranged from despair to confident hope, she ever remained in possession of certain beliefs which both acted as the starting point of her spiritual journey and represented the convictions tested and established by her life-long quest. Again the reader is confronted with the spontaneous nature of Christina's poetry, for she never systematically approached the investigation and expression of her religious beliefs any more than she did the study of her spiritual difficulties and crises. Although Christina never rejected or argued against the basic tenets of Christianity, she did explore and probe various aspects of the Christian faith as they occurred to her or as she felt the need to clarify or reassess her own position. Further, the problem of chronology occurs, for much of the poetry concerning Christina's religious beliefs occurs in such series as "Some Feasts and Fasts" and "Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims" which William Rossetti dates from 1853 to 1893 and from September, 1858 to before 1893 respectively. Aside from "Love", written 24 February 1847, we can conclude, however, that the poems

discussed in this section are representative of Christina's mature thought. An investigation of these poems yields much, for they reveal those beliefs which formed the basis of Christina's position as a Christian.

All Christina's beliefs and convictions stemmed from one central tenet: love is the essence of Christianity. This belief permeated her entire Christian experience, for as William Rossetti points out, ". . . she clung to and loved the Christian creed because she loved Jesus Christ. 'Christ is God' was her one dominant idea."[23] Indeed, she was ever convinced that love must form the basis of the Christian's belief, motivate his actions, and inform his relationship with God. And if love must guide man on earth, it is his means of eternal salvation and his reward in heaven. Love can help the Christian develop the necessary virtues of patience, hope, faith, and charity as it caused God to sacrifice His only son so that man could be saved from eternal damnation. Christ was born into this world as a man and chose to die as one in order to redeem man's past, present, and future sins. As H. N. Fairchild explains: "Love for her is the essence of Christianity solely because

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23. Poetical Works, p. liv.

the Love who 'came down at Christmas' to be as a babe in a manger was and is 'The Lord God Almighty Jesus Christ'".[24]

In "Christmastide" (p.159), she states:

> Love came down at Christmas,
> Love all lovely, Love Divine;
> Love was born at Christmas,
> Star and Angels gave the sign.
>
> Worship we the Godhead,
> Love Incarnate, Love Divine;
> Worship we our Jesus:
> But wherewith for sacred sign?
>
> Love shall be our token,
> Love be yours and love be mine,
> Love to God and all men,
> Love for plea and gift and sign.

Love divine chose to descend into the world in the form of a man among men. This love, God in man's shape, is man's salvation; it is the essence of the Christian relationship with God. God loves man who in turn loves God Who also rules that man must love his fellow man. Love is the plea by which God asks man to become the true Christian and hence lovingly follow His ways. It is also the plea by which man asks God to give him help in this world and eternal life in the next. It is the gift the self can give to God, for the Christian can offer God nothing but a loving self, a self which, through love, has acquired the Christian virtues. And it is also the gift God gives to

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24. Christianity and Romanticism in the Victorian Era, p.305.

man, the fruit of which is eternal salvation. In fact, love comprises God's essence. In "Trinity Sunday" (pp.171-2), she states, "My God, Thyself being Love Thy heart is love / And love Thy Will and love Thy Word to us" (ll.1-2). Christina Rossetti was thus convinced that love, and only love, constituted the basis of Christianity and defined every area of Christian belief and experience.

In "'Beloved, let us love one another', says St. John" (p.159), Christina reveals her conception of this love and outlines its characteristics and primary importance. Expounding St. John's exhortation to love, Christina calls love the "Eagle of all eagles calling from above" (l.2) and thereby reveals its strength and superiority, for the eagle, the monarch of all birds, is a traditional symbol for might and nobility; it is no delicate bird of the type which represents the paltry treasures of the earth. And this love is king; it is the mightiest eagle of all. She then states that this love is comprised of "Words of strong nourishment" for life to feed upon (l.3). Its might and unfathomable depth can furnish nourishment for an entire lifetime. It is this image which suggests the starving feast of earthly love which cannot, in Christina's view of things, provide sufficient sustenance. But if this love is all-powerful, it is also as peace-loving and as gentle as a dove; it has all the tender qualities of this most peaceful and most

gentle bird. And again she suggests it is life-giving: "If we may love, winter is past and gone" (l.6). In fact, it is "More sunny than sunshine that ever yet shone" (l.8). Love furnishes man with the warmth and the fertility which can eliminate the coldness and sterility of a spiritual winter. Unlike earthly love, it is no bittersweet dichotomy, for in contrast to the things of the earth, those of heaven are without an inevitable dark side. In fact, this love can sustain us through the disappointments and frustrations of the earth; it is the "Sweetener of the bitter, smoother of the rough" (l.9). This idea also reinforces her conception of love as a gentle comfort. Thus, so different from all on earth it deserves praise, "for lo it is enough" (l.7). It alone can fulfill and complete. It is, therefore, the "Highest lesson we need learn" (l.10). Hence, in eleven lines, because of her compact and concrete imagery, Christina has presented the reader with a detailed and comprehensive view of the love she believes to be the essence of Christianity.

