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Candidate session number			
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Examination session (May or November)	MAY	Year	2013

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: ENGLISH 1  
(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: William Blake's depiction of the Church of England and organised religion, through a selection of his poems of Innocence and Experience.

**Candidate's declaration**

*If this declaration is not signed by the candidate the extended essay will not be assessed.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

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Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters)

## Comments

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

chose a research question which, although not highly original was of great interest to her and she deliberated at length about which sources to use, experimenting with a variety of possibilities initially. really did work independently and always had a clear sense of purpose and focus throughout the writing period. Most of her research concerning criticism and background information was undertaken on the internet; she used this thoughtfully and was able to demonstrate the ability to discriminate and select appropriately.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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## Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Assessment criteria	Achievement level		
	First examiner	maximum	Second examiner
A research question	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
B introduction	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
C investigation	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
D knowledge and understanding	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
E reasoned argument	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
F analysis and evaluation	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
G use of subject language	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
H conclusion	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
I formal presentation	2	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
J abstract	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
K holistic judgment	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total out of 36	33		<input type="checkbox"/>

**William Blake's depiction of the Church of  
England and organised religion, through a  
selection of his poems of Innocence and  
Experience.**

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Name:

Candidate number:

Subject: English A1

Supervisor:

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## Abstract

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William Blake's two most famous books in which his ideas were the most accessible are, "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience". Blake's "Songs of Innocence" is a collection of poems that are all products of the human mind in the state of innocence, tending to be from the pastoral point of view of a child, as children conventionally represent the very essence of innocence. The "Songs of Experience", is also a collection of poems, however these poems juxtapose with the innocent view of the "Songs of Innocence" as they are written from the point of view of an adult, and reflect the state of experience. Many of the poems from both books go in pairs, and so the same issues can be seen through the two different perspective lenses of innocence and experience, as Blake had a very critical attitude towards the Church of England, and organised religion as a whole, this issue was addressed in many of his poems. In an attempt to explore and gain a deeper understanding of Blake's views towards the Church and organised religion, I chose the following topic for my essay:

**William Blake's depiction of the Church of England and organised religion, through a selection of his poems of Innocence and Experience.**

I chose four pairs of poems which I felt were most relevant to my topic, and carried out an in depth analysis of all of them, using the internet and a William Blake DVD for background information.

Through my research, Blake's views towards the Church of England became very clear. My conclusion contains an outline of Blake's critical attitude towards the Church of England as represented in the selection of poems I have chosen, showing that Blake was hugely against social inequality, political authority, repression and restrictive morality, which he felt the Church of England, and organised religion as a whole greatly promoted.

## Introduction

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William Blake was an English poet, painter, and printmaker in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. He was born in 1757, and died in 1827. He is considered the founder of English romanticism, bridging the gap between the rigid Augustan period and the Romantic one, also known as the Age of Revolution. The certainties of the Augustan Age were crumbling under an era characterised by major fundamental changes in British society; namely industrialisation of the economy and political oppression to put down social discontent. One reason for the latter was the French and American revolutions (both of which he supported) heavily influencing Blake's work. Blake was against absolute political authority, restrictive morality, social inequality, sexual repression, and most importantly, organised religion, which he felt promoted all of the aforementioned. Blake remained largely unrecognised throughout his career. His work was dismissed until years after his death. He was considered a madman, single-minded and abstract, using obscure symbolic imagery, but was unique amongst his contemporaries, writing and even illustrating, his own mythology. It is as if he had his own personal revolution of the mind.

