

Herbert Tribute to Francis Bacon



A tribute to Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam of Verulam, Lord Chancellor, by the poet, George Herbert, published in 'The Temple'.

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In Honour of the Illustrious Lord Francis of Verulam, Viscount St Alban

A remarkable tribute to Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam of Verulam, Lord Chancellor, was made in 1620 by the talented Welsh poet, George Herbert (1593-1633), who was Public Orator at Cambridge from 1620 to 1627. The tribute, in Latin, was composed when Herbert was 27 and Bacon was in his 60th year, at the height of his political career, and *Novum Organum* prefaced by an introduction to the *Instauratio Magna (Great Instauration)* had just been published. The praise given to Bacon, and the comparisons made, may seem over the top to our modern liking, but they are suitable to the time and not only perceptive, pertinent and sincere, but also reveal a great deal about Bacon and the work he was doing.

Herbert became a good friend of Francis Bacon and, together with Ben Jonson and others, was one of the final translators of Bacon's *Essays, Advancement of Learning* and other works into Latin. He was one of Bacon's "good pens who forsake me not" after Bacon's fall from Lord Chancellorship (in May 1621). Bacon dedicated his *Translation of Certain Psalms*, published in 1625, to "his very good friend Mr George Herbert".

Herbert became a member of the Little Gidding community (termed 'the Arminian Nunnery' by the Puritans), and in 1629 took up orders as an Anglican priest. He became known as "an all-but canonised Anglican Saint". Henry Vaughan called him "a most glorious saint and seer". Herbert's poetry, including this tribute to Francis Bacon, was published in *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633).

Many scholars have found it difficult to reconcile Herbert's friendship with Bacon and devotion to the Divine with what they think is Bacon's 'atheism', but these scholars have completely missed the fact that Bacon was intensely religious and devoted to the Divine, which he considered Philosophy should serve as a handmaiden, and that a considerable portion of Bacon's writings and teachings are based on those of the Bible. Bacon's great aim was to help bring home the truth that Divinity is immanent in nature and can be found in all things, divine, human and natural; but that it is a truth that is hidden and has to be brought to light in order to know it—a truth that is, as he pointed out, essentially love. He believed, as did the Church, that the greatest human exemplar of this was Jesus Christ. He believed, as Jesus said, that the greatest and summary laws are to love God (who is Love) and to love each other. He believed, again as Jesus said, that we are all gods, but that we have to discover this truth and come to know it by manifesting it, living it, and that such "living in truth" is love in action, otherwise known as charity or philanthropy.

The tribute is in Latin, presented here side by side with a translation into English. The end notes are provided to help explain the words and concepts used in the tribute, and form the main part of this essay.

See over ►

<p>IN HONOUR OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS LORD FRANCIS OF VERULAM, VISCOUNT ST ALBAN¹ After he had issued The Great Instauration.²</p> <p>Who is this, then? Do not look for walks Daily. You don't know, ignorant? Then harken. Leader of Ideas; Truth's High-Priest; Lord of Induction and of Verulam; The One Master of things, not artful theory; Pine of Profundity and Elegance;³ Nature's intimate Prophet⁴; Philosophy's Treasury; Trustee of Experience And Speculation; Equity's Standard-bearer;⁵ Liberator of Science, till now in pupillage; Dispenser of light; Disperser of idols and clouds; Colleague of the Sun;⁶ Certainty's Cornerstone;⁷ Sophistry's Scourge: Literary Brutus, Despoiling Authority's Tyranny,⁸ Stupendous Arbiter of Reason and Sense; Polisher of minds; Atlas of Physics,⁹ To whom yields the Alcides¹⁰ of Stagira;¹¹ Dove of Noah,¹² finding in the old arts no perch for a break-up requiem; guided by himself and his mother, to return to the Ark;¹³ Gimlet of subtlety; grandson of Time By his mother Truth;¹⁴ beehive of honey;¹⁵ Unique Priest of the world and of souls;¹⁶ Axe of errors; and natural grain Of mustard,¹⁷ increasing the acres of others; I almost fainted! It helps afterwards!¹⁸</p> <p>GEOR. HERBERT, Public Orator in Cambridge University</p>	<p>IN HONOREM ILLUSTRISSIMI DOMINI FRANCISCI DE VERULAMIO, VICE-COMITIS STI ALBANI Post editam ab eo Instaur. Magnam</p> <p>Quis iste tandem? non enim vultu ambulat Quotidiano. Nescis, ignare? audies. Dux Notionum; Veritatis Pontifex; Inductionis Dominus et Verulamii; Rerum Magister Unicus, at non Artium; Profunditatis Pinus atque Elegantiae; Naturae Aruspex intimus; Philosophiae Aerarium; Sequester Experientiae Speculationisque; Aequitatis Signifer; Scientiarum sub pupillari statu Degenium olim Emancipator; Luminis Promus; Fugator Idolum atque Nubium; Collega Soils; Quadra Certitudinis; Sophismatum Mastix; Brutus Literarius, Autoritatis exuens Tyrannidem; Rationis et Sensus Stupendus Arbiter; Repumicator mentis; Atlas Physicus, Alcide succumbente Stagiritico; Columba Noae, quae in vetustate Artibus Nullum locum requiemque cernens, praestitit Ad se suamque matris, arcam regredi; Subtilitatis terebra; Temporis nepos Ex Veritate matre; mellis alveus; Mundique et animarum Sacerdos unicus; Securis,que errorum; inque naturalibus Granum sinapis, acre aliis, crescens sibi; me prope lassum! Juvate Poster!</p> <p>GEOR. HERBERT, Orat. Pub. in Academ. Cantab.</p>
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Endnotes

