CHAPTER V

WORLD VIEW

The Weltanschauung or the general philosophy of life held by the two poets is an important aspect to be studied in detail for a comprehensive idea of their personality. As is to be expected, their world view springs out of their one mighty passion for God. They who seem to touch heaven with one hand, nevertheless have their feet firmly planted on the terra firma. As a result of their mystical union with God, they become powers themselves and try to uplift mankind.

In Herbert's case, his basic views on the world are generally founded on the ones believed in by the Elizabethan age to which he belonged. According to Tillyard, "Hamlet's words on man are often taken to illustrate the habit of mind of the Elizabethans:

What a piece of work is a man: how noble in reason;
how infinite in faculty; in form and moving how express
and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension
how like a God; the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals
This has been taken as one of the great English versions of Renaissance humanism, an assertion of the dignity of man against the asceticism of medieval misanthropy" (Tillyard 1). The world picture which the Middle Ages inherited was that the universe was all in order and man's sin modified it. This medieval picture continued into the Elizabethan age, which allowed the new and scientific temperament also to co-exist.

Cosmic order was one of the themes of Elizabethan poetry. In Tillyard's view, "If the Elizabethans believed in an ideal order animating earthly order, they were terrified lest it should be upset, and appalled by the visible tokens of disorder that suggested its upsetting" (13). The fear of chaos was very strong with them and it meant to them the cosmic anarchy before creation.

Herbert, fortunately, was not obsessed by these negative ideas of his age. He "believed in a supernatural order that rectifies all discords in the created world; and this intellectual and moral conviction, coupled with his inbred inclination towards sobriety, grace and elegance, accounts for the beautiful orderliness apparent in his poetry" (Bottrall 84).

Herbert shared the basic assumptions of his age and took for granted the traditional theology and cosmography.
The universe was believed to possess a coherent pattern. Every created thing had its own place and function in this pattern. God was believed to be sustaining this grand scheme. One of the prevalent ideas of the time was that a great chain originating from God, linked angels with men, men with beasts, plants and the rest of creation. As every creature in the world is thus a part of this great design, no object was considered to be mean and no action trivial. Every phenomenon was considered to be a manifestation of the divine power.

In "Providence" the magnificent power of the Lord is seen as manifesting itself through all creation. The unbelievable variety of creation containing absolute opposites within itself is breathtaking in its diversity. The unifying cord of this vast creation is the power of the Creator and the principles that govern the universe. God's gift to man is very often amazing. Herbert describes the coconut as clothing, meat, trencher, drink, can, boat, cable, sail, needle, all in one. So thoughtfully has God provided everything in creation that when the earth was dry, the sea was created and to contain that, the mountains. In order that all places on the earth get water, "the windes grew gard'ners and the clouds good fountains" (116). He provides meat and food and spins
"times" and seasons, night and day to create a chequered pattern. To show that He is not bound in His act of creation, which as a rule, follows a set pattern, He provides for exceptions as well. Thus the crocodile moves the upper jaw while most other creatures move the lower jaw. Similarly, while most creatures lie down to sleep, the elephant leans or stands and sleeps. The poet believes, on seeing this wonderful variety, that God is boundless in His creation.

In several poems of Herbert God is portrayed as an Almighty Power and as the Creative Force pervading the entire cosmos. Such a transcendent view of God is found side by side with his more characteristic portrayal of a personal God. God is the "author of this great frame", the universe ("Love (I)"). Mighty God has created everything from angels to dust. The "grosser world stands to [His] word and art" ("Temper (II)"). He creates anew everyday and He can disperse or unite all forces to kneel down before Him.

In "Trinitie Sunday" Herbert refers to God as having formed him out of mud. Such references are scattered throughout his poetry, wherein man is said to be moulded from dust or clay and then infused with life by God. This idea is further strengthened by Herbert's use of the
potter's imagery in "The Priesthood". In "Affliction (III)" too, Herbert remarks that God's breath has given him life and shape.

The power of God who has both life and death, at His command is something that Herbert marvels at in "Sighs and Grones". In his view God is the supreme power, unbound by time and space: "Of what supreme almighty power / Is thy great arm, which spans the east and west, / And tacks the centre to the sphere! ("Prayer (II)" 7-9).

