Chasing the Wind

Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:26

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

2 Merest breath, says the Preacher,

Merest breath! All is mere breath.

3 What does man gain by all the toil

at which he toils under the sun?

1. The Quest for Rest

Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:16

Ecclesiastes 1:12-14

I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. [13] And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. [14] I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is merest breath and a striving after wind.

1. The Quest for Rest

Qoheleth's Experiment

a) The vexation of wisdom (1:15-18)

Ecclesiastes 1:15-18

What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. [16] I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” [17] And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. [18] For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

1. The Quest for Rest

Qoheleth's Experiment

a) The vexation of wisdom (1:15-18)

b) The impermanence of pleasure (2:1-11)

Ecclesiastes 2:1-8

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was mere breath. [2] I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” [3] I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. [4] I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-8

5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit
trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. 7 I
bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I
had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been
before me in Jerusalem. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the
treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many
concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

1. The Quest for Rest

Qoheleth's Experiment

a) The vexation of wisdom (1:15-18)

b) The impermanence of pleasure (2:1-11)

Ecclesiastes 2:9-11

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also
my wisdom remained with me. [10] And whatever my eyes desired I did not
keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found
pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. [11] Then I
considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing
it, and behold, all was mere breath and a striving after wind, and there was
nothing to be gained under the sun.

1. The Quest for Rest

Qoheleth's Experiment

a) The vexation of wisdom (1:15-18)

b) The impermanence of pleasure (2:1-11)

c) The certainty of death (2:12-16)

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.
13 Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. 14a The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16

[14b]And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them.

[15] Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is mere breath. [16] For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!

1. The Quest for Rest

Qoheleth's Experiment

a) The vexation of wisdom (1:15-18)

b) The impermanence of pleasure (2:1-11)

c) The certainty of death (2:12-16)