Blake believed himself a prophet of the New Age, and his identification with free love and democracy made him a hero among many modern writers and artists. Blake was very religious using The Bible to learn how to read, hence his poems' biblical connotations. He was a Christian, but not in the orthodox sense. His image of God was that of a loving and forgiving being not restricting or condemning. For Blake, the Church and believing in God were mutually exclusive and were generally at cross-purposes. He believed that the Church of England and the Catholic Church were political institutions supporting a ruling class while God was not. He had a very critical attitude towards the Church of England and rejected its authority. Blake believed that the main message in the Gospels was that each person can have direct contact with God so a church is not needed. Blake believed that God was being misused by the Church on behalf of the state which stood only for the privileges of the rich. He deeply disagreed with the Old Testament view that God was your judge and his rules must

be obeyed<sup>1</sup>. Man will probably fail in doing so and will go to hell unless he listens to God's priests and obeys the King. Instead, he supported the New Testament view based on the life of Jesus; that God is loving and one must try to emulate him, leading one to heaven. This does not require priests or religious jurists to achieve.

The two most famous books published by Blake, in which he tried to make his ideas most accessible are "*Songs of Innocence*" and "*Songs of Experience*". The "*Songs of Innocence*" are all products of the human mind in the state of innocence, tending to be from the point of view of children as children conventionally embody the very essence of innocence. In Blake's opinion, childhood is about the only time when the weight of sin and corruption are nonexistent. This book was published in 1789, which was the same year the French Revolution started, when Blake was full of optimism for the future.

The "*Songs of Experience*", obviously reflect the state of experience, and are from the point of view of an adult. These songs show the discontent of how things really are and recreate the world of a complex mind and a stained heart. This book was published in 1794, which was the worst year in the Reign of Terror, which sickened Blake and made him lose hope in revolution and see the true image of the world. Both of these books together, according to Blake's own subtitle for them "*show the two contrary states of the Human Soul*"<sup>2</sup>. They contrast the idyllic, pastoral point of view of childhood against the fallen and urbanized adult world of subversion and repression. The poems in *Innocence* draw attention to the positive aspects of a 'natural' human being. This is a reverse in *Experience* to draw attention to the corruption and distortion of experience, and criticize the authority of the Church of England which, in his view has brought about this corruption. Many of the poems from *Innocence* and *Experience* go together into pairs, so that the same situation is seen through two different lenses. Blake sought to bring *Innocence*, his thesis, together with the *Experience*, its antithesis, to form a new synthesis which would offer a new way forward for the understanding and could positively change the world, introducing his own new form of a pure religion. In my essay, I will explore four pairs of poems from both of these books to compare the portrayals of the Church of England in both the states of *Innocence* and *Experience*. The poems I have chosen are: "*On Another's Sorrow*" and "*A Poison Tree*", "*The Divine*

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<sup>1</sup> Blake even created a character in his mythology called *Urizen*, meaning 'your reason' or 'horizon' which means 'limit' in Ancient Greek as *Urizen* personifies the traditional, mistaken portrayal of God as an old man with a beard and a severe face, judging everyone and setting them repressive rules to follow.

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songs\\_of\\_Innocence\\_and\\_of\\_Experience](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songs_of_Innocence_and_of_Experience)



*Image*” and “*The Human Abstract*”, the two “*Chimney Sweeper*” poems, and the two “*Holy Thursday*” poems.

## Main Body

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### "On Another's Sorrow" and "A Poison Tree"

"On Another's Sorrow", is a poem of Innocence. Like many of Blake's works, it is simple and childlike to illustrate the state of innocence, maintaining its profound meaning. The poem asks the same question throughout: how can one see another filled with grief, and not empathize? After, Blake reassures the reader that a lack of human empathy does not mean a lack of divine empathy and that God is the model for our character. We are in his divine image. Throughout the poem, rhetorical questions are asked, to which the answers are 'No'. "*Can I see another's woe, /And not be in sorrow too?*"<sup>3</sup> These rhetorical questions force us to stress the right answer of no in our head and think about them more deeply as if in a prayer. Another prayer-like technique Blake uses in the poem is repetition. He repeats the line: "*No, no! Never can it be! /Never, never can it be!*"<sup>4</sup> about lacking empathy. The repetition not only emphasizes the fact that it is, or should be, impossible to ignore someone's pain; it makes the poem sound more prayer-like. The fact that the poem is also in trimeter and tetrameter rhyming couplets gives it a steady rhythm and makes it even more akin to a prayer. The last four stanzas tell us the model behaviour of God who cares even for the tiny bird "*the wren with sorrows small*"<sup>5</sup>. This makes you want to act the same as God and be as loving and caring as He is. "*Till our grief is fled an gone /He (God) doth sit by us and moan.*"<sup>6</sup> As the Church of England is "God's institute on Earth" it should always be there for people and their struggles, however, this is strongly contrasted with the reality of the coldness and corruption of the church, which is later clearly presented in other Experience poems.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1 - "On Another's Sorrow" lines 1 – 2

