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POEMS OF SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE BIBLICAL ELEMENT IN DONNE'S POEMS
OF SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

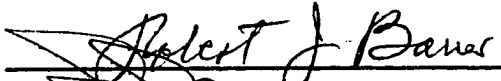
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GARY ALLEN STRINGER


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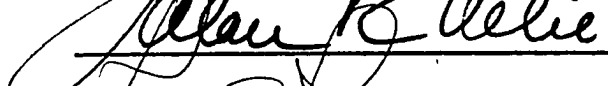
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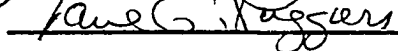
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THE BIBLICAL ELEMENT IN DONNE'S POEMS
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CHAPTER I

DONNE AND THE BIBLE

The Bible in Elizabethan England

To an age in which the average college undergraduate is baffled by Milton's reference to "that one talent which is death to hide" and in which a major poet and scholar requires a week to identify a clear allusion to Christ's statement "...there is nothing...hid, that shall not be known" (Matt.x.26), the Elizabethans' interest in and enthusiasm for Bible reading may verge on the incomprehensible. (Richard Wilbur, in an appearance on the campus of the University of Oklahoma in March 1969, confessed his failure to recognize the allusion to Matthew in a ballade of Villon which he had translated.) Yet there is abundant evidence that a thorough acquaintance with Holy Writ pervaded the whole of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English society, from the plowboy to the statesman. The history of Biblical translation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the multitudes of

Scriptural allusions in writers like Shakespeare, accounts of the educational goals of Renaissance grammar schools and universities, records of the publication and sale of Biblical helps, the history of church and state pronouncements regarding reading of the Bible, and the testimony of speeches given in the Elizabethan parliament all point to this conclusion.

Scholarly and political interest in the Bible were enormous at this time. For example, in spite of ecclesiastical disapproval, Tyndale got approximately 50,000 copies of his foreign-printed New Testament distributed in the ten years after it was translated in 1526. Then in 1539 was issued The Great Bible, a revision of Coverdale's earlier (1535) edition of the first complete translation of the Bible into English, and members of the clergy "were urged expressly to 'provoke, stir and exhort every person to read the same, as that which is the very lively word of God.'" This exhortation seemed to set a trend, for though Mary Tudor stopped all printing of the English Bible, the reign of Edward VI had seen thirteen editions of the whole Bible and thirty-five editions of the separate Testaments. Ostensibly much interested in the Bible, Queen Elizabeth gave evidence in various pronouncements of Scriptural knowledge, and during her reign ninety editions of the Geneva version appeared, as well as forty editions of other versions. "After a thousand years in England the Bible had suddenly

become a best seller."¹

It was sold, of course, to people. They read it at home and were taught it in the schools. Noting the average preacher's efforts to promote private reading of the Scriptures, Louis B. Wright concludes that the Bible was immensely popular with the typical Elizabethan Englishman, that, indeed, "A knowledge of the Bible was an essential in the education of every citizen."² Wright bases these comments in part on the successful publication and sale of such "helps" to Biblical study as John Udall's A Commentary Upon the Lamentations of Iremy (1593) and Thomas Wilson's A Christian Dictionary (1612), reasoning that the popularity of such items "cannot be explained purely by ecclesiastical demand," since "...some of the concordances and commentaries were avowedly prepared for the unlearned reader" (p. 236). And if the average citizen needed and wanted to know the Bible, he also wanted it taught to his children. Not only were children drilled in the Bible at home, but in the early years of Elizabeth's reign schoolboys regularly rendered various parts of English Scripture into Latin for linguistic training, a practice which familiarized them with the Old Testament books of Poetry, the Gospels, and Paul's Epistles. Though, except among Puritans, Elizabethan students were not catechized from the Bible at school, "Most boys were supposed to be drilled in the Bible till it became common knowledge among them."³

What is more, this emphasis on Biblical study carried over when a boy entered the university. Mark Curtis notes that student interest in religious and Scriptural matters was high in the universities and a good knowledge of them normal among students, despite the fact that Biblical or religious study was not mandatory.⁴

The effects of such Biblical training can be seen in what the Elizabethans said and wrote. For example, James Sims has demonstrated a substantial amount of Scriptural material in the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare and shown that the subtle uses to which it is put could never have achieved their effect if the audience had not been as apt to recognize Biblical allusions as the playwrights were to make them.⁵ And such other writers as Sidney, Harvey, Jonson, and Bacon evince a sound knowledge of the Scriptures.⁶ Furthermore, according to Sir John E. Neale, even the speeches given in parliament at the time "...abounded with allusions drawn from history, classical literature, and the Bible."⁷

The above evidence suggests that it would have been well nigh impossible for a literate Elizabethan to escape a knowledge of Scripture. If even a professed atheist like Marlowe possessed and used such knowledge, it seems likely that Donne, though his Romish upbringing might have been viewed in some quarters as little better than atheism, must have begun in early childhood the acquaintance with

Scripture so thoroughly attested by his religious poetry and sermons.⁸

Donne and the Bible

It is largely because of Donne's Roman Catholic upbringing and the uncertainty of the official Romist attitude toward private Bible study in Reformation times that the prevalent Elizabethan interest in and knowledge of Scripture need be mentioned at all. Even as products of a Philistine age, Donne's Divine Poems and much of his prose, especially the sermons, would bear unquestionable witness of Biblical provenance. But I am also concerned with the Scriptural influence in the Songs and Sonets, many of which were written before the poet's religious loyalties were finally settled.⁹ It therefore seems advisable to consider whether Donne, in a family of recusants, would have been likely to receive serious early exposure to Scripture and to investigate the possibilities of his having studied the Bible and pondered religious questions as a student at Oxford and Cambridge, before he broke with his Catholic heritage.

The history of the Roman Catholic attitude toward the Bible and Bible reading is long and varied. According to Orchard, "translation, according to needs, and manuscript circulation of translations evidently went on without let or hindrance" up until the invention of printing.¹⁰

Orchard attributes the relatively late translation of the Bible into English (by Wyclif in 1382) to the failure of English to establish itself as the dominant language in Britain before the middle of the thirteenth century, but asserts that once the Wycliffite Bible was seen "to contain no erroneous doctrine, it circulated without let or hindrance" (p. 6), even among the uneducated classes. Citing the calculation that "104 editions of complete vernacular Bibles were printed before the first Protestant Bible....," Orchard concludes: "This much should suffice against the charge that the Church kept the people in a state of Biblical starvation, and that this was especially the case before the Reformation" (p. 6).

The Reformation, however, caused the Church to adopt a more restrictive policy with regard to individual Bible reading: "As far as Catholics are concerned, it is doubtless true to say that the Reformation, far from being a stimulus to the use of the Bible, was indirectly responsible for a lethargy from which they are only now recovering."¹¹ As a result of the "heresies" attendant upon prodigal dissemination of the vernacular Bible, the Council of Trent laid down guidelines the effect of which was to "discourage the reading of the Bible in the vernacular" (Vawter, p. 37).

The publication of the Rheims New Testament (1582), the first Catholic translation into English, would seem to

have been a move in the other direction, for its preface stated that it was intended for "all sorts of Catholic readers," and it maintained a literal translation and included a gloss to clarify unusual or hard expressions. But the underlying assumption even then was that the people "would be taught to understand" the Bible.¹² Even the inception of the project of translation was colored by the need for more effective teaching of Scripture, not for the laity's easier access to the Word of God. Cardinal Allen, President of the Douay College, wrote in 1578:

On every Sunday and festival English sermons are preached...We preach in English, in order to acquire greater power and grace in the use of the vulgar tongue....In this respect the heretics...have the advantage over many of the more learned Catholics, who having been educated in the universities and the schools do not commonly have at command the text of Scripture or quote it except in Latin. Hence when they are preaching to the unlearned and are obliged on the spur of the moment to translate some passage which they have quoted into the vulgar tongue, they often do it inaccurately and with unpleasant hesitation....Our adversaries on the other hand have at their fingers' ends all those passages of Scripture which seem to make for them and by a certain deceptive adaptation and alteration of the sacred words produce the effect of appearing to say nothing but what comes from the bible. This evil might be remedied if we too had some catholic version of the bible, for all the English versions are most corrupt.¹³

The upshot of this evidence is that during the late sixteenth century individual Bible study among the Catholic laity was, if tolerated, hardly encouraged. Religious instruction, including Bible reading along with Church teaching, seems to have been primarily the responsibility

of the churchman. To such teaching, as I explain below, Donne had ready access, and Walton's assertion that Donne, at the time of his matriculation at Oxford, had "a good command both of the French and Latine Tongue" suggests that Donne would have been unhindered by one of the impediments which prevented private reading of Scripture by more ordinary persons.¹⁴

Donne stemmed from a long line of devout Catholics. His great granduncle, Sir Thomas More, went to the scaffold for the Romish cause; Joan and John Heywood, Donne's maternal grandparents, went into religious exile early in Elizabeth's reign; John Heywood's brother Thomas was executed for the faith; Donne's maternal uncles Jasper and Ellis Heywood "were both Jesuits and therefore risked their lives every time they set foot in England";¹⁵ Donne's brother Henry died while in prison for harboring a priest in his lodgings; and Donne's mother had three husbands, all Catholic, and remained so herself until her death. Under the influence of this heritage and such of these relatives as he associated with and of the tutor who had charge of him "until the tenth year of his age" (Walton, p. 6), Donne must have been thoroughly inculcated with a Christian faith based on Biblical and liturgical elements. Walton mentions the efforts of the tutors who taught Donne in the interval between his leaving Cambridge and his going to Lincoln's Inn to "instil into him particular Principles of the Romish

Church..." (p. 7), and it seems likely that such an emphasis would have been a part of his earliest tutelage, too. In contradistinction to Walton's insistence on the Catholic bias, however, Donne himself referred to his upbringing as simply Christian:

God wrapped me in his covenant, and derived me from Christian parents. I sucked Christian blood, in my mother's womb, and Christian milk at my nurse's breast. The first sound that I heard in the world was the voice of Christians, and the first character that I was taught to know was the cross of Christ Jesus.¹⁶

It seems certain, then, that his early religious training gave Donne a substantial acquaintance with Scripture, whether through actual study of the Bible or through participation in the Catholic liturgy and the catechizing of his teachers.¹⁷

Lamentably, our knowledge of Donne's religious training (including Bible study) at the universities must also be a patchwork of inference and conjecture. He went to Oxford on the twenty-third of October, 1584, when he was twelve years old, and remained there until 1587, at which time he transferred to Cambridge. It is usually supposed that he made this transfer before taking a degree at Oxford in order to avoid signing the Oath of Allegiance and subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles. After some time at Cambridge, "He probably traveled on the Continent (1591?) and then went up to London to study at the Inns of Court, at Thavies Inn (1591) and Lincoln's Inn (1592-94) a

course frequently taken by Recusants at this time" (White, NCE, 1006). According to Walton, it was at about this time, "about the nineteenth year of his age," that Donne began to ponder his religious affiliation and "begun seriously to survey, and consider the Body of Divinity, as it was then controverted betwixt the Reformed and the Roman Church" (p. 8). Donne's latest biographer asserts that by 1593, the year of his majority, Donne "had broken through the exclusively Roman Catholic circle of his minority forever..." and compares him, at that stage of life, to "the young person today who goes to college and has the faith of his fathers shaken" (Le Comte, p. 23). It would seem quite likely that such a reconsideration would entail some study of Scripture, especially in light of the general atmosphere in the two universities which Donne attended.

Even though Theology was a study reserved for graduate students, undergraduate education at both universities was theologically oriented.¹⁸ And even though it could not be said that either university provided a substantive religious education, the arts course at Oxford, in the last two decades of the sixteenth century, provided "catechism combined with lessons in practical piety" (Curtis, p. 124). Such catechizing included considerable use of and exposure to the Bible.

One of the strongest factors contributing to the establishment of a religious ambience in the universities

was the character of the typical instructor. Curtis describes the religious zeal of the Puritans who were at the universities during Elizabethan and Jacobean times as, in part, a "reluctance to allow any authority over conscience in matters of faith other than God as He revealed His will in Christ and the Scriptures" (p. 189). The following account exemplifies the kind of advice given to students regarding personal devotion:

Holdsworth [a tutor at Oxford] shows unequivocally how this matter [of the training in piety] is to be understood: "I shall speak a word or two of such books as you are to use on evenings, Lord's days, and other times set apart for devotion; that you may increase in piety and saving knowledge as well as in human learning which if not seasoned with that is vain and useless." He then recommended works in practical piety by Bishop Hall, Sibbs, Preston, Bolton, Davenant, Perkins, Drexelius, as well as the Scriptures. He added an even more significant note when he instructed his pupils how to read the Scriptures: "This reading of the Scriptures may be used without prejudice to your other studies if you begin the morning with one chapter, the afternoon with another, and read a third after supper or when you go to bed." (Curtis, p. 124)

Such men as this must have wielded considerable influence on Donne, even though he was no Puritan.

That the young Donne proved amenable to such advice as this of Holdsworth's and willingly engaged in the regimen of Bible study espoused by the universities is suggested by the mature Donne's familiarity with different versions of Scripture and by his habit of consulting various translations (a matter which I will discuss below). "In the middle of Elizabeth's reign," says Curtis, the Puritan leaders

endorsed especially the study of the Bible and disputation. Beneficial study of Scripture was thought to depend upon a thorough knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, of rhetoric (for the understanding of Biblical figures, etc.), and of logic. Comparative study of similar passages of Scripture, as well as poring over the commentaries, was also urged. "At Oxford Rainolds...put in the first place Bible study, grounded in thorough knowledge of the languages in which it was originally written" (p. 206). Donne the preacher clearly studied Scripture in the way described here, and it seems almost certain that he got his first acquaintance with the method and techniques from his university experience.¹⁹ Had he been reluctant to read the Bible, there would have been little point in mastering a scholarly approach by which to study it.

Whether or not Donne studied the Bible in the universities, there can be no doubt that his fellow students did. Even though not much religious activity was required by school statute,²⁰ interest in these matters generally ran high:

The vast majority of the men at the universities willingly and faithfully observed the regulations which assured them of some measure of religious training. Like their contemporaries outside the walls of Oxford and Cambridge, they possessed lively interests in religious matters and an immense appetite for lengthy religious discourses. They enthusiastically attended the sermons and lectures of popular preachers and professors. (Curtis, p. 186)

If this was true of the "majority," what of Donne, with his

confessed "hydroptique immoderate desire of humane learning" (Walton, p. 19) and his manifest love for disputation? In view of the overwhelming evidence that the university environment tended to exacerbate interest in religion, particularly a kind of religion grounded in Biblical doctrine, it is almost beyond doubt that his years at Oxford and Cambridge served to deepen and vivify whatever knowledge of Scripture Donne took there with him.²¹

Donne's thorough knowledge and extensive use of Scripture as a preacher is self-evident. But he did not acquire this familiarity overnight; it was begun in childhood, nurtured in the universities, and increased even more by the various intellectual and devotional enterprises that engaged him from young manhood to his ordination.

The initial entry into the controversy between the Roman and the "Reformed" churches which Walton places in Donne's nineteenth year seems to have been followed by an almost exhaustive study of that material. In the "Preface to the Priestes, and Iesuites, and to their Disciples in this Kingdome" of Pseudo-Martyr (1610), after conceding the weighty influence of Catholics in his upbringing, Donne claims not to have converted to Anglicanism "...till I had, to the measure of my poore wit and judgement, suruayed and digested the whole body of Diuinity, controuerted betweene ours and the Romane Church."²² As early as 1607, having demonstrated his sanctity and thorough theological and

legal knowledge by assisting Thomas Morton, future bishop of Durham, in the preparation of various anti-Papist pamphlets, Donne was offered a benefice and urged to accept it "if God shall incline your heart to embrace this motion."²³ But he was not to take orders until 1615, in the intervening years undergoing a spiritual struggle and self-examination reflected in Biathanatos (1608 or earlier), Pseudo-Martyr (1610), Ignatius His Conclave (1611), Essays in Divinity (1614), the two Anniversaries (1611), and "most of the devotional poems."²⁴ Thus it is clear that the religious quandry evinced in "Satyr III" (generally dated 1593) was no mere youthful tergiversation, but the sincere testimony of a spiritual restiveness that was not to be settled happily for over twenty years. Much of the prose and poetry arising out of these years bespeaks Donne's deep immersion in Scripture as he sought his way.

In summary, it seems virtually undeniable that Donne, though a born member of the Roman Catholic sub-culture, received an early acquaintance with Scripture (perhaps encapsulated in Romist dogma) which increased while he was at the two universities and continued to grow and deepen, perhaps with some stint in the 1590's, until he took orders in 1615. From that point, his sermons and devotions manifest, on every page, a spiritually sensitive, if not overly scholarly, intimacy with God's written word.

My purpose below is to point out the effects of this evolving Biblical knowledge in the Songs and Sonets and certain of the Divine Poems, for only if we make ourselves as familiar with Scripture as were Donne and the audience for whom he wrote can we fully understand and appreciate his poetry.

Donne's Bible and this Critical Approach

As I have said above, Donne's world was full of Bibles. In addition to many English versions, various Hebrew, Greek, and Latin editions were also available. Of Donne's use of different versions in the preparation of sermons we can speak with certainty, for scholars have studied the matter thoroughly. Though in comparison to such learned divines as Bishop Joseph Hall and Bishop Lancelot Andrewes Donne had little Hebrew and less Greek, he made some slight use of editions in these languages. He turned most frequently, however, to the Tridentine version of the Latin Vulgate and to the Authorized English version of 1611, referring at times to other Latin editions and to (especially) the Genevan and the Bishop's English versions. But these comments pertain to the sermons, and since we cannot be sure exactly when Donne began to consult any given edition, the question of which Bible he referred to in the poetry remains in some degree uncertain. Since his normal habit in setting a text for preaching was to quote the Vulgate, followed by the King James

translation, and since he refers to the Genevan edition as "our former text" (Allen, p. 226), however, we may assume the Genevan edition and the Vulgate to have been his primary Bibles before the publication of the Authorized Version.²⁵

Despite the anachronism of the practice, in the discussion below I have followed such editors as Shawcross and Gardner in quoting the Bible from the King James version, even though virtually all the poetry treated was composed before Donne could have seen that translation.²⁶ Two reasons seem to justify this method. First, Donne's wide-ranging eclecticism in quoting various versions and his habitual freedom with the grammatical details of Scripture make the tracing of each individual Biblical word or phrase to its exact source impossible.²⁷ Second, the essential similarity of all English translations of the Bible gives the method practical success--the Authorized Version manifestly does gloss the Biblical references in Donne's poetry.

Mindful of the slight hazard in using the King James edition and of the tendency of the source-hunter to run wild, however, I have tried to obey the dictates of good sense and to make critical significance my prime criterion in the identification of Biblical references. Furthermore, I have tried to minimize error by observing certain fundamental safeguards, especially in the treatment of the love

poetry. Though the recognition of any allusion must basically rest on verbal similarity, in my treatment of the Songs and Sonets I have generally identified ideational and archetypal elements which reflect the influence of Scripture. And in no case, unless a Biblical allusion is beyond doubt, have I considered isolated, single words or phrases in these poems. On the other hand, I have felt confident to push harder in the discussion of the Divine Poems, since they are manifestly saturated with Biblical phrase and idea, but have always insisted on contextual similarity between passages of poetry and Scripture before claiming a Biblical reference. Doubtless some of these identifications and the criticisms based on them are wrong, but I am convinced that they are mostly right and that this is a revealing approach to the poetry of Donne.

Notes to Chapter I

¹Most of this information and all the quotations derive from Lawrence E. Nelson; Our Roving Bible (New York, 1945), pp. 52-58. On page 57 Nelson quotes from J. R. Green, A History of the English People, III (New York, n.d.), 15 ff., to the effect that "The whole nation became a church" under the widespread influence of Scripture.

²Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill, 1935), p. 238.

³Emily Lu Pearson, Elizabethans at Home (Stanford, 1957), pp. 157-58.

⁴Oxford and Cambridge in Transition, 1558-1642 (Oxford, 1959), pp. 122-24, 185-6. I will discuss the probable effects of Donne's university experience on his Biblical knowledge below.

⁵Dramatic Uses of Biblical Allusions in Marlowe and Shakespeare (Gainesville, 1966).

⁶See Nelson, pp. 58-62, for a cursory treatment of this point.

⁷The Elizabethan House of Commons (London, 1949), pp. 407-08. Quoted in Curtis, p. 266.

⁸George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, eds., The

Sermons of John Donne (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953-62), X, 295, claim to have identified over 7,000 references to Scripture in Donne's sermons. I will consider below some of the Scriptural allusions in his poetry.

⁹The implication of my statement here is, of course, that I consider the Biblical influences in the Songs and Sonets to be less patent than those in some of the other poetry, and this is true. Several of the Scriptural allusions which I identify in the Songs and Sonets are rather subtle, and it lends weight to my identifications if a thorough knowledge of Scripture, even before 1601, can be established for Donne. Furthermore, several of the images and ideas which I view as Biblical are identified in Donald Guss, John Donne: Petrarchist (Detroit, 1967) as standard elements in the world of Petrarchan love poetry. Far from denying Guss's thesis, I will argue that they are Biblical before they are Petrarchan, or Biblical in Petrarchanism. To know that Donne knew the Bible thoroughly while composing the Songs and Sonets strengthens the argument that he viewed these images and ideas as Biblical (as well as, perhaps, Petrarchan) and expected his audience to see them in the same way.

¹⁰Orchard et al., A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture (London and New York, 1953), p. 5.

¹¹Bruce Vawter, C. M., The Bible in the Church (New York, 1959), pp. 34-5.

¹²See Orchard, p. 35, for these quotations from that preface and for an account of the history of the Rheims New Testament. According to William R. Mueller, John Donne: Preacher (Princeton, 1962), p. 76, "In his remarks about the Bible he Donne impresses upon his people the advantage they enjoy over the Papists of being able to read Scripture in their homes...." I have not been able to trace the source for Mueller's assertion, but if he may be believed, my point here is further substantiated.

¹³Quoted in Alfred W. Pollard, Records of the English Bible (Oxford, 1911), pp. 33-4.

¹⁴Izaak Walton, "Life of Donne," in Walton's Lives, ed. S. B. Carter (London, 1951), p. 6.

¹⁵Edward LeComte, Grace to a Witty Sinner: a Life of Donne (New York, 1965), p. 6. See this book, pp. 5-16, passim, for a discussion of Donne's Catholic heritage and upbringing.

¹⁶Quoted by LeComte, p. 12. Here, again, I have been unable to find the source of a quotation in Donne's works.

¹⁷New Catholic Encyclopedia (hereafter abbreviated

NCE), IV, 1006-08, in an entry written by Helen White, similarly concludes that Donne's family connections with Catholics, especially with his devoutly Catholic mother, imply a strong training in the Old Faith. Vol. II, 519, of that work supports my suggestion that one might receive much exposure to Scripture through the liturgy: "The principle that guides the Roman liturgy is that the entire Bible should be read through in the Divine Office in the course of the year." It seems almost impossible that Donne could have escaped early indoctrination with Scripture, at least in the mediate form of the liturgy.

¹⁸See the unpubl. diss. (University of Wisconsin, 1968) by Robert J. Bauer, "John Donne and the Schoolmen," p. 6.

¹⁹D. C. Allen, "Dean Donne Sets His Text," ELH, X (1943), 208-29, and Potter and Simpson, Sermons, X, 295-344, discuss the manner of Donne's Bible study and sermon preparation.

²⁰Of the official university requirements regarding religious training Curtis states: "Except for the fact that college and university statutes required attendance at chapel and university sermons, religious instruction for students of the arts might very well fall under the heading of extra-statutory learning. An Oxford statute of

1579 did, to be sure, order that each college should engage a catechist who would instruct the members of the college in the beliefs contained in the Thirty-nine Articles, but it did not change the requirements for degrees or provide any systematic way to make achievement in this field a test of a man's qualification for a degree" (p. 185).

²¹Two other related bits of evidence favor the likelihood that Donne read Scripture in these years: his basically independent, "protestant" turn of mind, and his urgent desire to rise in the world. White, NCE, IV, 1006, notes the "special animus against the Jesuits" revealed in Ignatius His Conclave (1611) and attributes it to Donne's dislike for his uncle Jasper Heywood, who seems to have sought to enlist the young Donne in the order. But Donne resisted such pressure, for, like Bacon, he was an aspirant-statesman, and so he remained until shortly before taking orders in 1615. In the light of these facts, we may conclude that Donne would have readily ignored any Church prohibition of Bible reading in order to acquire the Biblical knowledge necessary to worldly success.