2. The Resulting Restlessness

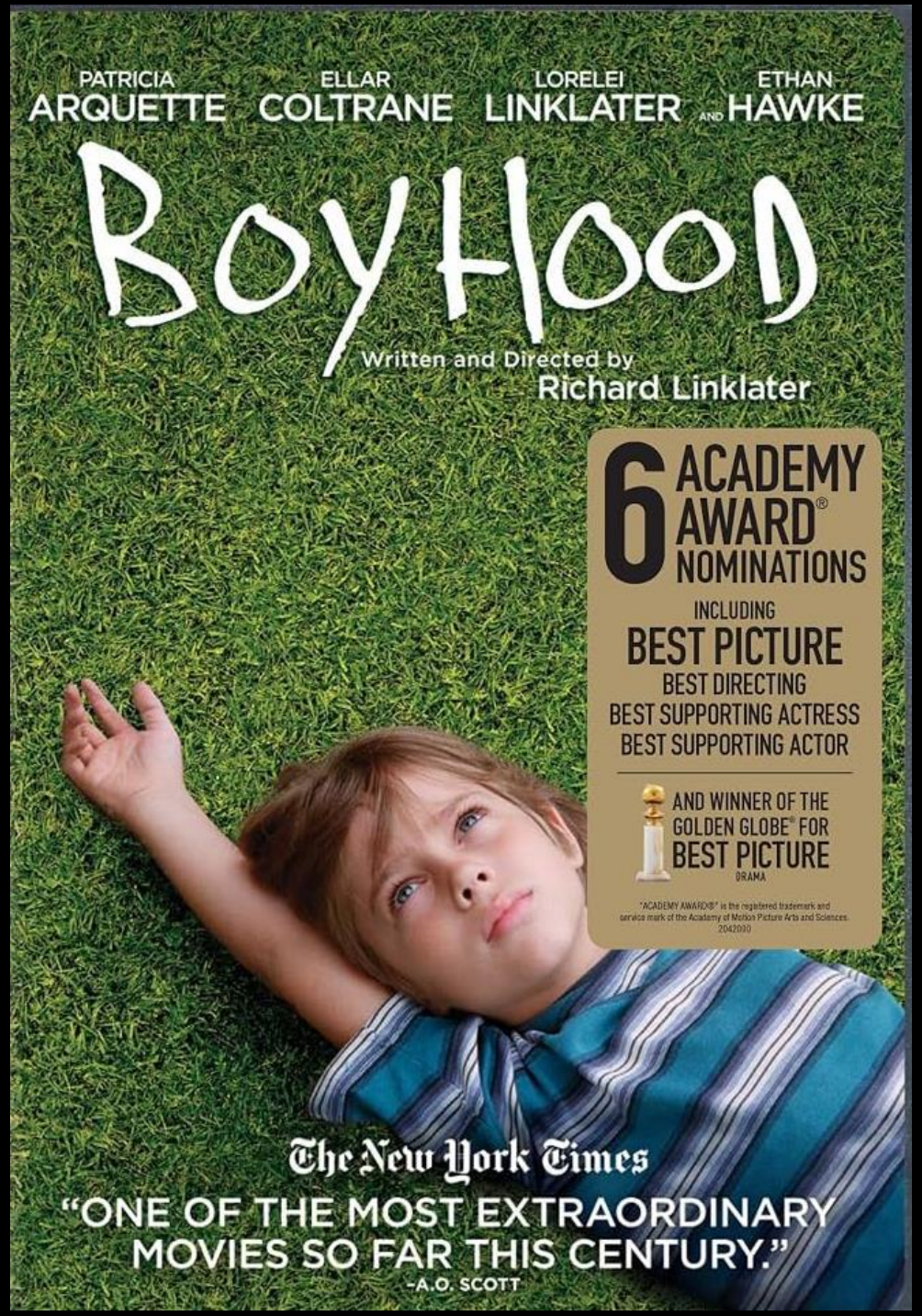
Ecclesiastes 2:17-23

Ecclesiastes 2:17–23

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me,
for all is mere breath and a striving after wind. [18] I hated all my toil in
which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will
come after me, [19] and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet
he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the
sun. This also is mere breath.

Ecclesiastes 2:17–23

20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my
labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with
wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by
someone who did not toil for it. This also is mere breath and a great evil.
22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils
beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a
vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is mere breath.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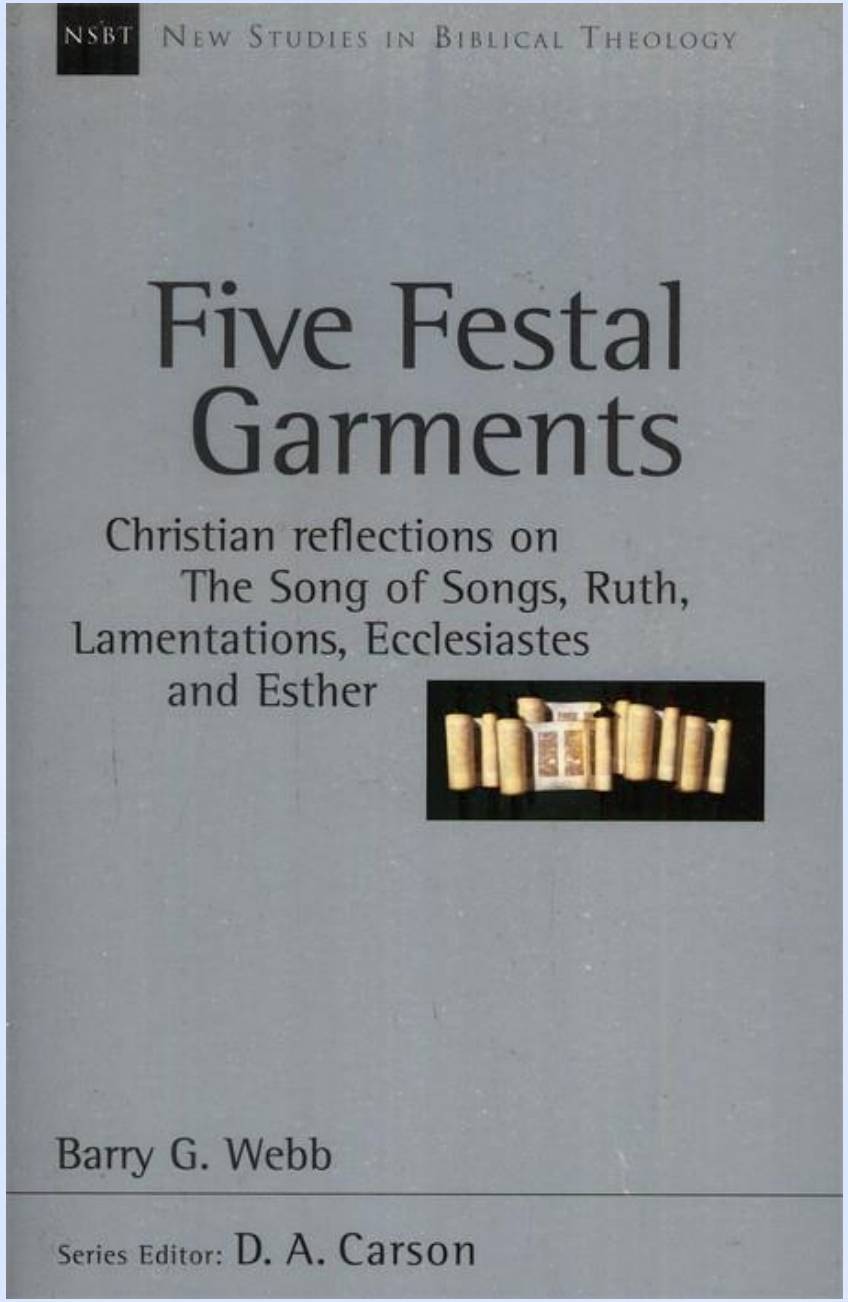
3. The Wisdom of Resting in God

