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Author

Sloane, T O

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THOMAS O. SLOANE

Dr. Donne and the Image of Christ

Abstract: John Donne's sermonizing *ethos* is a masterful creation, incorporating his individuality as poet and priest into a larger identity consonant with his interpretation of Christian doctrine. The role is also consistent with a dense and complicated style that has both troubled and fascinated readers through the centuries. This essay argues that Donne's *ethos*, while reflecting a penitential stance that has misled some readers, could have been fashioned to reveal his priestly view of Christ, whose image as "Delegate of the Trinity" extends beyond the Gospel into the whole of Scripture and catholic tradition.

Between 1953 and 1962 a monumental collection appeared: 160 sermons in ten volumes by the poet and Anglican divine John Donne (1572-1631).ⁱ Reading the sermons today, however, one might wonder why the collection had been published in the first place. If the sermons have lasting importance it would seem to be as documents in church history, for they are veritable monuments to Establishmentarianism.ⁱⁱ But that is surely a cause for limited readership, perhaps even among Anglicans. In the nineteenth century, for example, the then Dean of St. Paul's (himself a poet) found it "astonishing" that Donne held "a London congregation enthralled" with sermons that are "interminable disquisitions . . . teeming with laboured obscurity."ⁱⁱⁱ

Impetus for the modern collection, however, arose not from ecclesiastical but

from literary quarters.^{iv} The years of its publication were the twilight years of the New Criticism, an aesthetic movement that gave all of Donne's poetry and most of his prose a heightened (some might still say inflated) appeal. Because his youthful poems are particularly inventive and complex and because they often defiantly create their own frame of reference (their speaker's argumentative, moral independence seemed to call for a certain textual independence), they fit well the New Critical protocol. The genuine poem, New Critics insisted, has a certain aesthetic ontology. Because of that, we must respect its integrity and study it as a poem not, as our Romantic forebears did, simply as discourse produced by that remarkable being called a poet. But the insistence hardly dampened our fascination with poets themselves, with their history and biography, and ultimately with the total corpus of their work. This was poignantly true of Donne, ironically enough, who in his youth posed as a shocking, prankish, and often licentious womanizer and in his maturity became a curiously austere apologist of the Anglican *via media*,^v a division Donne himself tried to turn into a drama of conversion. Having ascended to the Deanship of St. Paul's cathedral, he retrospectively divided his life into two dramatic roles: a youthful Jack Donne whose "Mistresse" was poetry and a now mature Dr. Donne whose "wyfe" is divinity.^{vi} How easily the two may be divided, however, remained arguable.

It is little wonder that Dr. Donne would seek to distance himself from Jack. For Jack Donne reveled in his sexuality and wrote some of the most brilliant poems in our language on fornication, seduction, desire, love—poems Thomas Browne stuffily called (in his elegy on Dr. Donne) "of the looser sort."^{vii} Jack justified his earthiness by heaping a braggart's contempt upon those poets who having "no Mistresse but their Muse" find

love “pure, and abstract” (*Loves Growth*). Some of his poems go beyond earthiness into scurrility, such as the one that compares a certain woman’s vagina to “the dread mouth of a fired gunne” (*Elegie: The Comparison*); some verge on blasphemy such as *The Flea*, with its comic use of Trinitarianism and the Crucifixion; some are tender and moving: “So, so, break off this last lamenting kiss” (*The Expiration*). Almost all are highly innovative, particularly in their use of a certain far-fetched comparison that came to be called “the metaphysical conceit.” And all are voiced by a distinctive and colorful personality, often prideful of his singularity and notable for a stunning egocentrism: “Oh doe not die,” he pleads (in *A Feaver*) “for I shall hate/ All women so” when I remember you were one.

When he became Dr. Donne the poet did not exactly abandon his innovativeness or his early flamboyance and virtuoso displays. For they can still be found, often prominently so, in his divine poems and intermittently in his essays. But what happens in his sermons is a matter of contention. During the twentieth century some students, critics, and booksellers claimed that Jack himself could actually be found in the sermons, although proof seemed available only in patches. In 1919, for example, a single volume containing forty-five of the most eloquent passages in Donne’s sermons was published to considerable acclaim. (One of its most enthusiastic readers and reviewers was Virginia Woolf.) The editor, Logan Pearsall Smith, openly invited readers to find “the man of the world beneath the surplice,” the “Dr. Donne [who] was still Jack Donne.”^{viii} With his fame additionally impelled by New Criticism, Jack Donne overshadowed the priest for decades in the whole of Donne’s corpus.

On the other hand, many of his sermons have been available in print for well over

three centuries now, and readers who undertook to read them *in their entirety* discovered that Jack's character—to say nothing of his characteristic irony and wit—has actually all but disappeared, like gold one might say beaten to more than an airy thinness. Indeed this remarkable absence of the youthful, secular poet became in turn a kind of critical problem, one that stimulated at least two approaches. The first examined Donne's sermonic eloquence with minimal reference to the character of the sermonizer. The editors of the modern collection, for example, discuss several instances of various figures of rhetoric, which they call "the literary value of Donne's sermons" (I.83-103). Other notable achievements in this approach include Winfried Schleiner's study of the clusters of imagery.^{ix}

The second approach goes farther in seeking to describe the character of the sermonizer, this Dr. Donne, but like the first approach it offers neither expectation nor hope of finding "the man of the world beneath the surplice." This approach antedated the appearance of the modern collection, having been impelled in part by T. S. Eliot, whose critical writings decades ago cautioned us about overrating Donne as either poet or preacher. Eliot compared Donne's then-available sermons unfavorably with those of Donne's great contemporary, Anglican Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), partly because Andrewes was always "wholly in his subject, unaware of anything else," whereas Donne seemed to use his subject as a "refuge . . . from the tumults of a strong emotional temperament." But Eliot overstates his case, particularly when he describes Donne as "a little of the religious spellbinder . . . the flesh-creeper, the sorcerer of emotional orgy."^x He offsets Donne's occasionally electric presence with Andrewes' more consistent and readily accessible calmness and purity, thereby surely rationalizing Dr. Donne's

popularity with those who prefer taking him in small doses.

A dead end of this second approach is represented by the extensive, uneven index of the modern collection. In his preface Troy D. Reeves expresses surprise in discovering that Dr. Donne “seldom alludes to himself,” having found in the one hundred and sixty sermons “fewer than twenty-five personal references, and only two of these are anecdotal.” Thus for Reeves the sermons seem “impersonal,” and he comments that they “could have been preached – delivered – by virtually any parish priest in England.”^{xi} But Reeves ignores the kind of personalism at work in the sermons.

By contrast, William R. Mueller’s well-regarded study, *John Donne: Preacher*, which appeared in the same year as the final volume of the modern collection, finds that in his sermons Donne reflects prominently “upon his own person and upon his own congregation.”^{xii} Mueller, in short, argues that within the sermons there is a certain unique personalism that contributes to Donne’s preacherly effectiveness, a personalism arising from the interrelations of speaker, speech, and audience. More recently, Gregory Kneidel shows that Donne in his four sermons on the conversion of St. Paul assumes a Pauline style and manner. Kneidel, who intends to reframe questions perennially raised about the nature of Jack Donne’s conversion, offers a rhetorical analysis that pays particular attention to Donne’s “pastoral self-portrait,” his *ethos*, in these sermons.^{xiii}

This shift toward an emphasis on *ethos* amounts to examining Donne’s sermonizing role not so much for its bearing on biography as for its efficacy in making an argument cogent and persuasive to an audience. Style and manner are involved, of course, as are shared values, but so too is acting, for all speakers suppress some characteristics and assume or emphasize others. For evidence that Donne was interested in role playing,

and was very good at it, one need only consider his poems, secular as well as sacred—most of which vividly place a definable speaker within a dramatic situation; at least a couple of these poems have gender-reversals (surprisingly, for this pridefully masculine poet). One might also consider his letters, his other prose, and for that matter his contemporary reputation as a great frequenter of plays.^{xiv}

In the printed sermons, of course, delivery—the actor’s *sine qua non*, a quality for which Donne was famous and which may have accounted for his immense popularity^{xv}—is missing. Also missing, for that matter, are priestly costume and setting. We know, moreover, that after their delivery Donne prepared many of his sermons for print, writing them out in the solitude of his study and consciously devising what he thought he had said or what he wished he had said in oral discourse before his congregation.^{xvi} The sermons themselves were, most likely, delivered extemporaneously from notes—not *impromptu*, like the sermons delivered by the evangelicals of his time, the “separatists,” to whom he referred contemptuously.^{xvii} Instead Donne’s sermons relied on much study and preparation, and they were dependent upon that highly developed memory Izaak Walton (in his 1640 biography) so admired in Donne. Thus what we have in print are not exactly sermons, though I shall continue to call them that; they are more like essays in divinity, consciously devised, “lucubrated” (Donne would say), written discourse. Moreover, apparently among the collected sermons are those Donne himself may not have prepared for print; even in these he seems to downplay such rhetorical elements as occasion and audience. Certainly Donne observes funerals and weddings and events required by the Church calendar. But when he considers his audience, that most rhetorical of all elements, he seems to imagine primarily listeners who are outside the temporal. The

audience he mentions most explicitly and consistently throughout the 160 sermons is the Christian conscience (e.g. II.93).