In fact, this love is completely satisfying partly because it does not change. In the sestet of "Trinity Sunday" (pp.171-2) from "Some Fasts and Feasts," we see the characteristic of this love which perhaps held the most attraction for Christina.

> Lo, if our God be Love thro' heaven's long day,
> Love is He thro' all our mortal pilgrimage,

> Love was He thro' all aeons that are told.
> We change, but Thou remainest; for Thine age
> Is, Was, and Is to come, nor new, nor old;
> We change, but Thou remainest; yea and yea!
> (ll. 9-14)

The twice-repeated "We change" emphasizes the mutability of the things of the earth and thus shows how desirable love is. It alone in man's experience is that which is permanent. God's love for man is a permanent entity which is all-encompassing and satisfies completely.

To Christina, Christ's love for man constitutes the special nature of God's love and makes all things possible between the human and divine; Christ does not restrict His love to those angels already in heaven. This conception is found in the poem "S. Peter" (p.175) from "Some Feasts and Fasts," where she outlines the relationship between Peter and Christ. As Margaret Sawtell has pointed out, "In the S. Peter sonnet we get the emphasis on S. Peter, the representative man, insisting on his humanity (not on angelic nature) laying his claim on Christ."[25]

In the first quatrain of the octave, we are given a picture of the relationship between Christ and Peter, for such was Peter's faith that when Christ ordered him to set out into the unknown deep, Peter did so without fear because

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25. Christina Rossetti: Her Life and Religion, p.121.

he knew Christ, in this as in all things, would watch by his side. To Peter, who possessed a rock-like faith, all perils were small. The second quatrain goes on to explain that Peter possessed such a faith because of Christ's "Prescience" (l.5) or foresight or foreknowledge; Christ knows all and thus will not command Peter or any man to perform an act which would ultimately be of harm to him. Christ knows that all will come to good and He knows because He loves. And He possesses "Prescience of Love, which deigned to overleap / The mire of human errors manifold" (ll. 7-8). Christ's love for man took Him to the Cross where He suffered all so that man could gain eternal life. Indeed, the sestet points out that this special love is anchored in the human nature of the recipient, for Christ suffered for "human errors" and so gives humanity a special place in heaven. Speaking of Peter, representative of all men, Christina states:

> Hath he his throne among Thy Seraphim
> Who love? or sits he on a throne, apart,
> Unique, near Thee, to love Thee human-eyed?
> (ll. 12-14)

But Christina was not content to investigate and to characterize merely from the outside. With her quick mind and her passion for depth, she endeavoured to enter the very personality of Christ in order to search and probe this perfect embodiment of love. In "The Love of Christ Which Passeth Knowledge" (pp. 215-6), she ironically attempts to investigate His nature and His love by having Christ speak.

She also endeavours to outline a desirable relationship between the Christian and Christ. In love, Christ bore all the pains and sorrows the earth could offer:

> I bore with thee long weary days and nights,
> Through many pangs of heart, through many tears;
> I bore with thee, thy hardness, coldness, slights,
> For three-and-thirty years.
> (ll. 1-4)

And, Christ claims, the sacrifice did not stop here, for He went further in His sacrifice than any one ever had or will: "I plunged the depth most deep from bliss above / I not My Flesh, I not my spirit spared" (ll. 6-7). Because, to Christ, man is "Much sweeter . . . than honey to my mouth" (l.11), He gave all. His love is complete, a condition unknown to the changeable sons of the mutable earth.

On the Cross, although He suffered because of His love for man and although He put on man's guilt and shame, He received only the thorns of scorn and mockery. Christ then states one of those meaningful paradoxes Christina loved so well: "At length in death one smote My heart and cleft / A hiding place for thee" (ll. 23-24). In the very act of slaying Christ, man assured himself a place in heaven, for through the love of Christ and His sacrifice which redeemed all man's sins and washed away past, present, and future guilt, man can achieve eternal salvation. And because of His immeasurable love, even the Cross is "dear" (l.26) to Him; it was the means by which He could help man, His Beloved.

Thus, Christ now begs man to partake of the fruits of His sacrifice: "Share My crown; / A harvest, - Come and reap" (ll. 27-28). This plea, along with other exhortations to man which Christ makes throughout the poem, reveals His continuing love for man, for Christ searches after him and ever calls out. And the final fruits for the Christian are the crown of victory over death through eternal love and a harvest which suggests fertility and fulfilment, characteristics not to be found on this flaw-filled earth.