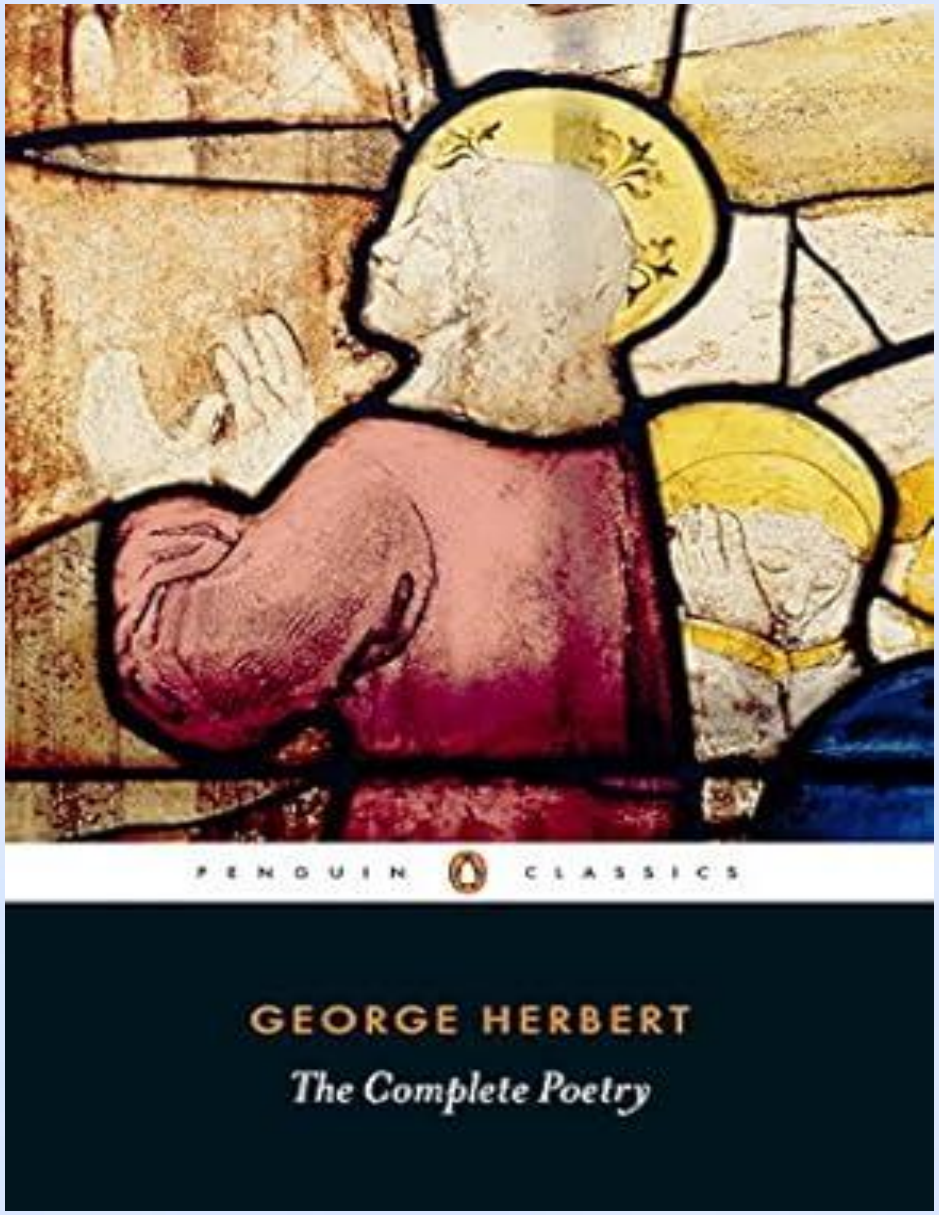
Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, [25] for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? [26] For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God.