²²Quoted in Mueller, p. 19. Pseudo-Martyr has never been reprinted since the 1610 edition.

²³LeComte, p. 102. Again, I have not had access to the original source.

²⁴Victor Harris and Itrat Husain, English Prose 1600-1660 (New York, 1965), p. 234.

²⁵The information of this paragraph comes largely from Allen (cited above) and is supported by the findings of Potter and Simpson, Sermons, X, 324-28. Allen finds Donne's method of preparing sermons basically the same throughout his career, a fact which suggests that the method was already developed when he entered the church. I have suggested above that Donne picked up his approach to the Scriptures at Oxford and Cambridge.

²⁶John T. Shawcross, The Complete Poetry of John Donne (New York and London, 1968); Helen Gardner, John Donne: The Divine Poems (Oxford, 1952) and John Donne: The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets (Oxford, 1965).

²⁷Potter and Simpson, Sermons, X, 324, note that Donne frequently quoted from memory and generally seemed satisfied if he preserved the sense of the passage, despite misplacing a particle or two: "His license was that of a poet." Allen, p. 225, has words to the same effect: "Like most preachers of his time, he apparently thought of the Bible not as a rigid and fixed authority, but as something pliable that a preacher might bend to his will."

CHAPTER II

THE BIBLE IN THE "SONGS AND SONETS"

Introduction

Even the casual reader of Donne cannot fail to notice that many of the religious ideas and images of the Divine Poems appear in the Songs and Sonets. References to God, the devil, heaven, saints, prophets, and the like are commonplace. And such poems as "A Valediction: forbidding mourning," with its mention of the dying of "virtuous men" and the "prophanation of...joyes," and "The Flea," with its finely seductive argument against the sin of shedding the insect's "blood of innocence" and of doing "sacrilege" to the "mariage temple" of the lovers, employ an obviously religious vocabulary and create a quasi-religious tone.¹ Yet most readers, if they have recognized such elements in the love poems, have attached little significance to them. Partly because of a line that Donne himself helped to draw² and partly because of the antithesis in the Judeo-Christian mind between the earthly-carnal on the one hand and the heavenly-spiritual on the other, Donne's readers, from his own time until quite recently, have accepted the notion of a "two-personality

Donne" and have failed to recognize the "thematic relationship [of the Songs and Sonets] to other poems" (Shawcross, p. xix.).

This concept of a Janus-faced poet has been fostered by inaccurate knowledge of the composition dates of many of the poems, the common belief having been that the Songs and Sonets were written in the wild heat of youth and the Divine Poems in the sober light of maturity. Recent scholarship, however, has shown the composition of some love poems and some religious ones to have occurred side by side. Though no critic, I think, has argued that any of the more rakish, naturalistic love poems were composed contemporaneously with the devotional poems, it is established that some of the love poetry, especially that treating love as a mutual sharing of sincere emotion by the lovers, was written during the period in which various religious poems were composed.³ But I wish to go further and show that even the cynical, hedonistic lyrics of the Songs and Sonets have certain things in common with the devotional and homiletic poetry: through a serious and widespread use of Scriptural ideas, situations, and images, Donne reveals, in the Songs and Sonets as a whole, the same familiarity with and willingness to use Christian elements that he shows in the Divine Poems. My discussion below will perhaps contribute to the trend of seeing in Donne "not a split personality, but one always intense,

concerned with the need for love and faith...one whose broad view of life embraced his own inheritance, his era, and the mundane and spiritual worlds beyond him" (Shawcross, p. xix).

In the Songs and Sonets, Donne uses the Bible in three main ways: (1) to define the character of the various agents who act in his poetic world; (2) to establish doctrine and precept; (3) to create dramatic contexts by making parallels between his imagined situations and Scriptural instances. Though not always, these three effects frequently overlap and blend together, so that a given Biblical allusion simultaneously conditions theme, character, and setting. For example, recognition in the poetry of an analogy to a Scriptural situation may serve to support theme and define character: if we perceive a similarity between a lamenting lover in a garden and Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, for instance, much light is thrown upon the meaning of the poem, and our understanding of the lover's character is enhanced. Even if this lover does not react to his crisis precisely as Christ did to His, there will be meaning in the contrast. So the poet's analogy will have served metaphorically to open new dimensions of response to the poem and to imply much that he has not actually said. In the discussion below, the poems are classified and explicated in terms of character and situation in an effort to get at that more

complex and comprehensive element, meaning. The results of this approach show that even in his more cynical and naturalistic poems, Donne did not reject the images and themes of the Bible, but rather secularized and used them to increase the richness of his poetic medium.

The characters, events, and themes in the Songs and Sonets constitute a mythos which, in several respects, parallels that of the Bible. Within this imaginative world we find the character types of the god, the disciple, the saint, the clergyman, the layman, the recreant, and the unbeliever. Imagined situations include the creation, the seduction in Eden, the flood, the appearance of an angel, chastisement by the god, the Incarnation, the agony in Gethsemane, the meeting of Christ and the Magdalen at the tomb, the Ascension, the apotheosis of the saints, and some others. There is also a sacred text and some ritual. Donne's appropriation of the forms and concepts of the basically other-worldly Judeo-Christian myth for use in his imaginative world of love indicates his thorough immersion in the Bible and his (at least) poetic commitment to this material, even in the days long before he seriously expounded Christianity from the pulpit. He found in the Bible a ready-made and widely known heterocosm of values, events, and character-types which he could use metaphorically to deepen and enrich his expression of the drama of earthly love.

Donne's study of Scripture must have had a part in forming his habit of thinking by analogy, of conceiving the forms and concepts of one mode of experience in terms of another. For Scripture is not basically abstract and discursive, even though it became the basis for theological and moral disquisitions of this nature. It embodies theological and moral doctrines in concrete, metaphorical language: the Bible explains the love of Christ for the church in terms of the human relationship between man and wife (Eph.v.23); it likens the dealings of God with man to the relationship between father and child (Ps.lxxxii.6); it uses frequent illustration and parable. Even the Incarnation itself is a kind of divine metaphor in which the Word, the Logos, is translated into flesh that men may know God more concretely. In his love poetry, Donne simply extends this process and explains the multifarious human relationship of love in terms of the established, well-known Biblical tradition. And this technique is a powerful one in the hands of such a subtle craftsman and perspicacious thinker. It allows Donne to weight his poetry with a tremendous emotional and conceptual freight, one that was inescapable to an audience so imbued with the content of the Bible as his, and thus to create a medium of expression which goes almost beyond words. Since no understanding of the love poems can be complete without a sensitivity to these pervasive Scriptural

elements, I turn now to a consideration of some of the Songs and Sonets in which this Biblical influence is most apparent.

Poems Addressed to the God of Love

Donne has a number of poems which approach Love, not as an emotional experience or an abstract quality, but as a person. "Loves diet," for instance, describes love as a captive pet which the lover controls by strict discipline and planned feeding. This regimen has resulted in the development of a "buzard love, to flye/ At what, and when, and how, and where" the lover chooses. But the most of the poems which personify love characterize him as a god: "Loves Usury," "Loves exchange," "The broken heart," "Loves Deitie," and "The Will" all speak of Love as a powerful being with whom the lover has a direct, personal relationship. When he celebrates love as a shared, satisfying spiritual experience, Donne concentrates on the feelings and attributes of the lovers themselves, filling the role of divinity, if there is one at all, with one or both of the lovers. But the poems which picture love in this personified form invariably portray a lover who either does not wish to participate in a love affair which demands spiritual involvement and fidelity (as in "Loves Usury") or has been denied or incapacitated for such a love affair by the cruel god.⁴ According with the psychological need to externalize

frustration or cynicism or to rationalize failure in love by affixing blame outside the lover, this technique of personifying Love effectively dramatizes the separation of the lover, in his unsuccessful or recalcitrant moments, from the object of his desires.

The primary uses of the Bible in these poems are to establish character through making Love analogous to the God of the Bible and the lover comparable to Biblical people and to underscore and deepen the themes of the poems. Though Donne was, of course, familiar with Cupid and the other deities of classical mythology, the god of these poems is predominantly the harsh, vengeful Jehovah of the Old Testament, a deity whose demands upon and treatment of the lover are strenuous and often devastating. In correspondence to this characterization of the god, the lover, who acts as an unwilling or rebellious child in these poems, is a helpless victim. His attitude toward his predicament ranges from proud defiance ("Loves Usury") to sorrowful acceptance of the god's irresistible power ("The Will" and "The broken heart") to a kind of grudging vindication of the god's wisdom in denying him what he seeks ("Loves exchange").

The youthful lover of "Loves usury" desires to play the game of love by his own rules. Love is implicitly characterized as a lord who demands total subjection of mind and soul, as well as body, from all his subjects,

but the hot-blooded young man attempts to buy love off with a promise of service in old age in exchange for license in youth:

For every houre that thou wilt spare me now,
 I will allow,
 Usurious God of Love, twenty to thee,
 When with my browne, my gray haire equall bee;
 Till then, Love, let my body raigne, and let
 Mee travell, sojourne, snatch, plot, have, forget,
 Resume my last yeares relic: think that yet
 We'had never met. (1-8)

He continues, in stanza two, asking leave to "Keepe mid-nights promise; mistake by the way/ The maid, and tell the Lady of that delay..." (11-12) and to "love none, no, not the sport..." (13). He then expands his proposition:

This bargaine's good; if when I'am old, I bee
 Inflam'd by thee,
 If thine owne honour, or my shame, or paine,
 Thou covet most, at that age thou shalt gaine.
 Do thy will then, then subject and degree,
 And fruit of love, Love, I submit to thee,
 Spare mee till then, I'll beare it, though she bee
 One that loves mee. (17-24)

Love never replies to the youth's proposal in the poem, but Biblical parallels to this situation strongly suggest what the answer would be. In a generally analogous situation, the rich man in the parable of Luke xii. 16-20 forgets God and builds bigger barns in which to hoard his possessions, only to hear God reply: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee...." An even more apposite comment, couched more nearly in the terms of this poem, is found in Ecclesiastes xi. 9-xii. 1:

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the

ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes:
 but know thou, that for all these things God will
 bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow
 from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh:
 for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now
 thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil
 days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou
 shalt say, I have no pleasure in them....

It is as if the lover in the poem had decided to take the ironic invitation of the Preacher seriously, ignoring the serious implications of the threat of judgment. Even though he expresses willingness to undergo the god's judgment, his impertinent suggestion of how Love may punish him in age--by having him hurt by one who loves him--marks him as an incorrigible, naturalistic spirit who refuses to take Love or Love's gospel seriously. He chooses to mock his god in the days of his youth, flaunting his disbelief and disrespect in this flippant prayer. As we turn to "Love's exchange," "The broken heart," and "The Will," we see the manner in which Love deals with those who come within his purlieu.

The speaker in "Loves exchange" has angered the god by refusing to "trust" Love's "first motions." In consequence of this resistance, Love has sternly forced the lover into a state of abject helplessness. The poem uses Biblical language to define the lover's condition, to draw the portrait of Love, and to outline, at least sketchily, the proper response of a willing, trusting seeker of Love's blessings.

The poem begins in a tone of frustrated defiance,

as the speaker names Love a "devill" for not having requited him for his "given Soule":

Love, any devill else but you,
 Would, for a given Soule give something too.
 At Court your fellowes every day,
 Give th'art of Riming, Huntsmanship, or Play,
 For them which were their owne before;
 Onely I have nothing which gave more,
 But am, alas, by being lowly, lower. (1-7)

Perhaps because he has not given freely or promptly enough, this lover has not received the rewards promised in the Christian paradox "...he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt.x.39). Instead his condition is that of those to whom Christ said, "...whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt.xiii.12).

Out of this opening despair, the lover begins to seek relief from his pain, indirectly illustrating, as he speaks, the spiritual pattern necessary if one is to find Love a merciful, receptive god rather than a harsh, vengeful master. This example of the proper response to the god is indirect in the sense that even though the lover rehearses the right doctrine and makes the appropriate gestures of submission to Love; his heart is not really in it--not, at least, until the beginning of stanza four.

Stanza two seems to record a submissive attitude on the part of the lover, but the content of the lines belies this apparent abjectness:

I aske no dispensation now
 To falsifie a teare, or sigh, or vow,
 I do not sue from thee to draw

A non obstante on natures law,
 These are prerogatives, they inhere
 In thee and thine; none should forswear
 Except that he Loves minion were. (8-14)

In sarcastically declaring that only true disciples of Love "should forswear," this speaker is prolonging his defiance, despite the apparent humility. And he maintains this same irony in stanza three, where he seems to throw himself upon the mercy of the god, like the publican who prayed, "...God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lu.xviii.13).

As Gardner has said (SS, p. 169), his prayer in stanza three parodies that of the Christian who asks for no "other reward than to share the weakness of his God." The lover asks, "Give mee thy weaknesse, make mee blinde..." (15). But the strength that he desires to have "made perfect in weakness" (II Cor.xii.9) is that of not knowing

...that this
 Is love, or, that love childish is;
 Let me not know that others know
 That she knowes my paines, least that so
 A tender shame make me mine owne new woe. (17-21)

Though this prayer verbally echoes the dictum "...Except ye...become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.xviii.3), it perverts the meaning of the declaration, for this lover splenetically insists on confusing childishness with childlikeness. Furthermore, his plea for "weaknesse" and blindness in both "eies and mind" (16), in addition to disparaging Love, underscores the faithlessness, the insistence on certain results, which has led him to his present plight. Nevertheless, in thus

enacting the form of submission, though without the humility in heart that should accompany it, the lover has both suggested the only way in which Love's blessing can be obtained and worked out his latent cynicism. Accordingly, in the stanza which follows he puts aside his resentment and accepts responsibility for his destitute state.

Stanza four spells out the justice of Love's dealings in the case:

If thou give nothing, yet thou'art just,
 Because I would not thy first motions trust;
 Small townes which stand stiffe, till great shot
 Enforce them, by warres law condition not.
 Such in loves warfare is my case,
 I may not article for grace,
 Having put Love at last to shew this face. (22-28)

These lines conclude the poem's statement of doctrine, mark the final stage in the lover's submission to Love, and prepare, with the last line, for the full description of the character of the god. In his woeful concession, "If thou give nothing, yet thou'art just," the lover exhibits something of the patient acceptance of Job, and his realization that once the time of judgment is at hand, the opportunity for mercy is past recalls the similar predicament of unbelievers at the last judgment of God:

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. (Rev.vi.15-16)⁵

Having attested to his own responsibility for Love's harsh treatment of him and to the impossibility of now escaping Love's wrath, the lover next describes the stern omnipotence of Love:

This face, by which he could command
 And change the idolatrie of any land,
 This face, which wheresoe'r it comes,
 Can call vow'd men from cloisters, dead from tombes,
 And melt both Poles at once, and store
 Deserts with cities, and make more
 Mynes in the earth, then Quarries were before.
 (29-35)

The Bible furnishes the material for this portrayal of Love's power. The Lord God promised Moses (Ex.xxxiv) that the indigenious inhabitants of the land of Canaan would fall before the Israelites and their pagan worship be destroyed. In the great visions of the New Jerusalem in the latter chapters of Isaiah and in Ezekiel xxxvi, God declares, "...the heathen shall know that I am the Lord...when I shall be sanctified before their eyes" (vs.23). In that same chapter of Ezekiel's vision the Lord promises to "cause... [his people] to dwell in the cities, and the wastes... [to be] builded" (vs.33). And many of the joyous prophecies of Isaiah contain visions of "rivers in the desert" (xliiii.19) and of the desert blossoming "as the rose"(xxxv.1). The calling of dead men from the grave suggests both the cosmic turmoil of the last judgment and Christ's miracles of reviving the dead. (John xi records the raising of Lazarus, while Luke viii relates the restoration of Jairus's dead daughter.)

Finally, both Old and New Testaments mention God's fiery destruction of a sinful earth. Isaiah lxvi.16 describes the destruction of the wicked that shall accompany the Lord's rebuilding Zion: "For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh...." And II Peter iii.10 describes the "day of the Lord" as a time when "the elements shall melt with fervent heat...." Thus virtually every concrete manifestation of Love's awesome power in this stanza has its roots in holy writ. Donne pictures the god of Love in affecting strokes drawn from the most reliable and available source for such portraits--the Bible.

The poem concludes with the lover's supplication to be removed from his miserable condition by the ultimate mercy:

If I must example bee
 To future Rebels; If th'unborne
 Must learne, by my being cut up, and torne:
 Kill, and dissect me, Love; for this
 Torture against thine owne end is,
 Rack't carcasses make ill Anatomies. (37-42)

With a witty justification characteristic of Donne's poetry, the lover here begs to be put out of his misery. And this last clever turn emphasized the basic independence which has doomed this lover from the first--he insists on making his own terms in Love's exchange. Even though he has worked out a rational explanation for his predicament and suggested the solution to it in the course of the poem, that intellectual self-consciousness always stands in

his way. In his plea for Love's "weaknesse" he came close to making the necessary submission to Love's omnipotence, but his fear of shame, the same reluctance to risk himself that caused him to resist Love's "first motions," prevented his entering a contract of faith which would have changed Love's "just" face to one of mercy. If he ends as, in a sense, his own man, it is poor consolation for being excluded from the joys of love which he desires.

Though the tone of "The broken heart" is lighter than that of "Loves exchange," the character of Love and the helplessness of the lover are much the same in both poems. This lover laments, "Ah, what a trifle is a heart,/ If once into loves hands it come!" (9-10) and proceeds to recount the destruction of his own heart when he first saw the mistress. One Biblical allusion contributes to the description of Love's irresistible power:

All other griefes allow a part
To other griefes, and aske themselves but some;
They come to us, but us Love draws.... (11-13)

Donne here alludes to Christ's declaration in John xii.32: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And he borrows another image of God's power from the Bible in the description of the destruction of the lover's heart: "...but Love, alas,/ At one first blow did shiver it as glasse" (23-24). This conceit echoes the Psalmist's prediction of the fate of the heathen

at the hands of Jehovah: "...thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps.ii.9). Though the lover appears somewhat less ruined in the conclusion of this poem than he did in "Loves exchange"--his "ragges of heart can like, wish, and adore" (31)--his position as a powerless pawn in the clutches of the willful god remains the same. The Bible plays a small part in the record of this relationship.

Scripture also makes its influence felt in the imagery of "The Will." In this poem the dying lover gasps out a series of legacies, demonstrating the ironic lessons Love has taught him. He has learned to "give to none, but such, as had too much before" (9); "Onely to give to such as have an incapacitie" (18); "Onely to give to those who count... [his] gifts indignity" (27); "to make, as though... [he] gave, when... [he] did but restore" (36); and to give disproportionate gifts (45). The first lesson--to "give to none, but such as had too much before"--, learned by being forced to love a mistress "who'had twenty more" (8), recalls Christ's explanation of why he spoke plainly to his disciples, but enigmatically to the masses: "...it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For who-soever hath, to him shall be given..." (Matt.xiii.11-12). And the stanza which enumerates the lover's disproportionate legacies uses one example of disproportionate giving

recorded in Scripture. The lover leaves his "brazen medals, unto them which live/ In want of bread..." (40-41). This image recalls the Biblical question cited by Christ as a negative parallel to God's willingness to give his blessings to those who seek, "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" (Matt.vii.9). This lover finally resolves to "undoe/ The world by dying" (46-47), since his mistress's love for him has died before. By such a step he thinks to gain a technical triumph, at least, for his death will "annihilate all three" (54)--Love, the mistress, and himself. And with this mournful sentiment, the poem ends, the lover once again having been defeated by Love. Though the Biblical elements here (and in "The broken heart") are not so abundant or crucial as in some of the other poems, their presence does show Donne's ready use of Scripture for imagery and precept, even in lyrics which draw primarily on other sources; such incidental employment of Biblical elements complements Donne's more extensive use of them elsewhere.

One other poem in which Love is characterized as a god must be mentioned--"Loves Deitie." This poem refers to the "God of Love" as a "child," and throughout most of the poem the speaker obviously has in mind Cupid, not the God of the Bible, in either of His manifestations. Vexed that he "must love her, that loves not [him]" (7), the

lover complains that Love no longer dutifully fits "Actives to passives" (12), but has now extended "His vast prerogative, as far as Jove" (16) and begun to traffick in pettiness: "To rage, to lust, to write to, to commend,/ All is the purlewe of the God of Love" (17-18). He even suggests dethroning the god as a solution:

Oh were we wak'ned by this Tyrannie
To ungod this child againe, it could not bee
I should love her, who loves not mee. (19-21)

In the last stanza, however, the lover's quarrelsome outburst against Love's mistreatment of him gives way to a grudging justification of the god's modus operandi:

Rebell and Atheist too, why murmure I,
As though I felt the worst that love could doe?
Love might make me leave loving, or might trie
A deeper plague, to make her love me too,
Which, since she loves before, I'am loth to see;
Falshood is worse then hate; and that must bee,
If shee whom I love, should love mee. (22-28)

In his self-chastizement this speaker alludes to a Biblical passage which relates God's punishment of the Israelites as they balked at entering the land of Canaan: Moses sent out spies "to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord" (Num.xv.36-37). The connection of "murmuring" against God, of being a "Rebell," with the punishment of

suffering "plague" clearly recalls this chapter of Numbers and in so doing points out Donne's technique of suffusing the myth of love defined in these poems with the material of Scripture. The use of this unmistakable Scriptural reference in a poem which expressly treats of Love's deity illustrates most clearly the main contention of this essay--the images and precepts of Donne's love poems reflect a strong Biblical influence.

The Divine Lover

We next turn to a group of poems in which the lover himself assumes the role of the deity and is characterized as such by language drawn from the descriptions of God and his actions in both the Old and New Testaments. Here the god of love has disappeared as a character with whom the lover must deal, and the poems focus on the relationship of the lover and his mistress. In accordance with the characterization of the lover as either God or Christ (or, in one case, Satan), the mistress is cast in the part of a disciple or votary. Two poems in this general classification--"Lovers infinitenesse," and "A Valediction: of my name in the window"--depict a happy relationship between the lovers; one, "Twicknam Garden," concentrates on the misery of the distressed lover; and one, "The Blossome," portrays an attempted Satanic seduction of the woman. In addition to the use of Biblical imagery and language to establish character and codify.

the doctrine of love, three of these poems demonstrate Donne's metaphorical use of Biblical situations to clarify emotions and ideas and deepen the significance of events treated in the poems.⁶

Though "Lovers infinitenesse" might be read allegorically as an account of the Lord's wooing the human soul, the primary function of the Scriptural material in the poem is metaphorical: the poem borrows from the parable of the sower (Matt.xiii., e.g.) to record the lover's desire to be the absolute owner of the mistress' whole heart. His goal is not to rule her cruelly, however, but to "joyne" hearts with her so they may be "one, and one anothers All" (32-33). In his statement of this goal, the lover portrays the mistress' heart in terms of the ground planted by Christ in the parable; hence he assumes the role of the Divine sower.

These respective roles of the lover and his mistress, however, do not emerge clearly until stanza two of the poem. Initially, they seem reversed, for in stanza one the lover expresses the fear that he shall never have the mistress, "All," if she gave only a part of herself at the time of their original "bargaine." This possibility is particularly distressing to the lover, for he says, "...all my treasure, which should purchase thee...I have spent..." (5-6). And it is these words which suggest the reversed roles, for they recall the simile of Matthew xiii.⁴⁴,

where the kingdom of heaven is likened "unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

Stanza two, however, establishes the lover as a Christ-figure (and, correspondingly, the mistress as a disciple) as he lays claim to all the mistress' love, even if some "new love" has sprung up since he purchased her heart:

The ground, thy heart is mine, what ever shall
Grow there, deare, I should have it all. (21-22)

This, the central metaphor of the poem, relates it to the Scriptural parable and defines the relationship of the man and woman which continues to the conclusion. In Matthew's account of the parable, "...He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man" (xiii.37), and the ground is the human heart. The lover here, having sowed the mistress' heart with "Sighs, teares,...oathes, and letters" (6), expects to reap the increase.

The poem comes to a climax in the last lines of the third stanza, where, in precisely Biblical language, the lover teaches the mistress the sure way of preserving her heart and entering into perfect union with him:

Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it:
Loves riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
It stayes at home, and thou with losing savest it:
But wee will have a way more liberall,
Then changing hearts, to joyne them, so wee shall
Be one, and one anothers All. (27-33)

The paradox of lines 29-30 echoes Christ's words of Mark viii.35, where He defines a similar gain-through-loss: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall save it." Then, having employed the paradox, the lover explains the manner in which it works, the same process which gives the Christian paradox validity--the distinct identities of master and disciple must merge into a unity. When this happens, the conditions under which any loss can occur in giving are removed. With this distinctly Christian vision of union, this Christlike lover finishes his joyful catechism on the nature of perfect love. Biblical imagery and idea clearly function crucially in the statement of this poem.