To trouble that conscience he speaks at times as a repentant sinner—employing tones wherein some readers hear Jack Donne ruing his sinful youth. But, to follow the lead of Mueller and Kneidel, it may not be Jack Donne we hear so much as a repentant sinner speaking for other repentant sinners in his audience, giving voice to certain impulses in his congregation, sinful and timeless impulses that he believed echo through Scripture. Perhaps he created this role in implicit acknowledgement of his prior reputation, even capitalizing upon it, as I shall suggest later. But his role as sermonizer reaches beyond that of repentant sinner. To anticipate my conclusion, I find the role essentially diffuse and purposefully lacking in individuality. Donne’s purpose, when viewed by means of his own argument, is to reject singularity—God, he says, “never loved *singularity*” for “there was never any time, when there were not *three persons* in heaven” (V.113)—and to subsume his identity within a greater, communal one.

In doctrine, style, and *ethos* there are a couple of church figures with whom Donne is frequently paired: the sin-laden Augustine (354-430), whose theology Donne consistently preferred,^{xviii} and of course Lancelot Andrewes, who was Bishop of Winchester when Donne was Dean of St. Paul’s. As for Augustine, some of the pairing seems obvious: both Donne and Augustine confessed to youthful sexual adventures, both converted somewhat late in life (Donne from Romanism, Augustine from Manicheanism), in middle age both had care of their mothers, both achieved fame as learned preachers. More importantly, by midpoint in their lives, both had abandoned a certain “perversity.” The word is Kenneth Burke’s, who argues that when Augustine gave

up his career as a teacher of rhetoric to become a Christian saint, he turned away from pursuing anything for its own sake rather than for God's sake.^{xix} Donne too—the point has not been sufficiently recognized—abandoned perversity in that sense. In his case, however, he turned not from the study of rhetoric but from the pursuit of an ingenuity and, frequently, a moral defiance which comprise the wit heard in Jack's poetry. Nonetheless, as with Augustine, perversity proved sporadically irrepressible.

This is one of several points where the pairing with Andrewes becomes contrastive. Nowhere in Andrewes' highly influential sermons do we find such sporadic perversity as we do in Donne, the sort of perversity which spurs the latter, for example, to ask whether the saints in this life never get a vacation from assiduously serving God, who after all himself took a break on the seventh day (VIII.52-53). Let me cite two further examples which may be more directly contrasted with passages in Andrewes. Donne, with a nod toward Luther, posits a list of questions God has forbidden us to ask. Among them, why we should worship a God whom we must petition not to lead us into temptation (VI.188)? The list is vivid, making the inquiries resemble *praeteritio* (in that we may not have thought of them on our own) and confirming Donne's point about the restless mind's sinful impulses. Second, in another sermon he wonders why, if Jesus's body was so tightly bound in a winding sheet after the Jewish custom, a couple of women could possibly hope to re-embalm it, let alone roll the grave-stone aside (IX.197-198). For Andrewes the petition not to lead us into temptation has mainly sequential significance, coming as it does in the Lord's Prayer after the petition that our past sins ("debts" or "trespasses") be forgiven. We are, Andrewes sermonizes, in most danger of Satan's wiles when we have been "restored out of the state of sin into the state of grace."

The women coming to the Tomb came—as Donne too insists—out of exemplary devotion; they gave no thought to moving the stone, out of a “love that will wrestle with impediments,” nor does Andrewes complicate matters by adverting to the Jewish practice of wrapping the dead.^{xx} But these are temperamental differences. The most telling comparison between Andrewes and Donne lies in their differing approaches to Christology, which will provide a useful beginning to the following section.

CHRIST’S IMAGE

Only twenty or so of Donne’s sermons could be said to directly feature Christ, or say much at all about his human nature—unlike Andrewes’, wherein the Incarnation is “omnipresent in the reality of the Person of Christ.”^{xxi} Those of Donne’s sermons which feature Christ are aimed at demonstrating Christ’s obedience to God’s will. They invariably—and characteristically—emphasize the Crucifixion. Christ’s human nature, Donne seems to believe, is best glimpsed in the moment in the garden when Christ prayed to be spared death, asking that “this cup” pass from him, a desire which his innate divinity then immediately dissolved by asking that God’s will, not his own, be done (*Matthew* 26.39, a passage Donne refers to over twenty times in different sermons). It is in Christ’s moments of apparent weakness that he revealed that he shares our human condition—as he did, second, earlier in his life when he wept (IV.xiii). But in both instances his divine impulses quickly supervened; in the former by bending his will to God’s, in the latter by raising Lazarus from the dead. “The first thing I look for in the Exposition of any Scripture,” says Dr. Donne, “and the nearest way to the literall sense

thereof, is, what may most deject and vilifie man, what may most exalt, and glorifie God” (IX.361).

But in another and most significant respect, Christ is “omnipresent” in Donne’s sermons, too. In Bishop Andrewes’ sermons Christ is essentially the Christ of the Gospels; in Donne’s Christ extends throughout Scripture, New Testament as well as Old, where he appears in innumerable masks or guises. Further, Donne’s Christology, more than Andrewes’, relies not only on Scripture but on doctrine, church fathers, and ongoing catholic tradition. Eliot finds Andrewes’ sermons “stick . . . to the point,” whereas for Donne “there is always the something else” and a sign of this apparently digressive impulse is that Donne’s “sermons can be read in detached passages.”^{xxxii} Andrewes, at least equally erudite, offers prose that is straighter, clearer, less dense, and more tightly woven. Donne’s sermonic style, and its coordinate *ethos*, including those features for which he has been castigated (“teeming with laboured obscurity”) and prized (“the man of the world beneath the surplice”) are traceable, I believe, to his highly comprehensive image of Christ.

To begin, Donne frequently adverts to the traditional investment of Christ’s image with the trappings of monarchy. The investment in turn, of course, simplifies Donne’s work as an apologist of Establishmentarianism. The Judeo-Christian tradition speaks of God as the “King of Kings,” and Christ asked us to pray regularly for the advent of God’s “Kingdom” upon earth. Both the early Apostles’ Creed, then the somewhat later Nicene Creed placed the risen Christ at the head of the church as well as at the “right hand of God.” This kind of governance, this vision of supreme monarchy, in turn sets the condition for what Deborah Shugar calls Donne’s “absolutist theology,” a defining

characteristic of his religious writings, which “differ from those of his contemporaries primarily in the *degree* to which he stresses the analogy between God and kings.”^{xxiii} In his Gunpowder Plot sermon at St. Paul’s in 1622, for example, Donne confesses,

All governments may justly represent God to mee, who is the God of Order, and fountaine of all government, but yet I am more eased, and more accustomed to the contemplation of *Heaven*, in that *notion*, as *heaven is a kingdome*, by having been borne, and bred in a Monarchy: God is a Type of that, and that is a Type of Heaven. (IV.241)

In this seemingly autobiographical moment, Donne articulates a view that he must know he shares with his audience. The comparison itself, however, becomes instrumental and the metaphor often extreme. Like the king, “God gives audiences” and even though Donne claims that our faith depends upon reason, logic, inquiry, study, he also advises us not to commit lese majesty and inquire after doings in God’s “Cabinet, in his Bed-chamber, in his unrevealed purposes,” for there are certain “secrets of State” (V.298, cf. also IX.246), not unlike the forbidden questions mentioned earlier in this essay. So far as the church is concerned, Donne never hesitates to conceive of it too as a monarchy united under her King, Christ (e.g., III.125-127). Nor does he hesitate to disparage and dismiss the new efforts in Protestant churches to locate the seat of governance democratically in congregations or in a “presbytery.” He insists, rather, that “our Religion,” “the Civil State,” and “*Temporall Government*, (what it is, to have a King and a Prince)” are mutually dependent.^{xxiv}

In sum, his image of Christ is set with the features of royalty, resembling those he attributes to England's own monarchy: love, certainly, but a love necessarily compounded of fear (II.xv), "a Powerfull, a Majestical, an Imperiall, a Commanding love" (IX.103-104). Christ's "fullness" was "not fully expressed in the Hypostaticall union of the two natures; God and Man in the person of Christ"; rather, his "fullness" lies in his "continuall administration of his church" (IV.289), a church based on tradition, standing in a "middle way" between Roman Catholicism and other reformed churches, and infused with a new and growing political identity, wherein the English king has displaced the pope as temporal head. The fear which compounds this majestic love of Christ, King, and church comes from our awe at power. And it also comes, above all, from our dread of judgment. Christ is at once our King and our judge. These images become prods to our emotions in sermons aimed at our conscience.