According to Herbert, God's power is "transcendent" and "divine". Everything in creation operates through His will and waits for His directions ("Providence"). In administering this universe, Herbert visualizes God as employing "thousands of things" ("Praise (III)"). To him, God is the Lord of Power "killing and quick'ning, bringing down to hell / And upto heaven in an hour:;" ("The Flower" 16-17).

Of all God's creations, man alone in endowed with the capacity to praise the Creator. This may be because he is the chief beneficiary of God's providence. All created things can praise God only through man. So, when man fails to fulfil this obligation towards God he denies other creatures dependent on him the opportunity for praising the Creator and thus becomes a great sinner ("Providence"). As
Herbert writes in *A Priest to the Temple*, "One singular End of man's creation is that he may be a 'priest' in this magnificent 'Temple' of the 'Universe', and send up Prayers and praises to the great Creator of all things in behalf of the rest of the Creatures" (*Works* 518).

Man had a unique importance and it was believed in the seventeenth century that he was a microcosm. According to Herbert, man is everything, "all symmetric", "full of proportion" and has balance, order and harmony within his own body which but reflect the principles that govern the universe. In short, "he is in little all the sphere" ("Man").

Man is the jewel in the crown of God's creation. Although the angels and the celestial beings may occupy a higher place than man in the cosmic design, only he can enjoy the fruit of God's labour in creating the world. The wind blows and the fountain flows for his sake and everything in the world has been created for his happiness and welfare: "Man is one world, and hath / Another to attend him" ("Man" 47-48).

So special is man to God that He has gifted only him with "reason and speech" ("Man"). In "Miserie" Herbert refers to this sixth sense which is denied to birds and
other creatures. The bird sings but does not know to praise its creator, but man alone knows.

God has given man eyes, light and power. With these he has pierced the spheres as a clever astronomer, dived into the deep seas for the rare pearl and discovered several scientific principles underlying creation. In Herbert's view, it is pathetic that he who has been endowed with so many gifts by God, is using them to find out everything in this transient world but fails to find God's glorious law of life embedded in him ("Vanitie (I)").

There is a distinction between the way in which man thanks God and the way in which other creatures do. The spontaneity with which trees, birds and stars express their praise and thanks to the Lord puts man to shame. They seem to fulfil the purposes for which they were created unlike man. The poet wishes he were an orange tree so that at least then he could bear fruit for the Creator and thus express his praise and thanks ("Employment (II)").

While everything in nature is busy and brings offerings to the Creator man alone seems to be wasting his gifts. This thought makes Herbert cry out in anguish that he is no link in God's great chain and that he is as useless as a weed ("Employment (I)").

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Herbert marvels at the divine principles of harmony, order, balance, economy, regularity and a clock-work pattern of conformity to nature. Man alone has strayed from the set pattern. As a result, he is restless and is not his true self: "He is some twentie sev'ral men at least / Each sev'ral houre" ("Giddinesse"). In Herbert's view "Man is out of order hurl'd" ("Doomsday" 27). Sin has enticed man and led him astray since the time of Adam. That is why, man who was created as a jewel is now a weed in God's garden, a lump of flesh, unable to get a glimpse of heaven.

Herbert's view of worldly life and his advice to man as to how he should conduct himself if he is to be the link in the great chain are found in "The Church Porch". He cautions man against several sins such as lust, drunkenness, gambling, defiance, falsity, idleness, hypocrisy etc. He wants man to be sober, thrifty, straightforward and follow abstinence and aim towards simplicity of living and sublimity of thought. Man should be balanced at all times and remember that he is God's image. He should imbibe the habits of prayer, fasting, charity etc. "The Church-Porch" embodies Herbert's views on man's sinful state of living and is a guide book for man to live properly in the world.

The picture of the model man can be obtained from "Constancie". The "mark man", as Herbert calls him, will be
unfalteringly honest and will accept trials calmly. None can trick him and he cheats none. He cannot be tempted, is virtuous and kind, dependable and constant. He is on the right path always as he "prayes to be so still".