[http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On\\_Anothers\\_Sor.htm](http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On_Anothers_Sor.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1 - "On Another's Sorrow" lines 11-12

[http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On\\_Anothers\\_Sor.htm](http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On_Anothers_Sor.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Appendix 1 - "On Another's Sorrow" line 14

[http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On\\_Anothers\\_Sor.htm](http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On_Anothers_Sor.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Appendix 1 - "On Another's Sorrow" lines 35-36

[http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On\\_Anothers\\_Sor.htm](http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On_Anothers_Sor.htm)

"*A Poison Tree*" is a poem of Experience that matches "*On Another's Sorrow*"; it shows the dark side of human nature, twisting the classic story of Adam and Eve, which marked the fall of innocence. It tells how anger can either be dispelled by goodwill or nurtured to become a deadly poison. It shows great contrast between the treatment towards a friend and a foe: "*I was angry with my friend:/I told my wrath, my wrath did end. /I was angry with my foe: /I told it not, my wrath did grow.*"<sup>7</sup> As can be seen here, the poem is in iambic trimeter couplets almost like a nursery rhyme, juxtaposing its sinister theme, this stanza makes the distinction we have between 'friend' and 'foe', and causes you to think twice about that distinction. It is effective how the syntax in this stanza is the same twice and Blake just substitutes four words to wholly alter the meaning. In the second stanza, Blake describes nurturing his resentment towards his foe which symbolically grows into a poison tree that bears a poisonous fruit. Blake's use of pleasant gardening diction for this sinister topic has a powerful ironic effect. "*And I watered it in fears / And I sunned it with smiles,*"<sup>8</sup> The Poisonous fruit that the tree bears is an apple which makes the reader immediately think of the apple of sin in the story of Adam and Eve. This apple, however, is one of death born from sin and kills the foe, a fact about which no regret or guilt is expressed. Thus "*On Another's Sorrow*" shows how sympathetic and caring people can and should be while "*A Poison Tree*" shows how horrible people can be and cause real physical and psychological harm to others as in the end of it: "*In the morning glad I see; /my foe outstretched beneath the tree.*"<sup>9</sup> The shocking use of "*glad*" depicts how cold and calculating people can be and obtain satisfaction from hurting or destroying others. The poem ("*A Poison Tree*") is clearly an opposition towards the Church of England, and its suppression of vindictive emotions, symbolized in an apple carrying a biblical connotation to the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden.

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<sup>7</sup>Appendix 2 - "*A Poison Tree*" stanza 1

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-poison-tree/>

<sup>8</sup>Appendix 2 - "*A Poison Tree*" lines 5 and 6

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-poison-tree/>

<sup>9</sup>Appendix 2 - "*A Poison Tree*" lines 15-16

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-poison-tree/>

“The Divine Image” and “The Human Abstract”

“The Divine Image” is another poem of Innocence. The theme of this poem is to deliver the message of the importance of pity, peace, love and mercy. Therefore each of those words are repeated throughout the poem at least once in each stanza, making it sound like a chant or prayer, and giving it a simple ballad form. This poem shows the qualities of Jesus in the Christian Gospels and says that we humans can be like him, that we can share the same divine qualities, no matter who we are. “In heathen, Turk, or Jew”,<sup>10</sup> these qualities can be appealed to by people of all races and religions. Blake makes this poem very simple writing it in ballad stanzas to emphasize how easy it is to have these characteristics, and how God has made it very simple; all we need to do is show “Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love”<sup>11</sup>. However, the poem states how each of these qualities, associated with innocence, and divinity takes a human form; therefore these factors associated with God are actually inside of us. With Blake trying to introduce a new form of religion through his poems, and criticize the church, is Blake saying that we are actually God??) If all the rules and regulations of the church were stripped away, would the solid truth be that religion is actually the idea that a person’s real and ultimate identity is God, therefore the Church, which is the source of corruption (shown in “The Human Abstract”) is actually not needed, and actually, all we, as humans should do is expose our true identity’s and the four “virtues of delight”<sup>12</sup> we all possess to make this world, an idyllic place?