A function of rhetoric, Dr. Donne says, is to "make absent and remote things present to your understanding" (IV.87). To "rhetoricate" is to stir the emotions (VII.203). He does not abandon those ends or simply relegate them to Christ's image as a remote and analogous royalty who will eventually return to judge us all. He serves them partly through comparisons, metaphors, and epithets which appeal to the audience's emotions and which serve at the same time to expand Christ's image. Some of these are conventional, some less so.^{xxv} Wisdom is the epithet Donne throughout his sermons uses most frequently for Christ. When he calls Christ Wisdom he means not only "intelligence," such as that which eternally governs "that spheare, the Christian Church" (III.369)—the metaphor is drawn from Donne's contemporary cosmology—but he also means, more importantly, Christ's place within the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the

Holy Ghost, for which the words Power, Wisdom, and Goodness are respectively equivalent. Thereby Christ, this “Delegate of the Trinity” (VIII.58), is rhetoricated in Donne’s sermons as a wise and knowing judge—to be approached with trepidation and anguished pleas for forgiveness (III.163). He is, moreover, the very judge in whose murder we are all complicit, a recurring theme that makes the Crucifixion a major rhetoricating element.

In all these comparisons Donne’s rhetorical invention appears motivated not simply by the needs of his audience (including such special ones as those at Court or at Lincoln’s Inn) but by the force of tradition and its ongoing compulsion to counterbalance the New Testament with the Old. None are exactly far-fetched. Most have biblical antecedents. Wisdom, for example, Donne draws from St. Paul (V.257) but characteristically assimilates to the Trinity, as when he cites the name of that ancient and great church in Constantinople, St. Sophia, which is Christ in his Trinitarian role as Wisdom (III.328). As one proceeds through the volumes of sermons, one finds the frequency of comparisons for Christ diminishes, until in the last two volumes there are virtually none. That matter notwithstanding, Wisdom as the usual name for Christ in the sermons points toward the significance of knowledge, intelligence, reason, study, and even the place of sermons themselves in the practice of one’s faith (a significance Dr. Donne does not always treat consistently; I shall return to this point). It also recurs to and augurs Christ’s own skill as judge of our lives and continues to expand Christ’s image.

Within the Trinity Christ as Wisdom is “rectified Reason,” unlike that “Reason” Donne refers to in a Holy Sonnet, “viceroy” of the “three-person’d God” which is woefully “captiv’d” within us in this life. The Holy Ghost that abides with us in this life

is “rectified Conscience” (V.66), the very “rectified Conscience” which gives us a longed-for “rest” (V.194, 207). As noted, this part of our humanity, the conscience, constitutes Dr. Donne’s universal audience, palpably so in the printed sermons, wherein it becomes the very target of his rhetoric. I shall return to this point. The point to explore now is that, as suggested, Trinitarianism is Donne’s “theological first principle.”^{xxvi} It is, he says, “all Christianity” (VI.139; cf. V.vi). With an emphasis not unlike that in the Athanasian Creed,^{xxvii} Donne argues that to be Christian one must believe in the Trinity (VIII.59). As a believer Donne finds the Trinity everywhere. If man was made in the image of God, he was therefore made in the image of the Trinity (IX.i, ii)—an argument Donne pursues in several ways. He pursues it frequently through the faculty psychology of the time, which gave man’s makeup three souls: vegetative, animal, and rational, and in the rational soul the three faculties of reason, will, and memory. Trinity accounts for the makeup of the Bible (God in the Old Testament, Christ in the Gospels, the Holy Ghost in the acts and letters of the apostles; IX.155). History itself is Trinitarian: we had two thousand years of Nature, two thousand years of Law, two thousand years of Gospel and Grace (VII.138-39). Why are we then not called Trinitarians instead of Christians? Because “in the profession of Christ the whole Trinity is professed” (IX.55)—the position throws down the gauntlet and makes non-Christians of those Protestants who are beginning to think otherwise.

As the Second Person, Christ “was the occasion before, and is the consummation after, of all Scripture” (V.132). He was “not onely the Essentiall Word . . . but the very written word too” (VII.400). He infuses Scripture—so much so that, as Donne argues in a sermon examined at the end of this section, any change in “Canonicall Scripture”

affects our image of Christ, whose voice echoes through the prophecies, unrest, and longing of the Old Testament. As Wisdom he spoke the proverbs of Solomon (III.328). He spoke the prophecies of Isaiah (V.229) and some of the lamentations of Jeremiah (X.ix). His character was adumbrated by the life of Abraham (VI.ix). Above all, Christ inhabited David, for whom Donne indicates a preference and fondness (II.49). A penchant for David is perhaps natural for Donne as a man, sinner, and poet. David, Donne believes, served as Christ's *persona*, actually spoke as Christ (VIII.142), and as man desired Christ's advent (V.377). Indeed, David emerges in the sermons much more fully realized than Christ himself.

Further, Christ or the Third Person, the Holy Ghost, not only inhabited the character of Paul (VIII.vi) but continued to speak through the church fathers (IX.vi) and thereby sanctioned the great catholic tradition to which the Church of England laid claim. If the effect further disperses the Christ of the Gospels and blurs his distinct identity, it nonetheless elevates the central importance of community, tradition, and the Trinity. As potentate, God himself at times uses the royal "we" (IX.58-59), but when he speaks as creator—as in "let us make man"—he speaks as a trinity, a theme Donne dwells upon. In an ultimate blurring of lines, Donne argues that the Incarnation places *us* in the godhead, and the Holy Ghost places Christ in us (IX.x). Thereby, everyone who becomes Christian becomes someone whose individuality is dissolved—or should be—into a greater whole.

When we put on the "garment" of Christ—when his "Image" is restored in us, as Donne pleads in his *Goodfriday 1613* poem—what has become imprinted in us is "the Image of the whole Trinity" (V.160), an image first imprinted in our souls at Baptism (VI.138-39). It is an image which Donne in his divine poems seeks within his heart and

“a face” which in his sermons he anticipates and dreads seeing after death, when it fully becomes the “one image underlying all the many likenesses.”^{xxviii} But that one image is never and could never be singular. We glimpse *Christ’s* image here in this life through Scripture, tradition, doctrine. When we see it “there,” Donne says with St. Augustine, after death, when we shall at last see *God’s* “face” (IX.129), the image will be ineluctably Trinitarian, Donne’s “three-person’d God,” surely the most mysterious of all Christian images. But this is an imaginative burden he does not impose on his audience. Rather than speaking of actually seeing God after death, he speaks of the soul’s dissolving into the godhead—a dissolving, he says in his penultimate sermon, into at last a “fulness of Joy” (X.228).^{xxix}

Finally, in his unrelenting expansion of Christ’s image, Donne continually expounds on the explicitly moral and theological dangers of considering Christ’s two natures as separable, or of emphasizing the human at the expense of the divine—or for that matter of distinguishing Christ’s personhood from the Scriptures. Because that lesson occurs, among other places, in a sermon devoted to Christ as sermonizer, it will provide a useful transition to our examination of Dr. Donne’s *ethos*.

The sermon (VII.xvi) was delivered before Charles at Whitehall during Lent, 1627, and is partly, the editors claim, “a piece of propaganda against seditious whisperers in Church and State” (VII.36). Donne’s text is almost opportunistic, *Mark* 4.24: “Take heed what you heare.”

Structurally the sermon follows Donne’s characteristic pattern (set by the rhetorical *ars praedicandi* tradition).^{xxx} It has four major sections: a brief introduction and explication of the chosen text, with a division of the forthcoming arguments into usually

no more than three parts; a lengthy discussion of those divided parts; and a conclusion that summarizes the arguments and ends by emotionally applying the lesson drawn from the text. As usual Donne frequently tosses in Latin words and phrases (less frequently Greek and Hebrew), which he translates. He seems often to assume—in the printed versions at least—that his audience had read the chosen text and understood its context in advance of the sermon.