¹ The address to Bacon heading the poem includes Bacon's title "Viscount St Alban", but at the time of composing the poem (1620) Bacon had not yet received that title and was known as Sir Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam of Verulam, Lord Chancellor. He was created Viscount St Alban in 1621, after which he signed himself as 'Francis St Alban' and was informally addressed as 'Lord St Alban'.

² *The Great Instauration (Instauratio Magna)* was issued—in terms of a Proem, Dedication, Preface and Plan—together with the *New Method (Novum Organum)* in 1620.

³ Pinus, meaning 'pine', is sometimes translated simply as 'ever-green'; but the pine symbolism means more than just this. The pine is an evergreen; it is also a tall upright tree. Not only is it symbolic of a person's uprightness or righteousness but also it is representative of the spine of man, with its cone signifying the pineal gland, 'third eye' and crown chakra, as used in Dionysus' wand, the thyrsus. Dionysus' alternative name is Bacchus, sometimes rendered as Bacco, which is also an

alternative rendering of the surname Bacon, as can be seen on the title pages on some of Francis Bacon's books. The most famous pine is the cedar of Lebanon, in the highest branches of which lives the phoenix. Cedar was one of the three main building materials (stone, cedar and metal) of Solomon's Temple and palace, and the Ark of the Covenant was made out of cedar covered in gold; all of which helps explain why Herbert uses the words 'profundity' and 'elegance' in connection with 'Pine'.

⁴ Aruspex is an alternative spelling of haruspex, meaning prophet or diviner—a person who foretells future events by supernatural means.

⁵ "Equity's Standard-bearer" refers in the first place to Bacon's position as Lord Chancellor and head of the Chancery. The Court of Chancery was the court of equity and, as "the king's conscience," was the body concerned with conscientious (equitable) law. The attribution can also be applied in regard to nature's laws, in regard to how they are applied—i.e. equitably, conscientiously. This was of major concern to Bacon, who consistently emphasised that all knowledge should be applied charitably.

⁶ "Dispenser of light; Disperser of idols and clouds; Colleague of the Sun" refers to Bacon's attribution made by many of his friends, including King James, as being an Apollo, like the god Apollo, and (as described in *The Great Assizes holden in Parnassus*) sitting at the god's right hand as the Chancellor of Parnassus, the mountain of poetry and the arts, throne of Apollo and Athena, and home of the Delphic Oracle. Poetry is one of the three main ingredients of Bacon's Great Instauration, the three being History, Poetry and Philosophy, referring respectively to the matter to be studied, the means by which it might be known, and the knowledge acquired as a result. Apollo is the sun-god, the god of light or wisdom. He and Athena are the divine Spear-shakers, shaking their spears of light at the dragons of ignorance, or at the 'eyes' of ignorance as Ben Jonson phrases it in his tribute to the author Shakespeare in the 1623 First Folio.

⁷ The "Cornerstone of Certainty" refers to the cubic cornerstone that is laid first, with a dedication and prayer, in the north-east corner of a temple, such as Solomon's Temple. It also refers by extension to all four cornerstones of a temple laid four-square and true, being placed on top of the metaphorical cubic Foundation Stone that contains and represents the wisdom of the universe, the Word of God. The cornerstone is a microcosm of the macrocosmic Foundation Stone. Certainty means that is proven, that it is true, and therefore the building will be properly or 'soundly' supported.