The antithesis of “The Divine Image” is “The Human Abstract”. The title alone, “Human Abstract” is devoid of any sense of the divine; while Blake associates good with an “Image”, evil is associated with the “Abstract”, giving a harsh and unconnected tone. It contrasts with “The Divine Image”, emphasizing how difficult evil is to arrive at as opposed to good. This is Blake’s version of how evil first began and how it sustained. To reinforce that “The Divine Image” is the antithesis of “The Human Abstract”, the four words mercy, pity, peace

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix 3 - “The Divine Image” line 18

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172912>

<sup>11</sup> Appendix 3 - “The Divine Image” line 1

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172912>

<sup>12</sup> Appendix 3 - “The Divine Image” line 3

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172912>

and love are all re-used in this poem but this time these characteristics are given an egotistical origin. “*Pity would be no more /If we did not make somebody poor,*”<sup>13</sup> This time pity, which is compassion and is a good thing, depends on there being someone poor to pity. As Blake uses the word “*make*”, Blake is implying that some people are forced into poverty so that others can pity them and gain twisted satisfaction from this, instead of having a fair society in which everyone’s material needs are properly met. Blake repeats this idea to make it sink in: “*And mercy no more could be /If all were as happy as we.*”<sup>14</sup> As for Peace, Blake says: “*And mutual fear brings Peace,*”<sup>15</sup> This suggests that peace is not chosen positively, but rather only to avoid harm from others. Ironically, fear is what the Church does use. From this cynical beginning, Blake then explains how sin and the present unjust social order started. Blake personifies the worst characteristics people have, for example: “*Then Cruelty knits a snare,*”<sup>16</sup> By personifying these characteristics Blake forces us to form disturbing mental pictures of them. “*The Human Abstract*” shares the same conceit, as “*A Poison Tree*”, an evil and deadly tree which bears a poisonous fruit that’s a temptation. The difference between these poems is that the tree in “*A Poison Tree*” is grown from the personal hate we have towards a foe while the tree in “*The Human Abstract*” is a result from what happens when one group has power and is cruel and harsh to another group who are weak and humble before them; this is a direct reference to the Church and is the origin of the verse: “*Then humility takes root /Underneath his (Cruelty’s) foot.*”<sup>17</sup>

The final stanza gives us the key to the poem, that the “*Gods of Old*”, but significantly not the God of the present day (so not the New Testament), searched everywhere to find this tree, only to find it growing in the human brain. This tells us that the existence of this tree of the knowledge of evil is real, but only metaphorically and not literally, and that man (mainly the church) and not God is the origin of evil<sup>18</sup>. Pity, peace and mercy, are not qualities that are

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<sup>13</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” lines 1-2

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>14</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” lines 3-4

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” line 5

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>16</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” line 7

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>17</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” lines 11-12

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>18</sup> This idea of evil originating in the mind of man, is also the central metaphor of one Blake’s Experience poems, “*London*”, where everyone has “*mind-forged manacles*” (appendix 9, *London* line 8), meaning that the

actually needed if “*all were as happy as we.*”<sup>19</sup>, however these qualities are set up by the Church with the purpose of empowering themselves; using fear to control. As “*humility takes its root/ underneath his foot.*”<sup>20</sup>, the corrupt institute, the church, actually abuses good qualities in order to gain power.