The text, “Take heed what you heare,” is from Christ’s first sermon to his apostles, as reported by St. Mark, and for Donne it has three layers of significance. First, Christ seems to be telling his apostles to listen carefully to what he says for they have an obligation to make his Gospel public and to keep it accurate: “*Ego autem dico*; your Rule is, what I say; for Christ spoke Scripture; Christ was Scripture”(p. 400). Secondly, Christ is also speaking to the “successors of the Apostles,” advising them (here Donne blasts the Roman Catholics) not to believe that “the Scriptures were no more sufficient than their *Decretals*, and *Extravagants*” (p. 403). Thirdly,

And into this part I enter with such a protestation, as perchance may not become me: That this is the first time in all my life, (*I date my life from my Ministry*; for *I received mercy*, as I received the ministry, as the *Apostle* speaks) this is the first time, that in the exercise of my Ministry, I wished the King away . . . (403)

Donne professes to be a little loath that Charles should hear what he has to say, for he is going to speak “of the Duties of subjects before the King” (and “of the duties of Kings, in publike and popular Congregations,” though this latter is slighted). It is at this point that

the sermon becomes “a piece of propaganda,” and Donne’s professed reluctance is less than ingenuous. He applies Christ’s warning from the first two levels to the third, and makes it political. Just as the prayer book of the time offered the paradox that only in service to God is there “perfect freedom,” so Donne extends the paradox to serving the King:

Curse not the King, no not in thy conscience; Doe not thou pronounce, that whatsoever thou dislikest, cannot consist with a good conscience; never make thy private conscience the rule of publique actions; for to constitute a Rectitude, or an Obliquity in any public action, there enter more circumstances, then can have fallen in thy knowledge. (408)

In a long discussion of this third point and in the long conclusion which follows, Donne returns again and again to the text, urging his congregation to be cautious about what they hear, to strive to distinguish God’s voice from man’s and from Satan’s. All speak to us, after all. “Above, in heaven, in his decrees, [God] speaks to himselfe, to the Trinity: In the Church, and in the execution of those decrees, he speakes to thee” (412).

The advice seems to have particular application to a matter Donne touched on carefully just before the conclusion, the argument premised once more on analogy:

The Church is the spouse of Christ: Noble husbands do not easily admit defamations of their wives. Very religious Kings may have had wives, that may have retained some tincture, some impressions of error, which they may have

sucked in their infancy, from another Church, and yet would be loth, those wives should be publicly traduced to be Heretiques, or passionately proclaimed to be Idolators for all that. A Church may lacke something of exact perfection, and yet that Church should not be said to be a supporter of Antichrist, or a limme of the beast, or a thirster after the cup of *Babylon*, for all that. (409)

Charles ascended the throne in March 1625, and soon thereafter married Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII of France. We may hear in Donne's careful phrasing echoes of some of the sedition whispered at the time. Whatever its target, the whispering was bound to have religious overtones, arising from Charles' increasing difficulties with the Puritan dominated House of Commons. Donne is talking about Christ's spouse as well (remotely alluding to the so-called Book of Wisdom), and apparently advocating religious tolerance. But the tolerance—expressed here and in other sermons—extends only partway to the Roman Catholic church (he often uses his sharpest barbs against Rome). Perhaps no church is to be defamed, he implies in this sermon, but none “can be said to have come” nearer Christ “then ours does” (409). His argument's ultimate thrust may be a securing, in the eyes of the King as well as his subjects', of the establishment of the Church of England as not only a spiritual *via media* but an instrument of political instruction. Tolerance is less the point than avoidance of sedition.

Donne's view of Christ's personhood seals the argument. Donne argues that Christ is constantly to be regarded as consisting of two inseparable natures, God and man. It is a personhood, never singular, which is embodied in Scripture:

Christ spoke Scripture; Christ was Scripture . . . *loquens Scriptura*; living, speaking Scripture. . . therefore, when he refers them to himself, he refers them to the Scriptures, for though here he seem onely to call upon them, to hearken to that which he spoke, yet it is in a word, of a deeper impression; for it is *Videte*; *See* what you hear. Before you preach any thing for my word, *see it, see it written*, see it in the body of the Scriptures. (400)

All the books of the Bible become the remains of Christ, the Old Testament as well as the New. It was the prophet Isaiah (8.21) who joined together the “cursing of the King, and the cursing of God.” It was Ecclesiastes (10.20) who warned us to “*Curse not the King, no not in thy thought.*” Donne’s own marginalia cites chapter and verse. He brings David and Solomon into the argument, all aimed at warnings about seditious whisperings. His point is that all these warnings are Scriptural and as such proceed from the voice of Christ, the Word delivered to the prophets and to “great Kings” of old. And now echoing through time the Word speaks its immutable truth to us and our king. Thereby the present is gathered into the only history that matters.

DR. DONNE’S *ETHOS*

A belief Donne held that is equal in rhetorical significance to his Trinitarianism was derived from St. Augustine: that the church is the mystical body of Christ, a greater communal whole enfolding each believer’s identity. This mystical body “implies the renunciation of all individualism, of any conception of being closed in on oneself, of

being separated from others in a unique relationship with God.”^{xxxix} Such loss of individualism was at the heart of Andrewes’ Christianity as well as Donne’s. But there remain striking differences between their sermons, apparent both in style (Donne’s is “sprawling . . . luxuriant, seemingly undisciplined”^{xxxix}) and consequently in *ethos* (Donne’s seems to be, to rephrase Eliot, more unsettled). These differences reflect, as I have tried to suggest, differences in their Christology, their ways of talking about Christ, their images of him. Like Andrewes’, Donne’s image of Christ is omnipresent in the sermons but it is dispersed and less centered on the Christ of the Gospels. Donne seeks Christ’s presence throughout the whole of Scripture as well as throughout doctrine and tradition.

So far as fashioning an *ethos* is concerned, Donne had “a longer work to do”^{xxxix} than Andrewes, for Donne had to deal with his well-known libertine youth, a near-notoriety to which the reputation of the celibate and ascetic Bishop Andrewes was immune. “Discredit a mans life, and you disgrace his Preaching” (VII.151). *Ethos* arises both from what an audience knows of a speaker before the speech and from what they discern of a speaker’s character during the speech through manner, style, and argument.^{xxxix} What Donne wanted them to discern was a man, more or less like themselves, but married to “divinity.” His comprehensive image of Christ patterned his mode of achieving that end.

The first long passage from the sermon just discussed is cited by the editors of the modern collection as offering important autobiographical information: “*I date my life from my Ministry.*” Here, the editors claim, we have “Donne’s own authority for putting the beginning of his new life at his entry into Holy Orders” (VII.36). The matter is of

some consequence for refuting those (like his nineteenth-century biographer Gosse) who ascribe Donne's great spiritual change in outlook to the death of his wife Anne, which occurred two years after he became priest. The matter may have continuing relevance for those who persist in exploring the sincerity of Jack Donne's change in life and who wonder if perhaps the supposed conversion from Jack Donne to Dr. Donne was compelled mainly by the dashing of his political aspirations when James insisted that the only door open to him was not the Court, to which Donne apparently aspired, but the priesthood.^{xxxv}

I shall argue that this reference, like most personal references (whether real or apparent) in the sermons, has another kind of significance. Donne is dramatizing his voice in such a way that, Christlike, he identifies himself with Scripture. The "Apostle" to whom he refers is St. Paul, who in his first letter to Timothy (1.12, 13) says, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." The passage could have even richer autobiographical echoes for those in the congregation (or among his readers) who caught the reference and knew about Donne's youth. But my point, like Donne's, is not about individual life. It is rather that by enfolding his life into Scripture he has shaped an *ethos* uniquely designed for his argument.

And, of course, for his implied audience. As noted earlier, Dr. Donne's most evident conception of his hearers lies in a word which appears prominently when he addresses any audience, at least in print: conscience. To a Renaissance casuist, conscience is the voice within us, the judge of our past and legislator of our future actions, and its

resultant emotions are all too often shame and guilt.^{xxxvi} Because to a religious moralist, conscience is the same in all people, it can serve rhetorically as an inner principle into which almost all other audience characteristics, such as time, place, occasion, collapse. It is to our conscience that Donne claims he preaches and our conscience, he believes, is or should be troubled. Consequently in Donne's sermons the prevailing emotion is almost always unrelieved gloom, a gloom compounded of shame and guilt. This is not to say that Donne never employs humor—as in his jibes at lawyers (e.g., II.154), or his barbs at Roman Catholics (e.g., VII.177, 184, 205); but these moments, like the two sermons (VII.v; X.x) which offer variable, even unstable, assurance of the joy of following Christ as well as the ultimate joy awaiting us tend by contrast to underscore the dominant mood. Christ was himself a man of sorrow (IX.407-8).