Herbert's Christian belief in the elevating nature of Sunday, the day of prayer, Lent, the period of fast, and Baptism is evidenced in the poems "Sunday", "Lent" and "Baptisme" respectively. A catalogue of do's and don'ts is provided in "Charms and Knots". The poet emphasises the value of prayer, charity and humility among other things. He also cautions one against casting aspersions on others when he is himself imperfect.

Herbert's view on marriage and family relations are found in "Thanksgiving" and "The Church-Porch". He declares that he would not marry and if he does, his wife and children shall be God's ("Thanksgiving"). Herbert wants man to "Abstain wholly, or wed" as God Himself gives the choice to him, but he should not take "by-wayes" ("The Church-Porch"). The duties of a father in ensuring the future security of his children are also emphasised in the latter poem.

Herbert's views on sin are scattered throughout his poetry. Man's susceptibility to sin and the vicious nature of sin are depicted in "Sinne (I)" and "Sinnes Round". It
was easy for man to go to paradise before Adam committed the first sin. Sin has now impeded man's progress ("The H. Communion"). So immense is man's sin that Herbert wonders if our sins will defile God Himself ("Marie Magdalene").

The transience of worldly life is often emphasised by Herbert. He reminds that the "earthly joy is but a bubble" ("Vanitie (II)"). The false pleasures of the world are "gilded emptinesse" and "embroider'd lyes", and are as insubstantial as shadows. Human beings "are but flowers that glide" but unfortunately man's life is neither so sweet nor so well-spent as that of the flower ("Life").

Herbert declares that money is a bane ("Avarice"). It is also the "sourse of wo". It is of low parentage, dug out of the dirty mine; it has no power and value till it is cleansed by fire and stamped with man's own impression. Money has become the man now, and while he digs it out, he falls into the ditch himself. In "Self Condemnation" Herbert remarks that man has become a "Judas-Jew" as he has conducted a "sorrie wedding" between his soul and gold.

Herbert views death as something inevitable. It approaches man from the moment he is born. But it works behind the scene and hence man is unaware of its true nature. Death which was considered to be fearful and
terrible before Christ's death, seems beautiful and graceful since that great event. For, His blood has infused colour into the once pale face of death ("Death"). Herbert declares that death does not frighten him as long as he had God with him ("23d Psalme").

Bottrall has this to say about Herbert's view of man's ingratitude:

Man's ingratitude is, for Herbert, the strangest and most tragic element in the whole world-picture; for Man's true dignity, as he and other Christian thinkers believed, consists in his being the peculiar focus of God's forgiving love. Man, like the rebel angels, had distorted the original design, brought discord into the original harmony; but God in the person of his Son intervened, to resolve the discords and restore the pattern, by taking up himself not only the consequences of Man's sin but the very nature of humanity. Because the Son of God became the Son of Man, humanity's position in the cosmological scheme is of unique significance. (87-88).

Only man is capable of entering into a personal relationship with God, a relationship of love.
In his prose work *A Priest to the Temple or The Country Parson*, Herbert portrays a priest who should go about doing good. He need not be a scholarly contemplative but "Love is his business and aim" (*Works* 284). From all available biographical records it is learnt that Herbert himself practised what he preached as a parish priest. According to him, the parson should not hesitate to "enter into the poorest Cottage, though he even creep into it, and though it smell never so loathsomly. For both God is there also, and those for whom God dyed" (*Works* 249). One of Walton's anecdotes illustrates Herbert's love and concern for the suffering - be it an animal or a human being. During one of his walks when he saw "a poor man, with a poorer horse" that had fallen under his load, Herbert not only went to their help but gave the man some money to refresh both himself and his horse. He did not mind his clothes getting soiled. He told his friends that he would not willingly pass one day of his life without comforting a sad soul or showing mercy and that he would praise God for this occasion (qtd. in Brown 18-19).

Herbert's concern for the poor was reflected even in the language he adopted for his sermons. As his intention was to move his hearers to goodness, he rejected the witty, learned, and ornamental language that he himself resorted to
as the Public Orator and used, instead, a very simple language.

Herbert's compassionate humanity is evident in his writings. He observes how harshly servants are treated (Works 265). The parson should treat his servants as his children, educate them and encourage them.