### “The Chimney Sweeper” (Innocence) and “The Chimney Sweeper” (Experience)

Another innocence poem is “*The Chimney Sweeper*”. This poem is about a little boy who has been sold by his parents to be a chimney sweep at a very young age. The poem is told by the little boy, so it is very innocent coming from a small child’s point of view. What makes this poem so poignant is that the little boy does not understand how bad his life conditions are as he is still in a state of childish innocence, simply accepting life as it is. When the little boy’s friend, Tom, gets his white hair that “*curled like a lamb’s back,*”<sup>21</sup> shaven off, it symbolizes these little children’s childhood being shorn away. That Tom’s hair was white and like a lamb. It represents innocence and purity in its association with this typical symbol of Jesus. The little boy, unlike the reader, cannot understand that, and when he sees Tom crying about his hair tells him: “*Hush, Tom! Never mind it, for, when your head’s bare, /You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair!*”<sup>22</sup> This line displays how these poor children, who are entirely based on reality at that time, just accept everything. A touching part in this poem is when Tom dreams that all the little chimney sweepers are locked up in black coffins but then an angel comes with “*a bright key*”<sup>23</sup> and sets them free. They rise to the clouds, and the angel tells the boy that if he’s good he’ll “*have God as his father, and never want joy.*”<sup>24</sup> This dream is a chain of typically Biblical and Blakean symbolism. Firstly the black

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only restrictions over man are “mind-forged” (appendix 9, London line 8), coming from ideas imposed upon us by external authorities, and mainly religious institutions. This poem is attached as an appendix. (appendix 9)

<sup>19</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” line 4

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>20</sup> Appendix 4 - “*The Human Abstract*” lines 11-12

[http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 5 - “*The Chimney Sweeper*” (Innocence) line 6

<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/628/>

<sup>22</sup> Appendix 5 - “*The Chimney Sweeper*” (Innocence) lines 7-8

<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/628/>

<sup>23</sup> Appendix 5 - “*The Chimney Sweeper*” (Innocence) line 13

<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/628/>

<sup>24</sup> Appendix 5 - “*The Chimney Sweeper*” (Innocence) line 20

coffins that all the sweepers are in symbolize their dark and miserable lives and the soot they are always covered with. They also symbolize the fact that most of the chimney sweepers will die young. When the angel comes and sets them free, it symbolizes how they will all be welcome into heaven where they will finally be happy, leaving their horrific past, as symbolized by their chimney bags behind, and finally have a proper father who cares for them in God. In the last stanza of this poem, Blake makes 'a powerful juxtaposition between the dream full of light and happiness to where the boys wake up in the dark and cold to get dressed to start their job, making you pity all the innocent child laborers. This is a very clear indictment towards the Church, as they condone the ill treatment of these young chimney sweeps. How could the Church permit such abuse? With its' power, the Church could improve the life for the chimney sweeps, but very little, if any effort has been put to try and do so.

The contrast of this poem is "*The Chimney Sweeper*" from "*Songs of Experience*". This poem is written as if it is a dialogue, with a question and response format. Blake makes you sympathize with the chimney sweeper as he is reduced using a metonym from a boy to "*A little black thing among the snow*"<sup>25</sup>. This tells the truth that the chimney sweeper has been made sub-human, a "*thing*". By putting the snow in the background Blake paints a striking black and white contrasting image for the reader. The parents have clothed their boy "*in the clothes of death*,"<sup>26</sup> destining him to an early death, and in the last stanza, the speaker reveals that although his parents have sold him as a chimney sweeper, and have drawn out for him this terrible fate, they are in Church, praying: "*And are gone to praise God and His priest and king*,"<sup>27</sup> This line shows how Blake is against the Church, as it permits people to do unpardonable things like selling their own children, and is in league with the state (the King) to allow this to go on. It is also ironic that after the parents of this boy have sold and abandoned him, they still have the nerve to go to the church and pray. Both poems contrast greatly with the other, as in the Innocence poem, the sweeper is hopeful but naïve, while in

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<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/628/>