With "A Valediction: of my name in the window," we have one of the two or three most sustained uses of Biblical materials in the Songs and Sonets. This poem, along with "Twicknam Garden" and, in a smaller measure, "The Blossom," reveals a technique of using the Bible not seen in the poems discussed so far. Here, in an extended metaphor, Donne parallels the parting of a lover and his mistress to the parting of Christ and His disciples at the Ascension.⁷ Though still a metaphorical use, as much of that in the poems discussed above has been, this employment of a specific Biblical event, with the characters and sentiments relating to it, represents a new level in

Donne's use of Scripture. This difference consists mainly in the fact that the metaphor is drawn out to great length, but also in the fact that the Biblical event itself, not just Biblical phraseology, confers much meaning on the poem. Of course, the Scriptural event is recorded in language, and our recognition of the parallels between this poem and that event depends upon a sensitivity to Biblical language, but beyond that, there is a nexus of meaning and emotion connoted by the Biblical archetype itself which operates to great effect within the poem.

The poem shows a lover about to leave his mistress. Before so doing, he has scratched his name in the window of her room to serve as a reminder of him during his absence. In discoursing on the significance of this action, he comments upon the power, permanence, and meaning of the name; promises to return; and instructs the mistress in her duties and deportment during his absence. Stanza I claims for the name the power to preserve the glass upon which it is inscribed:

My name engrav'd herein,
Doth contribute my firmnesse to this glasse,
Which, ever since that charme, hath beene
As hard, as that which grav'd it, was;
Thine eye will give it price enough, to mock
The diamonds of either rock. (1-6)

The image of engraving and the attribution of a diamond-like permanence to the name-inscribed-glass recall two Scriptural passages in this poetic context: first, there

seems to be a general reference to Christ's declaration, "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Lu.xxi.33). In light of the lover's subsequent definition of the mistress' duties toward and blessings from the name, it seems legitimate to identify the name, a word, with Christ's "words," his gospel. But an even more applicable Biblical comment occurs in Revelation. In John's opening messages to the churches, he employs the image of being inscribed with God's name to illustrate the certain preservation of the saints who "overcome": "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God...and I will write upon him the name of my God..." (Rev.iii.12). Donne does not, of course, use the figure with perfect metaphoric consistency--he has the Christ-lover inscribe a pane of glass, not the body of the mistress--but the preservative power of the name and its inscription on a hard substance recall this figure from Revelation and initially establish the role of the lover and his mistress as Christ and his disciple, identifications which become clearer in the succeeding lines.

The next two stanzas further the claims made for the significance and power of the inscribed glass. Stanza II focuses on the transparence of the glass and its power to unify the lovers by reflecting the mistress' image on its name-bearing surface:

'Tis much that Glasse should bee
As all confessing, and through-shine as I,

'Tis more, that it shewcs thee to thee,
 And cleare reflects thee to thine eye.
 But all such rules loves magique can undoe,
 Here you see mee, and I am you. (7-12)

This description of the unifying power of the glass parallels Christ's explanation of the spiritual communion between Himself and His disciples through the agency of the indwelling Holy Spirit:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever: Even the Spirit of truth...ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. (Jo.xiv.16-20)

Not only does the conceit of lines 9-12 establish the glass's ability to intermingle the beings of the lovers as a parallel to the Holy Ghost's role in the Christian analogue; in thus synthesizing the identities of the lovers and localizing that unity on the surface of the pane, this turn of wit recalls the already-cited allusion to Revelation and uses it even more precisely than did the first stanza--now the lover's name is actually inscribed on the mistress.

Stanza III asserts once again the permanence of the inscription and re-emphasizes, with three additional Biblical allusions, the enduring union of the lovers:

As no one point, nor dash,
 Which are but accessories to this name,
 The showers and tempests can outwash,
 So shall all times find mee the same....(13-16)

The first three lines here combine the imagery of Christ's

statement in Matthew v.18--"...Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law..."--with that of Matthew vii.24-25: "...whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." Then line 16 draws upon Hebrews xiii.38--"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever"--to complete the characterization of the lover as a Christ-figure and thereby conclusively establish the grounds upon which the permanence of this love-union is postulated. That point having been finally settled, the lover returns to the metaphoric identification of the name with the Holy Spirit which he first suggested in stanza II:

You this intirenesse better may fulfill,
Who have the patterne with you still. (17-18)

In I Corinthians iii, Paul speaks of the growth of the Christian as a building upon the "foundation...that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (vs.11) and concludes, "...ye are the temple of God, and...the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (vs. 16). The lover's words here obviously recall this Pauline discourse, itself verbally related to Christ's description of Himself as a "rock" in the Matthew chapter cited above, as he exhorts the mistress to "fulfill" his "intirenesse," to reconstruct his presence, by virtue of

the "pattern," the spirit, which he leaves behind. These lines put beyond doubt the poem's metaphoric identification of the lovers as Christ and disciple, to remain in union during their separation by means of the name-spirit, and begin the lover's instruction of the mistress in her duties during his absence, a point elaborated later.

Stanza IV (ll. 19-24) replaces the poem's concentration on the permanence of the name and the figurative relation of it to the Holy Spirit with a simpler message for the mistress. The lover suggests that "if too hard and deepe/ This learning be, for a scratch'd name to teach," the woman may take the name as a memento "Lovers mortalitie to preach" or as the man's "ruinous Anatomie." Then, in stanza V, the lover extends the metaphor of Ascension by promising, like Christ, to return after his absence:

Then, as all my soules bee,
 Emparadis'd in you, (in whom alone
 I understand, and grow and see,)
 The rafters of my body, bone
 Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
 Which tile this house, will come againe....
 (25-30)

Christ's promise to return is stated explicitly in the chapter of John to which we have looked above: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself....(xiv.2-3). Donne's art here

is very subtle. In characterizing the lover's body as a house, he skillfully integrates the imagery of this passage from John, where Christ describes the heavenly home of the disciple as a "mansion," with the imagery implied in stanza III, where the Biblical allusions defined the mistress' task of fulfilling the lover's "intirenesse" as that of serving as temple for the Holy Ghost. When the lover returns, the mistress can relinquish her function as the temple of his spirit, return it to him, and enjoy his bodily presence as her own "mansion."

The first three lines of the stanza (25-27) corroborate this relationship of stanzas V and III, for they elaborate the theme of those last lines of stanza III (17-18) in leading up to the lover's promise to return at which we have just looked. In obviously religious language, lines 25-26 confirm the lover:mistress=Christ:disciple equation that we have noted and underscore the notion that the mistress must embody the lover's spirit in his absence. And the parenthetical clause in lines 26-27 makes the same point. In language close to that of Acts xvii.28--"...in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being..."--the lover stresses the mistress' role as his representative during his absence. Literally, of course, these lines show the lover's real vitality, his spiritual life, to lie in the mistress' being, a dependency paralleling that of the ascended Christ upon the

church below.

Stanzas VI through X explicitly prescribe the mistress' duties and deportment in the lover's absence. The first lines of stanza VI directly charge the mistress to carry out the task already specified: "Till my returne, repaire/ And recompact my scattered body so" (31-32). In this metaphoric context, these lines must recall the parting instructions of Christ to his assembled disciples: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me..." (Acts i.8). To be a witness of the lover in his absence is the task assigned the mistress here, and the agency of performance, the spirit-in-the-name, has already been established as a parallel to the Biblical original--the third person of the Trinity.

Stanzas VI and VII extend the parallels between the lover and Christ and urge a decorously mournful performance of duty upon the mistress-disciple. Mentioning that "the vertuous powers...Fix'd in the starres...flow/ Into such characters, as graved bee/ When these starres have supremacie..." (33-36), the lover commands a corresponding sympathy between the mistress and himself:

So since this name was cut
When love and grieffe their exaltation had,
No doore 'gainst this names influence shut;
As much more loving, as more sad,
'Twill make thee; and thou shouldst, till I returne,
Since I die daily, daily mourne. (37-42)

The lover's reference to the "exaltation" of "love and

gricfe" underscores the links between him and the crucified Christ, and his citation of the name's power to penetrate doors recalls, in this context, not only the miraculous ability of the resurrected Christ to traverse solid matter (cf. John xx.19), but the close communion of Christ and disciple promised in Revelation iii.20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." This allusion seems particularly appropriate in light of the previous identification of the mistress with a temple.

Furthermore, the sympathetic sorrow urged on the mistress has a Biblical source which further confirms the metaphoric identity of her as a disciple, the lover as Christ. In Matthew ix. 15 Christ defines the proper deportment of His followers after his death and ascension: "...Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they shall fast." Thus the daily mourning of the mistress, correspondent to the daily death of the absent lover--his claim, "I die daily," repeats the words of Paul in I Corinthians xv.31--extends the underlying metaphor of the poem.⁸

In stanzas VIII-X the speaker's attention turns to the practical fears of a lover: Suppose another man

vies for his mistress' love in his absence? And his security against the encroachment of any such interloper must be the potent magic of the name inscribed in the glass. He informs the mistress in stanza VIII that if she opens the window to entertain the attentions of another, "thou thus...offendst my Genius" (47-48). And in stanza IX he attempts to empower his name to "step in, and hide" (54) the name of any man who may write to the mistress in his absence. Finally, envisioning the possibility that the mistress might be seriously turned toward some rival and write in response, the lover declares the power of the name to thwart the opponent:

And if this treason goe
To an overt act, and that thou write againe;
In superscribing, this name flow
Into thy fancy, from the pane.
So, in forgetting thou remembrest right,
And unaware to mee shalt write. (55-60)

In general, these stanzas proclaim the power of the name to cast out devils, a virtue attributed to the Holy Spirit in Mark xvi.17: "...In my name shall they cast out devils...." Lines 57-60, however, allude specifically to Christ's promise in John xiv. that "...the Holy Ghost... shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (vs.26). Thus Donne sustains the metaphor almost to the end.

The poem ends on a skeptical note. As if he realizes that he has imagined a humanly impossible ideal, the lover concludes by facing the real limitations of human

love and apologizes for his chimerical reverie:

But glasse, and lines must bee,
No meanes our firme substantiall love to keepe;
Neere death inflicts this lethargie,
And this I murmure in my sleepe;
Impute this idle talke, to that I goe,
For dying men talke often so. (61-66)

These lines are tonally consistent with stanza IV, where Donne self-consciously abandons the main conceit for a moment to view the imminent parting with quite human eyes:

Or if too hard and deepe
This learning be, for a scratch'd name to teach,
It, as a given deaths head keepe,
Lovers mortalitie to preach.... (19-22)

Moreover, they harmonize with the undertone of doubt that begins to sound with the lover's declaration, "I die daily" and grows more audible as he worries about losing the mistress to a rival. Though this lover is still speaking in hyperbole at the end--he says he is "dying"--, he has abandoned the airy Scriptural metaphor of transcendent love for one more applicable to lovers of flesh and bone. The presence of the thoroughly wrought Biblical figure heightens our sense of this speaker's realistic outlook, when it finally emerges, and, perhaps, makes us regret that love cannot long remain as he initially pictured it.

Like "A Valediction: of my name in the window," "Twicknam Garden" is based on a specific Biblical situation, or rather two of them. In the first stanza a dejected lover enters a garden to seek relief from his love-misery. As he broods on his abject condition (stanza two),

he prays to the god of love for the easeful oblivion of unconsciousness. Then in stanza three he establishes himself as the touchstone of grief and mournfully excoriates the "perverse sexe," one member of which has ruined him. By observing the specific imagery, general rhetorical forms, and underlying archetype of the poem, we discover that Donne is here fusing the two salient Biblical manifestations of the garden topos, Paradise and Gethsemane, in accordance with the Scriptural association of them as the places where the first Adam brought damnation on all men and the second Adam prepared himself spiritually to bring them salvation. (I Corinthians xv.22 authenticates the identification of Christ as the second Adam.) There are thus three levels of meaning in the poem: the literal level shows the dejected lover in Twicknam Garden; the first metaphoric level identifies that lover with Christ in Gethsemane; the second metaphoric level relates that Christ-lover to Adam in Eden. Besides these basic figurative identifications, certain other Biblical imagery contributes incidentally to the texture of the poem. And we cannot afford to overlook these artfully used Scriptural patterns and images if we wish to appreciate this poem fully.

The first stanza progressively establishes both symbolic levels of meaning, as the lover, literally a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is.liii.3),

enters the garden:

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares,
 Hither I come to seeke the spring,
 And at mine eyes, and at mine eares,
 Receive such balmes, as else cure every thing;
 But O, selfe traytor, I do bring
 The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
 And can convert Manna to gall,
 And that this place may thoroughly be thought
 True Paradise, I have the serpent brought. (1-9)

The first four lines employ some Biblical imagery in presenting the purely human lover: his search for a healing spring to wash away his tears recalls Revelation vii.17: "For the Lamb...shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." And his need for "balmes" at his eyes and ears, recalls several New Testament passages where Christ, the "balm in Gilead" (Jer.viii.22), healed deafness (Mk.vii.32, e.g.) and blindness (Mk.x.52, e.g.). The lover here is clearly seeking some such miracle in his own case.

Though there is nothing in these first four lines to suggest the identification of this lover and Christ (in fact, he seems in need of a miracle by Christ), the diction of the following lines effects the metaphoric relationship. The lover calls himself a "self traytor" whose "Manna" has been changed to "gall" by the "spider love," and these phrases link this human speaker with Jesus. According to I John iii.16, Christ was a "selfe traytor" who sacrificed himself for love: "Hereby pre-ceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life

for us...." And the images of "Manna" and "gall" reinforce this identification: Manna is a symbol of God's love and care dating from the wanderings of the Jews in the wilderness (cf. Ex.xvi.), and gall symbolizes spiritual isolation. On the cross, where he was forsaken by God (Matt.xxvii.46), Christ was made to drink gall (Matt.xxvii.34). Thus His spiritual crisis there, anticipated in Gethsemane, may be figuratively described as a decline from "Manna," a state of communion with God, to "gall," a state of separation from God. These Biblical images, then, combined with the underlying pattern of a sorrowful man's entry into a garden, symbolically identify this lover as a Christ-figure and Twicknam garden with Gethsemane.

The last lines of the stanza, after the poet has worked his way from the literal level through the first symbolic one, introduce the second symbolic identification, that of Twicknam-Gethsemane with Paradise. And this third garden-form undergirds and deepens the significance of both the other two. It relates to the literal story of the poem thematically in that the sorrowful human lover, like Adam in Eden, has been ruined by a woman. And it relates to the Christian level typologically in that Christ prepared Himself in Gethsemane to reverse the ruin wrought in Paradise. Thus, by the end of this opening complaint, the surface meaning of the poem is symbolically fused with

the two metaphoric levels into a unity. As the lyric proceeds, both these symbolic substrata rest beneath the surface and open wider dimensions of meaning to the poem, though the Gethsemane pattern is more obvious and more influential in shaping the remaining stanzas.

Once in the garden, the Christ-lover testifies to his utter dejection and desperately prays to the god of love for relief:

'Twere wholsomer for mee, that winter did
 Benight the glory of this place,
 And that a grave frost did forbid
 These trees to laugh, and mocke mee to my face;
 But that I may not this disgrace
 Indure, nor yet leave loving, Love let mee
 Some senslesse peece of this place bee;
 Make me a mandrake, so I may groane here,
 Or a stone fountaine weeping out my yeare.
 (10-18)

The first four lines here draw one image from Scripture in describing the beauty and fecundity of the garden. Isaiah lv.12 records a joyful promise to the church that "...the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." This lover, of course, is further depressed by the burgeoning of the garden; the image of animate vegetation functions ironically to heighten our sense of his despair.

This despair leads him to the agonizing prayer of lines 14-18. And these lines incorporate the most significant Biblical influence in the stanza, for this lover's plea for easement, coupled with a determination not to

"leave loving," forms an exact rhetorical parallel to the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane: "...O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt.xxvi.39). The emotional effect of this stanza is, therefore, quite powerful, as this lover writhes in a spiritual agony reflective of a Biblical one the intensity of which produced "sweat...as it were great drops of blood" (Lu.xxii.44).

Stanza three concludes the poem with a claim that the speaker's love is the standard against which all other must be measured and a mournful condemnation of the falseness of women, both of which incorporate Biblical material:

Hither with christall vyals, lovers come,
 And take my teares, which are loves wine,
 And try your mistresse Teares at home,
 For all are false, that tast not just like mine;
 Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,
 Nor can you more judge womans thoughts by teares,
 Then by her shadow, what she weares.
 O perverse sexe, where none is true but she,
 Who's therefore true, because her truth kills mee.
 (19-27)

The first four lines here seem to have dropped the figurative identification of this lover in Twicknam garden and Jesus in Gethsemane. But, if we can extract the general significance from the words, we see the Scriptural counterpart running parallel to the surface. The postulation of this lover's tears as the "wine," the very essence of love, when pronounced by a Christlike speaker, echoes Jesus' promisory dictum in John xv.13, where He prepares

his disciples for His approaching sacrifice: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Despite the dissimilarity between the diction of this verse and the lover's statement here, the basic idea is the same--both Christ and this speaker are setting up their love as the touchstone in comparison with which all other must be evaluated.

The last lines (23-27) explicitly state the theme of woman's falseness and thus recall the image of Paradise employed in stanza one and relate this betrayed lover to the first man betrayed by woman. And this symbolic linking of Twicknam garden and Paradise explains the logic by which the lover ironically inverts the Biblical statement "...ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (Jo.viii.32). The mistress' truth "kills" the lover because she is a true child of Eve, a member of the "perverse sexe." Her killing truth is the truth to type.

"Twicknam garden" is one of Donne's most beautiful and moving poems, even to the thoroughly secular man. But for the Biblically sensitive reader, the poet's use of the Scriptural parallels greatly enhances the depth of the emotion and the precision of the expression. Donne's graceful suffusion of the Biblical images into the texture of the poem results in a statement of inexhaustible richness.

One last poem which characterizes the lover as a deity, although an infernal one, is "The Blossome." In

fact, it is the lover's heart, not he himself, that is so characterized, and it is described in Satanic terms. Accordingly, the poem includes a sketchily presented Edenic seduction, a metaphoric use of Scripture similar in method to that elaborated in the poems above.

This highly cynical poem establishes the lover's heart as a being with a mind of its own and presents a sort of one-man debate which records the lover's hesitation about abandoning an unreceptive mistress. He objectifies his double-mindedness by imagining that his "naked thinking heart" (27) desires to remain with the lady until "Twenty dayes hence" (34) in order "to get a part/ In a forbidden or forbidding tree" (12), while he himself goes to London. In accounting for the heart's obstinate insistence on continuing the "seige" (13), the lover characterizes it as a being "which lov'st to bee/ Subtile to plague thyself" (18-19). Now the word "subtile," used in context where a woman identified as a "forbidden or forbidding tree" is the object of a "seige," must recall Satan's deception of Eve in the Garden. (Genesis iii.1 calls the serpent "more subtle than any beast of the field.") Thus the Biblical seduction in Eden is established as the archetype upon which this attempted conquest is based.

Though this Scriptural pattern is not extended to great length, the poem does bear two other points of similarity to it. One is the innocence of the woman, a quality

power of that in "Twicknam garden" nor is it used in such a complex manner. It does testify, however, to Donne's ready use of Scriptural patterns and language when such analogies can add wider dimensions of meaning to his poetry.

The Divine Mistress

We next come to a group of poems in which the mistress is elevated to the status of divinity, the lover occupying the position of a votary or subject of hers. In these lyrics, as in those discussed above, Biblical imagery adds to the richness of the poetic texture, contributes to the characterization of the lovers, and, in some cases, establishes meaningful contexts for the action described. This category of poems comprises "A Feaver," "A Valediction: of weeping," and "The Dreame."⁹

"A Feaver" uses the Bible sporadically to praise the mistress and highlight the lover's fear of losing her to the disease. The basic sentiment of the poem is that the mistress is all-in-all to the lover; accordingly, he establishes the conceit that she is the "whole world." Though it does not become apparent at the first of the poem, however, the metaphor is actually more refined than this: the lady's nature is poetically separated into body and spirit and these parts made analogous to the physical earth and "the worlds soule" respectively. Thus (after an opening plea to the mistress not to die) when the poet addresses the mistress as "thou [who] canst not die" (5),

he is referring precisely to her spirit, not to her whole being. But if she (her spirit) cannot die, she can go "from this world" (7) and cause it to "vapor," to dissolve. The lines literally mean that the flight of her spirit, "the worlds soule" (9), will leave nothing but a decaying "carkasse" (10); figuratively, however, these phrases identify her with the Spirit of God that moved "upon the face of the waters" (Gen.i.2) and wrought creation or with the Son "by... [whom] all things consist" (Col.i.17). Donne's subject, of course, is destruction, not creation, but these allusions indicate his Biblical orientation as he imagines the undoing of the creating Spirit's work or the cessation of the Son's sustaining function.¹⁰ The woman (or her spirit, at least) is thus metaphorically elevated to divine status.

In stanza four the equation of the woman's spirit with the "worlds soule" and her body with the earth becomes clear. The speaker momentarily identifies her fever with the eschatological fire:

O wrangling schooles, that search what fire
 Shall burne this world, had none the wit
 Unto this knowledge to aspire,
 That this her feaver might be it? (13-16)

Such a fire is prophesied in, for example, II Peter iii.10 as a time when "the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works which are therein, shall be burned up." Were the mistress' spirit not distinguished from her body, of course, the suggestion of these lines

of the poem would conflict with the previous characterization of the mistress as divine.

Even as it is, the lover cannot long endure the aspersion cast on his mistress by the idea of this stanza; consequently, in stanzas five and six he backs away from it and offers a more complementary suggestion. In stanza five he predicts a short duration for the "fire," "For much corruption needfull is/ To fuell such a feaver long" (19-20). Stanza six goes even further, as the lover declares that even the lady's physical being is above that of mere mortals--"Thy beauty, 'and all parts, which are thee,/ Are unchangeable firmament" (23-24)--in language which recalls once again the first chapter of Genesis.

Having at least immortalized not only the woman's spirit, but her body as well, the lover's last turn of thought is a gesture of deep admiration and devotion:

Yet t'was of my minde, seising thee,
Though it in thee cannot persever.
For I had rather owner bee
Of thee one houre, then all else ever. (25-28)

Paralleling the devout worship of the last lines here are such Scriptural declarations as that of the Psalmist--"...I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps.lxxxiv.10)--or of the Apostle Paul: "...I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil.iii.8). Through

an eclectic use of Biblical imagery and idea, then, this poem views the mistress as a divine creature and records the lover's heart-felt love for her.

Like "A Feaver," "A Valediction: of weeping" characterizes the mistress as a creating spirit, but this poem concentrates directly on cosmogony, whereas "A Feaver" deals with the 'possible disintegration of the world. The poem considers the parting of a pair of devoted lovers, as the male partner prepares to undertake a sea journey. As they weep, the speaker notices that each tear he sheds bears an image of his beloved, a property which confers great value upon them: "...thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare,/ And by this Mintage they are something worth..." (3-4).

In stanza two, however, the imagery changes from that of coining and stamping to that of cosmogony, and this second stanza establishes the central conceit of the poem:

On a round ball
 A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
 An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
 And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
 So doth each teare,
 Which thee doth weare,
 A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
 Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
 This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven
 dissolved so. (10-18).

The mistress's power to evoke tears and then make each one into "A globe, yea world" (because each bears her image, and she is all-in-all to the lover) is likened to

the cartographer's ability to make an "All" of a blank ball. But, ultimately, the original action of the Supreme Artificer, as described in Genesis i, underlies both of these acts of "creation": "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void: and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (vss. 1-2). The basic concept of creation from chaos which Donne is using here is Biblical.

That the poet has the Scriptural account of creation in mind is further suggested by the last two lines of the stanza. In those lines he sadly laments that, as the weeping of the two continues, his newly created world is destroyed in the same way that earth was destroyed in the time of Noah: "...This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so" (18).