Herbert believed this mortal life to be only the prelude to a more complete existence. But he did not underestimate the worth of the good things that one meets in the present world; learning, honour, music, poetry, the pleasures of the senses etc. were all things that suggested more substantial joys:

For as thou dost impart thy grace,
The greater shall our glorie be.
The measure of our joyes is in this place,
The stuffe with thee.

("Employment (1)" 9-12).

In Bottrall's opinion, "The tranquillity that underlies Herbert's writings springs from his conviction that God, by condescending to man's estate, hallowed the whole of human life, and by suffering on man's behalf, made even pain intelligible" (141). It is this faith that was responsible for the note of hope that characterizes many of
his poems. Even when he writes poems which are poignant and grief-stricken, they are immediately followed by poems of hope and affirmation. For example, "Longing" is followed by "The Bag" and "The Crosse" by "The Flower". Very often a poem which begins in despair ends happily. In "The Search" the poet laments his utter alienation from God throughout the poem but ends it in a note of optimism:

For as thy absence doth excell
All distance known:
So doth thy nearnesse bear the bell,
Making two one. (57-60).

To what extent Herbert succeeded in achieving his ideal of the spiritual well-being of his people can be judged from the classic description of Walton about the ploughmen in the fields dropping their labour at the sound of the bell from Bemerton Church to join their prayers with the morning or evening prayers of their beloved pastor (White 154).

Herbert's convictions and faith in God's redeeming love as expressed in his poems illustrate his positive philosophy. Though Adam's sin and fall have a bearing on man, Herbert's faith in the redemptive love of God raises him from utter despondency. Herbert is sure that all his learning, honour, pleasure and worldly attractions are not going to help man even a bit in his uplift unless God takes
the initiative of showering His grace on him and thus help him to climb up to Him. He has been created as a piece of wonder by God. That God has gifted him with speech, intelligence and reason is proof enough that He wants man to understand and praise His ways.

Man can get rid of the effect of all his sins through confession and prayer. Herbert is sure that the blood shed by Christ pleads for man much more effectively than anything else.

If God could teach us to see Him in everything and do anything as an offering to Him, it would make our life very pleasant ("The Elixir"). He should also instruct us to see "life in death" ("Mortification"). Instead of going after the transient things of life, if man starts searching for his true self, he can make himself contented always ("Content"). Then he will come to possess a state of mind in which he could accept the joys and afflictions sent by God with equanimity. He accepts God's stretching and contracting him only as a means of making him a better being in harmony with the universe.

This worldly life is fraught with cares and griefs. A positive philosopher, Herbert affirms that the past cannot be recalled and the future is in God's hands. So, man
should be concerned with the present only. Thinking about future grief is not going to remove it; instead, it will extend the period of grief. Man should not grieve in anticipation as it will amount to grieving twice. Herbert wants us to believe with firm faith that grief will not come. If at all it comes, it is almost past, the moment it comes. Man should therefore get rid of distrust and grief by believing in God's promises and justice ("The Discharge").

Grief can also be changed to relief if only man takes it in the right sense, for, as Herbert declares: "Happie is he, whose heart / Hath found the art / To turn his double pains to double praise ("Man's Medley" 34-36).

With the study of Herbert's values and attitudes, a clear picture of the personality of the poet emerges. His philosophy is mostly based on the tenets of the Christian religion, Western thought and the beliefs of his times. It would be rewarding to study Nammazhvar's world view which is coloured by Hindu philosophy.

Nammazhvar's worldview hinges on the relation between the human self and the divine self. The nature of the human self from the theoretical point of view does not appear to be his primary concern. Instead, he is dominated by thoughts of the self on the existential level.
Nammazhvar portrays the Lord as both Transcendental and Personal. Referring to God as paran, paraman, paraparan etc. all terms meaning "supreme", Nammazhvar tries to describe the Indescribable Lord in the opening decad of Tiruvaymozhi:

What existed in the past, What exists in the present, What will exist in the future is the form of that one. Masculine, feminine, neuter; near, far, in-between, singular and plural, the enduring and the non-enduring, the good and the bad—everything has its existence derived from that one who is all in all (1.1.4).

The One spread himself in every particle of water in the wide-spreading ocean; he pervades every minute particle of ether and earth; ever when hidden, he is in every object in every place. That steady One who swallows the entire world (1.1.10)

(Kaylor and Venkatachari 15-16).