<sup>25</sup> Appendix 6 - "*The Chimney Sweeper*" (*Experience*) line 1

<http://www.blakesongsettings.co.uk/index.php/the-poems/100-the-chimney-sweeper>

<sup>26</sup> Appendix 6 - "*The Chimney Sweeper*" (*Experience*) line 7

<http://www.blakesongsettings.co.uk/index.php/the-poems/100-the-chimney-sweeper>

<sup>27</sup> Appendix 6 - "*The Chimney Sweeper*" (*Experience*) line 11

<http://www.blakesongsettings.co.uk/index.php/the-poems/100-the-chimney-sweeper>

the Experience poem, the chimney sweeper fully understands how his parents, the Church and the State have betrayed him.

“Holy Thursday” (Innocence) and “Holy Thursday” (Experience)

Both the “*Holy Thursday*” poems refer to a traditional Charity School service at St. Paul’s Cathedral, to celebrate the fortieth day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Charity schools were institutions that were established to educate and care for thousands of orphan children in London. In the Innocence poem, the clean-scrubbed orphans of London flow into St. Paul’s Cathedral “*like Thames waters flow.*”<sup>28</sup>, the river running straight through the heart of London, carried along by the invisible stream of their innocent faiths. And just as the children are likened to flowing into the Cathedral, each stanza in the poem contains two rhyming couplets suggesting the same idea of the flow of the children. As the children are dressed in bright colours, they form a joyful multitude, with their “*radiance*”<sup>29</sup> similar to that of a multitude of lambs, the typical representation of Jesus, emphasizing the children’s gentle innocence, and reminding the reader of Jesus’s kindhearted care for children. The children are then described as being “*flowers of London town!*”<sup>30</sup> a description accentuating the children’s beauty and fragility, completely disregarding the fact that they are actually the city’s burden, they are instead London’s most beautiful. As the children sing in the final stanza of the poem, they are no longer fragile little flowers, but their song sounds like “*a mighty wind*”<sup>31</sup> or “*harmonious thunderings*”<sup>32</sup>, the image is transformed into something sublime, with the strength of their voices combined towards God, they are put in direct contact with heaven, just as if they are angels. Their guardians, “*the aged men,*”<sup>33</sup> stand by,

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<sup>28</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 4

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>29</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 6

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>30</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 5

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>31</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 9

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>32</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 10

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>33</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 11

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>



and right in this heavenly moment, these authoritative figures sit “*beneath*”<sup>34</sup> them, as the children are raised up towards the heavens.

In the Innocence poem, Blake describes the public appearance of the Charity School children in the Cathedral, and in the Experience poem, Blake critiques the institutions responsible for these children. However, the Innocence poem does also subtly critique the treatment of the orphan children, as a number of disturbing factors are introduced throughout. As the fact that the children’s “*faces clean,*”<sup>35</sup> is mentioned, it suggests that the children have been tidied up for this public spectacle, with their usual state being quite different. The “*Grey-headed beadles*”<sup>36</sup> marching the children are holding “*wands as white as snow,*”<sup>37</sup> and one would think that these “*wands*” actually represent the oppression the children were faced with, being rods, used to implement violent authority. Moreover, as the poem transitions from visual to aural imagery, instead of the interpretation of the children being in direct contact with God, there is a suggestion of divine rage and vengeance coming from the children. As seen, the Innocence is open to two contrasting interpretations; however, the Experience poem could only be read as a harsh critique towards the Church.