It is because of this love for man that God's will is best. His will for man is framed and given substance by His love. In a poem fron the "Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims" series, she states, "Who knows God knows: and what He knows / Is well and best" (p.138, ll. 1-2). If he follows God's loving will, man will find fulfilment and strength. Man must give himself completely up to God and make his will one with God's. And if he does so, man will find strength because "man's strength is to sit still" (l.6) "watching meekly, watching with good will" (l.9). In fact, in "Whatso it be, howso it be, Amen" (p.201), Christina states:

> God's Will is best for man whose will is free.
> God's Will is better to us, yea, than ten
> Desires whereof He holds and weighs the key.
> (ll. 5-7)

And Christina goes on to say, the reason why His will is best is that He has all knowledge, something of which man is incapable, and hence He can will that which is most wise

and good. His eye goes everywhere:

> Amid her household cares He guides the wren,
> He guards the shifty mouse from poverty;
> He knows all wants, allots each where and when,
> Whatso it be.
> (ll. 8-11)

In short, "God knows all that is" (l.3). And in this poem, Christina is subtly contrasting man's knowledge with God's. She does so by twice saying "whatso" (l.1, l.4) happens and "howso" (l.1) it is, God knows. By using these words, she reveals that she, a human being with only human understanding, does not know these things. Christina thus poses herself as a foil to God and has deftly used her language to carry out her intent. And the reason why He knows and understands all is because He loves. In "Love understands the mystery" (p.121), she states:

> Love understands the mystery, whereof
> We can but spell a surface history;
> Love knows, remembers: let us trust in Love:
> Love understands the mystery.
> (ll. 1-4)

This love "measures the depth beneath the height above, / The mystery, with the anti-mystery" (ll. 6-7). We must, therefore, give ourselves up to God and put ourselves in His hands: "Trust all to Love, be patient and approve: / Love understands the mystery" (ll. 10-11).

Perhaps, she suggests, love can understand all in the universe because it contains all perfection within its being. In "Leaf from leaf Christ knows" (p.221), she expounds the mystery of Christ's all-encompassing knowledge and investigates

the nature He possesses which enables Him to gain this knowledge. She states: "Leaf from leaf Christ knows; / Himself the Lily and the Rose:" (ll. 1-2). He can know even the smallest details because He is supreme above all; He is the most perfect in virtue and in love. He is not merely "a" rose among roses, but rather "the" Rose and stands above all else. From this great height, He can see all. Again, because He, and "no-one else" (l.4), is "the Shepherd" (l.4), He can distinguish sheep from sheep. This traditional image of Christ as the Shepherd, suggests again that Christ is above all, He is the tender, careful leader of flocks. And He can also tell star from star because He outblazes "all their flames" (l.6). In His glorious perfection, Christ is brighter than any mere star of the sky could be. And His range is limitless; He counts the stars, the leaves, the drops of the ocean, and the sands of the earth. And because He is everywhere and superior to all, everything can be entrusted to Him. Christina concludes:

> Lord, I lift to Thee
> In plea what is and what shall be:
>
> Lord, in peace I trust
> To Thee all spirits and all dust.
> (ll. 13-16)

And it is love which not only understands, but also defines the very universe; it is that which shapes, quickens, and sustains all creation. In "O Ye, who are not dead and fit" (p.131), she voices her conviction that love is the

creative principle which caused the birth of all creation and is its underlying harmony:

> Love poises earth in space, Love rolls
> Wide worlds rejoicing on their poles,
> And girds them round with aureoles.
>
> Love lights the sun, Love thro' the dark
> Lights up the moon's evanescent arc,
> Lights up the star, lights up the spark.
> (ll. 7-12)

Again, those who partake of love are quickened and harmonized by it, for as she states in "Quinquagesima" (p.162), "Love is the motive of all things that move / Harmonious by free will without constraint" (ll. 5-6). In fact, she says in this poem, love moves all: "Love is the law from kindled saint to saint, / From lamb to lamb, from dove to answering dove" (ll. 3-4). Saint and animal alike are joined by love, the supreme bond and law. Indeed, as far as man is concerned, we find her stating in "O Ye, who are not dead and fit", that love is something which is ever carried on by those who comprehend its worth, for they realize only good can come of love: "Who knows not love begetteth love?" (l. 6). In fact, the true Christian can involve himself in the processes of good, if he sings love's praises and calls to those who would otherwise be unaware of its worth and who thus have no hope for eternal salvation. The loving Christian can "Set waymarks for all doubtful feet / That stumble on in search of it [love]" (ll. 14-15). Like Christ, the embodiment of this perfect love, the Christian must live a life of love:

Lead life of love; that others who
Behold your life may kindle too
With love and cast their lot with you.
(11. 19-21)

But although she endeavoured to probe its essence, investigate its manifestations, and plumb its depths, Christina found this love ultimately unknowable and mysterious. God's love is to her, simply beyond human comprehension. In fact, after contemplating Christ's sacrifice, she concludes:

I comprehend not why Thou lovedst me
With Thy so mighty Love; but this I know,
No man hath greater love than thus to die.
(11. 12-14)

To Christina, all the Christian can do is accept Christ's sacrifice with humility and love: the ultimate manifestation of Christ's love for man is that which gives testimony to this love, and man must simply embrace it, for human understanding cannot comprehend the Divine workings behind it. All man can do is love in return, for as she states in "Love" (p. 97), "Love is the only everlasting duty" (l.3).

And with love, all things are possible, for love has the power to make of the self something worthy and fruitful. In "How can one man, how can all men" (p.213), she wonders how the small and the weak can be as great as Saint Peter, Saint Paul, or Saint John. The answer she receives is that love can do so, for love can cause complete transformation in even the weakest Christian. And love makes one like the

Saints because it can engender in the possessor all those qualities which have made the Saints strong and great. In fact, it is love which causes the Christian to possess complete faith in God, for it is the kind of love which "clings and trusts and worships" (l.11). It is also a love "which rises from a fall" (l.12). In other words, this love is a sustaining one which supports the possessor through all difficulties and setbacks; it never falters, never weakens. Again, it prompts "glad obedience" (l.13), for the true Christian ever lovingly trusts in God and completely obeys His will, and thus achieves saint-like devotion. Perhaps most important, however, this love "Labours most of all" (l.14) on the narrow path to heaven. Love will persevere in the face of all odds and will bring the possessor through any difficulty. Thus, because of the many things which love makes possible, "Love makes great the great and small" (l.15). It is the necessary possession of all Christians and the force through which anything is possible.

This love is thus a creative one, for it is that which quickens the very universe and which can transform sinner into saint. And through this love, man can help save his fellow man. As is implied in "O Ye, who are not fit and dead", the Christian, because of this love, has a duty not only toward God but also toward his fellow-man. This conviction is Christina's in "I was hungry, and Thou feddest me"

(p.225) where she states that when she was in hunger and thirst, Christ gave her food and drink because of His love for her. Feeling indebted to Christ, she inquires as to what "love gift" (l.3) she can give Him in return and receives the answer:

> 'Feed My hungry brethren for My sake;
> Give them drink, for love of them and Me:
> Love them as I loved thee, when
> Bread I brake
> In pure love of thee.'
> (ll. 5-9)

True love of Christ thus involves imitating His work among men; the Christian who truly loves Christ must adopt His attitude toward mankind. The speaker states, however, that although she will perform acts of charity, she wishes to devote herself exclusively to Christ; she states, "'Yet would I love Thyself, Lord, face to face / Heart to heart, one day'" (ll. 12-13). But Christ reminds her that such love will come later; love of man is a necessary part of complete Christian love, and one must perform such patient Christian work in order to fulfill oneself as a Christian. Thus, Christ tells her, "'Let to-day fulfil its daily task'" (l.14), for until she is united with Christ, she must also serve Him through man. In fact, charity is so important a quality that without it the Christian will not be allowed to enter paradise. Indeed, in "Lord, make us all love all: that when we meet" (p.265), she states:

Oh if our brother's blood cry out at us,
  How shall we meet Thee who has loved us all,
  Thee Whom we never loved, not loving him?
  The unloving cannot chant with Seraphim,
Bear harp of gold or palm victorious,
  Or face the Vision Beatifical.
(ll. 9-14)

Perfect Christian love includes love of all mankind; this love must be complete if the Christian is to be worthy of a paradise of love.

Through love, the Christian is also to acquire the virtue of patience, for patience, based upon a firm trust in God's love and the wisdom of God's Will, is another of the Christian virtues which must be perfected. She thus counsels the sorrowful sinner in "Watch yet a while" (pp. 121-2) that although there is much pain and sorrow on earth, he must learn to watch and to wait quietly until God deems he can enter paradise. Chafing against one's fate and begrudging God the time spent upon earth is not to follow the course of true Christian love which involves a firm acceptance of whatever is given unto us. We must also trust that God's love will reward our patient love. Indeed, in heaven, love shall be our lot, but unlike love on earth, it will come rejoicing and "shall forget to weep" (l.5). There will be no need for hope, fear, or careful watch, for love's promises shall be fulfilled. Thus, she advises:

Have patience as True Love's own flock of sheep:
Have patience with His Love
  Who served for us, Who reigns for us above.
(ll. 9-11)