Nammazhvar considers the entire universe as the manifestation of God and so identifies everything with Him: "You are the five elements, namely water, land, fire, and the sky, you are the Sun and the Moon. You are Siva, the Lord of Destruction and Brahma, the Lord of Creation"
Nammazhvar refers to the creation of the universe by the Lord in a number of verses, "When there was nothing absolutely, the Lord created Brahma and the gods, celestials, all the worlds, men and animals" (TVM 4.10.1). Nammazhvar believes that all gods form just the body of the Lord. Not only did He create all the worlds and the various gods, but He saved them all at the time of the great Deluge by swallowing everything and bringing it out later. Such a One is also the Lord of Siva and Brahma (Verses 3 and 4). Nammazhvar asserts that the Lord is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, all in one. Behind the many gods, the Azhvar is able to see the reality of the one God.

The creation of the universe is praised in TVM 7.4.9 by Nammazhvar thus:

When the Lord first created the worlds,
The elements five, the mountains and other things were ushered,
All at once and so were the Sun, Moon and stars,
That very moment came up the clouds that shower.
Rains and the lives they sustain, all things still and mobile,
And the minor deities, oh, what a marvel!
(Trans. S.S.A. 659).
To Nammazhvar the sustenance of the world by the Lord during the great deluge is illustrative of His infinite love for the creatures. In TVM 7.5.4 the poet describes how during the deluge, the Lord sustained in His stomach every created thing - the gods, humans, birds, beasts, and all things mobile and still belonging to all the worlds - without their being drowned. From this stage of virtual nothingness, He restored order once again by creating good water first and Brahma the Lord of creation next. This Supreme Lord is none other than Lord Krishna and Nammazhvar wants every one to worship Him. The Transcendent Lord is also the one who is easily accessible to everyone in the form of His various Incarnations. Thus in TVM 7.8.8., Nammazhvar declares that the Lord who is the Creator and Controller of the worlds and who pervades them all and whose ways are inscrutable, is his own "Kanna" or Krishna.

The glory of the Lord is baffling and it defies description. He directs and controls the innumerable deeds performed by the vast multitude of His subjects (7.8.9). The poet often marvels at the tirelessness of the Lord in creating and sustaining the world.

Having dwelt at length with the creation of the universe, the Azhvar tries to go a little deeper to understand the principles governing the creation.

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Tiruvaciriyam 3 illustrates the Azhvar's belief that the Lord created the three worlds with the fond hope that they would all go according to His design and reach the highest state of excellence. All creation goes according to the divine scheme and everything sings His praise. He undertook the magnificent task of churning the ocean and extract nectar for the celestial beings only with this grand scheme in view.

For Nammazhvar, God is the Ultimate Reality. The world and the individual soul are also real to him. But since they are within Him and He is within them, they are parts of reality and Reality therefore is one (Raghavan 59). The phenomenal world, though real, "renews itself continuously according to His design in an endless cycle of growth and decay and revival, of birth and death. It has its origin in the Real and cannot be other than part of it" (Raghavan 59). The Lord lives in everything as the indweller. Thus He is inside everything, inside man too. At the same time He is beyond everything and remains untouched; He is unreachable even by the immortal gods who cannot comprehend Him.

But Nammazhvar believes in a personal God and it is Him he yearns for. Narayana is the Absolute for the Azhvar but very often He is spoken of as abstract and
concrete, impersonal and personal (*Tiruvaymozhi* 2.5.8 and 9). In several verses Nammazhvar speaks of the world in terms of God. Thus this earth is Vamana's earth; the sea is where the Lord reclines, the cattle are the ones the Lord grazed (Ayyangar, D.R. 49).

In *TVM* 5.6 Nammazhvar identifies himself with the Lord and declares that it was he who created the world, that he is the world and that he measured it (as Vamana); that he is the earth, sky, fire, air and water; that he is in the past, present and future and so on. These verses illustrate that to Nammazhvar, "man and God are not two distinct factors though they may be two separate entities. They are not different in connotation but only in denotation" (Ayyangar, D.R. 49).