The Experience poem actually questions the holiness of “*Holy Thursday*”. The children must take part in a public display of joy that carries no actual reflection to their circumstances, but actually serves to support the smug satisfaction of those institutions that are entitled to care for them. The poem begins with a series of questions, asking the reader how holy it really is to see the display of children living in such misery “*In a rich and fruitful land,*”<sup>38</sup> and could their “*cry*”<sup>39</sup> really be mistaken for a “*song of joy?*”<sup>40</sup> England is a “*rich and fruitful*

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<sup>34</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 11

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>35</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 1

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>36</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 3

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>37</sup> Appendix 7 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Innocence) line 3

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

<sup>38</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Experience) line 2

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Experience) line 5

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (Experience) line 6

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

land,”<sup>41</sup> but her children are “*reduc'd to misery*,”<sup>42</sup> and are fed with a “*cold and usurious hand*”<sup>43</sup>, as long as poverty exists within her borders, England will be doomed to be “*bleak & bare*,”<sup>44</sup> suffering an “*eternal winter*”<sup>45</sup>, being “*a land of poverty!*”<sup>46</sup>. The song that had been sung in the Innocence poem, and had sounded so splendid, empowering the children, is reduced to a “*trembling cry*”<sup>47</sup> in this poem, and while the children represented the mighty river of England in the Innocence poem, here they are linked to failing crops and sunless fields. This hints towards society’s views towards these children as being a waste of the nation’s resources, and symbolizes society’s neglect towards them. The irregular rhyme pattern throughout the poem further emphasizes the neglect of these children, as the irregularity adds to the sense of deterioration of the subject. “*Their ways are fill'd with thorns*”<sup>48</sup>, and these thorns that line their paths link to the suffering of Christ; and as they live in an “*eternal winter*”<sup>49</sup>, lacking spring, summer or rain, where they experience neither physical comfort or the warmth of love, these children are doomed to this unnatural state by the scheming of a system that remembers them only to defend its own morality.

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<sup>41</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 2

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>42</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 3

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>43</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 4

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 10

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>45</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 12

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 8

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>47</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 5

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 11

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

<sup>49</sup> Appendix 8 - “*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*) line 12

<http://classclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

## Conclusion

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William Blake's attitude towards the Church of England and organised religion in both his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* is a condemning one. While Blake's "*Songs of Experience*" are more directly accusatory towards the Church, "*Songs of Innocence*" display an obvious naïveté, effectively questioning the morality of the Church.

The Church is represented as having false morality; an institution that victimises children, and condones their ill-treatment, as seen in both "*Holy Thursday*" and "*The Chimney Sweeper*". Aside from the children's miserable lives, the child in "*The Chimney Sweeper*" (*Experience*) poem was objectified to a "thing," showing the extent of neglect experienced by these children from "*religious*" institutions; and after having been condemned to a life of abandonment from his parents, we see their devotion to the Church as they go to pray, showing the deplorable nature of the Church. In "*Holy Thursday*" (*Experience*) we saw the parading of thousands of impoverished children, cared for only on that day, to give a misleading image of the Church's morality.

The Church is represented as a repressive institution, seeking to suppress and institutionalise the human spirit, as seen in "*Holy Thursday*" (*Innocence*), where restriction and conformity were imposed upon the children, and "*The Human Abstract*" where it is clear that the restrictions and rules that are imposed upon us by corrupt religious institutes to gain power are a result of the use of fear to control us and the setting up and abuse of "good" qualities. "*The Human abstract*" even presents the idea of the Church being the source of sin on Earth, linking it to the story of Adam and Eve (the original sin).

As William Blake is only accepting the New Testament and its basis of emulating the life of Jesus, and the idea that priests and jurists are not needed to do this, "*The Divine Image*" shows us God's model behaviour and talks about the four virtues

of "*Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love*"<sup>50</sup>, going as far as to suggest that we ourselves are God, hence emphasizing the irrelevance of there being church, which in turn summarizes Blake's attitude towards it, as being an irrelevant, corrupt, unholy institute.

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<sup>50</sup> Appendix 3 - "*The Divine Image*" line 1  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172912>

## Appendices:

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### Appendix 1<sup>51</sup>: (*"On Another's Sorrow"*)

Can I see another's woe,  
And not be in sorrow too?  
Can I see another's grief,  
And not seek for kind relief?

Can I see a falling tear,  
And not feel my sorrow's share?  
Can a father see his child  
Weep, nor be with sorrow filled?

Can a mother sit and hear  
An infant groan, an infant fear?  
No, no! never can it be!  
Never, never can it be!