The speaker concludes by urging the mistress to cease her weeping. Because she not only moves the waters, but creates them, the lover addresses her as "more then Moone," a supernatural being who has the power to "Draw ...up seas to drowne me in thy spheare..." and to "Weepe me...dead" (19-21). Thus, through the Biblically based cosmogonical imagery, the mistress receives high praise as a sort of creating divinity who also has the power to utterly destroy the lover's world. Such an extravagant conceit skillfully objectifies the deep sorrow of the parting

lovers.¹¹

The dramatic situation portrayed in "The Dreame" is that of the mistress' interrupting the lover's dream of her by entering into his bed chamber. In his waking response to her coming, the joyful lover uses Scriptural concepts and imagery to characterize the mistress as a godlike creature and record his devotion to her.

In the opening lines, the lover expresses pleasure that the entering woman has disturbed his dream and sees wisdom in her so doing--"...thou wakd'st me wisely" (5)--, for, he declares, the dream was a "theame/ For reason, much too strong for phantasie" (3-4). He then urges her to help him finish the plot:

My Dreame thou brok'st not, but continued'st it,
Thou art so truth, that thoughts of thee suffice,
To make dreames truths; and fables histories;
Enter these armes, for since thou thoughtst it best,
Not to dreame all my dreame, let's act the rest.
(6-10)

The implication that the mistress somehow knew that he was dreaming, what he was dreaming, and how far his dream had progressed shows that the man conceives her as more than mortal. And the identification "Thou art...truth" must suggest Christ's claim "...I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (Jo.xiv.6), or one of the many Old Testament passages where God is either identified as truth or said to be the author of it (e.g., Is.lxv.16).

In stanza two the lover reflects on the means by which he identified the mistress when she first appeared:

As lightning, or a Tapers light
 Thine eyes, and not thy noise wak'd mee;
 Yet I thought thee
 (For thou lovest truth) an Angell, at first sight,
 But when I saw thou sawest my heart,
 And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an Angels art
 When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st
 when
 Excesse of joy would wake me, and cam'st then,
 I must confesse, it could not chuse but bee
 Prophane, to thinke thee any thing but thee. (11-20)

These lines contain several Biblical references, all of which contribute to the characterization of the mistress as a god. The woman at first seemed to be an angel, says the lover, her eyes appearing "As lightning, or a Tapers light...." The manifestation of divinity (God or an angel) by lightning or fire is almost commonplace in Scripture: the voice of God speaks to Moses out of a burning bush (Ex. iii); a divine messenger with "his face...the appearance of lightning" reveals a great vision to Daniel (Dan.x.6); even Jesus, after the Resurrection, had a countenance "like lightning" (Matt.xxviii.3). In line 14, the lover apologetically explains that he is bothering to reveal his original mis-identification of the woman as an angel only because she loves truth. And this phrase adds more Biblical evidence that the lady is here being thought of in divine terms. The statement "thou lovest truth" recalls Psalms li.6: "Behold, thou [God] desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." And the lines "...thou sawest my heart,/ And knew'st my thoughts..." echo David again: "Search me, O

God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts..." (Ps.cxxxix.23). In view of these extraordinary abilities, the lover concludes, "I must confesse, it could not chuse but bee/ Prophane, to think thee any thing but thee." He has recognized her as a creature above the angels--in short, as a god.¹²

The last stanza embraces the dramatic situation of the mistress' leaving the chamber. In it the speaker comments on the quality of true love and speculates on the reasons for her departure. In both purposes, he employs Biblical ideas. He begins, "Comming and staying show'd thee, thee..." (21), but claims that her leaving makes him doubt "that now,/ Thou art not thou" (23). Her "Comming and staying" in this context suggests God's mercy in coming in the flesh to save helpless men and serves as proof of her divine nature. But her leaving makes him doubt that it is really she; it seems inconsistent with her nature as he understands it, just as the disciples in Acts i.6 failed to understand Christ's ascending without restoring "the kingdom to Israel." The lover's first reaction to the mistress' intended departure is to question the strength of her love-- "That love is weake, where feare's as strong as hee..." (24)--in a statement that recalls I John iv. 18--"perfect love casteth out fear." But seeing that she is determined to leave, despite his protests, he suggests another explanation for her coming and going in language that extends the

identification of her with Christ:

Perchance as torches which must ready bee,
 Men light and put out, so thou deal'st with mee,
 Thou cam'st to kindle, goest to come; Then I
 Will dreame that hope again, but else would die.
 (27-30)

That the mistress came "to kindle" recalls Isaiah's prophecy of the Lord's rebuilding Zion and dispelling her assailants--"...under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame..." (Is.x.16-17)--, a passage which metaphorically anticipates the New Testament description of Christ as "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jo.i.9). And the possibility that she goes "to come" reminds us of Christ's promise to return in John xiv.2-3: "...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again...." It is, of course, consistent with the basic metaphor here that the lover says the hope of the mistress's return is all that makes it possible for him to continue living.

Taking the poem as a whole, we can see that Donne has used the Bible extensively to portray the mistress as a divine creature. Specifically, he has established a subtle parallel between her pleasant and timely appearance in the lover's bedchamber and the physical manifestation of God on earth in the Incarnation. The author has sought, and found, an effective new twist by means of which to

revitalize a much worked Ovidian theme.¹³

The Lovers Apotheosized by Love

We now turn to a group of poems which celebrate love as a fulfilling and fulfilled relationship. In these poems, the lovers have experienced a mutually shared emotion and attained an elevated union in which all distinction of degree between them has been banished. In the lyrics discussed above, one of the pair was generally depicted as divine in relation to the other earthbound one, and the affair had not yet progressed to the point of complete understanding and mutual reciprocation of affection.¹⁴ But "The Anniversarie," "The Canonization," "The Relique," and "A Valediction: of the booke" predicate as a starting point the satisfactory achievement of a state of mutual love and the complete equality of the lovers. These poems, like those already considered, use Biblical concepts and situations significantly to characterize the lovers, define the nature of their relationship, and establish imaginative contexts within which the various scenes of the love-drama are enacted.

In "The Anniversarie," at the completion of an entire year's relationship with the mistress, the lover finds occasion to declare the immutability of their love (stanza one) and to predict the continuance of it in heaven (stanza two). Stanza three reverts to the notion introduced in the first of the poem, exhorting complete truthfulness on

the part of both lovers, so that they may insure together the eternality which the speaker has envisioned. The idea of the preservative power of love and the conception of the afterlife here presented, as well as certain other incidental details, all derive from Scripture.

The central idea of the poem occurs in lines 6-10:

All other things, to their destruction draw,
 Only our love hath no decay;
 This, no to morrow hath, nor yesterday,
 Running it never runs from us away,
 But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

The speaker is saying that the relationship of this pair is of the order of eternity and has placed them above the mundane, mutable sphere in which ordinary mortals live. Underlying this conceit are such Biblical passages as Psalm xc, where the brevity and fragility of human life are contrasted to the eternality of God:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction....For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night....they are like the grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth...in the evening it is cut down and withereth.... For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore and ten.... (vss.1-10)

God is from "everlasting to everlasting;" He is the "first and the last..." (Rev.ii.8). Furthermore, through Christ (Love incarnate), he has "translated us into the kingdom" (Col.i.13), has given humans temporal participation in His eternity, though they must wait for death or the destruction

of the temporal order to experience it most fully. The poet is clearly appropriating these Scriptural ideas in his claim that the lovers already enjoy eternity in this life through love.

In accordance with this pattern, stanza two spells out the relationship of the lovers' earthly state to their future heavenly condition. Conceding the physical nature to death--"wee,/ ...Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and eares..." (13-15)--the lover insists on the continuation of their love beyond the grave:

But soules where nothing dwells but love
 (All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove
 This, or a love increased there above,
 When bodies to their graves, soules from their
 graves remove. (17-20)

The idea of the "removal" of souls from their graves to heaven (a place "there above"), of course, is Christian and Scriptural: for example, Jesus promised the thief on the cross an immediate home of the soul "in paradise" (Lu. xxiii.43).

We should also note, since such a realization adds to our appreciation of the lover's commitment to his mistress and to their relationship, that the main thought of these lines also uses Scriptural doctrine very subtly. Christ told the Sadducees, when they propounded a problem concerning the Mosaic law of marriage and the last resurrection, "...ye know not the scriptures...when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in

marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mk.xii.24-25). In light of this Biblical statement, the lover's notion that the only possible change of their love in heaven is that it be "increased" reinforces his earlier claim that their love is already of an heavenly nature and they as-yet-unglorified angels.¹⁵

The first two lines of stanza three extend the speaker's discourse on the future heavenly state of the lovers, but his attention rather quickly reverts to a fact of more immediate interest to him--their present condition on earth:

And then wee shall be throughly blest,
But wee no more, then all the rest;
Here upon earth, we'are Kings, and none but wee
Can be such Kings, nor of such subjects bee....
(21-24)

The contrast of these two couplets consists in the fact that, whereas in heaven all shall be "kings and priests" (Rev.i.6) and "shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev.xxii.5) --or be "throughly blest," as the lover describes it--; the lovers are already "Kings" in this life. With the self-centeredness of a lover, this speaker delights in the exclusiveness of the heavenly relationship he enjoys with his mistress, a blessing for which "all the rest" will have to wait.

The poem ends with an exhortation to the mistress that she join the lover in concluding their earthly reign, the merest beginning of their eternal dominion, in a manner

befitting their kingly status:

Let us live nobly, and live, and adde againe
Yeares and yeares unto yeares, till we attaine
To write threescore: this is the second of our
raigne. (28-30)

These lines have a Biblical flavor much like that of the last half of stanza one, and incorporate some of the notions found in the verses from Psalm xc quoted above: the meaninglessness of mortals' time from a divine perspective (a "thousand years" are to God as "yesterday") and the concept that the normal lifespan of man is "threescore." With these images the poem has come back to its beginning, and Donne has employed Scripture to portray the love of this devoted pair as an enduring entity which already, in this life, partakes of the eternity into which it will finally pass.

Like "The Anniversarie," "The Canonization" celebrates the perfect union of the lovers and envisions them as apotheosized saints. But the tone of the poem is more variegated than that of "The Anniversarie," for it begins in vein of tongue-in-cheek Petrarchanism before getting to a serious statement of the divine nature of the lovers and their heavenly relationship. Accordingly, one detects the Biblical influence in the latter stanzas of the poem. Beginning with the third stanza and continuing to the end, the poem embodies Scriptural concepts and phraseology to define the "Mysterious," divine quality of the lovers' union.

The first two stanzas seem intended to silence any bothersome interference by outsiders. The first implores the (real or imagined) critic, "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love" (1), and proceeds to suggest other objects of attention for the meddler. Stanza two defends, in a lightly ironic, Petrarchan tone, the harmlessness of the lovers' activities:

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
 What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
 Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 When did the heats which my veins fill
 Adde one more to the plagueie Bill? (10-15)

And the poet concludes that life goes on, "Though she and I do love" (18).

The playful disparagement of Petrarchan images gives way, in stanza three, to a serious (though not less extravagant) statement of the nature which the lover and his mistress share:

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
 Call her one, mee another flye,
 We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
 And wee in us finde the 'Eagle and the Dove.
 The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
 By us, we two being one, are it.
 So to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
 Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
 Mysterious by this love. (19-27)

All the conceits in the stanza, of course, show the love of the couple to be basically paradoxical: they are like the fly drawn to its death in the candle's flame, the candle which consumes itself in burning, etc. But the climatic conceit, the lovers as the Phoenix, is the crucial

vehicle of meaning here, for it symbolizes a dimension of the love relationship that the "flye," the "Tapers," and the "Eagle and the Dove" cannot. These minor images fitly suggest the irresistible, self-consuming nature of passion, but the Phoenix is a more profound paradox, because it rises "the same" after death. It is this "Mysterious" ability upon which the poet bases the lover's claim to sainthood.

It is also in the image of the Phoenix that the influence of the Bible is most clearly seen. The eagle and the dove, conventional symbols in occidental literature, appear in the Bible, of course: a dove alighted on Christ after His baptism by John (Matt.iii.16), and Jesus Himself characterized the eagle as a quarrelsome bird of prey--"For wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matt.xxiv.28). So one might see some (at least) faint Scriptural influence in the appearance of these symbols of love and rage, but the Phoenix, particularly as depicted in the language of this poem, manifests the influence of the Bible much more clearly than do they. In fact, it is the terms in which the Phoenix is here described, not the thing itself, that shows the Biblical coloring--the Phoenix is never mentioned in the Bible. But the Phoenix is one archetype of eternity; Christ is another. And Donne's contemporaries viewed the Phoenix as a type of Christ. It seems to me that the claim

of the lover "Wee dye and rise the same, and prove/ Mysterious by this love" suggests Christ's death and resurrection here, particularly in light of the subsequent prophecy that he and his mistress will be "Canoniz'd for Love."¹⁶

This reading of the significance of the Phoenix image is corroborated both by the line that precedes it-- "to one neutrall thing both sexes fit"--and by the lover's declaration that he and the mistress "prove/ Mysterious by this love." The description of the physical union of the lovers parallels the Biblical adjuration "...they twain [husband and wife] shall be one flesh; so then they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Matt.x.8). And this Scriptural concept both establishes a Biblical frame of reference for the following lines describing the dying and rising of the lovers and provides part of the significance which the speaker prophesies later lovers will see in viewing him and the mistress as "Mysterious." There are three senses in which the word "Mysterious" must be understood here. First, on the literal level of the poem these lovers "die and rise the same" and enter heaven, as did Christ, whose triumph over death is defined in such texts as I Corinthians xv as the warrant of a similar victory for believers. Second, they are "Mysterious" in that they function as types of a profound truth. Third, the truth which they figure is the "mystery" that perfect love effects the union

of two previously distinct persons. The last two stanzas of the poem employ all these meanings of the concept.

Stanza four identifies the medium through which the message of these lovers will be transmitted and their saintly status documented as the "pretty roomes" (32) of sonnets. Then stanza five offers a model prayer for more mundane lovers to pray in striving for the same divine union:

.....You whom reverend love
 Made one anothers hermitage;
 You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
 Who did the whole worlds soule contract, and drove
 Into the glasses of your eyes
 So made such mirrors, and such spies,
 That they did all to you epitomize,
 Countries, Townes, Courts: Beg from above
 A patterne of your love! (37-45)

These lines re-affirm the perfect union which the speaker has already defined and claimed, and identify the love of the pair as a "patterne" which others will desire to emulate. In recording the "Mysterious" progress of these lovers from earth to heaven, then, Donne has used certain Biblical concepts and the Christian pattern of death, resurrection, and glorification as a model for their transcendence.

I should next like to consider "The Relique," a poem which is quite similar to "The Canonization" in theme and tone; furthermore, it parallels "The Canonization" in using the Bible analogically and typologically to present the relationship of the lovers as a paradigm of perfect union for others to follow. The main emphasis of "The

Relique" comes to bear on the perfection of the mistress-- "a miracle she was" (33). And her perfection, characterized as that of "a Mary Magdalen" (17), is no greater than that of the lover, "a something else thereby" (18). In the end of the poem, the "miracles... [the] harmeslesse lovers wrought" (22) receive enumeration and praise. These themes create a heavy quasi-religious tone and suggest a substratum of meaning which comes to light upon our recognition of the Scriptural element in the poem and the use to which it is put.

The imaginative starting point of the poem is the re-opening of the lover's grave "Some second ghest to entertaine..." (2). The speaker queries whether "he that digs it" (5) and "spies/ A bracelet of bright haire about the bone" (6) will not recover the grave

And thinke that there a loving couple lies,
 Who thought that this device might be some way
 To make their soules, at the last busie day,
 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay? (8-11)

These lines are important to this discussion in two ways: they introduce the theme of enduring, shared love ("there a loving couple lies"), and they establish a Biblically based context for the love in their mention of "the last busie day" (cf. I Thess.iv.16-17). As the poem progresses, this Scriptural orientation becomes more and more crucial to a perceptive reading of the poem.

In stanza two the poet extends the conceit of the first by projecting the reaction of the grave digger when

he recognizes the "haire about the bone" as representing a "loving couple." This identification, "If... it fall in a time, or land,/ Where mis-devotion doth command" (12-13), will cause the couple to be made "Reliques" (16).

The mistress, says the speaker, shall be "a Mary Magdalen," and he "A something else thereby." And since relics promise miracles, the lover concludes the poem with a recitation of "What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought" (22).

Now the crux of the poem lies in the identification of the mistress as "a Mary Magdalen" and the lover as "A something else thereby." And it is at this point that a Biblical orientation rescues us from misreading. Gardner assumes that the mistress is identified with Mary Magdalen because "Mary Magdalen is always represented in art with long brilliant golden hair" (SS, p. 222), an attribute which she supposes Donne to refer to in his startling image of "A bracelet of bright haire about the bone." But that which strikes the one who exhumes the lover's remains as unusual enough to cause him to take them "to the Bishop, and the King" (15) is clearly his understanding that the two are a "loving" couple. It is axiomatic in the poem, both for Donne and for the (imagined) future defiler of his grave, that women are unfaithful: "(For graves have learn'd that woman-head/ To be to more than one a Bed)" (3-4). And the entire episode of making the bones relics takes place in an age when "mis-devotion," lack of

faithfulness, "doth command." Thus it is the faithfulness of the mistress that so impresses the grave digger in the future age.¹⁷

In the synoptic gospels, Mary Magdalen is invariably in the company of the women who go to anoint Christ's body at the tomb on the Sunday after his crucifixion. And in John's gospel, she has a tender, private anagnorisis, at first mistaking him for the gardener, but shortly hailing him as "Rabboni...Master" (Jo.xx.16). It is Mary's love and devotion to Christ, revealed in this chapter of John most clearly, that the poet has in mind as the salient point of similarity between her and his mistress. Furthermore, in light of this Biblical scene, the clear implication of the poem is that the "something else" of line 18 is Christ. And this identification is not so indecorous as it has seemed to some, for the poet is careful to mediate the identification made by the conceit: he says the mistress will be "a Mary Magdalen" and he "A something else thereby" [my italics]. He is not asking the reader to accept the lover and his mistress as the Magdalen and the Christ, even in the imaginative terms of poetry.¹⁸ As we have seen him do in other poems, Donne is here simply using the Bible analogically and typologically, characterizing the faithful relationship of the lovers by evoking the delicate scene where Christ and the Magdalen did "Meet at... [the] grave, and make a little stay."

Not only do these lovers recall Christ and the Magdalen, who are here presented as types of them; this man and his mistress become exemplars for the future age. The last stanza describes the relationship upon which this mysterious function is predicated:

First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
 Yet knew not what wee lov'd, nor why,
 Difference of sex no more wee know,
 Then our Guardian Angells doe;
 Comming and going, wee
 Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales;
 Our hands ne'r toucht the seales,
 Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free:
 These miracles wee did; but now alas,
 All measure, and all language, I should passe,
 Should I tell what a miracle shee was. (23-33)

This portrait of the lovers' love-union is given in justification of their predicted canonization. It emphasizes, of course, first of all their faithfulness, a quality which distinguishes them from the speaker's own age and the future age when they will be apotheosized by those who enshrine their remains as "Reliques." These lines also claim, with an allusion to Jesus' comment on the asexuality of angels in Mark xii.24-25 (see my discussion of "The Anniversarie" above), that this union was exclusively spiritual, a fact surely worthy the name "miracle" in any age.¹⁹ This last stanza, then, extends the analogy between this couple and Christ and the Magdalen and firmly establishes their union as a type of heavenly love. The discussion above should indicate how essential a proper interpretation of the Biblical references is to a clear understanding of the poem.

I should like to conclude this discussion of poems which attribute a kind of divinity to the lovers with a look at "A Valediction: of the booke." This poem imaginatively ascribes to the lovers a divine nature and, conveniently, adds a needed element--a Bible--to the structure of the love-religion which I have traced in these pages. Here the major conceit identifies the "Myriades/ Of letters" (10-11) which have passed between the couple as the repository of all "Rule and example" (14) for "all whom loves subliming fire invades" (13). More than that, the lover conceitedly asserts that he and his mistress stand as the incarnation of Love's "Records" (18), suggesting by this parallel to the Christian pattern the heavenly nature of their union.

In stanza one the lover declares his intention to tell his mistress how she can "anger destiny" (2) by defeating destiny's attempt to separate them, how the lover himself "shall stay, though she [destiny] Esloygne" him, and how "posterity shall know" (4) of their frustration of destiny's efforts. Furthermore, the lover's plan will make the mistress' fame

out-endure
 Sybills glory, and obscure
 Her who from Pindar could allure,
 And her, through whose helpe Lucan is not lame,
 And her, whose booke (they say) Homer did finde,
 and name. (5-9)

These lines embody the logical beginning of both strains of the poem's main conceit. First, even before

the concept is made explicit in stanza two, this first stanza tacitly identifies the essential being of the lover with the letters he has written. He claims that he "shall stay" (in the letters), even though destiny takes him away. That he shall remain behind in the letters is clearly stated in the beginning of stanza two. Second, in the description of the glory that will accrue to the mistress if she follows the lover's instructions, the lines foreshadow the extreme importance, and great value of the work which the lover subsequently instructs the mistress to perform.

The second stanza defines the mistress' task and expresses the poem's major conceit fully:

Study our manuscripts, those Myriades
 Of letters, which have past twixt thee and mee,
 Thence write our annals, and in them will bee
 To all whom loves subliming fire invades,
 Rule and example found;
 There, the faith of any ground
 No schismatique will dare to wound,
 That sees, how Love this grace to us affords,
 To make, to keep, to use, to be these his Records.
 (10-18).

Though it is difficult to pinpoint verbal echoes of specific Biblical verses in these lines, that the couple's "Annals" are to be a kind of Bible for lovers is plain. One is reminded of the Apostle Paul's comment in II Timothy iii.16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...." (Cf. I Cor.x.11, Gal. iii.10, Rom.xv.4). Once the annals are declared a quasi-Bible

and a Scriptural parallel has been founded for the literal statement of the poem, the speaker pursues that logic one step further and posits the identity of the lovers and the "Records" of Love: "...Love this grace to us affords,/ To make, to keep, to use, to be these his Records." The Biblical counterpart of this identification is found in John i.14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Not only because it describes the Christian Incarnation in terms very close to those used by the speaker here--the "Word" manifesting "grace," became flesh--but also because it provides a source for the "glory" which the lover promised his mistress in stanza one, this verse seems to be the Scriptural germ from which the poem's main conceit stems.

The end of stanza two melds the two-pronged beginning of the poem by metaphorically unifying the two lovers into a single entity and identifying that synthetic entity with the "Records" of the love relationship, thus completing the parallel between this conceit and its New Testament model. This imaginative unity having been effected, the speaker then proceeds to speak of the lovers and "This Booke" synonymously throughout the remainder of the poem. Though the Biblical allusions in the rest of the poem pertain to the nature of the Bible itself, they

also describe the lovers and their relationship, since the "Booke" and the lovers have become identical.

Stanza three claims that the lovers-book is eternal, esoteric, and comprehensive: it will endure forever; it is intelligible only to those committed to love; it contains all essential knowledge and art. All three of these claims reflect Biblical ideas about the Bible itself. First, the lover states that "This Booke, [is] as long-liv'd as the elements,/ Or as the worlds forme..." (19-20), alluding to Christ's statement about his teaching in Matthew xxiv.35: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Second, the notion that only those who are spiritually devoted to love can understand its message is also Scriptural. The lover asserts, "Wee for loves clergie only'are instruments..." (22), an idea which recalls Jesus' statement to his disciples in Mark iv.11--"...Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables...." (Cf. I Cor.ii.7-10) In I Corinthians Paul declares,

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. ...hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (I Cor.i.18-20)

In addition to attesting the private nature of the gospel, these verses also parallel the poet's third claim--that

the book the lovers represent contains all essential knowledge:

When this booke is made thus,
Should againe the ravenous
Vandals and Goths inundate us,
Learning were safe; in this our Universe
Schooles might learne Sciences, Spheares Musick,
Angels Verse. (23-27)

Paul's implication in the verses quoted above and the speaker's here are clearly the same: both say, mutatis mutandi, that their message is all-in-all.

Stanzas four through six elaborate the three points already made about the "Booke." Stanza four focuses on its uses by "Loves Divines," that select group who are devoted to love:

Here Loves Divines, (since all Divinity
Is love or wonder) may finde all they seeke,
Whether abstract spirituall love they like,
Their Soules exhal'd with what they do not see,
Or, loth so to amuze
Faiths infirmitie, they chuse
Something which they may see and use;
For, though minde be the heaven, where love
doth sit,
Beauty a convenient type may be to figure it. (28-36)

These lines employ the lover's earlier identification of himself and his mistress with their letters in claiming that the Bible which they constitute will contain "rule and example" (14) for all sorts of lovers--"Here Loves Divines...may finde all they seeke...." Those whose faith is sufficiently strong can abstract what they need from the written word; those who have the spiritual

"infirmities" of a weak faith (Paul so classes a lack of "hope" in Romans viii.24-26) can take from the lovers themselves, the word incarnate, "Something which they may see and use...." Thus the lover re-affirms the esoteric and encyclopedic nature of the "Booke" for disciples of love.