While Nammazhvar is certain that God cannot be understood by anyone, his desire to probe into the mysteries of the universe remains till the end. Being assured of His grace which will soon make him reach the holy feet of the Lord, Nammazhvar asks Him to clarify the mystery for him: Why God left him in the lurch all these days and why He should now decide to merge with him (*TVM* 10.8.9). This is not an ordinary question but one which goes to the very root of the cosmic principle and the continuance of the world. No one has a definite clue to solve this mystery. It is a
problem "that has never been solved; but it can be very easily dissolved by each one of us by invoking the Lord's Grace and throwing ourselves on it, as Nammazhvar did" (Ayyangar, BR 64).

It is interesting to see what according to Nammazhvar is the goal of man. The ultimate or real value of a thing lies in whatever is bestowed by the Lord out of His own free grace. And therefore, in TVM 2.9, the Azhvar unwaveringly tells the Lord that he wants nothing but His holy feet and he wants to serve Him forever. He is not bothered about reaching Heaven or Hell or neither of these. He only wants to constantly remember the Lord and ultimately reach His feet. The same idea occurs in Tiruvagiriyam 4, where the Azhvar expresses his yearning to hold on to the Lord's feet and sing His glory for ever. His holy feet alone can grant salvation, declares Nammazhvar.

The single dominant mood in his poetry is the mood of craving for God. The Azhvar wants his entire being to be absorbed in God. This craving which starts in his first work, Tiruviruttam continues till the end of his last work Tiruvaymozhi, when the Lord satisfies the Azhvar's passion by taking him to His abode.

While the Azhvar craves for Union with the Lord all the time, he is also filled with agony because of separation
from Him. The twin themes of craving for God and lamenting the separation from Him are the chief end of human existence, according to Nammazhvar. What he longs for is intimate and unhindered communion with God. The communion that the poet achieves occasionally is intermittent and it is not as intense as he wants it to be. He starts analysing the reasons that could be responsible for such a situation.

The foremost factor coming in the way of the Azhvar realizing his highest goal is his Karma which follows him from previous births. So powerful is it that Nammazhvar often qualifies the word 'Karma' or 'Vinai' with the adjectives "wicked", "terrible", "cruel" etc. While he is sure this could be the reason, he is not very sure of what specific bad deed done in the past or the present could have resulted in this pathetic situation. The poet laments his bad Karma and tries to find ways of overcoming its effect. He tells himself that he should abandon sense experience and all worldly desires (TVM 1.2) and worship only God and not anything of the world. He realizes that total surrender to God is the only way to salvation.

Sense organs are responsible for attaching man to the objects of the world and weaning him away from God (TVM 7.1). Nammazhvar wants them to be controlled and hopes to
redirect them in the service of the Lord and in the achievement of his goal.

The question of the freedom of the self to will and to act is linked with one's *Karma* and the cycle of births and deaths. The freedom of the self is limited in two ways — by the nature of creation and by the effects of one's action. The human being cannot escape the limitations which are intrinsic to the creature. God has placed him in finite existence with sense organs and their real powers of enticement. The human being has to overcome these and reach His feet, with His grace. In Nammazhvar's case, there is also the desire to completely unite with the Lord. He cannot free himself from this desire till it is fully realized. To a certain extent the human condition in the embodied state is subject to a tension between the pull of the phenomenal world away from God and the pull of God away from the world. Man cannot extricate himself from this situation merely by his will.

The fact that one cannot undo the past which determines the present existence means that the human self is at the mercy of a power that is outside its scope, and events which are uncontrollable. It is only God who can remedy this situation and therefore Nammazhvar often pleads with Him to
remove his Karma. His poems are exhortations to God who alone can save us.

But, regarding the relation between Karma and God and whether it is outside His control or within it, Nammazhvar does believe that God is responsible for the workings of Karma in the life of an individual. That is why he blames God for having given him a life-situation in which he is subject to the operation of Karma. But nowhere do we see the Azhvar complaining that God is using it to punish him for his sins. He refers to God as the "medicine for removing Karma" (7.1.4) and as a great poisonous medicine which removes the Karmas of his devotees (3.4.5).