Moreover, when he uses "I" in his sermons—when for example he describes his failures at prayer, or his shortcomings in fulfilling the obligations of Christianity—he is speaking in part as representative of the troubled Christian conscience in general and in part as member of Christ's mystical body.^{xxxvii} God's "ambition," Donne says, is to have us all (VI.161). "All," he further says, is the most frequent word in the Bible (VII.247), and in fact, Christ is himself "all in all" (VII.258). If we are not part of that all, the failure can only be our own. God's initial plan was that man "should have passed from this world to the next without corruption" (X.187), but because of Adam's sin we fell and must die. Every person born today sinned with Adam (VI.196) and thus must revert to the dust out of which we were created. But because of Christ we can experience life everlasting as well as resurrection of the body (when "my flesh" becomes "my Saviors flesh," III.112), and because of the resurrection of the body we are potentially higher than

angels, who have no body (VI.297). Blessed assurance, perhaps. But grasping it increases the troubling of any man's conscience once he explores (juristically, in Donne's terms) the extent and nature of his own faith and the obedience upon which those divine promises rest (V.132). Those who hear the Gospel but do not believe are damned in a way that those who do not hear the Gospel are not (VII.396, 398). Those who believe but do not live by their faith are no better off. For God has a contract with us, spelled out in the Scriptures—a legalistic contract by which we can expect him to abide and by which we shall certainly be judged (VIII.281). God "hath given us his Word" (VI.216). But through that covenant the very prospect of our salvation becomes a burden, one that Christians (or for that matter anyone who has so much as heard the Gospel) forego or abandon at their extreme peril. Ominously, an argument that echoes through Donne's sermons employs a central concept he found intriguing in his other prose and poetry, the idea of "nothing"; its theological point is that our souls were made out of "nothing" but "nothing can make thee nothing" again (VIII.283). Here in this lesson is surely the greatest source of anguish, both to Dr. Donne and to his congregations. Oblivion is impossible. Final judgment, the fulfilling of our contract with God through Christ, is therefore ineluctable—and to be feared.

At our Baptism we are delivered over to many tribulations (V.110), in a life that is a "warfare" (V.281). Christ, who did not dispute or flatter but promise (VII.13), promised us above all "rest," which seems to mean a less troubled conscience in this life and eternal peace in the next (V.ix). But to our horror we carry into Christ's presence in this life a "menstruous conscience, and an ugly face, in which his Image, by which he should know me, is utterly defaced"—this passage, echoing his *Goodfriday* poem of perhaps a

decade earlier, is spoken just before one of the famous passages in which Dr. Donne movingly describes his failure to keep his mind focused when he is praying privately (V.249-50), challenging us to consider his failure as in any way different from our own attempts. The world in which we find ourselves is “various” and “vicissitudinary” (IX.63). Man has four names in Scripture, three of which mean “misery” (IX.61). Only one child, Zoroaster, “laughed at his birth”; the rest of us Donne says, Learlike, came crying hither (VI.333). And we came “to *seeke a grave*” (X.233). Continually, the mood is further rhetoricated by recurrence to the image of Christ crucified, and continually the eloquent and repentant “I” reflects the hearers, too.

Because of the centrality and importance of the conscience as his target, in reviewing Donne’s sermons I have not observed a major tenet of rhetoric, which always insists upon the unique characteristics of the particular audience for whom the discourse is designed. As priest Donne spoke in several places, with audiences before him at St. Dunstan’s, Lincoln’s Inn, Whitehall, Paul’s Cross, St. Paul’s cathedral. Certainly in Donne’s sermons at Lincoln’s Inn legalisms abound, as courtly values abound in his sermons at Whitehall. But throughout the entire collection there are very few localisms; rarely do the sermons reflect times, places, occasions, as in the one reviewed in the previous section—the result, perhaps, of preparing the discourse for print and of aiming it universally at the Christian conscience. In the sermons as read, Donne’s conception of the human condition remained consistent from audience to audience, and at the very core of that conception was, as I have indicated, that vulnerable and troubling feature Donne was confident he shared with every Christian, a burdened conscience. In fact, from Volume I to X there are no major changes in Dr. Donne’s religious thought.^{xxxviii} Nevertheless, there

are at least two general characteristics of the audience Donne seemed to have in mind, listeners or readers inside the temporal.

First, he seemed to conceive of his audience as consisting largely of the wealthy, powerful, and educated, even when he was speaking outside Whitehall and Lincoln's Inn. "Estate" may be a collective noun. But Donne narrows its focus to estate holders, including those privileged enough to sinfully spend their time in "unnecessary sleep," or "superfluous sittings at feasts," or "curiosity in dressing," and leave a tomb with "gold or marble . . . bestowed upon it" (X.96). Moreover, his implied audience also consisted of those who had read the Bible and for whom learned allusions, subtle theological points, and Latin, Greek, or Hebrew references would be either appealing or impressive. In his elegy written upon Dr. Donne's death, Richard Busby acknowledges that Donne's sermons, however powerful in delivery, may have been too intellectual for the common man. The virtual exclusion of classes below the privileged from all conscious address is a delimiting characteristic of Donne's *ethos* in the printed sermons, curiously inconsonant with the image of our "pattern" and "Example" (VIII.187) and God's ostensible ambition to have us all.

Second, it seems he addressed primarily men. "Man" too may be a collective noun. But Donne's sermon praising the devotion of the women who came to the Tomb on Easter morning (IX.viii) pays discrete attention to women and thereby makes a conscious shift in his focus, as do his scattered remarks on women's inferiority (VI.94; VII.419). Woman, he notes, was created by fiat, not like man by deliberation of the Trinity (II.337). In an important respect, however, these are cultural reflections—Bishop Andrewes offering a notable exception.^{xxxix} Donne is also deeply aware of the ongoing catholic

tradition in which feminine nature has a variable prominence—as in Marianism for example, or, better, in the ancient practice of referring to the soul as “she” (whose feminine nature Dr. Donne dramatizes in the sonnet “Batter my heart”). Although for the most part the Trinity, his own *ethos*, and the central conception of his audience form a “masculine collectivity,” he could never consciously exclude the vital elements within the body of Christ which are themselves essentially feminine.^{xi} Like Jack Donne who in at least one poem dramatized himself as a woman (*Break of Day*), Dr. Donne recognized that as pastor he has female roles to perform (VI.92), that the Christian conscience was exemplified by Esther (V.xi), that the congregation also consists of the “daughters” of God (VI.283), that the church of which we are members is the “spouse” of Christ (VII.325), and that Christ sits upon the church—Donne says in a metaphor that would be far-fetched were it not based in tradition—like a hen upon her eggs (IX.263).^{xii}

To this audience Dr. Donne presents an *ethos* as a privileged, highly educated man with certain admirably feminine characteristics burdened by the revealed truth and its traditions, who as a result of that truth and those traditions is necessarily also burdened with a troubled conscience, a repentant sinner who has—with effort—abandoned his individuality for membership in Christ’s mystical body. But, as always with Donne, brief summaries lack resonance and can be more onerous than comparisons.

As priest he offers a method of instruction that is at times inconsistent, one that counters his vaunted reliance on knowledge and reason. He trumps all learning with a return to the urgency of repentance. As a learned believer he finds the image of Christ extending, as noted, through the actions of the triune God, and thus infusing not only the Scriptures but also the writings of the church fathers—Augustine, above all, and

Tertullian, Origen, Arnobius, Ambrose Jerome, Nazianzen, Nyssen, Theodoret, et al. Although Donne does not claim that the Holy Ghost/Christ speaks through the classical authors—Trismegistus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca—or through such contemporaries and near-contemporaries as Reuchlin, Erasmus, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, he does not hesitate to draw their testimony into his argument.^{xliii} At the same time, however, he can turn away from study and reason, and even invert the nascent scientific paradigm of the “new philosophy.” You must first believe, Donne argues, and then you will see proofs, evidence of your faith everywhere (VIII.40, 55). On the one hand he will argue that “*Religion is reason and Logique*; The devil hides, and deludes, Almighty God demonstrates and proves” (V.104). Curiously, on the other hand he can remark that we believe because the angels work upon us and remove impediments to our unbelief (X.49).