The possibility of enjoyment returns, significantly, only when the quest for profit is given up altogether (2:22–23) and replaced by the notion of gift. Opportunities to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in one's work, when they come, are not human achievements but divine gifts, and are to be enjoyed as such. They are only palliatives, to be sure, for they too are [*hevel*], and will slip from our grip like everything else—but that is no reason to reject them.



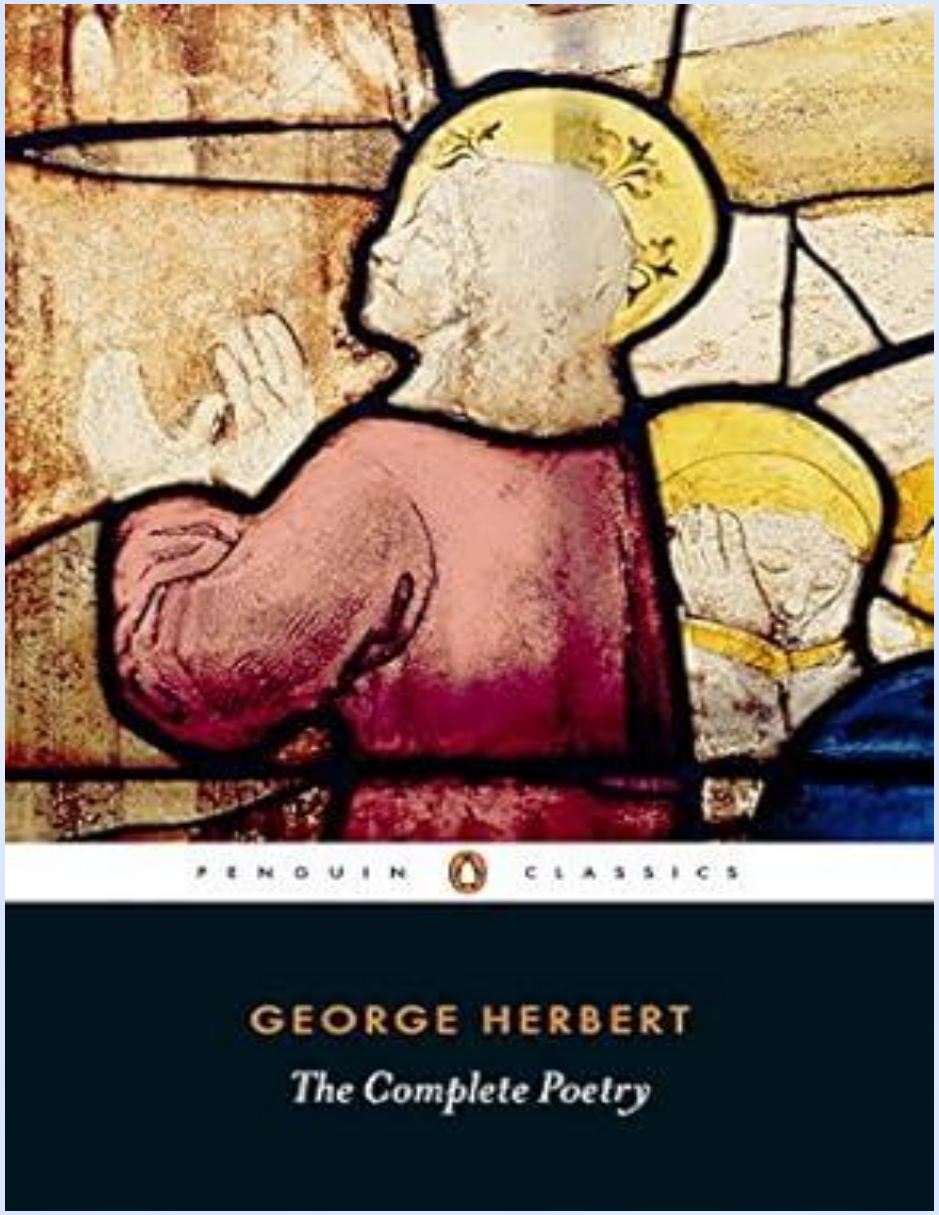
When God at first made man,

Having a glass of blessings standing by,

“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.

Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,

Contract into a span.”



So strength first made a way;

Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour,

pleasure.

When almost all was out, God made a stay,

Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,

Rest in the bottom lay.

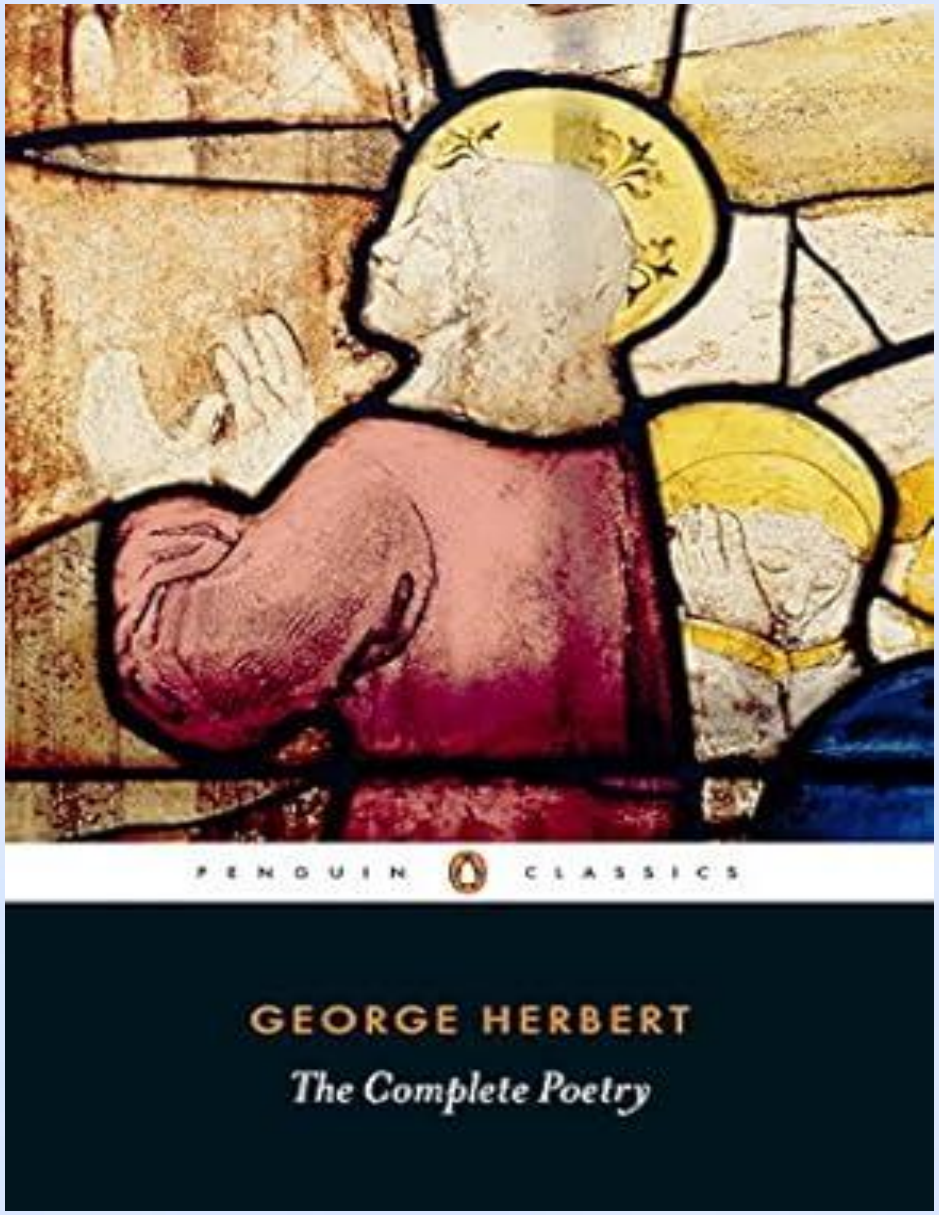
Application

(1) Accept your condition

Application

(1) Accept your condition

(2) Receive God's gifts



“For if I should,” said he,

“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,

He would adore my gifts instead of me,

And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;

So both should losers be.”