The reality of the individual self is never in question in Nammazhvar's hymns. It is simply taken for granted that the self is real and eternal. There is no suggestion that the individual existence is illusory or that it is to be transcended. There is plenty of basis for seeing the individual self as alienated from God; communion is not fully realized but it is communion and not absorption in an undifferentiated absolute which is longed for. In TVM 2.6.9. Nammazhvar experiences God's self becoming his own self and vice versa (Kaylor and Venkatachari 48).
In many poems Nammazhvar uses the Hindu notion that everything comes from Brahman or the Absolute Reality. That can mean that the human self is part of God, in essence one with Him. Everything is a form of that one who is himself without form (TVM 6.9.7, 8.4.9). Very often Nammazhvar speaks of God taking everything into Himself and bringing it out all again. In the pralaya (Deluge) state all is in God but all is not exactly to be equated with God. The individual self existed during this state and God again brought out the self provided it with a body and thereby created a conscious, living self (Kaylor and Venkatachari 48).

The self is dependent, not independent; God is necessary for its being and fulfillment. But it is essentially free though its freedom may be reduced by subjection to the material world. That the self has freedom to choose its course is evident in TVM 1.2 where Nammazhvar asks his self to renounce egoism and the world of sensual enjoyment and to submit itself to God in servitude. One's past Karma may limit one's actions and choices but that power can be broken either by God in response to one's prayers or by the self in exertion of will. This, of course, does not mean that one can attain liberation by an act of will. In Nammazhvar's case, his self has already aligned itself with God and awaits intimate
conmunion. God has to decide when the union should take place.

The problems and frustrations of this existence and the Azhvar's longing to be free from the body and the sense organs raises the question whether Nammazhvar attached any value to this earthly life. Human life is generally considered to be full of sorrow and misfortune. But Nammazhvar does not consider it to be wholly bad. He is aware of the advantages of this life. In TVM 2.3.1 for instance, he says he is fortunate to have his life in this body as it made God's mingling with him possible. Moreover, God made Nammazhvar write a poem on Himself and in fact, became a wonderful poem within the Azhvar. (TVM 7.9 and 10.7). Such a life cannot be bad. But it should be spent in constant remembrance of and service to the Lord. Service to the Lord and His devotees gives the Azhvar joy which is comparable to Heaven itself. The present life may be full of suffering and misery but it offers evidence of God's love and grace. In spite of the vicissitudes of his own heart, he knows that God's love for man is infinitely greater than man's love for God (TVM 9.6).

Yet, intimate and continuous communion with God is possible only if man frees himself from the cycle of births and deaths. Even in this life Nammazhvar experiences
ecstatic communion but he is not content with this. What he longs for is a never-ending experience of communion with the Lord.

Having set the goal for himself as well as for all beings, Nammazhvar proceeds to advise man as to how he should conduct himself. In Tiruvaśiriyam 6 and 7, he cautions man against worshipping lesser gods, mistaking them to be the Supreme Lord. He should recognise Narayana as the Supreme One and surrender to Him. In Peria Tiruvantati 78, the Azhvar asserts that one should not entangle himself in worldly attachments. One should not be excessively attached to the world, friends, relatives, family and so on which are not permanent in any sense. In Tiruvaymozhi 8.10, Nammazhvar declares that service to the Lord's devotees amounts to serving the Lord Himself and so one should render constant and loving service to the devotees of the Lord.

Nammazhvar is aware of the ephemeral nature of the world and so he wants his fellow-man also to be careful. In TVM 9.1, he is practical and down-to-earth. He reminds man that his close relatives, including his wife and children, friends and others remain only as long as he has wealth. When he loses it, they disappear. They do not come to our help in times of difficulty. Like leeches they suck a man's
wealth and do not care for him when he is poor. Wealth and youth do not stay with one for ever. The only one who will never desert us is the Lord. And so one should take refuge at His feet.

The infinite compassion that the Azhvar has for the worldlings who waste their lives in pleasure makes him address them in a number of verses. The second decad of Tiruvaymozhi exhorts men to renounce worldly things and hold on to the Lord, who is the Permanent thing in the world. There are verses where the Azhvar complains against God for not caring for such men properly.

Nammazhvar advocates various methods by which one may achieve one's goal. The simplest method is chanting the name of God (10.1.2). A mere repetition of the name of the Lord will make past Karma powerless and prevent future ones from originating and thus will shield a man from all sorrows (10.5). He says, the Lord does not even look for sincerity of mind while chanting His name (2.7.3).