It is no surprise, then, to discover that Donne’s most consistent reasoning stems less from logic than from rhetoric and emotion: our search for belief is compelled by the recognizable and uniform necessity to acknowledge our sins, beg for forgiveness, and seek repentance even for sins hidden from our conscience (e.g., V.320)—the passage echoes the argument in his famous *Hymne to God the Father* (“When thou hast done, thou hast not done,/For, I have more”). Our quest for forgiveness sends us to the God whom we have murdered, the Person who will return to judge us, and whose death ransomed us for Adam’s disobedience. So posed the situation is virtually self-rhetoricating and independent of the learning that suffuses the sermons. Our greatest wisdom (or so says this man who does not carry his own learning lightly) is the knowledge of Christ crucified (IX.88). The troubled Christian conscience is in sum not

only Donne's target but also the resting point of all his theological groping and inconsistencies.

As a man he shares with his audience the burdens not only of a sin committed at the very outset of human history six thousand years ago but also of the propitiation for that sin, the contract with God which had to be sealed with the blood of Jesus. As repentant sinner and preacher he exemplifies the Christian life in its absorption into the church, the mystical body of Christ. To search the sermons for shards of autobiography is, thereby, beside the point—at least, beside the rhetorical point, for it localizes and narrows Dr. Donne's intention, reducing his rhetorical masterwork to scattered passages, the very passages which ironically offer the best test of my thesis.

For example, an early sermon preached at Lincoln's Inn contains a passage that seems patently autobiographical, in which Dr. Donne seems to look back at Jack Donne, whose reputation as a rowdy student of law in that very place twenty-five years earlier might still have been known to certain members of the congregation there. But it is important to note the context within which Donne sets the passage. He begins, and ends, by echoing the prophet Jeremiah (15.10), who

preached heavy Doctrin, and therefore his Auditory hated him; *Woe is me, my Mother, says he, that thou hast born me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth!* I preach but the messages of God; (and *vae mihi si non*, wo be unto me if I preach not them) I preach but the sense of Gods indignation upon mine own soul, in a conscience of mine own sins, I impute nothing to another, that I confesse not of my selfe, I call none of you to confession to me, I doe but

confesse my self to God, and you, I rack no mans memory, what he did last year, last week, last night, I onely gather into my memory, and powr out in the presence of my God, and his Church, the sinfull history of mine own *youth*, and yet I am a *contentious man*, says *Jeremy*, a worm, and a burthen to every tender conscience, says he, *and I strive with the whole earth*, I am a bitter, and satyricall preacher . . . (II.52-53).

If one were to remove Jeremiah's voice, and abstract the passage beginning with "I preach but the sense of Gods indignation . . ." and ending with "the sinfull history of mine own *youth*," then Donne's "youthful profligacy" would seem to be the subject.^{xliii} But the subject is Jeremiah and his trials as a preacher. True, Jeremiah was not exactly a preacher within a church. But if Donne has in fact inserted his own voice and history into Jeremiah's, he has simply once more identified himself with Scripture, and the move might have particular poignancy for those lawyers, aspiring and otherwise, in Donne's audience who could recall the priest's youth. If so, they could thereby put a face on Jeremiah. And if Donne's *ethos* move is successful, they might join their own lives to the preacher's and Jeremiah's in an enduring Scriptural truth about the burdens of memory and the anguish of a troubled conscience.

A final example: Dr. Donne's final sermon, which was printed first in 1632, two years after its delivery in St. Paul's and entitled "Deaths Duell," was trumpeted on its title page as "the doctors owne funerall sermon." A month after its delivery, he was dead. This final sermon, perhaps the most famous of all of Donne's sermons, is a precis of *ethos* and argument, the identity he claimed to have assumed upon his conversion and the

knowledge he considered essential.

Donne's text is from *Psalm 68: 20*, quoted at the head of the sermon in the following way: "And unto God the Lord belong the issues of death, i.e. from death." Donne proceeds rapidly to a division. To his poet's mind the key terms are rich in meaning. First, "this *issue of death* is *liberatio à morte, a deliverance from death*": God delivers us from a kind of death in the womb by delivering us over to "*another death, the manifold deaths of this world,*" not the least of which is our bodily death with its "*corruption and putrefaction and vermiculation and incineration*" and finally dispersion into dust in the grave. Second, this issue of death is a "*liberatio in morte,*" as God determines the kind of death we shall have. The third and final issue is a "*liberatio per mortem,*" a deliverance from death altogether by virtue of our salvation achieved through Christ's crucifixion. This third concludes the sermon by taking us "through some of those *steps which God the Lord made to his issue of death*" on his last day, from the hour he "*received the passeeover on Thursday unto the hour in which hee dyed the next day.*"

The conclusion wraps up all, not simply the sermon itself but the whole of Donne's sermonizing by concentrating on the event and the knowledge he considered essential to Christian devotion. The steps Christ took are encompassed by the tripartite procedure traditionally advised for religious meditation: a scene is visualized; the meditator considers its implications and then as the emotions become aroused turns to God in prayer. The meditative steps resemble those set forth by St. Ignatius Loyola in the middle of the sixteenth century, which were adapted and revised as the procedure grew in popularity not simply among Jesuits but even among Puritans.^{xliv} Donne uses only the first two parts, the visualization and contemplation, and challenges the congregation to supply

the third, the prayer, in their own devotions. He takes us step by step through the major events of Christ's final day: "About midnight he was *taken* and *bound with a kisse*, art thou not *too conformable to him in that?* Is not that *too literally*, too exactly *thy case?* at *midnight* to have *bene taken* and *bound with a kisse?*" And he leaves us hanging, literally hanging upon the feet of the dead Christ on the cross. Earlier in the sermon Donne had argued, characteristically, that just as God had delivered the Jews from Egypt by passing them through the Red Sea, so Christ delivers us from death through the sea of his blood. Now at the conclusion he reminds us that just "as *God breathed a soule into the first Adam*, so this *second Adam breathed his soule into God, into the hands of God.*"

If there is a stimulus to find Donne's poetic imagination in these correspondences, there may be an even greater one to find Jack Donne the womanizer in the remark about kisses at midnight. However, this is Dr. Donne's final sermon, after a quarter of a century in Anglican orders and long experience in capitalizing upon his audience's expectations. Familiarity is turned to pastoral advantage and made strategic. This final sermon ends in a meditative drama, challenging the audience to compare their "conformity" to Christ's final hours—our own "conformity," that is, as fallible human beings to Christ's nature:

Hast thou been content to come to this *Inquisition* [with Herod and Pilate],
 this examination, this agitation, this cribration, this pursuit of thy *conscience*, to
sift it, to follow it from the *sinnes* of thy *youth* to thy *present sinnes*, from the
sinnes of thy *bed*, to the *sinnes* of thy *boorde*, and from the *substance* to the
circumstance of thy *sinnes?* That's *time spent* like thy *Saviours*.

Those in Donne's audience or among his readers, then as now, who summon the preacher's life remove the obvious target and avoid the point of "*Inquisition*." Donne's subject is not individual history. Every use of "I" in this sermon identifies the plurality of the central *ethos*: Donne as a man burdened by mortality and by God's contract with humankind; Donne as the voice of Scripture and tradition; Donne as a priest within the church faced at last with the only essential knowledge: "wee leave you in that *blessed dependancy, to hang* upon him that *hangs* upon the *Crosse*." The singularity of the priest's life and the disconnectedness of "you" are but stages in any believer's spiritual progress.