Another saint-like quality which the perfect Christian must possess is that of hope. In "Hope is the counterpoise of fear" (p.271), she states, "Hope is the counterpoise of fear / While night enthralls us here" (ll. 1-2). While death and sorrow instill fear into us, hope can provide the means by which we can continue on in a sometimes horrifying world. Although fear offers only a tear, hope turns its vision heavenward and looks at the dawn which will come "With sunshine and with cheer" (l.5). Indeed, gazing earthward, fear creates further fear, for on this transient earth, all it sees is decay and death and thus is led to added lamentation and fright. Worse still, however, is the fact that fear seems to bring spiritual sterility. Viewing earthly destruction, it rears "A lamentable tomb where leaves drop sere, / Bleaching to congruous skeletons austere" (ll. 8-9). The images of the tomb, the sere leaves, and the austere, bleached skeletons suggest that fear can breed spiritual decay and sterility. Although hope may chant a "funeral hymn" (l.10), this hymn is "sweet and clear" (l.10), for hope looks on the positive side of things. Instead of being frightened by death, it views death as the gate to eternal life. It places its trust in the hope of eternal salvation which Christ holds out to all men. Thus, with a touch of metaphysical imagery, Christina concludes: hope

> . . . seems true chanticleer
> Of resurrection and of all things dear
> In the oncoming endless year.
> (ll. 11-13)

Hope thus signals coming eternal life whereas fear sees nothing but death. Nevertheless they are both integral parts of the Christian experience: "Fear ballasts hope, hope buoys up fear, / And both befit us here" (ll. 14-15). Fear is needed because it confronts man with the reality of his earthly experience and shows man the grim death he will meet if he does not follow the Christian vision. Fear is, in turn, softened by hope which promises comfort and life. By itself, fear would, with its horrifying visions of decay and death, merely freeze the believer; hope provides the means by which the Christian can endure earthly decay and enables him to strive for Christian salvation. Without the hope of future life, the Christian would not strive; there would be no goal to work toward.

We must also keep faith and fend off the doubt of Christ and His promise which can rot the soul. In "Be faithful unto death" (p.277), Christina advises that we must ever keep faith, for Christ holds out eternal bliss and grace to those who do so. "Be faithful unto death. Christ proffers thee / Crown of a life that draws immortal breath" (ll. 1-2). And this faith must be no fair-weather friend; the Christian must, if he wishes eternal salvation, cling to this faith in the face of every difficulty which

the earth can provide. Thus, Christina advises:

> Tho' trouble storm around us like the sea,
> Tho' hell surge up to scare us and to scathe,
> Tho' heaven and earth betake themselves to flee,
> 'Be faithful unto death.'
> (ll. 8-11)

And in the poem, "Our heaven must be within ourselves" (p.133), we find Christina employing her recurrent fruit symbolism as well as a touch of medieval allegory in order to voice her conviction that it is within ourselves that we must build that optimistic faith and Christian hope which should be the guiding forces of our lives as we make our journey to heaven.

> Our heaven must be within ourselves
> Our home and heaven the work of faith
> All thro' this race of life which shelves
> Downward to death.
> (ll. 1-4)

We must define our selves with faith and must build the "boundary wall" (l.5) of our selves with this faith. We must have faith to wall out these forces of evil which would corrupt the soul.

> And hope shall plant the secret bower,
> That both may show magnifical
> With gem and flower.
> (ll. 6-8)

Hope must thus support faith and provide a lovely garden plot of comfort and confidence of eventual triumph over death and sin if the self is to carry on faithful Christian battle. And these qualities are essential for every Christian, for they are the gem and flower of the Christian

virtues. Most important, however, is love:

> While over all a dome must spread,
> And love shall be that dome above;
> And deep foundations must be laid,
> And these are love.
> (ll. 9-12)

Love must encompass the Christian and lay its foundations deep in the recesses of his self. If the self is built with love, as we have seen, anything is possible, for love can make a sinner into saint. Thus, to Christina, love, faith and hope must comprise the very universe of each Christian's self. Nevertheless, love is the mainspring of each Christian grace, for as she states in "Fear, Faith, and Hope, have sent their hearts above" (p.277), "All other graces, to their vast increase / Of glory, look on Love and mirror Love" (ll. 18-19).

Thus, although Christina ever fought for eternal salvation and passed through a multitude of spiritual crises, she was convinced that her striving was dictated by love and would be rewarded by it. Underneath the foam of her spiritual battle, beneath wave after wave of spiritual crisis, there flowed a deep undercurrent of belief which never left her. Love prompted and sustained her as she weathered the often desperate conflicts and anxieties of her heavenward journey, and love, she hoped, would fulfill her at the journey's end. Christina thus believed that love comprised both the beginning and the end of the Christian road, and if

she ever had something to teach her fellow man, it was this:

If not with hope of life,
  Begin with fear of death:
Strive the tremendous life-long strife
  Breath after breath.