Stanzas five and six enumerate some of the uses to which unbelievers will put this Bible. Like those who Christ said were not "given to know the mystery of the kingdom," such purely secular types as lawyers and statesmen will see in this "Booke" mere "parables" of their own occupations: lawyers will learn new sophistry from the devious actions of common "Mistresses" (38); statesmen will detect similarities between the lack of substance of their profession and the nebulous nature of love.

As he spells out the perverse uses which non-lovers will make of the lovers' records, the speaker himself begins to reveal an undertone of cynicism which rises to the surface in the final stanza. In his account of the book's usefulness to lawyers, he testifies that mistresses have usurped Love's prerogatives and now "from heart, and eyes...exact great subsidies" (41-42) and "Forsake him who on them relies" (43). The similarity between lovers and statesmen lies in the vacuous nature of the interests which both pursue, the need to "governe" (51). the present well, the necessity of hiding "weaknesse"

(52). Then, in the last stanza, the lover prolongs this skeptical view by asserting that, while "presence best tryall makes" (57) of the greatness of love, only through absence can the durability of a love affair be determined. As he did in "A Valediction: of my name in the window," Donne has here withdrawn from his high-flown conceit of love as a divine relationship to balance it with a more realistic appraisal of the nature of human love. Here, too, it seems to me that the tonal contrast heightens our sense of the lover's desire to find in love a genuine, fulfilling union which could be as he sometimes envisions it.

Summary and Conclusion

Except for a formal opening in "The good-morrow" and a conclusion in "Farewell to love," there does not appear to be any overriding structural principle which determines the sequence of the poems in the Songs and Sonets.²⁰ There is, for instance, no suppressed narrative line beginning with the speaker's cynicism and culminating with his participation in a secure, rapturous relationship with his mistress. Rather, like Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the internal arrangement of the Songs and Sonets seems to depend upon whim and the principle of alternation. (Chaucer, of course, gives his work an internal logic by suiting tales to tellers and letting the interaction of his characters serve as a structural

principle.) The lover's awakening to love in "The good-morrow," for example, is followed immediately by the cynical "Song: Goe, and catche a falling starre." And I certainly have not meant to imply, by my rearrangement of the poems above, that the Songs and Sonets should be printed in a new order, even if the poems which do not employ Biblical imagery or precept could be brought into harmony with the scheme I have outlined--I have discussed only 16 of 55 poems printed by Grierson. Neither do I assume that a single love affair revolving around a single pair of lovers in all their various moods is to be discerned in the whole corpus of poems, though the large looming of Petrarch's Canzonieri in the background might suggest this (v. Guss, passim). I have merely fastened on the drama in the Songs and Sonets and found in the constitutive elements of it--the nature and condition of the speaker, what he is saying, whom he is speaking to, etc.--a convenient and revealing means of explaining individual poems and relating them to others of a similar dramatic nature.

This dramatic orientation, of course, is clearly discernible in the various uses of the Bible which I have discussed. I have treated most, though not all, of the Scriptural allusions and Scripturally based metaphors which I have identified as elements in the characterization of the several agents in the love-drama of the Songs

and Sonets. And this seems to me the main way in which they function. The speaker in these poems is concerned, not with geometrical instruments, insects, the legal profession, human anatomy, or the like; he mentions "compasses," a "flea," "Lawyers," and the "ragges of heart" in the process of objectifying his experience of love in all its variety. Similarly, he uses the Biblical ideas of creation, heaven, Paradise, Gethsemane, etc., not allegorically to throw light on these events and concepts, but metaphorically to externalize his private feelings of joy and despair, hope, cynicism, or frustration. The lover says, "I am blessed, like an angel!" or "I am miserable; my world has been destroyed!" Thus, in the poems treated above, he clarifies his feelings toward himself and his mistress by characterizing himself and her by reference to Scriptural events, concepts, or persons which evince emotions, ideas, and characteristics like theirs.

The emotional and tonal range of the poems I have included is as broad as that in the whole of the Songs and Sonets. Donne does not draw on Scripture only when he feels peaceful or elated, as though he sentimentally views the Bible as a precious book; rather, he uses it freely, whenever it can help him to actualize any mood or situation in which his lovers may be involved. He employs it as readily in completely naturalistic and cynical poems like "Loves Usury" and "The Blossome" as in his most exalted visions of perfect love like "The Anniversarie" and "Lovers

infiniteness." Furthermore, even when he begins with some high-flown Biblical conceit, as in "A Valediction: of my name in the window" or "A Valediction: of the booke," Donne does not allow the Scriptural material to lead him to a predetermined conclusion, but rather turns it to his own ends to make the precise statement he has in mind. Thus our recognition of the Biblical element in the Songs and Sonets does not lessen our appreciation of Donne's poetic art, but increases it, as we see that Scripture is one of the many kinds of material which he synthesizes and uses uniquely in his memorable record of the nature of human love.

Notes to Chapter II

¹All citations to Donne's poetry are from Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., The Poems of John Donne (Oxford, 1933). In later references, I will include line numbers in parentheses in the text.

²LeComte, pp. 268-69, prints a letter of April, 1619, in which Donne, having sent a copy of the youthful Biathanatos, urges Sir Robert Kerr to remember that the book was "written by Jack Donne, and not by Dr. Donne."

³See Gardner, SS, pp. xlvii-lxii, and Shawcross, pp. 411-17. Shawcross disbelieves Gardner's argument that quite a number of the Songs and Sonets were written as late as 1607-1614.

⁴Gardner, SS, pp. li-lii, categorizes all these poems as "poems of unrequited love" or as "cynical generalizations."

⁵In his fear of becoming his "owne new woe," and in the Jobean tone of submission in line 22, Donne echoes the keening tone of the Old Testament prophets. He may have had in mind the mournful prophecy of Isaiah xxix.1-4:

Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!
add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet
I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness
and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. And
I will camp against thee round about, and will lay

siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise
forts against thee. And thou shalt be brought down....

The prophet predicts woe to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, because they have strayed from God. Both this dread of "woe" and the figure of the besieged city are parallel (and arranged in the same sequence) with the poem at this point.

We should also note that Donne mentions the predicament of the sinner's not being able to repent at the last judgment in "Holy Sonnet VII," which reflects, "'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,/ When we are there..." (11-12).

⁶I do not pretend to discuss all of Donne's poems which show the lover in a position of superiority over the woman here, only those in which this superiority is defined explicitly in Biblical terms. "Aire and Angels," for example, characterizes the man as superior to the woman, though not in Scriptural terms sufficiently strong to warrant its inclusion here.

⁷Though the Biblical event of the Ascension is Donne's main source here, it is an "improved" source. Donne does not limit himself to the actions and statements of Jesus' recorded in Acts i, the fullest New Testament account of the Ascension, but synthesizes that account with several other passages of Scripture where Christ discusses his departure, return, and related subjects to

construct a fuller picture of Jesus' last words and deeds than any single Biblical text can provide.

⁸The lover's use of this Pauline comment, of course, breaks the decorum of the poem. It seems an undeniable identification, however, so my conclusion is that Donne, whenever he started to mine the Biblical vein, digged it freely.

⁹Other poems such as "The Dissolution," which characterizes the mistress as a savior-figure, might fit here, but I have omitted them in favor of ones in which the Biblical material is more obvious and crucial.

¹⁰Some of the language may suggest a Platonic source, but the poet's mention of the "fire/ that Shall burne this world" (13-14) indicates that Donne's mind is running on a Scriptural track here.

¹¹Similar cosmogonical imagery serves in the beautiful "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day," though it is only one of several kinds of imagery there.

¹²In the lover's assumption that the mistress' entry was purposely timed to occur just when "Excesse of joy would wake" him, there is perhaps audible a faint reverberation of the notion that Christ appeared on the human scene "in the fulness of time" (Gal.iv.4).

¹³See Gardner, SS, p. 209 for a discussion of other Renaissance treatments of this theme.

¹⁴There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization: "Lovers infiniteness," for example, envisioned the perfection of the love relationship, and this perfection was an accomplished fact in "A Valediction: of weeping."

¹⁵The passage quoted from Mark seems to imply that there is no sexual love of any kind in heaven. If Donne so understood it, his allusion implies that the lovers' affair had never descended to the physical plane.

¹⁶Renaissance and seventeenth-century Christians commonly viewed the phoenix as a type of Christ. It is so used, for example, in Milton's Samson Agonistes, ll. 1699-1707, and so explained in Douglas Bush, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton (Boston, 1965), p. 566. Even Guss, who interprets this stanza as Petrarchan and neo-platonic, notes this common Christian usage: "Though the phoenix image is sometimes used with a sexual meaning, it is primarily the symbol of holy mysteries, such as the union of the Virgin Mary with Jesus....Donne's own use of the phoenix to represent the consummation of a marriage in the epithalamion 'Haile Bishop Valentine' reveals his intention of exalting both the married couple and the miracle

of marriage; he considers sexual consummation as merely one element of spiritual union and rebirth" (p. 212). As I read this poem, Donne pointedly devalues the Petrarchan mode in the opening stanzas, substituting in this third stanza a Christian pattern in its place and carrying it out to the imagined canonization of the lovers-saints in the end of the poem. I might also add that Donne's indication in using the phoenix here rather than Christ accords with, for example, his practice in "The Relique," where (as I argue below) he hesitates to make the identification of the lover with Christ explicit, calling the lover instead "A something else" (18). We may also note the language of an incidental reference to the phoenix in Donne's sermon "Deaths Duell" (Sermons, X, p. 234): "Nor doe all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth arise so, as a Phoenix out of the ashes of another Phoenix formerly dead...." Donne here distinguishes two phoenixes; he does not, as in the poem, say the same phoenix rises again. Even though this sermon comes about two decades after "The Canonization," it provides some evidence of how Donne commonly thought of the phoenix and supports my argument to at least a slight degree.

¹⁷Gardner, SS, p. 222, and Shawcross, p. 142, miss the literal meaning of "mis-devotion," seeing instead a reference to actual religious practices, perhaps those of Roman Catholicism.

¹⁸ Failure to recognize that Donne uses Christ and the Magdalen metaphorically and typologically leads Gardner to comment: "It has been suggested that Donne intended that his bone would be a bone of Christ and this has been supported by the revival of the hoary canard that Luther said that Christ and Mary Magdalen were lovers. But however sunk in 'mis-devotion' an age was it would surely be aware that the grave of Christ contained no relics other than his graveclothes" (222).

¹⁹ The Biblical influence is notable in a couple of other lines in this last stanza. Grierson (vol. II of his 1912 edition), p. 50, notes a sermon in which Donne lists salutation and valediction as among "the uses of kissing sanctioned by the Bible...." Kaichi Matsuura, A Study of Donne's Imagery (Tokyo, 1953), pp. 85-89, in discussing the naturalistic love of certain parts of The Progresse of the Soule, claims that the Old Testament was Donne's primary source for the idea that "nature" was "injur'd by late law" in regard to sexual relationships.

²⁰ Guss, p. 197, claims the poems are arranged in a Petrarchan order, but means no more by that than I have said here. His explanation of the arrangement merely identifies the two poems named here as, respectively, a beginning and an ending.

CHAPTER III

THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN "LA CORONA"

According to Helen Gardner (DP, pp. xxii-xxiv), Donne's sonnet cycle La Corona celebrates seven of the traditional mysteries of faith found in the Roman Catholic "Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary" (p. xxii). Miss Gardner judges that the poems are "inspired by liturgical prayer and praise--oral prayer..." and "echo the language of collects and office hymns, which expound the doctrines of the Catholic Faith..." (p. xxii): "His 'crowne of prayer and praise' was to be woven from the prayers and praises of the Church" (p. xxiii). This effort resulted in "striking and memorable expressions of the commonplaces of Christian belief" (p. xxiii). Gardner provides evidence that the ideas and language of the Roman Breviary do affect La Corona, but the ultimate source for this material is the Bible. Since Donne had renounced the Roman faith at least ten years before the composition of these poems (according to Gardner, p. 56, they were probably written in July of 1607) and since he had, by 1607, certainly studied Scripture long and deeply, it seems likely that he intended these poems as devotions not of a Dominican nature (the

Rosary) or of a liturgical cast (the Breviary) or even of Roman coloring at all, but as devotions universally Biblical in theme. And, indeed, these poems evince Scriptural influence in almost every line. As I have suggested above, ours is an age in which the "commonplaces of Christian belief" are no longer so common. I should therefore like to point out the Biblical sources of the cycle here and to discuss Donne's way of turning that material into poetry.

The poems of La Corona are carefully crafted sonnets of the Petrarchan sort.¹ But they also stand as a powerful digest of Christian doctrine to the fit audience though few who are prepared to recognize the Biblical provenance and respond to it. Assuming that these sonnets are good as "poetry,"--they hold a high place in English devotional literature--I will attempt to cite the Scriptural sources of their content and explain the principles which determine the selection and ordering of that source material.

The imaginative starting point of each sonnet in La Corona is some event in the career of the Son. But Donne's primary interest seems never to lie in this event; he is concerned rather with the significance of that event for the seeking Christian. The poems do not generally portray scenes in graphic, physical terms such as one might expect in a private meditation of the Ignatian type, but

concentrate rather on the relations which the events bear to other events or themes in Scripture.² In accordance with this interest, the poems are characterized by a sparsity of pictorial detail and a high ideational content. Furthermore, they exhibit a highly allusive impulse, a tendency to synthesize, as the poet pulls together Biblical happenings and precepts which are entailed in the subject of the poem. A third object of interest in these poems is the posture and role of the speaker, the poetic consciousness which enacts the human response to the complex of meanings which is expressed in each poem. The content of the sonnets, the principles which determine the manner in which that material falls together, the condition and function of the speaker who is projected--all three aspects are rooted in Scripture.

These poems, like many of Donne's, have as their formal cause, their principle of organization, the logical proclivities of the poet's mind. On account of the nature of this subject matter, however, those tendencies do not operate in a way unique with Donne, for the Renaissance inherited a long tradition of Biblical exegesis which passed on customary, if not necessary, ways of interpreting Scripture and of relating events and doctrines in different parts of the written word. Citing the Epistle to the Hebrews as a precedent, Medieval commentators, for example, evolved a complex four-fold method of interpreting the

Bible, in accordance with their belief that the Bible was true universally (on all levels). This method identified a literal and three symbolic significations (allegorical, tropological, and anagogical) in Scripture.³ The system was sometimes expressed in the Latin verses,

Littera gesta docet; quid credas, allegoria;
Moralis, quid agas; quo tendas, anagogia.⁴

On the literal level the words tell a story, identify an object, or state a precept; on the allegorical level, the objects referred to by the words signify a general meaning applicable to the human experience (this level almost always involves the identification of Old Testament personages as types of Christ, the head of redeemed humanity); the tropological level implies the action that the reader should take in response to the Biblical passage--quod agas; and the anagogical level teaches the ultimate (eternal) significance to be derived from the passage--quo tendas. For example, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac literally relates a narrative, allegorically typifies Christ's sacrifice on the cross, tropologically teaches the sacrifice necessary in the life of one obedient to God's will, and anagogically prefigures the harmony of the obedient man and God that is to come in eternity (see Dunbar, p. 20).

Familiar with this method as Donne was (Mueller, p. 90), however, he does not use it systematically as a structural device in the sonnets of La Corona; nevertheless, this exegetical tradition helps to elucidate the

logic by which the content of this poetry is ordered and to explain the poet's various reactions and his shifting self-image. Since these poems primarily concern New Testament events, the literal and allegorical levels are generally one, (e.g., Christ is not a figure for Isaac, but acting in his own right) though the Old Testament type is sometimes brought in retrospectively. The tropological (represented by the poet's responses) and anagogical connections frequently seem to determine the selection of the materials which the poet relates to his main theme. Admittedly, we can usually understand the poet's selection and arrangement of content in terms of thematic and imaginal resemblance; still it seems worthwhile to be aware of the specific interpretive system which Donne knew and used.

The first sonnet, "La Corona," centers on the theme of crowning. Four instances of crowning from Scripture are here melded, as the poet offers his artistic effort as a "crown of prayer and praise" and asks for a crown in return:

But doe not, with a vile crowne of fraile bayes,
Reward my muses white sincerity,
But what thy thorny crowne gain'd, that give mee,
A Crowne of Glory, which doth flower alwayes.... (5-8).

The Biblical sources of the basic contrast established here are found in Isaiah xxviii and I Peter v. In Isaiah, the prophet records:

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim,
whose glorious beauty is a fading flower....The crown

of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower... (vv. 1-4). (Gardner, p. 57, sees these verses as "The contrast on which the sonnet is built....")

But Peter promises the faithful, "...when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Pet.v.4).⁵ Donne has here related two passages which are thematically, even verbally, similar in order to define the range of response which God can make to his offering and to beg the blessed alternative. He also faithfully understands the desired "crowne of Glory" to be available because of Christ's "thorny crowne" (Matt. xxvii.29) and the sacrifice it represents by synecdoche.

The first four lines of the sestet (9-12) elaborate the concept of "A crowne of Glory" by reminding us that its bestowal will usher us into "our endlesse rest" and by attesting the poet's intent meditation upon that wished-for state of being. The final state of the blessed as "rest" is both an Old and a New Testament notion. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews appropriates the Old Testament term (there rest suggested the entry of the Israelites into earthly beatitude in the promised land) to define the spiritual peace reserved for the obedient Christian (Heb. iii and iv), a peace to be worked out ultimately in eternity, but also available in the present life through faith: "For we which have believed do enter into rest..." (Heb. iii.4).⁶

Now what of the first act of crowning mentioned in

the poem, the proffering of "this crown of prayer and praise"? This is a complicated question involving the stance (temporal position and spiritual condition) which the poet assumes in this poem. At certain points in the poem, the meditating poet clearly stands at a point in time from which he has a double vision backward to Christ's sacrifice and forward to ultimate glorification. As a finite, striving creature, he partially fears that he will be classed with the drunkards of Ephraim and receive an ephemeral "crowne of fraile bayes"; on the other hand, he has faith, which generates hope that he will receive the "crowne of Glory" and enter "endlesse rest." Indeed, he declares in lines 11-12 that, with the writer of Ephesians, he already has the reward: "The first last end, now zealously possest...." Ephesians ii.4-6 declares, "But God...for his great love wherewith he loved us...hath quickened us together with Christ....And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus...." By an act of faith, the poet makes "rest" a present reality, and he contemplates it "With a strong sober thirst," a clear-mindedness that contrasts with the drunkenness of the Ephraimites. Thirst, we should note, is a standard Biblical metaphor for the soul's desire for God. I Peter i.13, for example, exhorts: "...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you

at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (cf. also Ps.xlii. 1-2) The poet initially offered the poems out of his "low, devout melancholy," in accordance with the directive of Psalms li.15-17:

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrificeThe sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

In the process of meditation, he has moved from this humble supplication for God's mercy to the joyful possession of it.

It seems to me, however, that the poet already enjoyed the exalted position of a glorified one, at least by implication, in the first line of the poem. That line records the first act of crowning in the poem and is based on the account, in Revelations iv.10-11, of the praising of the Lamb by the four and twenty elders who

fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

This passage identifies the event in the career of the Son which the poem focuses on primarily, and Donne seems to have imagined himself with the praising saints, offering a crown of his own. It may appear contradictory for me to identify the poet as a glorified saint in the first line, when he obviously registers fear, a little later in the

poem, that he may not receive an immutable crown at all, but the key to this paradox lies in his assertion (line 11) that he now possesses the "first last end" "zealously": he is a sinful mortal who, through faith in Christ's sacrifice, can sometimes make an affirmative spiritual gesture and actually get a foretaste of his own glorification. Through his "white" sincerity--the elders in Revelation were clad in "white raiment"--, he is already glorified in the earthly life.

Like the rejoicing saints around the throne of the Lamb, the poet praises God, and in Biblical terms:

Thou which of good, hast, yea art treasury,
All changing unchang'd Antient of dayes.... (3-4)

Though several Psalms open with a declaration of God's goodness (e.g., Ps. ciii, civ), and though Paul attributes the goodness of believers to the workings of the Lord (Eph. ii.10), these lines reflect most specifically the declaration of James i.17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The epithet "Antient of dayes" derives from Daniel vii.13, and the characterization of God as the unmoved mover couches the idea in the verse from James in the language of such Scriptures as Daniel ii.21 ("And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and he setteth up kings....") and Malachi iii.6

("For I am the Lord, I change not....").

The sonnet concludes with a couplet that reverberates with the phraseology of the Old Testament. The poet's lifting "heart and voice...high" recalls Isaiah's exhortation to Jerusalem: "...O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength...say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God" (Is.xi.9). And the message that Donne declares--"Salvation to all that will is nigh"--repeats the words of Psalm lxxxv.9--"Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him..."--with perhaps a glance at the universal invitation of Revelation xxii.17--"...whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

In summary, this poem begins the cycle with a direct offering to the glorified Son of God by a poet who, though a sinner, anticipates by faith, "the substance of things hoped for" (Heb.xi.1), his own ultimate glorification and outlines the divine plan by which that salvation has been made possible. In the subsequent sonnets, he focuses on selected episodes in the life of Christ to elaborate the blessed paradox of the Incarnation and further explain its significance for mankind.

The Biblical event that constitutes the subject of the second poem is the Annunciation, recorded only in Luke's gospel. But the details of the episode as related by Luke figure only slightly in this poem. In fact, Luke's

relation of the annunciation is brief: he records that the angel Gabriel came to Mary, a virgin, and told her she was to conceive of the Holy Ghost and bear a son whose name was to be Jesus and who was to be called the Son of the Highest and to reign over the house of Jacob forever (i.26-35). But Donne does not develop the poem in these terms. He does address Mary as "faithfull Virgin," perhaps a derivation from her submissive statement, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (vs. 38), and announce that she is to bear the Son of God; but aside from a general reliance on Luke for authenticity, the poet ignores the details of the Scriptural account of the annunciation, selecting the substance of the poem from other places in the Bible.

Donne's interest here is not in the fact of the Annunciation per se; he is moved rather to elaborate the paradox of the Incarnation by considering various facets of it. The poet himself takes the role of the announcing angel (Gabriel, the messenger mentioned in Luke, is not referred to at all in the poem) and addresses Mary in the present tense, substituting his own message for the original. In spite of the poet's presence on the scene, however, the poem is almost totally lacking in pictorial detail.

That message propounds the paradox of the Incarnation in six parts: the eternal All becomes a part (l. 2); pure Holiness becomes sin (l. 3); Immortality dies (l. 4);

pure Spirit becomes flesh (ll. 5-8); the Eternal becomes temporal (ll. 9-12); and Light becomes darkness (l. 13). Each of these particular divisions of the paradox has Biblical sources. Colossians i.15-17 states the idea that Christ is "That All, which alwayes is All Every where... (2):

Who [the Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

The last two clauses of this passage also throw light on lines 9-10--"Ere by the apheares time was created, thou/Wast in his minde, who is thy Sonne, and Brother"--, lines which expand, in more specific terms, the concepts that the Son "alwayes is" and "is All" (creates all).

The second aspect, "... Christ cannot sinne, and yet all sinnes must beare" (3), echoes such passages as II Corinthians v.21--"For he God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin..."--and I Peter ii.22-24--"Who [Christ] did no sin....Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...." The third part of the paradox, that Christ "cannot die, yet cannot chuse but die" (4), follows the second according to the Scriptural logic which states that "...the wages of sin is death..." (Rom. vi.23). The idea that the eternal cannot die is consistent not only with human logic, but with such Biblical passages

as Romans vi.9: "...Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." And Revelation xiii.8 refers to Christ as "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," showing that He could not "chuse but die."

The second quatrain of the poem shows the angel-poet announcing to the Virgin that she will bear God's son and clothe him with a sinless flesh:

Loe, faithfull Virgin, [Christ] yeelds himselfe to lye
 In prison, in thy wombe; and though he there
 Can take no sinne, nor thou give, yet he'll weare
 Taken from thence, flesh, which deaths force may trie.
 (5-8)

Line five's identification of Christ's manifestation in the flesh as a voluntary sacrificial action--He "yields himselfe"--is based on such Biblical statements as John x.17-18, where Christ declares "...I lay down my life....No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." The poet's assertion that the Son "Can take no sinne" from his condescension reiterates, in a more particular way, the second aspect of the larger paradox (Holiness becomes sin) and is adequately glossed by such verses as the one from I Peter ii cited above--" [Christ] did no sin," though it may recall particularly the angel's description of the child promised Mary as a "holy thing" (Lu.i.35).