All this is not to say that there are no autobiographical passages in the sermons or that the style, including certain figures of speech and sentence structures, is neither reminiscent of the youthful Donne nor recognizably Donnesque. It is to say, however, that the *ethos* in the sermons is a masterful creation: a plural identity, patterned after the plurality Donne found in the living image of Christ, subsumed finally into his identity as man and priest in a church that he believed was the body of Christ, a body that like all believing bodies will experience resurrection. It is to say, finally, that this *ethos* is an artistic creation, one devised to reveal his argument. (And it is to suggest that similar artistry may underlie his earlier creation of Jack's *ethos*.^{xiv})

Earlier I noted Donne's evident interest in and skill at role-playing. I could also note that another, similar trait sets Donne apart from most sermonizers of his time: he was always a poet.^{xv} An accomplished poet, he knew well the uses of an inventive imagination—of the sort George Puttenham (1589) described admiringly as leading to artful "dissembling," at once "cunning" and "honest." If it is the rhetorician's role to aid

our understanding (and stir our emotions by rhetoricating), it is the poet's role to be creative (IV.87). Although both arts, as Donne says in the referenced passage, are alike weak in trying to express eternity, it is ever the poet's unique facility to lead us into new and different worlds—a facility which centered Donne's religious life and furthered his sermonic style at the expense, perhaps, of coherent theology. In his role as Dr. Donne he regarded the Scriptures as poems. And the Holy Ghost too in his view is something of a poet, with a penchant for metaphor and indirection (II.170-71; VII.80; X.103). But, whether interpreting Scripture as poetry or building arguments and emotions through the strategies and figures of rhetoric, the learned Dr. Donne speaks not as a theologian but as an often somber poet, one who no longer flaunts his singularity or moral independence but works to merge his inner self with believers. This is not exactly self-erasure—which would have been an impossible task for this poet/priest—but an *ethos* fashioned to strike deep chords within his congregations' troubled consciences. It was through his poetic imagination that Donne channeled what Eliot called his “tumults of a strong emotional temperament” into a larger, mystical body and made them exemplary.

This sermonizing *ethos* is not found in Donne's other religious prose, *Essays in Divinity and Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. The *Essays*, written in the months before he took Holy Orders, places us in the company of a “vulgar Christian,” Donne calls himself, writing to his “equals”—who may also be “vulgar” in the sense that they are not in Orders (and in the passage referred to, know little about mystical numbers) but who are clearly students of the Bible and comfortable with Latin passages left untranslated.^{xlvii} The writer is a “Renaissance humanist,” as Anthony Raspa calls him, a reasoning, learned man who in studiously applying himself to the task of explicating

Genesis 1.1 and *Exodus* 1.1 is in search of intellectual and spiritual stability.^{xlviii} Emotions are relegated to the short prayers.

Then in 1624 Dr. Donne published his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, his discursive, ostensibly private meditations on various truths which he believed emerged from the near fatal illness he had experienced the year before. In a brilliant piece of self-dramatization, Donne allows the reader to overhear the Dean of St. Paul's at the age of 50 think aloud about the meaning of twenty-three stages in his recent illness.^{xlix} Each stage—from “the first grudging of the sicknesse” to the physician's fear of a possible relapse—is (in tripartite, loosely Ignatian fashion) meditated upon, expostulated over, and prayed about. The *ethos*, addressee, and overhearing audience are not unlike those in the *Holy Sonnets*, wherein Donne in his most dreaded state, solitude (itself “the greatest misery of sicknes,” he says in his fifth devotion), faces death.

A famous passage from the seventeenth devotion places Donne in his sick room listening to someone's passing bell and realizing that the bell tolls for him as well, since he is “involved in *Mankind*.” The phrase is an aperçu of the *ethos* he employs and displays throughout his sermons. There “*Mankind*” includes not simply the congregation before him but all those through whom the Holy Ghost spoke. “How much oftener,” Donne asks in the nineteenth devotion “doth he exhibit a *Metaphoricall Christ*, than a *reall*, a *literall*?” Thus involved in mankind, Dr. Donne constructed a rhetoric obsessed, like Augustine's, with human guilt and frailty and centered on an *ethos* that with effort abandons individuality and exemplifies his understanding of Christ's timeless involvement in mankind. Our search for his success in achieving this difficult end, in which “contraryes meete,” could put us in touch with one of Donne's most complex

rhetorical achievements.

NOTES

ⁱ *The Sermons of John Donne*, eds. George Potter and Evelyn Mary Simpson. 10 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-1962. Entire sermons are cited by volume number (upper-case roman) and sermon number (lower-case roman); particular passages are cited by volume number (upper-case roman) and page number (arabic numeral). Hence II.iv refers to volume two, sermon four; II.4 refers to volume two, page four. My use of the term “Anglican” is somewhat anachronistic, since the term did not become meaningful until after Donne’s death; see Daniel W. Doerksen, “Polemist or Pastor? Donne and Moderate Calvinist Conformity,” in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives*, ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), pp. 12-34.

ⁱⁱ This importance has been recently argued by Jeanne Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge, England: D. S. Brewer, 2003). In one of his final sermons at St. Paul’s Donne claims a Scriptural basis for Establishmentarianism (X.112); see also, e.g., VIII.115; IX.69, 85, 129, 153.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henry Hart Milman, *Annals of S. Paul’s Cathedral* (London: Murray, 1868), p. 328.

^{iv} Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough in “Revising the Study of the English Sermon” observe that “without Donne’s cachet as a poet, no major university press would have contracted the project” of publishing his collected sermons: *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History, 1600-1750*, eds. Ferrell and McCullough (Manchester: Manchester University press, 2000), p. 7.

^v The term *via media* when applied to Donne’s idea of the Stuart church may be too simple or flat in meaning; see Jeanne Shami, “Kings and Desperate Men: John Donne

Preaches at Court,” *John Donne Journal* 6 (1987): 17; see also Gregory Kneidel, “John Donne’s *Via Pauli*,” *JEGP* 100 (2001): 224-246.

^{vi} Letter to Buckingham, 1623. Letters cited throughout are available in Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St. Paul’s*, two vols. (London: W. Heinemann, 1899); letter to Buckingham appears in II: 124.

^{vii} In Herbert J. C. Grierson, *The Poems of John Donne* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), I: 372-373. Elegies mentioned throughout refer to those in Grierson I: 371-395.

^{viii} *Donne’s Sermons: Selected Passages*, ed. Logan Pearsall Smith (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1919), p. xxxii; see *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), III: 171.

^{ix} Winfried Schleiner, *The Imagery of John Donne’s Sermons*. Providence: Brown University Press, 1970.

^x T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929), pp. 10, 21-22.

^{xi} Troy D. Reeves, *Annotated Index to the Sermons of John Donne* (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1979-80), I: 6. The “unreliability” and “carelessness” of Reeves’ work as an indexer are reviewed by Jeanne Shami, *Renaissance and Reformation*, ns 8 (1984): 59-62.

^{xii} William R. Mueller, *John Donne: Preacher* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 245-246.

^{xiii} Cited in n. 5 above.

^{xiv} As well as a great “visiter of Ladies” and writer of “conceited Verses”; Sir Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England . . .* (London: Printed for Daniel Frere, 1643),

Part II, p. 156. Dr. Donne himself claimed that even in prayer “I am not alwayes I” (IX.219) and that in this world he is known only “in disguises” (IX.129). The extent to which Donne’s notion of self is less stable or solid than ours is a complex matter; cf. Joan Webber, *The Eloquent “I”: Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); and John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*, 2d ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), esp. pp. 153-156.

^{xv} In 1640 Donne’s earliest biographer, Izaak Walton, suggested that Donne’s effectiveness as a preacher lay in his oral delivery. That ability is frequently recurred to by Donne’s elegists; see the elegies in Grierson, cited in n. 7 above.

^{xvi} The point is arguable. Mueller, for example, believes “that the written text is a fairly accurate reflection of the spoken text” (cited in n. 12 above, p. 87). Too, his modern editors note that Donne as early as December 1622 may have implied in a letter “his growing realization that some of his sermons might have a future life in print” (IV.36). And thus it may also be true that he gave the texts of his sermons a consciously “literary” quality before committing them to manuscript. Nonetheless, it seems likely that his mode of delivery was extemporaneous.

^{xvii} The extemporaneous mode of delivery was traditional in Donne’s day, as shown by John Sparrow, “John Donne and Contemporary Preachers,” *Essays and Studies*, 16 (1931): 144-78. See also Walton; *Sermons* I: 46-47; R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (London, 1970), pp. 407, 480; P. M. Oliver, *Donne’s Religious Writing: A Discourse of Feigned Devotion* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 237. Because extensive preparation was required, this kind of sermonizing is quite different from what Donne means by the “extemporall” preaching in some of the “separatist,” churches, where the preacher speaks

impromptu by inspiration with little preparation or forethought, a style Donne calls “negligent” and lacking in “a learned assiduity” (V.43-44). Extemporal praying and preaching, he says, can lead to “an extemporall faith, and extemporall religion; and then I must looke for an extemporall Heaven” (VII.61).

^{xviii} The editors have an excellent short essay on Donne’s Augustinian debt in X.345-401.

^{xix} Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961, 1970), p. 69.

^{xx} For Andrewes on the Lord’s Prayer, see *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841-1854; reprint New York: AMS, 1967), V: 443; for the women coming to the Tomb, see II: 221-237.