Bleed on beneath the rod;
  Weep on until thou see;
Turn fear and hope to love of God
  Who loveth thee.

Turn all to love, poor soul;
  Be love thy watch and ward;
Be love thy starting-point, thy goal,
  And thy reward.
(p.121)

CHAPTER IV

PARADISE

Christina Rossetti's life was thus one of constant examination and struggle as well as belief. She ever warred with temptation, doubt, and sin and was ever sustained by her unhedging belief in God's love. And because she so believed in the promise of God's love held out for man, she could allow herself to be comforted and refreshed by visions of the bliss and fulfilment this love would give to the deserving Christian. Her poems written about paradise reveal what she trusted was every Christian's reward and what earth could not possibly give her. And although Christina often doubted the worthiness of her self in the face of God's judgment, she nevertheless believed that perhaps she merited some small corner in heaven from which she might reap the fruits of eternal life. An examination of these poems produces a definition of the goal she journeyed toward, and explains why she condemned the earth as unsatisfactory and why she turned her vision elsewhere. Heaven promised Christina Rossetti the emotional and spiritual fulfilment for which she hungered and the permanence she was denied while on earth.

Indeed, Christina conceived of herself as a yet

unblossomed flower awaiting the warmth and life-giving quality of the sun. In "The hills are tipped with sunshine while I walk" (p.133) from "Songs for Strangers and Pilgrims", Christina sees the distant hills shining with vital warmth while she walks comfortless among "shadows dim and cold" (l.2). Like an "unawakened rose" (l.3) waiting for the sun to flood the world with fertilizing sunshine, she lifts her face to the far-off hills of heaven and awaits the sunshine of grace which will give her eternal life. Tired and cold amid the half-life of earth, she attends the quickening touch of heaven which will give her joyous "sunshine and song" (l.14). Only in heaven will she be brought to fruition, for on earth there is nothing which can give her that perfect fulfilment of the Christian soul. Man lives in a world marred by the shadows of decay, sin, and death, and all he can do, Christina believes, is take heart in future bliss, for as she states in "Shadows to-day, while shadows show God's will" (pp. 142-3):

> To-day we race in darkness for a crown,
> In darkness for beatitude to be,
> In darkness for the city luminous.
> (ll. 12-14)

And although she took joy in the thought of paradise while dwelling on earth, as she says in "Eye Hath Not Seen" (pp. 148-9):

> If but the thought of Paradise
> Gives joy on earth,

What shall it be to enter there
Through second birth?
(ll. 37-40)

In the poem "Paradise" (pp. 180-1), Christina shows why she takes so much joy in and so ardently strives for the realm of heaven. Beside the treasures of heaven, all earth's beauties pale:

Once in a dream I saw the flowers
That bud and bloom in Paradise;
More fair they are than waking eyes
Have seen in all this world of ours.
And faint the perfume-bearing rose,
And faint the lily on its stem,
And faint the perfect violet,
Compared with them.
(ll. 1-8)

She obviously delights in the joys heaven offers to sight and smell, for the scent and the loveliness of heaven's flowers win her praise. In addition to this beauty and sensuous delight, there is also softness and gentility. Hearing the birds of paradise, she describes their singing as "A tender song so full of grace / It soared like incense to the skies" (ll. 11-12). Both"incense" and "grace" here suggest softness and encompassing comfort. Again as mate calls to mate in a bliss of love, their "soft cooing notes" (l.14) shame the earthly nightingale as cold in comparison. There is both sensuous and emotional delight and comfort in heaven. Indeed, Christina's diction alone suggests heaven's comforting quality, for she uses such soft-sounding words as "bloom", "cooing", "soft", "tender", and "full". The broad vowels of such words as "bloom", "grace" and "rose" slow the movement

of the poem and make all seem peaceful and at rest. The rich quality of these vowels also suggests the abundance and plenitude of heaven. And the word "cold" (l.15) is included as a reminder of earth's freezing emotional and spiritual sterility when compared to loving heaven's warm fertility.