Line 8 iterates the fourth part of the larger paradox--eternal Spirit became flesh--and defines the purpose of this incarnation in Scriptural terms. Christ's flesh

was to "try" death's force in two senses: "to become subject to"; "to demonstrate the limits of." We have already seen passages showing that the divine purpose of the Incarnation was to provide a blood sacrifice acceptable to God, to subject the Son to death. The other sense of "trying" death's force--"to define the limits of"--implies the Resurrection and the victory over death consequent of it (e.g., I Cor. xv). But concentration on the Resurrection comes in a later poem.

Since the last line of the poem--"Immensity cloyed
tered in thy deare wombe"--restates the idea of line 2 (the first division of the paradox) and since we have already considered lines 9-12, which contain the fifth aspect of the paradox (the Eternal becomes temporal), it only remains to notice the light-in-dark variation of the paradox in line 13. This statement, "Thou'hast light in dark," takes a phrase from John i.9 and imaginatively applies it to a situation different from the one in which it originally appeared. John, speaking abstractly of the incarnation of the Logos, the "Word" which made all things and in whom was "life" that was "the light of men" (Jno.i.1-3), then observes: "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (vs. 5). Donne here orthodoxly takes the "light" as Christ, the incarnate Logos, but interprets the "dark" as the womb of Mary, in accordance with the subject of his poem. This one kink, the witty

turn, marks these verses as Donne's more definitely than all the other irony in the poem. With it and a restatement of the first formulation of the paradox (l. 2), he concludes his rumination on the paradox of the Incarnation and turns to a consideration of Christ's nativity.

"Nativity" relies more heavily on the actual Scriptural narrative of an event in Jesus' life than does either of the poems discussed thus far. The poem synthesizes details from Matthew and Luke, the two gospels which record the nativity, in order to underscore one part of the paradox elaborated in the preceding poem--that the Omnipotent Creator became a weak creature in the Incarnation. From Luke ii comes the account of Christ's necessary birth in a stall: "But Oh, for thee, for him, hath th' Inne no roome?/ Yet lay him in this stall..." (5-6). (From Luke also derives the second-line epithet "welbelov'd," a Marian quality based on Gabriel's declaration in i.30: "...thou hast found favour with God.") And from Matthew ii.1 comes the account of the "wise men from the east" who "travell to prevent/ Th'effect of Herod's jealous generall doom" (7-8), and of the flight into Egypt (ii.13-14).⁷

In its handling of the source material, this sonnet clearly demonstrates Donne's eclectic use of Scripture to serve his own purposes and minimize whatever determinations may be inherent in basing a poem on a borrowed story. Only Matthew and Luke mention Christ's birth at all, and their

accounts are complementary and exclusive rather than duplicative: Luke records the manger scene and the arrival of the shepherds, Matthew the epiphany to the wise men and the Herodian plot. Donne has combined elements from both here to point his theme--in Christ the Omnipotent Creator became a vulnerable mortal. This is the heart of the poem, and most of the substance which does not directly describe the events surrounding the birth expounds this subject.

The terms of the paradox at the core of this poem are little different from those enumerated in the previous statement of it in "Annunciation." The poet looks on as the "Immensity cloystered" in Mary's womb "leaves his wel-belov'd imprisonment" where he has "made himselfe to his intent/ Weake enough, now into our world to come..." (1-4). The assertion that Christ purposely made himself weak resembles such passages as Philippians ii.6-7 quoted above ("... [Christ], being in the form of God...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."), but is also the conclusion of an enthymeme the stated premise of which occurred in the previous poem. "Annunciation" cited the incarnation of the Logos; the present poem concludes that the Word became "weake," on the basis of the suppressed Biblical premise "...the flesh is weak" (Matt.xxvi.41). Later, after describing Christ's birth and the Epiphany, the poet returns to the ironic fact of the Incarnation,

this time in almost sentimental terms: "Was not his pity towards thee wondrous high,/ That would have need to be pitied by thee?" (11-12) If a specific Biblical precedent is involved here, in addition to the common New Testament doctrine that Christ submitted himself to the ordeal of the Incarnation out of love and mercy, one might mention the succinct testimony of James 5.11: "...the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

In the manner of the previous poem, the narrative voice in "Nativity" remains an on-the-scene witness throughout the octave, all the verbs being cast in present tense. With the reflexive movement of line 9, however, we get the double perspective on the poet as a camera eye and as a frail mortal for whom the birth of Christ has deep significance, a split view existent in the first poem of the cycle: "Seest thou, my Soule, with thy faiths eyes, how he/ Which fills all place, yet none holds him, doth lye?" (9-10) Then the poem proceeds to state the tender paradox of the merciful God's need for the pity due an imperiled infant (11. 11-12). Now faith as sight is pre-eminently the doctrine of Hebrews xi: After a roll call of virtually all the great men of faith in the Old Testament, verse 13 of that chapter summarizes their plight--"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off...." By the same means, the poet has zoomed in on an event 1600 years before his time,

and he seems almost to take a place in the ranks of the Old Testament men of faith by calling attention to the manner of his participation in the event of Christ's birth. Following this rumination on the meaning of the Nativity for him and on the mode of his relationship to it, Donne concludes the poem by willing his soul back to a direct observation of the flight of the holy family into Egypt: "Kisse him, and with him into Egypt goe,/ With his kinde mother, who partakes thy woe" (13-14). ("Woe" testifies to the poet's sympathetic fear for the Child's life, but also recalls the lamentation of "Rachel weeping for her children," Jeremiah's prophecy of the Slaughter of the Innocents in Jeremiah xxxi.15.) In this role of on-the-spot overseer, the poet begins the next poem, "Temple."

"Temple" gives a more comprehensive relation of the Biblical incident upon which it is based (found in Luke ii.42-52) and employs collateral Scriptural materials in a smaller degree than any of the poems so far discussed. The explanation for this close adherence to the Biblical narrative probably lies in the fact that Luke's account of the boy Jesus' encounter with the doctors in the temple contains a rather full statement of the Mystery; little other material is needed to sharpen the point of the paradox that in the temple scene, a twelve-year-old child evinced knowledge of "all which was, and all which should be writ..." (7).

In the first quatrain, the poet portrays the basic event as recorded in Luke ii.42-47:

With his kinde mother who partakes thy woe,
Joseph turne backe; see where your child doth sit,
Blowing, yea blowing out those sparks of wit,
Which himselfe on the Doctors did bestow....

We should note the changed meaning of the first line: in the conclusion of "Nativity" the poet had exhorted himself to accompany Mary, woeful because of the menace of Herod, into Egypt; here the exhortation is addressed to Joseph, and the woe is Mary's anxiety at not finding her child among the company departing Jerusalem (Lu.ii.44-45).⁸ The return of Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem and their discovery of the child among the learned men rework verses 45-47 of the Luke chapter:

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And...after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

Though Donne characterizes Christ's "understanding and answers" as "sparks of wit," the quatrain is extremely close to the original here.

These verses from Luke also provide the source for most of the second quatrain:

The Word but lately could not speake, and loe,
It sodenly speakes wonders, whence comes it,
That all which was, and all which should be writ,
A shallow seeming child should deeply know? (5-8)

The amazement of the listeners at the mystery of hearing

the young Jesus discourse with the learned men of the temple (here the poet imaginatively shares that amazement), of course, has its seeds in the Biblical account of Luke. But since his theme is teaching and hearing, the business of words, Donne has appropriated the Johannine appellation for the Son, the "Word" (Jo.i.1), to underscore the paradox at the heart of this Mystery; otherwise, these verses add no Scriptural material to Luke's story.

Having posed the paradox as a question, the poet proceeds to explain it in terms of Christ's double nature as the God-man and concludes that the nature of Christ's task on earth required an early start. Here in the sestet Donne departs, in several particulars, from Luke. His answer to the riddle--that Jesus' "Godhead was not soule to his manhood,/ Nor had time mellowed him to this ripeness" (9-10)--takes a more dichotomous view of Jesus' nature than Luke presents. After merely recording the incident in the temple, Luke concludes his account of the episode with a purely naturalistic comment on the child as a normal, developing youth: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lu.ii.52). Though Luke's statement implies an evolving intelligence, Donne apparently interpreted the temple episode as a manifestation of the Word in all of His omniscience, though he does present Christ as physically immature--"Nor had time mellowed him to this ripeness." It seems likely, furthermore,

that the fruit imagery here, though in no way unusual in such a context, stems from the poet's wide acquaintance with Scripture. Isaiah liii.2, Song of Solomon ii.1, and John xv.1 speak of Christ as a "tender plant" and a "root," "the rose of Sharon," and "the true vine" respectively, so there are definite Biblical precedents for characterizing Christ with such plant imagery. One last point deserves commentary: Donne says, "for one which hath a long taske, 'tis good,/ with the Sunne to beginne his business..." (11-12). The "long taske" is, literally, the "Father's business" of Luke ii.49, but this phraseology is curious; it suggests not only that Christ would meet harsh resistance in the accomplishment of his business, but also that He came in "the fulness of time" (Gal.iv.4) to perform a long-awaited task. There may even be a hint of the final act of the performance, to be "lengthened" on the cross, which would put him temporarily in his "long home" (Ecc.xii.5).

As I have indicated above, throughout the first part of this poem the poet assumes the temporal stance of an onlooker, directing Joseph to turn back and find Jesus in the temple and registering his own astonishment at the deep knowledge of the Incarnate Word. In the sestet, however, he resumes his exegetical capacity in order to explain the mystery. As he does so, marshalling knowledge that no one in the temple that day could have known (Jesus' mother and Joseph excepted), he reestablishes a temporal distance

between himself and the event by reverting to preterit verbs. And this removal of himself to a more distant point in time both reinforces the sonnet's structure by calling attention to the poet's new role as interpreter (rather than onlooker) and underscores the enduring significance of the Temple Mystery by defining the poet's condition as a finite mortal of a later day for whom the ancient event is still highly important.

The fifth sonnet, "Crucifying," begins with Donne still temporally separated from the object of his meditation, and his view from afar holds throughout the first quatrain, in which he sparsely narrates the story of Christ's ministry. At line 5, however, he has progressed to the time of the crucifixion, and throughout the remainder of the poem stations himself quite close to the scene with present-tense verbs, as he gets caught up in the intense emotion of the situation. In this sonnet especially, then, the disposition of present- and past-tense verbs accords with the substantive and emotional structure of the poem.

Though this poem is entitled "Crucifying," it avoids the brutal treatment of Christ and never describes Christ on the cross; Donne's major focus here is on the somber irony of mankind's "Measuring self-life's infinity to'a span,/ Nay to an inch" (8-9). He records Christ's ministry in summary fashion (as I said above) and the events leading up to the crucifixion--the prescription of a fate to Him

"whose creature Fate is" and Christ's journey to Golgotha. Then there is a lapse in the account, as the poet only alludes to Jesus' agony on the cross and concludes with a passionate prayer to the crucified Savior. In filling in the substance of the poem, Donne makes extensive use of Scripture.

The first quatrain is quite eclectic and, in some respects, a bit general in its reflection of the Biblical account of Jesus' career of healing and teaching:

By miracles exceeding power of man,
 He faith in some, envie in some begat,
 For, what weake spirits admire, ambitious, hate;
 In both affections many to him ran.... (1-4)

I call this use of the Bible "general" because it is impossible to determine which of Christ's miracles, if any in particular, Donne has in mind as the cause of faith "in some." The gospels abound with reports of Jesus' healing the sick, raising the dead, easing the broken hearted. For example, Christ was once approached by a Roman centurion who requested that his servant, sick of a palsy at home, be healed in absentia. Christ's response to the soldier's confidence in His absent power over the sickness shows the connection between miracles and faith: "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel....as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee" (Matt.viii.10,13). But the "envy" begotten "in some" can be identified quite precisely as the hateful emotion of those who delivered

Christ to Pilate: "...Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matt.xxvii.17-18. Mark xv.10 also uses "envy" in recording this same situation.). Line 3 attributes the "faith" and "envy" of line 2 to "weake" and "ambitious" spirits respectively. The ambition of the religious establishment of the day is devastatingly characterized by Jesus himself in Matthew xxiii.5-7:

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogue, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

Though the relationship of weakness and faith can be documented, it is worth noting that Grierson found "meeke" in "most MSS" (p. 241), and this reading seems more congenial to me, for the word meek recalls particularly the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt.v.5). And the promise of this particular reward underscores the possibilities that Donne had this precise verse in mind, since it establishes such a precise contrast between the "meek" and the Scribes and Pharisees, who had ambition of their own to inherit the earth.⁹ This evidence should make it clear that Donne is drawing on Scripture, sometimes generally, sometimes very precisely, in this account of Christ's ministry.

Lines 5 through 11 synthesize various related Biblical ideas and facts in centering precisely on the condemnation of Jesus, his journey to Golgotha, and his imminent crucifixion. The sad paradox at the heart of this poem, that "the immaculate" Creator receives "a Fate" at the hands of his creatures, is stated in lines 5 through 9a. Even though it perhaps smacks of theology and patristic exegesis rather than Scripture, Christ's immaculateness is asserted in the Bible: II Corinthians v.21 speaks of Him as one "who knew no sin." And that the Son created fate is at least implied in the statement of Colossians i.16-17-- "For by him were all things created....And by him all things consist"--though the word fate is not found in the 1611 Version. Isaiah xl.12 spells out God's omnipotence as creator more concretely:

Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

In addition to attesting God's creatorhood, this passage may have influenced Donne's wording here: line 8 of the poem asserts that those who passed sentence on Jesus measured "selfe-lives infinity to'a span...." Quite possibly the word span derives from this passage in Isaiah which states the attribute of God that Donne is here concerned with.

The focus on the bitter-sweet paradox of Christ's

condemnation occupies the second quatrain of the poem and half of line 9. In 9b through 11 the poem proceeds to the crucifixion (in the subjunctive mood):

Loe, where condemned he
 Beares his owne crosse, with paine, yet by and by
 When it beares him, he must beare more and die.
 (9-11)

Line 10 shows Donne making a choice from among Scriptural sources, for only John (xix.17) of all the gospel writers, asserts that Christ bore his own cross to Calvary; the other gospels record the conscription of one Simon of Cyrene for this task. The "more" which Christ "by and by ...must beare" (Donne, as I said above, refuses to witness the actual crucifixion, mentioning it instead in a future tense) includes not only death, but the sins of mankind. I Peter ii.24 describes Christ's sacrifice and the significance of it retrospectively: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness...." This verse is representative of many Biblical statements which metaphorically characterize sin as a burden to be born. Donne is clearly relying on Scriptural imagery to describe the implications of Christ's death on the cross.

The last three lines of the poem constitute a discrete structural unit, even though they are not held together by the rhyme scheme. An apostrophe to the crucified Savior, these lines reveal, in Scriptural phraseology and

precept, the proper response of the sinful soul to the Lord's propitiatory life and death narrated in the first eleven lines of the sonnet:

Now thou art lifted up, draw mee to thee,
 And at thy death giving such liberall dole,
Moyst, with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule.
(12-14)

Imaginatively prostrating himself before Christ on the cross in line 12, the poet appropriates Jesus' own words to describe the Savior's situation and the response he desires to make to it: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jo.xii.32). The "liberall dole" provided by Christ's death is, of course, redemption and eternal life; if Donne had a specific Biblical text in mind as the source of this reward, perhaps it was another passage from John which is verbally related to Christ's promise in John xii.32: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jo.iii.14-15). These verses use the lifting image and spell out the salvation made possible by that raising. Finally, the last line employs conventional Biblical imagery to define the poet's need and the answer to it, but Donne handles these images in his own fashion. The figure of being washed clean from sin by the blood of Christ is commonplace in the New Testament (e.g., Rev.i.5), but Donne seizes on the wetting

involved in washing rather than the cleansing, and combines that with an image of dryness (symbolizing spiritual lifelessness), the prime example of which is Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. xxxvii). "Crucifying" thus concludes with the poet on his knees before the crucified Savior.

Though "Resurrection," in the context of this sonnet cycle, would appear to be concerned with the resurrection of Christ, the poet seems to intend that meaning only secondarily, if at all. His main concern is with the redemptive effects of Christ's death and resurrection which he, as a struggling believer, expects in consequence of that sacrifice. Only lines 9-11 can possibly refer to Christ's temporary habitation in the grave, and the context and wording of these lines indicate that the poet is thinking primarily of himself rather than of Christ. As a result of this inward focus of the poem, the speaker's relation in time and space to the resurrection of Christ is not a matter for consideration, for he depicts no historical scene in the career of the Son to which he can spatially or temporally relate himself. Donne's omission of the narrative element in favor of an intense concentration on the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection for him turns this sonnet into an expository meditation, much like "Annunciation."

The first quatrain uses Biblical ideas and images

to define the potential salutary effects of Christ's blood on the poet's "dry soule":

Moyst with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule
 Shall (though she now be in extreme degree
 Too stony hard, and yet too fleshly,) bee
 Freed by that drop from being starv'd, hard, or
 foule.... (1-4)

Donne has said "soule" here where his Scriptural sources for the imagery generally use "heart" or "mind." Lines 2-3 recall Ezekiel xi.19, where a transubstantiation of the heart signals a spiritual renewal: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh...." Yet Donne cannot rest satisfied with such a transmutation, for the New Testament teaches that the flesh is evil--"...to be carnally minded is death..." (Rom.viii.6).. He thus wittily "corrects" the Old Testament in the language of the New. Line four's trinity of perjorative epithets--"starv'd, hard, or foule"--also bears witness of the poet's acquaintance with Scripture: a "starv'd" heart is one that has not fed on Jesus, the "bread of life" (Jo.vi.35); a "hard" heart is an unbelieving one, like that of the Israelites in the wilderness (Ps.xcv.8) or of the disciples who refused to believe post-resurrection reports that Christ had risen from the dead (Mk.xvi.14); a "foule" heart is simply a normal, unregenerate human one--"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked..." (Jer.xvii.9).

Line 4 also recalls Christ's parable of the sower (Matt. xiii) in which He defines the various responses of the human heart to the gospel with a figure of planting: sometimes the seed falls "by the wayside" where it is devoured by passing birds (vs. 4); sometimes on "stony" ground, where its roots are too shallow to sustain it in the sun's heat (vss. 5-6); sometimes among thorns, which spring up and "choke" it (vs. 7); and sometimes on good soil, where it yields an abundant harvest (vs. 8). Like Marlowe's Faustus, Donne prays for "one drop" of Christ's blood--the "one drop" also echoes Dives' request from hell for Lazarus to "dip the tip of his finger in water" to cool his tongue (Lu.xvi.24)--to effect the transformation of his heart, to make it a fruitful soil for the gospel to grow in.¹⁰

Lines five through eight bring together several Biblical ideas as Donne voices a belief that, in His resurrection, Christ gained the victory over death not only generally, but particularly, for Donne himself:

And life, by this death abled, shall controule
 Death, whom thy death slue; nor shall to mee
 Feare of first or last death, bring miserie,
 If in thy little booke my name thou enroule....
(5-8)

The doctrine of the first clause here--"And life, by this death abled, shall controule/ Death, whom thy death slue"--is stated by Paul in I Corinthians xv.20-22, 25-26:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive....For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Except for taking the slaying of death as an accomplished fact (whereas Paul foresees it as a future event), Donne has followed the Apostle's notion quite closely here. (In I Timothy i.10 the Apostle declares that Christ "hath abolished death.") The last two lines of the quatrain are adequately glossed by two verses from John's vision in Revelation: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (xx.14-15); those whose names do appear in the book, of course, enter the New Jerusalem. This text explains Donne's reference to the "first" and "last" deaths and identifies the "little booke" of line 8.¹¹

In lines 9-11 (a single conceptual unit, though their unity is not reinforced by the rhyme), Donne states the doctrine of I Corinthians xv on the transmutation of the carnal into the spiritual at the resurrection of the saints:

Flesh in that long sleep is not putrified,
But made that there, of which, and for which 'twas;
Nor can by other meanes be glorified. (9-11)

Of the change from the fleshly to the spiritual Paul says:

As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (vss. 48-49)...We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible....For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (vss. 51-53).

Paul also avers that such a death-change is the necessary way for the earthly to be glorified:

...that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.... (vs. 36) ...there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.... (vs. 39) So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.... (vs. 42) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. (vs. 44)

Donne clearly has in mind such passages as these, very likely these specifically, in this part of his meditation.

Donne concludes the poem with a prayer based on the verses from I Corinthians quoted above:

May then sinnes sleep, and deaths soone from me
 passe,
 That wak't from both, I againe risen may
Salute the last, and everlasting day.

The image of the sleep of sin and death are based on Paul's assertions that the earthy, corruptible, mortal will be raised from the sleep of death (hence Donne's "waking" image) to a heavenly, incorruptible, spiritual condition. And Donne's image of "the last, and everlasting day" combines Paul's declaration that the resurrection of the dead shall mark "the end, when he [Christ] shall have delivered the kingdom up to God" (I Cor. xv. 24) and John's vision of

the New Jerusalem as a place where there is "no night" (Rev.xxi.25). Through thus meditating his own future resurrection as a corollary to the resurrection of Christ, the poet prepares to consider the ascension which will be his as a result of Christ's own apotheosis.

Like "Resurrection," "Ascension" has meaning on both the literal and the anagogical levels; it treats both history and eschatology. Literally the poem celebrates an event in the earthly career of the Son. But through some clever amphiboly in language, Donne actually places his primary emphasis on the event of which that historical ascension is a type--the final progress of Christ to heaven at the head of the body of resurrected saints. The ambiguous lines occur in the second quatrain:

Behold the Highest, parting hence away,
Lightens the darke clouds, which hee treads upon.
Nor doth hee by ascending, show alone,
But first hee, and hee first enters the way. (5-8)

Literally these lines follow the account of Jesus' ascension in Acts i.9-11:

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven ...two men stood by them in white apparel: Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

To the angels' assertion that Christ would return, lines 7 and 8 of the poem add the promise of Christ himself that he would, upon His return, take His followers to a place

prepared for them: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (Jo.xiv.3) It seems clear that, on the historical level, Donne is referring to Christ's promise, echoed in part by the angels at His ascension, that His ascension was to be seen only as a temporary absence from which He would soon return to lead the saints to heaven.

Our recognition of the anagogical (eschatological) level in the quatrain discussed above largely depends on a sensitivity to the Biblical sources of the first four lines of the poem. In these opening lines, Donne sets the scene on the last day and addresses the purified saints mentioned in the Apocalypse:

Salute the last and everlasting day,
 Joy at the uprising of this Sunne, and Sonne,
 Yee whose just teares, or tribulation
 Have purely washt, or burnt your drossie clay
 (1-4)

The meaning of "the last and everlasting day" remains unchanged from the end of "Resurrection," and those who are exhorted to rejoice (the Sun-Son pun comes from Malachi iv.2) are the redeemed referred to in Revelation vii.13-14:

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence come they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said...These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

These verses account for the "tribulation" and "purely

washt" of lines 3-4. The phrase "just teares" recalls John xvi.16-22: there Christ foretells his disciples of His imminent departure and prompt return and warns them that they "shall be sorrowful" during his absence, but promises that their "sorrow shall be turned into joy" (vs. 20) at His return. (This passage provided Donne with authority for commanding the saints to "Joy" in line 2.) And Donne uses one other Scriptural figure, a refining image from Malachi iii.2-3, to characterize the jubilant saints of the last day:

...for he is like a refiner's fire....And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver....

In thus addressing this part of the poem to the resurrected saints, the poet shapes our expectations to read the second quatrain anagogically.