⁸ "Literary Brutus, despoiling Authority's tyranny" almost certainly refers to the legendary Lucius Junius Brutus, leader of the Roman noblemen who expelled the autocratic and tyrannical Tarquins and ushered in the Roman Republic. As a Member of Parliament, lawyer and ultimately Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon was very much an advocate for a form of democracy in which Parliament and Crown (Government) worked together as equal partners, not dissimilar to a Republic. In philosophy, Bacon was the advocate for breaking free of the autocratic and tyrannous rule of academic authority, promoting instead a more truly scientific, experimental and cooperative approach to the discovery of truth, for the common good and glory of God.

⁹ "Atlas of Physics" refers to Atlas, legendary king of Atlantis who is known in Jewish tradition as Enoch, the first to become the Messiah and from whom all the original wisdom teachings derive. Atlas, meaning 'Pillar', also represents the *Axis Mundi* or central Pillar/Pole of the universe, around which the universe revolves. Atlas is involved in holding heaven and earth apart, he himself forming the middle region, thus enabling all manifestation to occur. In doing so he became knowledgeable about everything in heaven, on earth, and in the middle realm of the mind or soul.

¹⁰ Alcides is another name for Hercules.

¹¹ "Sage of Stagira" refers to Aristotle, who was born in Stagira, an ancient Greek town.

¹² “Dove of Noah” refers not only to the dove, symbol of peace and purity, and of the Holy Spirit of love that bears the Word of God, but also to the ending of the Flood, which wiped out the old forms of civilisation and changed the face of the earth, culminating in the discovery of ‘new’ land. It is Noah’s dove that discovered the new land, which Bacon allegorises as ‘New Atlantis’. This is the new land of the mind, with new landscapes of knowledge, acquired in a new or reformed way after the old and corrupt systems have been purified or swept away. The old “arts” are here likened to the flood of waters and barren land that provide no perch for the dove to alight on.

¹³ “Guided by himself and his mother to return to the Ark”. The Ark is Noah’s Ark. It is the ship (symbol of the soul) that sails safely over the ocean seeking new land. It also refers to the symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant, in which is contained the Law, the Wisdom. This is a synonym for the heart, in which is stabled the zodiacal creatures expressing the law of God. His “mother” who helps guide Bacon back to the Ark is his divine Mother, the Holy Spirit that inspires and guides, and which is also known as the Spirit of Truth. That Bacon’s mother is Truth is revealed in the next description of Bacon.

¹⁴ “Grandson of Time by his mother Truth” refers to:-

- (a) Cupid, son of Venus, who herself is the daughter of Time (Saturnus; Greek Kronos), born of ‘sea-foam’—a mixture of Uranus’ semen, scattered by Saturn, and the sea. Venus is also known as Veritas (Truth). Her children by Mars are Cupid (Love) and Harmonia (Harmony). Her special emblem is the rose.
- (b) Apollo, the god of light, music, truth and prophecy. Although Greek myth makes Apollo to be the son of Zeus and Leto, the goddess Leto means ‘the hidden one’ and is associated with divine beauty and motherhood. The statement, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know,” by the poet Yeats, gives the traditional association of Truth with Beauty; and this Truth or Beauty is hidden in nature until drawn forth by Time (Kronos/Saturnus), the father of Zeus. This associates Leto (Beauty) with Veritas (Truth). Veritas is the daughter of Saturnus (Time) in Roman mythology. Leto, in Greek mythology, is the daughter of the Titans Coeus (‘Inquisitive Mind’) and Phoebe (‘Shining’). In Greek vase painting Leto was usually depicted as a woman lifting her veil: hence the Renaissance imagery of Truth with her veil removed from her face, signifying Truth revealed.

¹⁵ “Beehive of honey” refers not only to a rich storehouse of sweet or goodly things, particularly knowledge, but also to the Rosicrucians who symbolised themselves as bees and whose work of service was to gather the pollen and nectar from the flowers of the land, then transmute the substance within themselves into honey for the preservation and maintenance of the whole hive, and for sharing with others. Bacon uses this as a metaphor for the gathering of facts and observations from life, from nature, and then gradually transforming and transmuting this ‘history’ into the purest knowledge—knowledge of truth, which is enlightenment. Honey mixed with wine was the traditional drink of the ‘feast of love’ (agape) in the mysteries—the cup of love, knowledge, joy and enlightenment.

¹⁶ Note that Herbert recognised Bacon as a unique priest not just of the world but also of souls. Herbert is likening Bacon to what he himself was at that time aspiring to be, a priest of the Church.

¹⁷ “Grain of mustard” refers to Matthew 17:20: “For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

¹⁸ In this final part of his tribute to Bacon, Herbert seems to be not only remarking on Bacon’s remarkable faith but also on how it has increased his own faith.