Application

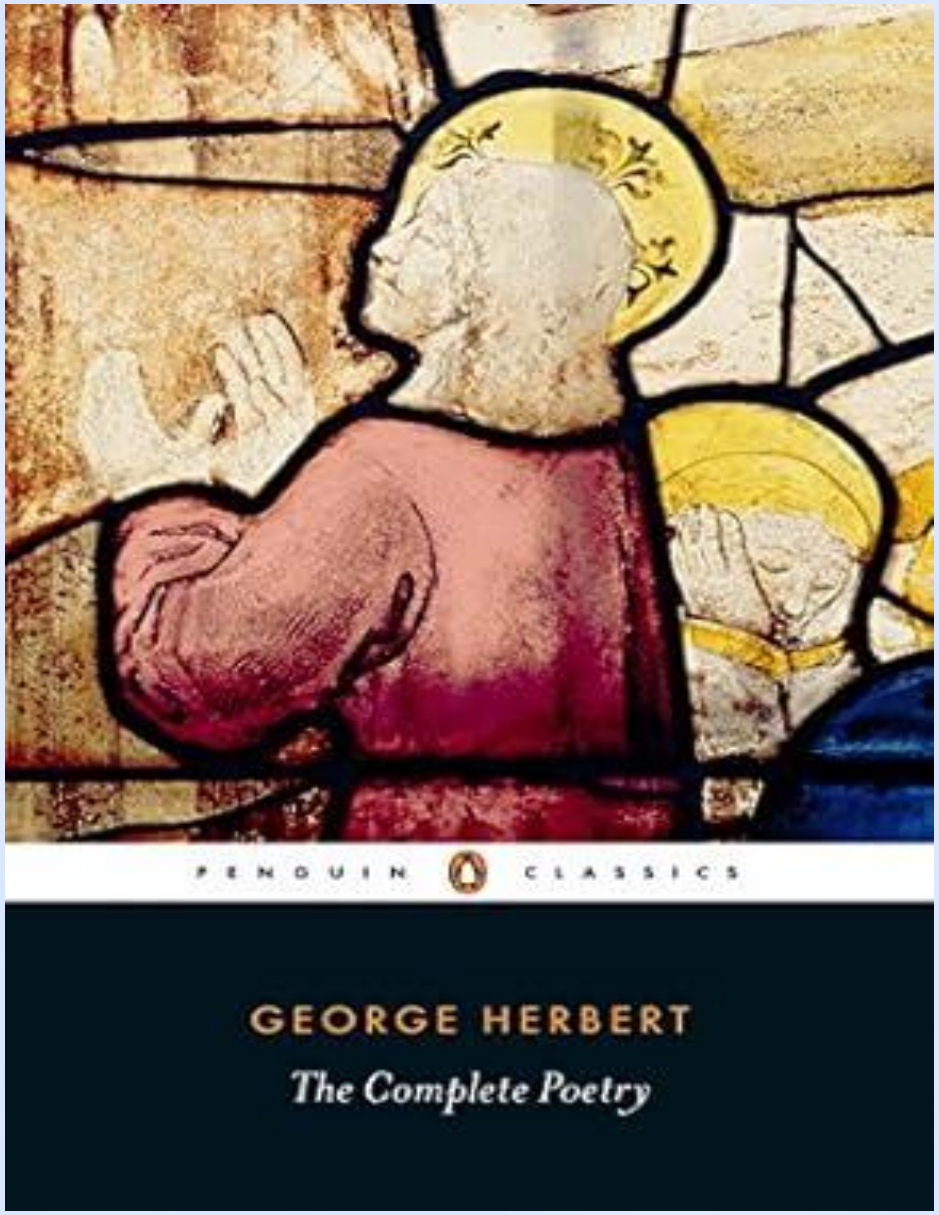
(1) Accept your condition

(2) Receive God's gifts

(3) Find your rest in Christ

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.



Yet let him keep the rest,

But keep them with repining restlessness;

Let him be rich and weary, that at least,

If goodness lead him not, yet weariness

May toss him to my breast.

Summary

1. The quest for rest
2. The resulting restlessness
3. The wisdom of resting in God

"Come to me and I will give you rest."

(Matt. 11:28)