Taken on this second, symbolic level, lines 5-8 refer to several Scriptural sources pertaining to Christ's return and subsequent re-ascension with the glorified church. The phrase "[Christ] Lightens the darke clouds" (6) calls up the image of Judgment day described by Jesus in Matthew xxiv, an event that is to preface the rapture:

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of man be. ...Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the

tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (vss. 27-30)

This passage explains why the clouds are "darke" (all the natural sources of light shall be extinguished) and, since Christ shall "appear" in the midst of that darkness, what Donne means by the "Lightens" of line 6, though this word may also glance at the lightning image of verse 27. A related Biblical passage occurs in I Thessalonians iv.16-17, where Paul is proclaiming the doctrine of the rapture in language which helps to clarify these lines of the poem:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Donne has said "Nor doth hee by ascending, show alone, / But first hee, and hee first enters the way" (7-8), thus emphasizing the uprising of the saints that is to parallel that of Christ. So the passage from Thessalonians here, in the cloud imagery of the poem, relates Christ's treading on the clouds and the similar course of action to be followed by the resurrected saints.¹²

Another Pauline statement, one we looked at in the discussion of "Resurrection," provides Donne with his emphasis on Christ's temporal priority in the resurrection-- "But first hee, and hee first enters the way" (8). II Corinthians xv.22-23 asserts the Son's primacy in the resurrection:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

I conclude, then, that these lines are skillfully ambiguous, that they mean on two levels at once, and that, depending upon which level we contemplate at a given moment, a completely different (though thematically and verbally related) set of Scripture verses is implied by them. These lines, as much as any we have viewed, show how compressed with meaning and suggestion Donne's poetic medium can be.

As at previous points in the cycle, Donne has achieved a vision of sufficient intensity in the octave to carry him to a position on the scene; he has projected himself to that future "last and everlasting day" when the perfect union of Christ and the church will become a reality. But as always, such an extreme imaginative effort soon gives way to a keen awareness of his own actual separateness from the event and a probing self-examination of his present spiritual condition. The sestet of "Ascension" registers such a shift toward introspection, as Donne catechizes himself on Christ's enactment of God's plan of salvation and prays to be included among the redeemed. In so doing, he continues to employ Scriptural images and ideas of great affective power.

The first four lines of the sestet preface a request for mercy with a tripartite epithetical apostrophe

to the Son:

O strong Ramme, which hast batter'd heaven for
 mee,
 Mild Lambe, which with thy blood, hast mark'd
 the path;
 Bright Torch, which shin'st, that I the way may
 see,
 Oh, with thy owne blood quench thy owne just
 wrath.... (9-12)

Gardner (p. 64) even found a Biblical source for Donne's use of "Ramme" in line 9: "The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them" (Micah iii.13). The ordinary reader, however, will immediately notice the antithesis between this word and "Lambe" of line ten and see "Ramme" as a pun. Especially in these two lines the poet's knowledge of typological interpretation (the allegoria of the four-fold method) becomes evident, for the connection of Abraham's ram (Gen.xxii.13) with Christ, the "Lamb of God" (Jo.i.29), is traditional. And Christ's appellation as the Lamb of God who "mark'd the path" with his blood reminds us that in this role, Christ was viewed as the fulfilling counterpart of the Old Testament paschal lamb whose blood was used to mark the doorposts of the enslaved Israelites, thus protecting them from the avenging death angel in God's punishment of Pharaoh (Ex. xii). (The qualifying "Mild" perhaps glances at Matthew xi.29: "I am meek and lowly in heart....")

In line 11, Christ is called a "Bright Torch," in accordance with the metaphor of John i.4: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." And line 12 succinctly states the paradox at the heart of God's plan of redemption ("Oh, with thy owne blood quench thy owne just wrath"), a request that changes Paul's declaration of Romans v.9 ("...being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him") to metaphorical consistency and stresses God's mercy by emphasizing that His wrath is just, a notion implicit in the Pauline phrase "justified by his blood."

With the last line--"Deigne at my hands this crowne of prayer and praise"--the poet has ended where he begun. But he has been a long way in the interim, having surveyed the signal episodes in the drama of redemption. Though he has, at various points in the cycle, risen to great imaginative heights and poetically become a witness of the events he has described and participated in them, he concludes as a mere mortal, humbly making an offering of his talent and himself to God. But his request for acceptance has, here at last, taken a new mien, because he has iterated and pondered the mysteries which give him confidence of acceptance. If his initial presentation of a crown (as did the elders in Revelation) seemed somewhat premature, it now seems timely and worthy of acceptance.

In the discussion above, I have tried to indicate

the Scriptural content of these poems and point out how Donne uses that material in his art. I have shown the Biblical sources of each event used as a poetic subject and attempted not only to identify collateral Scriptural texts which influence lines not directly expressive of the central subject, but also to explain the logic by which that peripheral material is related to the center. Finally, I have traced the shuttling stance of the poet, as he approaches and withdraws from his subjects, and related this alternation to his shifting sense of himself as now a sinful seeker of God's grace, now a joyful possessor of it by faith. I hope this treatment of these poems helps to explain the powerful effect which they work on the reader who shares Donne's spiritual heritage and understands the Biblical roots of it.

Notes to Chapter III

¹The octave employs only two rhymes, the sestet three. But the sestet, more specifically, employs either a closed (sonnets 1, 3, and 5) quatrain and a couplet or an open (sonnets 2, 4, 6, and 7) quatrain and a couplet. Conceptually, sonnets 1, 3, and 4 fall into three quatrains and a couplet; sonnets 5, 6, and 7 fall into an octave (number 5 uses 8½ lines for the octave) and two tercets; and sonnet 2 falls into an octave, a quatrain, and a couplet.

²Louis I. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 107-12, places the poems in "a different kind of meditative tradition" (p. 110) from the Ignatian--the Catholic "meditations of the corona" (p. 108). Martz suggests that one reason why these sonnets do not and can not evince the influence of the Ignatian meditation is that "properly speaking, there are no individual sonnets here. We have one poem, one corona..." (p. 110).

³See H. Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought (Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 18-21, 498, passim, for an excellent discussion of this interpretive method.

⁴Quoted in G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in

Medieval England (Cambridge, England, 1933), p. 59.

⁵The Greek verb (ἀμαράντινος -- "never fades") implies a garland of flowers, too, a fact which makes the passage from I Peter even more clearly relevant.

⁶Perhaps Donne's awareness of the anagogic significance of the crown image is what determines his choice of crowns as subject matter. Martz, pp. 108-110, notes that while this sequence of Donne's parallels certain Jesuit sequences very closely, it cannot begin, as they generally do, with the legendary life of Mary before Christ's birth. Thus the starting point of this corona is Donne's own.

⁷"Prevent" here probably means both "come before" and "forestall." Both meanings are consistent with Scripture, since the wise men did get to Bethlehem before the slaughter by Herod and since their failure to report back to him as he requested (Matt.ii.8) delayed the execution of his plot until Joseph had time to flee to Egypt with Mary and the Child.

⁸This is the only instance in the cycle where the repetition of the last line of one sonnet as the first of the next involves a shift in the actual reference of the words.

⁹Gardner's (p. 61) gloss of the phrase--she accepts

"weake" as the preferable reading--is also tenable. To her the "weake" are the "poor in spirit" of Matthew v.5, the "Weak things of the world" which are chosen to "confound the things which are mighty" (I Cor.i.27).

¹⁰This allusion to the parable, the connection with Faustus, and the subjunctive mood of the verbs all suggest that Donne, in this part of the cycle, is struggling with an intense spiritual crisis, perhaps viewing himself with the "ambitious" and "stony-hearted" and trying to make the spiritual gesture necessary to assure him of his part in the future resurrection. Though the general tenor of these poems is more intellectual and, consequently, less personal than the later "Holy Sonnets," within the limitations of that kind of religious response, it seems to me that Donne (at least poetically) arrives at some confidence of acceptance by God in the end of the cycle, despite the persistence of the subjunctive verbs to the end.

¹¹Revelation x mentions a "little book" which the angel gives John to eat. Scripturally, this is not the "Book of Life," despite Donne's usage here.

¹²Gardner (p. 64) glosses "show" with Colossians ii.15: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

CHAPTER IV

THE BIBLE IN THE FIRST "HOLY SONNETS"

According to recent studies, Donne's "Holy Sonnets" date from about 1609, two years after La Corona and a few months before the long excursion into theology which produced Pseudo-Martyr in 1610 (Gardner, DP, pp. xxxvii-1). At this time Donne had already refused Thomas Morton's offer of a church benefice, still clinging to hopes of getting state employment (Le Comte, pp. 102-03). Like his youthful attempts to rise in the world, however, his effort to get appointment as a state secretary in Ireland in 1608 and as Secretary of Virginia in 1609 also failed. Thus he was still a man of unsettled occupation in 1609, and would so remain until he finally entered the church six years later. The "Holy Sonnets" bear witness to the intense self-examination and agonizing spiritual struggle of this period.

Both Helen Gardner and Louis Martz argue persuasively for the influence of the Ignatian Meditation in these poems (Gardner, DP, pp. 1 ff.; Martz, pp. 43-56). Noting the rubric "Divine Meditations" in the original

manuscripts of Donne,¹ Martz and Gardner discuss the meditative pattern of Ignatius and others and convincingly demonstrate the effects of this method of contemplation on both the form and content of the "Holy Sonnets."

Briefly, the meditation involved the successive application of the three powers of the mind--memory, understanding, and will--in a religious exercise. These mental faculties produce composition, analysis, and colloquy respectively (Martz, p. 38). The composition involves the clear envisagement of some situation or occurrence, frequently in the life of Christ. Once the memory has clearly sketched the scene, the understanding takes over to draw out theological truths from that vision, and finally the will expresses itself in the outpouring of an emotional and dedicatory response by the exercitant. For example, Donne's "Holy Sonnet XI" employs this pattern: the first quatrain vividly presents the crucifixion (the poet here replaces Christ on the cross, citing his sinfulness as reason), the second moves to an intellectual pondering of the significance of that scene (the poet reasons: "...by my death could not be satisfied/ My sinnes...."), and the sestet closes the poem with an expression of love and wonder at the love of Christ ("Oh let me then, his strange love still admire....").² Though Martz sees the complete tripartite pattern in operation in only four "Holy Sonnets," both he and Gardner identify various parts of the meditation

process in all the poems.³

Such pious endeavor necessarily employed Biblical material in great measure, and I believe this material is almost as unfamiliar to the twentieth-century reader as the meditation itself. Consequently, in my discussion below, I will attempt to complement the critical approaches of such interpreters as Martz and Gardner by identifying and explaining the poetic function of the Scriptural substance out of which Donne's meditation is largely shaped. This approach brings us into contact with an intense interior experience that is, at times, almost physically excruciating.

Some thematic structure has been discerned in the twelve sonnets printed in the 1633 edition. According to Gardner, they form, roughly, two groups of six: a sequence on death and judgment, the Last Things (II, IV, VI, VII, IX, X); and a complementary group comprising three on Christ's atoning death (XI, XII, XIII) and three on the love man owes to God in consequence of that sacrifice (XIV, XV, XVI).⁴ Gardner is clearly right in viewing the first six poems as a thematically coherent unit, and I think she is right in seeing in the second six an underlying unity. She seems wrong, however, in her division of this second group into two sets of three which balance each other according to the formula "We love him because he first loved us" (Gardner, DP, p. xli); furthermore, I suggest that the entire twelve-poem group is informed by

a general pattern of meaning which lends them an underlying structural unity. If this unity is not so strict as that of La Corona, it is, nevertheless, present in the poems, as I will show below.

The "Holy Sonnets" differ from those of La Corona most significantly in their more private, personal tone. Whereas the La Corona poems begin with a focus on some well-known event in the life of Christ, these frequently start from some private proposition or image and record the poet's subjective reaction to it. In accordance with the personal quality, the Biblical texture of the "Holy Sonnets" is not so dense as that of the earlier sequence: more space is given to sparks of the poet's own wit, and more of his non-religious experience comes into play. Thus if La Corona strikes us as a compact digest of Christian doctrine and symbol focused through the eyes of a representative Everyman, the "Holy Sonnets" come to us as the private record of Donne's unique spiritual experience.⁵ But that experience is objectified and made intelligible largely through Scriptural concept and imagery which other sympathetic souls can recognize and respond to.

I

The sonnets on the Last Things are prefaced by an introductory poem addressed to "E. of D." (see Grierson, p. 288) in which Donne claims that that patron's "fatherly

yet lusty Ryme" has begotten the poems.⁶ While I am far from the cynicism of Leishman regarding Donne's sincerity in these years, I do think these sonnets, taken as a group, testify to a somewhat forced inspiration.⁷ I mean that, in comparison with the last six, these sonnets show Donne making a rather mechanical spiritual effort. This is not to deny that the sonnets have intensity, nor to claim that they are inferior poems. They evidently are not. It is to say, however, that they seem to belong more to the mind than to the heart and that, in contrast to the following poems, they appear to be more "poetry" than experience.

"As due by many titles I resign" (Grierson II) stands first in the original ordering. It introduces and motivates the five exercises which follow by posing a crucial problem which they try to resolve. And there is certainly nothing perfunctory or tangential about this poem. In the octave the poet enumerates the "many titles" by which he belongs to God and states his willingness to yield himself to those claims. But it is not that simple, for, as the sestet states, man's tendency toward God is obstructed by Satan. Furthermore, not all men are among the chosen. In touching these themes, the poem raises the most agonizing question the religious man, especially one of Calvinistic leanings, can ask: Am I predestined for salvation? All God's "titles" to man here mentioned are Scriptural, as is the octave's analysis of the poet's

inner conflict.

Lines 2-8 cite seven Scripturally based reasons, really variant images of the God-man relationship, why the poet belongs (at least theoretically) to God. His first point, that he was made by and for God, parallels Paul's homily on the Godhood of Christ in Colossians i.15-16: "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God...all things were created by him and for him." And in his sermon to the pagan Athenians, Paul asserts of God, "...in him we live, and move, and have our being...For we are also his offspring" (Acts xvii.28). The "title" of lines 3 and 4-- "...when I was decay'd/ Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine..."--employs the imagery of redemption found in such passages as I Peter i.18-19: "...ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...But with the precious blood of Christ...." (In verse 23 Peter elaborates the concept of salvation with a change of metaphor--"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible"--, language which shows the Biblical commonness of Donne's "decaying" image in line 3.) The third image--"I am thy sonne, made with thyself to shine..." (5)--combines the Biblical notion that the redeemed are the sons of God (I Jno. iii.2, e.g.) with the figure of Matthew xiii.42: "[In heaven] shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father" (Gardner, p. 65, notes this). God's fourth hold, that the

poet is His well-rewarded servant (l. 6), reworks Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. xv.58). (Servantship is clearly implied in this quotation, but earlier, in vii.22 of the same epistle, Paul uses the precise word: "...he that is called...is Christ's servant.") Then line 7 adds two more Scriptural images to express the manner of man's relationship to God--man as God's sheep and as His image. Psalm lxxix.13 declares, "...we [are] thy people and the sheep of thy pasture..."; and Genesis i.27 avers, "...God created man in his own image...." The final "title" of God comes in lines 7-8: "...till I betray'd/ My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine...." The concept of man's having betrayed himself derives from no specific Biblical text, though it implies the doctrine of individual responsibility found throughout Scripture (e.g., Isa. liii.6, Rom. iii.23). I Corinthians vi.19 provides the temple image: "...your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost...." Thus each part in this motley description of the relationship between the poet and God has its roots in Holy Writ. Each image and the context it echoes ought to provide the poet a sense of spiritual security, but the sestet shows that they do not.

The sestet thematically contrasts with the octave

as practice with theory:

Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee?
 Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?
 Except thou rise and for thine owne work fight,
 Oh I shall soone despaire, when I doe see
 That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not
 chuse me,
 And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee.
 (9-14)

These lines synthesize several Scriptural concepts and images in depicting Donne's struggle with sin and despair. The Apostle Paul testifies to a similar problem with sin, though without the despair: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin..." (Rom. vii.22-23).

Donne's imagery is not that of Paul, however. He dramatizes the conflict over sin as a psychomachia between God and Satan, drawing his characterization of Satan as an usurper from the picture in Isaiah xiv: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer....For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God....I will be like the most High" (12-14). The rape image, though implicit in the Isaiah passage, also recalls the marriage metaphors used in the New Testament to symbolize the relationship between Christ and the soul: "...I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor. xi.2). Donne sees the devil as defiling the bride of the Lamb.

This topsy-turvy state of affairs leads him to the real crux of the poem: unless God intervenes soon, the poet sees no alternative to the conclusion that he is excluded from grace, "due by many titles" or no. But before actually broaching the fearsome subject, Donne holds out the possibility that he may yet be saved (l.11), and the notion that it is God who wins His people's battles repeats a common Old Testament idea. For example, II Chronicles xx.17 states: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord...." Finally comes the terrifying heart of the matter: "...I shall soone despaire, when I doe see/ That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me..." (12-13). That God loves man categorically is the dominant theme of the New Testament (cf. Jno.iii.1), but the comfort of that thought is disturbed by the doctrine of predestination, or election. Though even Christ himself alludes to the "elect" (Mat.xxiv.31), predestination is primarily a Pauline concept: "...whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.... Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom.viii. 29-30). The word "chuse" is clearly a synonym for "elect" here; once we perceive that and note the Biblically based dilemma of line 13, we begin to understand the spiritual

agony which gave rise to the poem. Donne is not perfunctorily submitting himself as a kind of automatic beginning for a series of meditations; in the light of Satan's continued dominance of his life, he is initially raising the question whether his own salvation is possible at all. In the five poems which follow, we see him considering the problem from various vantage points and catechizing himself in confidence-inspiring Biblical doctrines.

In "Oh my blacke Soule!" (Grierson IV) the poet imagines himself sick unto death, throughout the octave evincing a despair akin to that he feared in the previous poem. He compares his predicament as a moribund sinner first to "a pilgrim, which abroad hath done/ Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled..." (3-4), then to a thief who, until "death's doome be read" (5), wishes to escape, but then desires "that still he might be imprisoned" (8). The ingredients of this compositio loci reveal no Biblical flavor, with the exception of a single word: in the first line Donne calls his soul "blacke," a color traditionally symbolic of evil, but not Biblically so--at least not purely so. The Old Testament repeatedly uses the word, however, to signify sickness that accompanies sin. Lamentations iv.6-8, for example, describes the "punishment of the iniquity" of the inhabitants of Zion thus: "Their visage is blacker than a coal...their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like

a stick." (cf. Job xxx.30 and Jer. viii.21, passages which make a similar use of "black.") Donne's association of blackness with not only sin, but primarily sickness clearly recalls Scriptural uses of the word.

The sestet provides relief for the severe depression of the octave, as the poet, apparently having overcome the fear (recorded in the first sonnet) of not being numbered among God's chosen, or having set the question aside, ponders the remedy for his desperate condition:

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;
Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white. (9-14)

The details of Donne's analysis of the solution come from Scripture. His confidence of grace, if he repents, comes from such New Testament passages as II Peter iii.9--"The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"--and Romans iii.24--" We are justified freely by his grace...." Moreover, he is on firm Biblical ground in realizing (l. 10) that even the beginnings of the move toward salvation must come from God. Ephesians ii.8 records: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God..."; Romans ii.4 states a similar idea: "...the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."

The last four lines register Donne's knowledge of the cure to his sickness and a move toward contrition.

He urges himself to "holy mourning," confesses his sinfulness (again employing a Biblical metaphor of color), and concludes by stating the precise manner in which absolution comes. The portrait of penitence may contain no specific Biblical allusion at all, but it is worth noting Ezra ix.6 in this connection, since that passage contains one of the few Scriptural uses of the word blush: "[I] said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee...for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." Of course, the notion of blushing before God is consistent with the idea of repentance, being especially apt where the cause of shame is specified as "red...sinne." The Biblical precedent for calling sin red may be identified precisely: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa.i.18). In lines 13-14 Donne has combined this Old Testament promise with the New Testament figure of washing sins away in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. i.5, e.g.).

These lines are curious rhetorically, for this act of purifying, though presented here as an alternative to mourning, Scripturally constitutes the step that follows repentance under the New Covenant. Furthermore, it is not clear that the tension of the poem is actually

resolved. The poet certainly knows that black and red, which stand for iniquity, must be made to stand for sorrow and shame, but he does not verbalize the spiritual gesture in which this knowledge passes from the mind to the heart. Though the poem qua poem seems complete enough, there is something vaguely lacking in the experience which it relates.

The acts of composition, analysis, and colloquy all serve a turn in the structure of "This is my playes last scene" (Grierson VI): the first quatrain depicts the poet at the very moment of death; lines 5-12 discuss the divergent natures and destinies of soul and body; the couplet expresses a plea for salvation. Several Scriptural passages affect the verbal and ideational constitution of the poem.

Though the open cluster of metaphors which place Donne on the very verge of death may dimly reflect Paul's similar statement in II Timothy iv.6-7 ("...I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith...."), the discourse of lines 5-12 incorporates material that is definitely Biblical. The description of death as a sleep (l. 6) alludes to such passages as I Thessalonians iv.14 and I Corinthians xv.51, which so characterize death, and the poet's fear of God (l. 8) shows him to be wise in Scriptural precepts: "The

secret of the Lord is with them that fear him..." (Ps. xxv.14). But most of the analysis in these lines bears on the conflict between the body and the soul.

Donne considers this flesh-spirit antinomy under three heads: origin, nature, and destiny. Lines 9-10 treat of the respective origins and destinies: "Then... my soul, to heaven her first seate, takes flight,/ And earth-borne body, in the earth shall dwell...." The Bible states this concept exactly: "[At death] shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl.xii.7). Though, at this point in his life, Donne does not seem to have been finally decided on the time-table by which the soul would enter God's presence (Gardner, pp. 114-17), in this poem he seems to expect his soul's immediate flight to heaven: "...I shall sleepe a space,/ But my'everwaking part shall see... [God's] face..." (6-7). This phraseology clearly recalls Paul's teaching on the subject in I Corinthians xiii.12--"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face..."--though the Apostle's comment is indecisive on the temporal schedule of that encounter. In discussing the soul's destiny, Donne has already indicated its nature--it is eternal and untainted. Lines 10-12 complete the discourse by spelling out the body's nature:

...earth-borne body, in the earth shall dwell,

So, fall my sinnes, that all may have their right,
 To where they'are bred, and would presse me, to
 hell. (10-12)

On the basis of the Biblical identification of sin and the flesh (see Paul's comments in Romans viii), these lines equate the emergence of the soul from the body with an escape from sin. Though there is no precise Scriptural authority for Donne's belief that his sins will fall to hell when his soul goes to heaven, the idea is logically consistent with the doctrine that sin is damnable. Donne seems to have invented the conceit to preserve the rising-falling antithesis of lines 9-10 and yet preserve the body in earth for its resurrection from "sleep" (see I Cor.xv, e.g.).

The sound doctrine on the soul and body lays the foundation for an almost demanding tone in the couplet:

Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evil,
 For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devill.
 (13-14)

In addition to concluding the argument of lines 9-12--that the soul is cleansed of sin in escaping Satan's theater of operations (the world) and his medium of control (the flesh)--, this final distich expresses the concept which explains how an individual entangled in sin can prove acceptable to a God who cannot brook sin--the doctrine of imputed righteousness. In chapter iv of his letter to the Romans, Paul explains that even Abraham, "the father of us all" (vs.16), was a sinful man who could not be justified

by his works, but that God saw fit to "count" or "impute" Abraham's faith as righteousness. Perhaps Donne intends his rehearsal of doctrine in the poem to be his declaration of faith, but it is strange that the word never comes up, especially when it is so vital in the Biblical plan. At any rate, Donne's reliance on this concept here is in keeping with his earlier confession of sinfulness (though he rather mechanically dissociates himself from his body and lays all the sin to the body's charge), and it is this Biblical doctrine in terms of which he claims salvation. In this poem, then, we catch the poet in the very act of conquering his anxiety over sin by articulating his belief in the Scripture's teachings on the nature of man and the means of escaping its consequences.

"At the round earths imagin'd corners" (Grierson VII) is one of Donne's better known poems. Like "This is my playes last scene," it treats of the very end of life, but in terms of the last judgment rather than of death. The poem begins with a vast, panoramic view of the last day, but concludes with a very private image of the poet on his knees, suing for God's grace in order to escape the terrible wrath that will finally fall on the damned. Both parts of the contrast are saturated with Scriptural matter.