In TVM 5.1.9 Nammazhvar says that a desperate and ignorant cry for help may be sufficient to earn God's grace. The Azhvar was only telling himself that he had no friend or supporter in this world and the Lord appeared before him, said that He was there to protect the Azhvar and then united with his soul.
Nammazhvar believes in ritualistic worship too. It too has favourable results, whether done with sincerity or not. In many verses Nammazhvar refers to various pilgrim centres and talks about the good effects of worshipping the deity in that place. Some holy places are so charged with the power and glory of the Lord of that place that the mere utterance of the name of the pilgrim centre is enough to win the Lord's grace. In TVM 10.8.1 the poet says that he just said "Tirumaliruncolai" and the Lord entered his heart completely.

In a few verses he highlights the benefits of meditation and doing service to the Lord by offering fresh flowers to Him (TVM 10.5) and by worshipping in the temples (TVM 7.10).

In addition to these, Nammazhvar prescribes renunciation as a way toward liberation. In TVM 1.2.1. he proclaims that one should renounce everything and completely surrender to the Lord of Heaven. Renunciation does not mean choosing the life of an ascetic and going into the forest. It is rather, a proper understanding of the true nature of the self. As the self which had its origin in God is related to Him, any attachment other than of God would mean losing the self. So, the world cannot be the goal of one's striving. It should
be seen as something under the control of God. The self should not be associated with the material world, according to Nammazhvar.

Although Nammazhvar advocates the performance of ritual acts as one of the methods of worship, it is bhakti or loving devotion that is characteristic of his hymns. Some consider that it is not merely bhakti but prapatti or saranagati (loving surrender) that Nammazhvar glorifies. The surrender of the self to God as the sole refuge is prapatti (TVM 6.10.10) and it is more of an attitude than an action, and it includes bhakti. Kaylor and Venkatachari observe:

One could argue that the Tiruvaymozhi advocates different approaches for different types of persons with their varying abilities and preferences; but one would receive no help from the texts themselves, which do not make any neat divisions among people and do not suggest any hierarchy of means.... Nammazhvar rather frustratingly leaves the whole matter open, so little is he interested in systems of any kind (68).
This leads us to a very important characteristic of the poet - his compassion for the world. Nammazhvar is not satisfied with his own personal salvation. His immense sympathy for his fellow-beings is evident in a number of hymns. The very first verse of Tiruviruttam is a prayer to the Lord that the entire humanity should not wallow in this sorry state of false knowledge, evil conduct and filthy body. His compassion for the erring humanity makes Nammazhvar accuse the Lord of being selfish and not caring for the well-being of the world. At the same time, he calls upon his fellow beings to give up worldly pleasure and to turn towards God, who alone can grant them everlasting happiness. Not finding encouraging response from them, the Azhvar becomes bitter and decides not to bother about them any more. He is satisfied that, with the grace of the Lord, he has wiped out pain from his mind (Peria Tiruvantati 25). But this bitterness is short-lived and in verse 47 he pleads with the Lord for the world once again.

In Tiruvaymozhi the Azhvar even condemns God for His indifference to man's sufferings. In 3.1.4 he asks the Lord how He can indulge Himself in merely enjoying the sweet fragrance of the tulasi leaves instead of doing His duty of protecting the worldlings. There are also a number of verses where the Azhvar addresses his fellow-men.
These hymns talk of the emptiness of human life and the vanity of human wishes and highlight the greatness and the glory of God.

The philosophy of the West and the East seems to converge in the poetry of Herbert and Nammazhvar. Both believe in the Transcendent and personal aspects of God, the universe being His manifestation, the transience of worldly life which is only the prelude to a more complete life and man's sinful nature, which can be conquered by God's love and grace. They have a great compassion for humanity. The goal of life is, for both, communion with God. The poets also share a note of optimism and hope, and their philosophy is positive. Points of divergence are also found in them as a result of their different religious backgrounds, in matters relating to the origins of human life, sin, attitude to death and so on.

Having dwelt at length on the content, thoughts and philosophy of the two poets, it would be a rich experience to study the poetic techniques, devices and other formalistic aspects of their poetry.