^{xxi} Nicholas Lossky, *Lancelot Andrewes, the Preacher (1555-1626): The Origins of the Mystical Theology of the Church of England* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1991), 327. See also Maurice F. Reidy, S. J., *Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, Jacobean Court Preacher* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1955).

^{xxii} Eliot, cited in n. 10 above, pp. 2, 21, 24.

^{xxiii} Deborah Shugar, “Absolutist Theology: the Sermons of John Donne,” in Ferrell and McCullough, cited in n. 4 above, p. 117. Some important critiques of and moderating opinions about Donne’s “absolutism” are offered in the series of essays on the sermons, ed. Jeanne Shami, in *John Donne Journal*, 11 (1992), nos. 1 and 2.

^{xxiv} See VII.426-427; VIII.349. Donne, however, as the editors note, delivered no sermon on “divine right” (IX.9).

^{xxv} Among the conventional are Lamb of God, Light, sun and Son (often used interchangeably; see V.367, VII.266, VIII.82), Advocate, Redeemer, Savior (who in

taking all the sins of the world upon himself nonetheless burdened us with debt; II.141), Bud, Blossom, Love, Voice, Word (God made heaven and earth silently, from nothing, but when he spoke he gave matter form, making matter into things; thus, as the Creed says by the Word were all things made; II.289). This “Word” includes *verbum*, *sermo*, as well as *logos*. Donne indicates no preference, unlike Erasmus, who for doctrinal reasons preferred *sermo* (see Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Characteristically, Donne draws from each whatever argument best suits his theme: e.g., *logos* he translates occasionally as “rectified Reason” (IV.119; cf. VIII.119), which is revealed through *verbum*; the latter in this case is partly the sermon. Other conventional comparisons include Bridegroom, Church, Prophet; East (*Oriens*), Shepherd; Angel of the Covenant, Vine, Rose of Sharon, Lily of the Valley; and, continuously, Judge, a role that can outweigh Christ’s meekness (e.g., III.163). Among the less conventional, at least for our age, are Ladder (especially Jacob’s ladder); Chancellor, who mitigated the Law from Moses, God’s “chief Justice” (I.255); Looking-glass (VI.286); Zodiak, the first and last point of our “circle” (IV.68); “debter” as well as “paymaster” (IV.189); “Solomon crowned” (VI.14), and the “exalted Serpent” who counterbalances the “creeping” or “groveling” Serpent who tempted Eve and who is merely “Craft” (X.189-190).

^{xxvi} Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Woodbridge, England: D. S. Brewer, 1999), p. x.

^{xxvii} The creed Donne seems continually to have in mind is the Nicene. However, virtually echoing the Athanasian Creed, Donne seemed to believe that one must accept the Trinity to be a Christian and that the Trinity is a mystery that can be reasoned about and not

simply blindly accepted or thrust upon “natural” man (III.357-58), since it was a truth present before all worlds.

^{xxviii} Donald M. Friedman, “Christ’s Image and Likeness in Donne,” *John Donne Journal* 15 (1996): 92. Professor Friedman concentrates on Donne’s poetry; a concentration on the sermons shifts the emphasis more definitively toward the Trinitarian.

^{xxix} William Empson makes the point: the “idea of dissolving into the godhead, rather than seeing God, continues to crop up in his religious writing after conversion” *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, ed. John Haffenden, I: Donne and the New Philosophy (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 89. The point sheds light on what Donne means in III.iii by the “redintegration” of soul and flesh, the flesh in which we “shall see God.” Cf. Paul W. Harland, “Imagination and Affections in John Donne’s Preaching,” *John Donne Journal* 6 (1987): 33-50.

^{xxx} See “Homiletics” by Gregory Kneidel in Thomas O. Sloane, et al. eds. *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 347-350.

^{xxxi} Lossky, cited in n. 21 above, p. 334. For Augustine’s ideas about Christ’s “Mystical Body” see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), esp. p. 257.

^{xxxii} Oliver (cited in n. 17 above) uses these words in comparing Donne’s style with Andrewes’ (p. 247).

^{xxxiii} In his preface to *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), published five years before he entered the priesthood, Donne said that given his family background and early Roman Catholicism he had “a longer work to do than many other men” in coming to accept Anglicanism and its oaths of supremacy and allegiance.

^{xxxiv} For a succinct review of elements in *ethos* see the essay by James S. Baumlin, in Sloane et al., cited in n. 30 above, pp. 263-77.

^{xxxv} John Carey, cited in n. 14 above, offers a creative slant on the old search for Jack, by insisting on a certain “imaginative continuity” between Jack and Dr. Donne. More recently, David L. Edwards, in *John Donne: Man of Flesh and Spirit* (London: Continuum, 2001), raises the hoary question about the sincerity of Jack’s conversion. But see the reframing of the question by Kneidel, cited in n. 5 above. Goss’s work is cited in n. 6 above.

^{xxxvi} The seminal work on the subject remains Camille Wells Slight, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). For a collection of essays on the meaning and jurisdiction of the conscience in Donne’s time, see *Contexts of Conscience in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, eds. Harald E. Braun and Edward Valliance (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). See also Meg Lota Brown, *Donne and the Politics of Conscience in Early Modern England* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), esp. ch. 2.

^{xxxvii} Brent Nelson in a recent analysis of a sermon by Donne finds the preacher moving “very easily between a second-person orientation (‘you’) and a first-person perspective (‘I’), often implicating both himself and his audience with the first-person plural”; “*Pathopoeia* and the Protestant Form of Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*,” in Papazian, cited in n. 1 above, pp. 247-272. Thirty years ago, Gale H. Carrithers, Jr. in *Donne at Sermons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972) argued that Dr. Donne’s ability to connect “his inner self to a social world ‘out there’” (p. 189) gives him a modern readability—doubtfully, I think; it surely worked better for his seventeenth-

century congregation—but the argument is an interesting variation on the one I am pursuing.

^{xxxviii} Mueller states, “Since Donne’s views underwent no appreciable change during his preaching years, no chronological problem is involved” (cited in n. 12 above, p. 162; see also p. 148).

^{xxxix} See Lossky, cited in n. 21 above, pp. 200-204.

^{xl} This argument has been pursued at some length by Elizabeth M. A. Hodgson in *Gender and the Sacred Self in John Donne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999).

^{xli} The tradition extends from Jesus’ comparison of himself to a hen gathering her brood under her wings in *Matthew 23.37*.

^{xlii} The editors have an excellent essay on Donne’s “sources” among the church fathers and his contemporaries and near contemporaries (X.345-375). They list some of his classical sources as an introduction to sermon 14 in VIII: 28-30.

^{xliii} Edward LeComte, *Grace to a Witty Sinner: A Life of Donne* (New York: Walker, 1965) so abstracts the text in this manner and quotes approvingly Theodore Gill’s comment (1958) about how Donne’s “youthful profligacy comes through in his sermons” (pp. 55-56).

^{xliv} Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* appeared in 1548; they were further promulgated by Robert Persons in 1598. Louis L. Martz (*The Poetry of Meditation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954) first discussed the relation between meditation, particularly Ignatian meditation, and the poetry of the time. U. Milo Kaufmann discussed the signature Puritans placed on the procedures in *The Pilgrim’s Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962). Some of the connections

between meditative procedures and rhetoric are traced in Thomas O. Sloane, "Rhetoric and Meditation: Three Case Studies," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (1971): 45-58. For the use of meditation in Donne's divine poems to extend the reach of language and reveal Presence see Margo Wesley's doctoral thesis, "'Holy Discontent': John Donne's *Poesis* as Sacred Struggle" (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 2003).

^{xlv} R. C. Bald, cited in n. 17 above, comments that Jack Donne was "not the licentious figure that some of the elegies might suggest" (p. 7).

^{xlvi} For an incisive comparison with Andrewes in this matter see the editors' comments in X.308.

^{xlvii} John Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952. Both Donne's son in editing the *Essays* for publication in 1651 and Mrs. Simpson speak of them as if they were solitary debates or meditations. Yet Donne clearly speaks to an audience and thinks of his writing as a "book" which may be read by others (see p. 29). Donne calls himself a "vulgar Christian" on p. 59.

^{xlviii} Anthony Raspa, "Donne's *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Essayes in Divinity* as Companion Pieces," *John Donne Journal* 18 (1999): 1-12.

^{xlix} John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975. Donne is identified on the 1624 title page as Dean (see Raspa ed. p. 1). In the twenty-first devotion he mentions his age.