And can He who smiles on all  
Hear the wren with sorrows small,  
Hear the small bird's grief and care,  
Hear the woes that infants bear --

And not sit beside the nest,  
Pouring pity in their breast,  
And not sit the cradle near,  
Weeping tear on infant's tear?

And not sit both night and day,  
Wiping all our tears away?  
Oh no! never can it be!  
Never, never can it be!

He doth give his joy to all:  
He becomes an infant small,  
He becomes a man of woe,  
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,

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<sup>51</sup> [http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On\\_Anothers\\_Sor.htm](http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/On_Anothers_Sor.htm)

And thy Maker is not by:  
Think not thou canst weep a tear,  
And thy Maker is not near.

Oh He gives to us his joy,  
That our grief He may destroy:  
Till our grief is fled an gone  
He doth sit by us and moan.

## **Appendix 2**<sup>52</sup>: (*"A Poison Tree"*)

I was angry with my friend;  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,  
Night & morning with my tears:  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.  
Till it bore an apple bright.  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,  
When the night had veiled the pole;  
In the morning glad I see;  
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-poison-tree/>

### **Appendix 3**<sup>53</sup>: (*“The Divine Image”*)

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

All pray in their distress;

And to these virtues of delight

Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is God our Father dear,

And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is man, His child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,

Pity, a human face,

And Love, the human form divine,

And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,

That prays in his distress,

Prays to the human form divine,

Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,

In heathen, Turk, or Jew;

Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell

There God is dwelling too.

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172912>



## **Appendix 4**<sup>54</sup>: (*"The Human Abstract"*)

Pity would be no more

If we did not make somebody poor,

And Mercy no more could be

If all were as happy as we.

And mutual fear brings Peace,

Till the selfish loves increase;

Then Cruelty knits a snare,

And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,

And waters the ground with tears;

Then Humility takes its root

Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade

Of Mystery over his head,

And the caterpillar and fly

Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,

Ruddy and sweet to eat,

And the raven his nest has made

In its thickest shade.

The gods of the earth and sea

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<sup>54</sup> [http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human\\_abstract.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/blake/human_abstract.html)

Sought through nature to find this tree,

But their search was all in vain:

There grows one in the human Brain.

## **Appendix 5**<sup>55</sup>: (*"The Chimney Sweeper" (Innocence)*)

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet; and that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight, -  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;  
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;  
And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;  
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.online-literature.com/poe/628/>

## **Appendix 6**<sup>56</sup>: (*“The Chimney Sweeper” (Experience)*)

A little black thing among the snow,  
Crying! 'weep! weep!' in notes of woe!  
'Where are thy father and mother? Say!' -  
'They are both gone up to the church to pray.

'Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smiled among the winter's snow,  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

'And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury,  
And are gone to praise God and His priest and king,  
Who made up a heaven of our misery.'

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.blakesongsettings.co.uk/index.php/the-poems/100-the-chimney-sweeper>

**Appendix 7**<sup>57</sup>: (*“Holy Thursday” (Innocence)*)

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,  
The children walking two and two, in red and blue and green;  
Grey-headed beadles walked before, with wands as white as snow,  
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames waters flow.

O what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town!  
Seated in companies they sit, with radiance all their own.  
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,  
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,  
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among;  
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor:  
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172917>

## **Appendix 8**<sup>58</sup>: (“*Holy Thursday*” (*Experience*))

Is this a holy thing to see  
In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduc'd to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurious hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,  
And their fields are bleak & bare,  
And their ways are fill'd with thorns:  
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,  
And where-e'er the rain does fall,  
Babe can never hunger there,  
Nor poverty the mind appall.

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<sup>58</sup> <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/wblake/bl-wblake-soe-holythursday.htm>

**Appendix 9:**<sup>59</sup> (“London”)

I wandered through each chartered street,  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,  
A mark in every face I meet,  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper's cry  
*Every blackening church appals,*  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace-walls.

But most, through midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot's curse  
Blasts the new-born infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172929>

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