The fourfold River which flows through heaven and is symbolic of the eternal life to be found therein is indicative of heaven's fertility, peace, and fulfilment. The great depth of this river suggests that in heaven earth's shabby shallowness is unknown; heaven gives no momentary pleasure, for all therein is deep and lasting. Again, the river's bottom of "golden sand" (l.18) suggests heaven's warmth and spiritual richness. Further, the river flows "With murmured music grave and low" (l.20). Such profound music, described with the words "grave" and "low" which contain broad vowels, indicates the deep richness of this heaven which can satisfy the very soul. This river also flows in "a mossy land" (l.19), another symbol of fertility. Thus, the river has much to give the thirsting soul:

> It hath refreshment for all thirst,
> For fainting spirits strength and rest;
> Earth holds not such a draught as this
> From east to west.
> (ll. 21-24)

In the middle of this paradise stands the Tree of Life; it towers budding and "Abundant with its twelvefold

fruits" (l.26). It is thus symbolic of spiritual growth, fruition, and plenitude. And this fertility is a permanent one, for the tree is fed by "eternal sap" (l.27). As well as providing fulfillment, it also provides rest and comfort; it has "shadowing branches" which give ease and shelter to all who come. Its sweet fertility is such as can nourish all spirits:

> Its leaves are healing for the world,
> Its fruit the hungry world can feed,
> Sweeter than honey to the taste
> And balm indeed.
> (ll. 29-32)

Looking inside the gate called "Beautiful" (l.33), she sees heaven's golden streets which are representative of paradise's warmth and richness. She also sees the "crowns of plenteous stars" (l.37), and the crowns and stars here suggest the rich plenitude of heaven and the king-like state of all found therein. Further, there are "green palm branches many-leaved -" (l.38), another symbol of heaven's unsparing plenitude and comforting peace. The spiritual richness of this heaven touched with the splendour of its green, gold, violet, and rose, and studded with sparkling crowns of stars are beyond any prize of earth. Indeed, heaven is such that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard, / Nor heart conceived" (ll. 39-40). It stands supreme above earth with the result that Christina, although hoping to see this paradise again, does not wish to do so in an earthly

vision. Because this vision has made her impatient with earth's poor treasures, she wishes to abandon earth and enter paradise.

But there is more than this to heaven. In "When wickedness is broken as a tree" (pp. 206-7), she tells us, with a device like that of medieval Christian allegory, that in Paradise, where barrenness and death have no part, the "bulwarks are salvation fully manned" (l.5). Heaven is thus built on Christ's gift of salvation to all men who so choose. Again, "All gems it hath for glad variety" (l.6), for heaven is characterized by a brilliant plenitude. Nevertheless much of its outer richness is symbolic of an inner one; Heaven has "pearls for pureness radiant glimmeringly / And gold for grandeur where all good is grand" (ll. 7-8). Heaven is lighted with the lustre of a purity unknown upon this sin-tainted earth. And its gold is not that of any earthly material splendour; rather, it is the richness of incomparable good. Heaven is to be valued because of its spiritual splendour and perfection.

Christina was also attracted to heaven because of its quality of perfect harmony. Unlike earth which is torn by discord and strife, heaven is made harmonious because of love. In "Jerusalem is built of gold" (p.206), she speaks of "The one thanksgiving" (l.14) of Jerusalem's throng, for all of heaven is united in Christian love:

Jerusalem makes melody
  For simple joy of heart;
An organ of full compass she,
  One-tuned thro' every part: . . . .
(ll. 8-11)

Again, heaven must be sought because it is characterized by love and permanence. In "A Burden" (pp. 204-5), Christina informs us that in heaven there is a love which never fails and provides man with complete fulfilment. In heaven, there is, she says:

Sweet love, a fountain sealed to me:
Sweet love, the one sufficiency
For all the longings that can be - . . . .
(ll. 46-48)

And this love cannot be found on earth; it exists only in heaven. Indeed, she states that although she has striven to find its earthly counterpart, she has done so in vain. She has, in fact, found only the "sapless leaves" (l.55) of emotional sterility and decay.

Heaven is the place of permanent love, for she speaks of heaven as "the time of love" (l.15) in "When sick of life and all the world" (p.197), and envisages it as the place where Christ will wipe away our tears and give us loving comfort. Sorrow and suffering have no place in heaven where

There shall be no more blight, nor need,
  Nor barrier of the sea;
No sun and moon alternating,
For God shall be the Light thereof;
  No sorrow more, no death, no sting,
    For God Who reigns is Love.
(ll. 19-24)

Christ is king in heaven, Christ Who, as she states in "Eye Hath Not Seen" (pp. 148-9), guards His sheep and leads them by heaven's life-giving streams of spiritual fertility. With Christ guiding them with His love in a permanence of bliss, they will rest content:

> Never again
> To thirst, or need
> Aught in green pastures where they feed.
> (ll. 46-48)

The Christian penitents who have wept and suffered are given glory equal to that of the angels, for angels "are not more white / Than Penitents some while ago." (ll. 20-21). Indeed, those who were once "soiled and sad" (l.22) with sin and sorrow are "Cleansed now and crowned, fulfilled and glad" (l.24). In heaven, all is put aright by love. In heaven, uncorrupted by time and change, joy and fulfilment are to be found:

> Saints love beyond Time's measure:
> Where love is, there is bliss
> That will not pass;
> Where love is
> Dies away 'Alas.'
> (p.200, ll. 20-24)

In "That Eden of earth's sunrise cannot vie" (p.162), she compares even the best earth had to offer with paradise. But the grand beauty of Eden's lovely sunrise cannot outshine paradise, for there, where permanence reigns, there is no sunset. Again, Eden had wealth, but:

> . . . Paradise hath gold
> Like unto glass of splendours manifold
> Tongue hath not told.
> (ll. 7-9)

The plenitude of paradise's riches far outshines Eden's poor gold. Also, if the sun and moon made Eden magnificently bright, Paradise has no alternating times of day and night and glows with the incomparable brightness of God and Christ. And even the supreme quality of Eden, its innocence, cannot vie with the best qualities of Paradise, "Triumph and rest" (l.15), triumph of life over death by faithful Christians and rest from those weary struggles they endured on earth. Thus, thinking of the glory of paradise and its crown of peace and rest from all earth's sufferings and sorrows, she states:

> Hail, Eve and Adam, source of death and shame!
> New life has sprung from death, and Jesu's Name
> Clothes you with fame.
> Hail Adam, and hail Eve! your children rise
> And call you blessed, in their glad surmise
> Of Paradise.
> (ll. 16-21)

This goal is the one toward which Christina Rossetti worked throughout her life. And, to her, it was the only desirable and worthwhile goal, for where earth failed in its promises of beauty, perfection, love, and fulfilment, heaven gave out these most cherished things in abundance. To her, heaven bestowed all earth could not and completely satisfied those who strove for the best in all the entire universe. Only in heaven could the soul be satisfied, and in heaven alone could she find rest and comfort from the pain and suffering inflicted by an earth tortured by time and

transience.

And if she often doubted her worthiness of entering paradise and if God's commandments ever weighed heavily upon her, she nevertheless believed that perhaps she was worthy of at least some small place in paradise. Although she had sinned and had often failed on her heavenward journey, she believed she had at least given Christ something worthwhile, something essential for entrance into paradise. In "Thy lovely saints do bring thee love" (p.218), she claims:

> Yet I too bring a little love
> Amid my flaws and fears
> A trembling love that faints and fails
> Yet still is love of Thee,
> A wondering love that hopes and hails
> Thy boundless Love of me;
> Love kindling faith and pure desire,
> Love following on to bliss,
> A spark, O Jesu, from Thy fire,
> A drop from Thine abyss.
> (ll. 7-16)

And perhaps because of this love, Christina felt she might at least have a small claim to make upon God. Thus, because of this love and with true Christian humility, Christina sings:

> Give me the lowest place: or if for me
> That lowest place too high, make one more low
> Where I may sit and see
> My God and love Thee so.
> (p.237, ll. 5-8)

Perhaps, just perhaps, she could be granted that lowest place which would entitle her to share in those gifts of heaven for which she ever yearned and which she could not find on

an earth scarred by time's ruinous blades of transience, decay, and death. If an earthly journey had to be made, the traveller ever had to strive for heaven or he would share in only earth's starving feast and meet only destruction and death.

CONCLUSION

From adolescence until death, Christina Rossetti travelled a journey which she believed would lead her to heaven and to Christ's eternal embrace. But if she fixed her eyes upon heaven at an early age and often dreamt of paradise and pictured the rest, love, comfort, and fulfilment she believed could be found therein, she never ignored earthly experience which to her, largely consisted of the struggles she knew she must wage if she was to enter paradise. Although her poetry is full of reflections upon heaven's unequalled attractions and the comparative poverty of earth, it also tells the story of a courageous Christian who never turned away from her struggle for Christian worthiness. It exposes her in moments of painful self-examination which, she believed, too often revealed her as full of the imperfection of sin, of crippling spiritual paralysis which seemed to deaden her response to Christ's call, and of determination to struggle against the failures of self and the temptations of deceptive earth. And it reveals at what price Christina rejected earth and fought her Christian battle, for she often appears saddened, exhausted, and overwhelmed by her wearisome efforts to achieve Christian perfection. But perhaps most important to her, it tells of that love of Christ for all men which,

she believed, was both her starting point and her reward. Indeed, Christina believed that every man must begin his Christian journey, not with fear of eternal damnation and punishment, but with a love for Christ which would make lighter and more joyous the painful road to salvation, with a love so deep and vital that it made easy the obedience of Christ's commands and the following of the only course Christ laid down for all men. And the reward she so earnestly held was a thousandfold more satisfying than man could imagine, for the end of the spiritual journey is an eternity of love with God.

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