The first quatrain comprises the compositio loci of the poem:

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
 Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
 From death, you numberlesse infinities
 Of soules, and to your scattered bodies goe....
 (1-4)

These lines distill a picture from matter scattered throughout the Revelation of John, with an admixture of Pauline doctrine. The image of the angels at the "imagin'd" corners of the earth comes from Revelation vii.1--"...I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth..."--, while the blowing of the trumpets selectively compresses the narrative of nearly all the remainder of that book. Finally, chapter xx records the last judgment before God, verses 12 and 13 authenticating Donne's image of the resurrection of the "numberlesse infinities": "...I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.... And the sea gave up the dead which were in it: and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them...." The other particulars of Donne's lines rely on the account of the second coming in I Thessalonians iv. The poet here exhorts the souls to arise from death and rejoin their scattered bodies, an idea logically consistent with Paul's assertion that "them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" and "the dead in Christ shall rise first..." (vss. 14, 16). This passage clearly implies that the soul sleeps with God until re-animating the body at the last day.⁸

In the second quatrain, Donne analyzes the

constituency of the congregation on the last day. Line 5 defines the temporal scope of his vision by mentioning Noah's ancient flood (Gen.vii-viii) and the fire waiting for the damned at the end of time (Rev.xx.15). Though they could just as easily represent Donne's own inventory of the perennial causes of mass destruction, the particular evils of line 6 may have their source in the plagues cited in the middle chapters of Revelation (vi-xx). The first half of line 7 anatomizes the causes of individual misery, and the last half combines with line 8 to complete the compilation with a reference to those who will be alive on the earth at the last day. And this idea, though logically self-sufficient, gives a Biblical flavor by echoing the confident references of the Apostle to those "which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (I Thess.iv.15).

Having envisioned the whole of earth's population on the day of judgment, Donne turns, in the sestet, to a searching of his own soul in the here and now:

But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
 For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
 'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
 When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,
 Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
 As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.
(9-14)

Teaching the certainty of future salvation for one who repents in the present, these lines contain the conclusion of the poet's thoughtful consideration of the scene he

began with and combine that analysis with a colloquy in which he begs for personal grace. Nearly all the material of these lines is Scriptural.

The continued theological discourse, identifiable by the indicative and subjunctive verbs, contains references to several specific Biblical texts. Donne's statement "...if above all these my sins abound,/ 'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,/ When we are there..." echoes the language of Romans v, where Paul summarizes Christ's reversal of the consequences of Adam's sin: "(...if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace...shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound..." (vss.17,20). The doctrine iterated by Donne's lines, that there can be no repentance at the judgment, cannot be specifically tied to any Scriptural statement. It is, however, easily inferable from such passages as Hebrews ix.27 ("...it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment...") which teach that the individual must prepare for eternity beforehand. The second doctrinal assertion, "...that's as good/ As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood," assimilates the Old Testament concept of pardoning with the New Testament images of being sealed by Christ and bought by His blood. Isaiah, for example, declares, "...our God...will abundantly pardon" (lv.7). Revelation both supplies the

sealing image (vii.3 mentions the servants of God "sealed ...in their foreheads") and teaches the power of Christ's blood: "...thou [Christ] wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood..." (v.9). Thus Donne has blended images from diverse parts of Scripture to create a (now) traditional, though not precisely Biblical, conceit.

The remainder of the sestet is supplicatory in tone and uses imperative verbs, though it also rehearses doctrine in language that is recognizably Biblical. Reversing the earlier exhortation to the sleeping souls to reinvest their bodies, line 9 reiterates the Pauline teaching that the souls of the dead "sleep" until judgment and records the poet's intention to mourn. Then the final suppliant element, "...here on this lowly ground,/ Teach mee how to repent....," explains the purpose of that mourning. The whole concept of mourning in repentance receives Scriptural sanction in II Corinthians vii.10: "...godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...." With confidence that this repentance can put his own salvation beyond doubt, Donne concludes the exercise, having allayed his fear of the cataclysm of the last day.

The fifth sonnet on the Last Things, "If poysonous minerals" (Grierson IX), hardly supports the concept of a coherent sequence here at all. For one thing, its theme does not necessarily concern the Last Things. And the prayer for forgiveness in the sestet repeats material

already covered in the preceeding poems. Furthermore, it hardly makes sense for one who has just poetically prepared himself for the last judgment to raise a question which is logically prior to a serious consideration of that event. Even considered singly this poem lacks the rhetorical power of the three immediately before it, for it contains no "composition of the place" to give it immediacy, but only an argumentative complaint about the alleged injustice of the poet's being condemned for sin (in the octave) and a plea for forgiveness (in the sestet). Nevertheless, certain Biblical elements need pointing out in a study like this; what is more, the conceit in the sestet, whatever the qualities of the poem as a whole, is effective.

In first quibbling that his capacity to reason should not render him more culpable before the Lord than are poisonous elements, harmful plants, or vicious animals, the poet mentions "that tree,/ Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us" (2-3), thereby referring to the account of the Fall of man in Genesis iii. He next argues the contradiction between God's mercy and His wrath: "And mercy being easie, and glorious/ To God; in his sterne wrath, why threatens hee?" (7-8). Both parts of the first concept--that mercy is both easy and glorious to God--are Biblically supported by such passages as Paul's discourse in Romans ix on the absolute

authority of God to do as he pleases:

...Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.... For the scripture saith unto Pharoah, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee (Rom.ix.14-15,17)

God's "stern wrath" is that reserved for him who "believeth not the Son..." (Jno.iii.36). A fabric of objection woven from Biblical threads, the octave thus closes on a note of questioning defiance.

The sestet quickly reverses that tone, however, as Donne remembers his own utter helplessness before the Supreme Being. His testimony of weakness--"But who am I, that dare dispute with thee..." (9)--again echoes Romans ix, where Paul, having cited the example of Pharoah, puts the same question: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (vs.20). Apparently having taken this truth to heart, the poet then implores forgiveness of sin (the only proper response for the human creature) in a moving conceit that fuses classical and Scriptural elements:

Oh! of thine onely worth blood,
And my teares, make a heavenly Lethean flood,
And drowne in it my sinnes blacke memorie;
That thou remember them, some claime as debt,
I think it mercy, if thou wilt forget. (10-14)

The Biblical authority for the image of drowning sins comes from Micah vii.19: "...thou wilt cast all their

sins into the depths of the sea," the efficacy of Christ's blood being an item already explained in this essay. Concluding the sonnet, the couplet blends two Scriptural passages in a specious antithesis: the first half echoes Psalm xxv.7--"...according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord"--, while the second part derives from Jeremiah xxxi.34--"...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Shawcross, p. 408, notes the reference to Psalms, Gardner, p. 69, the one to Jeremiah.) If somewhat artificially, Donne has set up the tension of rebellion in the octave and resolved it with a gesture of submission in the sestet. In the light of his close following of the Pauline discourse of Romans ix, however, we may feel that the defiance was only half meant and the reversing conclusion foregone.

If the fifth sonnet seems disruptive of the sequence, "Death be not proud" (Grierson X) makes the inevitable concluding statement and gives the whole six-poem unit a sense of formal completion. Not only that Death shall die, but also that that event will be the ultimate event in God's program of redeeming mankind may be substantiated by Scripture. Thus the sonnet reflects Donne's Biblical orientation in both its theme and its placement in the cycle.

Two passages we have looked at above furnish the Biblical material of this poem--I Corinthians xv and

I Thessalonians iv. The theme of the poem is exhausted in the defiant opening and triumphant closing clauses-- "Death be not proud..." (1); "...death, thou shalt die" (14)--, and the last is the ground of the first. Donne's authority for his scornful denunciation of Death is Paul's discourse in I Corinthians xv:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward, they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (vss. 22-26)

Later in the chapter Paul recapitulates this argument (vss. 51-55), calling death a "sleep," and Donne's thirteenth line employs this image: "One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally...." Another of the Apostle's comments on this theme, however, is more exactly relevant: I Thessalonians iv not only speaks of those "which sleep in Jesus" (vs. 14), but substantiates Donne's assertion that the sleep will be "short" and that waking will last "eternally." Paul's following declaration of faith in the imminence of Christ's return implies a brief tenure in the grave (a belief shared by orthodox Christians at all times), and he promises an everlasting habitation with God: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (vs. 17). In the middle of the poem, between the

first and last lines, Donne elaborates the argument that Death has no real grounds for pride: it has not the destructive power commonly attributed to it, providing only a sleep which cannot compare to that induced by "poppie, or charmes" (11); and it is itself "slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,/ And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell..." (9-10). But the poem never actually gets beyond the concept that death shall die.

Donne intended these first six sonnets as a unified set. A part of their unity is thematic: excepting the first and the fifth, they generally deal with the subject of the Last Things, and even the first can be harmonized with this pattern as the psychological cause of Donne's concern with the basic theme. The group of poems also reveals an underlying structure in moving from despair to its antithesis, a celebration of the death of Death, though the intervening material does not show a progressive evolution from poem to poem so much as a recurrent treatment of the themes of death and judgment, as the poet tries to come to terms with the idea of his own destruction by repeated considerations of the problem.

Despite Donne's rounding off the series with a defiance of death, the formal answer to his initial despair,

it seems to me that the (real or imagined) religious experience conveyed by these sonnets is incomplete and abstract. For one thing, the static, recurrent treatment of the same theme suggests that, if Donne's despair is real enough, the peace and surety of salvation implied at the end of the second, third, and fourth poems are less so, that they are acknowledged in the mind, but not convincingly felt. And this is pre-eminently the impression given by the digressive sonnet five. Furthermore, the concluding "Death be not proud" is highly impersonal, containing almost no reference to the poet and offering absolutely no grounds for his confidence that he himself will escape death's clutches: Donne seems to base his premature threnody for death solely on the Apostle's statement that death will die, disregarding the Biblical teaching that there is an everlasting death for the unredeemed. Admittedly, a poem with the large scope and high tension of "At the round earths imagin'd corners" hardly seems subject to improvement; however, as we turn to Donne's meditation of his sin and Christ's sacrifice in the next six poems, we note an increasingly more personal tone, as Donne focuses on the central and most profound paradox of Christianity.

II

The seventh poem (Grierson XI) opens with a vision of the crucifixion, the poet imaginatively offering himself

in Christ's stead (ll. 1-4), then retreats from that image into a homily on the poet's need for Christ to make the sacrifice (ll. 5-8), and concludes with an adoring confession of the love Christ evinced in offering Himself for man's sin. As might be expected in a poem on this subject, the Bible furnishes most of the substance.

The beginning is one of Donne's most dramatic and effective:

Spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side,
 Buffet, and scoffe, and scourge, and crucifie mee,
 For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and onely hee,
 Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed.... (1-4)

All the indignities which the poet here invites in the first two lines are mentioned in the gospel accounts of Christ's trial and crucifixion. Matthew, for example, though attributing them to the Roman soldiers, not the Jews, authenticates all but the piercing of Jesus' side, which comes from John xix.34: Matthew xxvii.30 records that the soldiers "spit upon" and "smote" (Donne's "Buffet") Jesus, verse 24 that they "mocked" (verse 41 says that the chief priests mocked him), verse 26 that they "scourged" and verse 35 that they "crucified" Him. Such close adherence to the Scriptural source makes one wonder whether Donne did not have the Bible open as he wrote. This quatrain then closes with an admission of Donne's sin set in opposition to an assertion of Christ's sinlessness, the poet underscoring that purity by altering

Biblical testimony that Christ did no sin (Heb. iv.15, II Cor. v.21, e.g.) to a declaration that He "could do" none.

Analyzing the compositio, the second quatrain concentrates on the poet's sinful condition and compares it unfavorably with that of the Jews. The first statement, "But by my death can not be satisfied/ My sinnes..." (4-5), is doctrinally consistent with the Bible's teaching that "...the wages of sin is death..." (Rom. vi.23) and that only Christ can provide salvation (Acts iv.12, e.g.), though that precise statement does not appear in any specific text. The Jews are accused only of having killed an "inglorious man," a phrase which perhaps glances at Isaiah's prophetic characterization of the Messiah as a "despised and rejected" man, with "no form or comeliness" (liii.2-3); but Donne claims to "Crucifie him daily, being now glorified" (8). The first phrase reflects the language of Hebrews vi.6, a verse which speaks of those who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh" by reverting into sin after having received forgiveness. (Donne does not, however, classify himself with those backsliders; if he did, he could not finish the poem optimistically, for verse 4 of that chapter teaches that they who fall away are beyond hope.) The second phrase refers to the last event of Jesus' earthly career, his being "received up into glory" (I Tim.iii.16).

In a manner typical of the meditation, the first two quatrains primarily reveal the operations of the memory (really the imagination here) and the understanding respectively. Rising out of the will, the sestet completes the pattern by registering Donne's admiration for Christ's "strange love":

Oh let mee then, his strange love still admire:
Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment.
And Jacob came cloth'd in vile harsh attire
But to supplant, and with gainfull intent:
God cloth'd himselfe in vile mans flesh, that so
Hee might be weake enough to suffer woe. (9-14)

This expression, of course, is didactic as well as laudatory, and the ideas it employs are Scripturally verifiable. Even the epithet "strange" in line 9, though perfectly clear in light of the context, has a Biblical basis in Paul's characterization of Christ's love as one "which passeth knowledge" (Ephes.iii.19).⁹ The lines which follow incorporate Biblical material in almost every phrase.

The antithesis in line 10 requires close scrutiny, for the contradiction of the two clauses involves more than appears on the surface. That Christ "bore our punishment" is a common New Testament doctrine (I Pet.ii.24, e.g.), but it is also true that God (the Eternal King) pardons (Isa.lv.7) and that Christ and the Father "are one" (Jno.x.30). Thus the line not only contrasts earthly kings and the Son, but also emphasizes Christ's love by implying His willing relinquishment of kingship to become

a scapegoat. Relying on the account of Jacob's insidious theft of his brother's birthright (Gen.xxvii) and such New Testament passages as Phillipians ii.5-8, the last lines enhance Christ's love by contrasting it with Jacob's perfidy. Jacob disguised himself with a goatskin to fool his blind old father and "supplant" Esau; Christ "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil.ii.7) that he might suffer "even the death of the cross" (vs. 8) and save mankind.¹⁰

Centering upon the (humanly) incomprehensible love of Christ and the utter despicableness of the poet, this is perhaps the most compelling poem yet discussed: it certainly conveys the impression of an excruciating agony within the human soul. While under-denoting Christ's love as "strange," Donne tries to sound the depths of it by projecting himself onto the cross and by the Jacob comparison. One can scarcely imagine a single individual's sins being more heinous than the Jews' collective, deliberate, and persistent conspiracy against Christ, but Donne confesses that his are, for he, unlike the Jews, knows who Christ is and why He suffered, yet continues to sin. When invited on himself, his almost masochistic savoring of the details of the crucifixion not only testifies to his terrible sense of guilt, but also underscores his appreciation of the love of Christ who, unlike Jacob, who cheated a loved one, blessed an enemy by sacrificing

Himself.

In the thoroughly Biblical poem "Why are wee by all creatures waited on?" (Grierson XII), Donne reworks the material of "If poysonous mineralls," but with a radically different tone. Instead of carping at God for the animals' amoral status, the poet here shows perplexity that the innocent creatures of nature, many of which are enormously more powerful than man, have been made subject to weak, sinful humankind. From this, the consideration of the octave, Donne turns in the sestet to confess his own sinfulness and extol God's munificence in not only subduing nature to man, but also yielding Himself to death for man's sake.

This poem is clearly inspired by Psalm viii, from which it also derives much of its detail:

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! (vss. 4-9)

Donne's treatment of this material, however, is far from slavish paraphrase. Whereas David surveys the chain of being from bottom to top and exults in an encomium on man's glory as the creature just beneath the angels (an honor given, of course, by God), Donne sees the moral and physical

decadence of mankind in contrast to the purity and strength of elements and beasts and focuses on the irony that man has been placed above them in the chain. In emphasizing this point, he stresses the strength of the beasts--David merely names them--and mentions the "pure" elements, which the Psalmist includes only by implication. And both poets take man's dominion over the creation as a sign of God's goodness.

If Donne differs from David in the evaluation of man he is moved to record, he surpasses the Psalmist in praise of God by citing the supreme instance of His being mindful of man:

But wonder at a greater wonder, for to us
Created nature doth these things subdue,
But their Creator, whom sin, nor nature tyed,
For us, his Creatures, and his foes, hath dyed.
(11-14)

That God is above sin and nature, predicaments of "Creatures," and that he "dyed" should require no further Scriptural documentation. And the idea that we are "his foes" is also Biblical: Paul says, "...when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..." (Rom.v.10). Furthermore, Donne's admission of guilt and the consequent need to be "timorous" (10) accord with Scripture's attribution of sin to all men (Rom.iii.23, e.g.) and its reference to death as sin's "wages" (Rom. vi.23). Even line nine's "woe is me" echoes a common Old Testament cry of despair (Isa.vi.5, e.g.). In thus

synthesizing these Biblical elements with his variant version of Psalm viii, Donne movingly meditates the paradox of God's love for sinful man. And the effect of the paradox is heightened by his rhetoric: for three quatrains he amplifies the lesser irony of man's dominion over the creation; in the couplet he tersely records the most profound inversion of the natural order known to man.

The poem which follows, "What if this present were the worlds last night?" (Grierson XIII), shows the poet in contemplation of a picture of the crucified Christ, thus concentrating on the central manifestation of the profound love which formed the theme of the previous poem. Rhetorically, this sonnet comprises an initial question calculated to spur the poet to serious meditation (l.1), a brief description of "Christ crucified" (ll.5-6), and a discourse on the love evinced in the portrait. These modes of poetic activity, of course, are functions of the memory and the understanding, the mental faculties which seem to produce the most of the poem, and the material upon which they work is interlarded with Scriptural matter.

Though an imaginative projection of oneself to the very end of time would seem a logical way of exacerbating the devotional spirit--we have seen Donne employ this technique in "Oh my blacke Soule!" "This is my playes

last scene," and "At the round earths imagin'd corners"--, the particular language of Donne's first two lines here echoes God's response to the rich man who determined to build bigger barns in which to store his abundant harvest: "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou has provided?" (Lk.xii.20). Both the wording of this verse and the predicament it presents--a man on the brink of judgment--parallel the poet's beginning. If he had this passage in mind, however, he used it primarily for contrast, proceeding to stress God's mercy, not His wrath.

In accordance with this purpose, he next turns to sketch the love-inspiring portrait: "Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light,/ Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell" (5-6). There is no difficulty in identifying the Biblical source of line 6: Matthew (xxvii.29), Mark (xv.17), and John (xix.2) all mention the crown of thorns which "pierc'd" Jesus' head, though the image of blood-filled frowns is Donne's addition. Line 5, however, employs detail not found in the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. Perhaps the "Tears in his eyes" and the "amasing light" (this phrase suggests John's description of Christ's eyes as "a flame of fire" in Revelation i.14) derive from some painting Donne had seen; perhaps, since these details define Jesus' double

nature as the God-man, he invented them himself to heighten the irony of the crucifixion and underscore the depth of God's love. At any rate, these details are consistent with other Biblical verses which aver that Jesus could both weep (Lk.xix.41) and express Himself profoundly with his eyes (Lk.xxii.61).

Though the general theme of the sonnet is God's love for man, particularly as manifested in the crucifixion, the poet's pervasive goal here is to gain assurance of personal grace. For that purpose he raised the provocative beginning question and introduced the vision of the crucified Savior; to that end he next puts the central question of the poem:

And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,
Which pray'd forgiveness for his foes fierce spight?
(7-8)

Seeming to show the understanding's response to the compositio, this question juxtaposes apparently contradictory Biblical passages; Matthew xxv.41 records Jesus' pronouncement of doom upon the wicked--"...Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire..."; Luke xxiii.34 (only) relates Christ's intercession for those who slew him (Gardner, DP, p. 71, notes verse 5 of that chapter as the source of "fierce.") On closer inspection, however, this question and the neo-platonic answer provided in the sestet appear to rise not so much from the understanding's exposition to truths about Christ as from the will's gropings for

spiritual security.

On one level serving to "prove" Christ's love for the poet, the last six lines more basically reveal a colloquy of supplication. Donne tells his soul, as he formerly had said to his "profane mistresses" (10), that "Beauty, of pittie, foulnesse onely is/ A signe or rigour..." (11-12) and concludes: "This beauteous form assures a pitious minde" (14). But this will not do, for it slights Christ's function as judge, a role to which Donne alludes in lines 7-8, flies in the face of Scripture's description of the Messiah as "without form or comeliness" (Isa. liii.2)--not "beauteous" at all--, and ignores such Biblical evidence of Jesus' compassion as James v.11: "...the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." In short, the neo-platonic strain seems immiscible with Scripture here; that Donne falls back on it reveals an anxiety that prompts one to construe a favorable sign out of whatever evidence lies at hand. Donne seems under more duress here than at any previous point in the series of poems.

The three poems just discussed center, as I have said, on the love of God for man and on man's need of that love. Of this entire set of sonnets (the last six of the 1633 edition) Gardner (DP, p. liii) asserts, "...they fix the mind on the saving love of God in Christ," a more accurate comment than her earlier declaration that

the first three concern "the Atonement, and the mystery of the Creator's love for his creatures," while the last three treat of "the love man owes to God and to his neighbor" (p.xli). In fact, the last three extend Donne's meditation on sin and redemption by precisely defining the paradoxical manner through which the individual must experience religious conversion ("Batter my heart"), enumerating some of the evidences of God's love ("Wilt thou love God, as he thee!"), and celebrating the new testament of love effected by the Incarnation ("Father, part of his double interest"). Predictably, much of the ideational and verbal substance of these poems has a Biblical origin.

"Batter my heart" (Grierson XIV) is perhaps the most complex of all Donne's "Holy Sonnets," for the imagery is diverse and initially confusing, and the rhetorical structure is unusual.¹¹ The sestet clearly employs sexual imagery (excepting lines 12-13), and the second quatrain describes a siege, but the vocabulary of the first quatrain seems to imply several other kinds of activity. To complicate matters, the concluding couplet uses both love imagery and the language of conquest, as though the poet had developed only two conceits in the poem. The poem is also rhetorically difficult, for it encloses a six-line declarative description of the poet's predicament between two four-line units of imperative paradoxes, and the middle section employs two kinds of figurative language.

Especially the uncertain nature of the imagery in the first quatrain complicates the task of identifying the Biblical allusions there, for the Scriptural sources of those echoes are not all metaphorically alike. On the other hand, it seems to be Donne's determination to use Biblical metaphors in those lines that leads him to violate the imaginal consistency of the octave. In light of these problems, then, I will approach the poem thematically as essentially a tripartite construct: the first quatrain defines the poet's goal in language reflective of several appropriate Biblical passages; the second quatrain develops the conceit of the poet as "an usurpt towne"; the sestet presents the speaker as Christ's lover and reiterates his request for violent action, using both sexual and martial imagery.

Rich in Biblical allusions, the opening quatrain implores the Lord to act violently in Donne's life:

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
 As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to
 mend;
 That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and
 bend
 Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make mee
 new. (1-4)

Addressed to the "three person'd God," an appellation which accords with Scriptural teaching (I Jno.v.7, e.g.), these lines urge the Lord to strengthen the poet by the paradoxical method defined in such New Testament passages as Luke xiv.11--"...whosoever exalteth himself shall be

abased; and him that humbleth himself shall be exalted"-- and such Old Testament texts as Job xxii.29: "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person." In light of his overt desire for union with God, especially when the achievement involves such a painful ordeal, Donne clearly qualifies as the humble person to whom the paradoxical exaltation is promised. His desire to "rise" is not to be taken in a worldly sense.

Lines 2 and 4 define, respectively, God's present gentle dealings with the poet and the harsher measures necessary if the poet is to "rise and stand." Each word in the four sets of opposing verbs echoes some Scriptural description of God's treatment of His human children. The word "knocke" recalls the Son's invitation in Revelation iii.20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man...open the door, I will come in...." "Breathe" reminds us that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..." (Gen.ii.7), that He gives life to all. (In John xx.22, Christ breathes on the disciples and says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost...") God's "shining" refers to his sending Christ, characterized in John i.9-10 as "...the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," a light which the "world knew...not." And that God seeks "to mend" recalls Jesus' reply to the

Pharisees' question why His followers did not follow the established Jewish custom of fasting: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse" (Mat.ix.16)--Jesus' message could not merely be absorbed into the old religion.

Line four contains the alternatives that Donne begs to have replace his former treatment: "...breake, blowe, burn and make me new." These, too, derive from Scripture. The word "breake" recalls David's similar supplication for God's favor, after he had sinned with Bathsheba: Psalm 11.8 refers to the "bones which... [God] has broken" in bringing David to repentance, and in verse 17 the contrite Psalmist declares, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart...." (cf. Ps.ii.9) "Blowe," intensifying the "breathe" of line 2, requests a violent visitation of God's spirit that echoes Isaiah xl.7: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." "Burn" reminds us that the Lord is "like a refiner's fire" who "shall purify the sons of Levi...that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal.iii.2-3), and Donne's request to be made "new" accords with Paul's statement that "...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature..." (II Cor.v.17).

The language of these lines cannot support the concept of a single conceit, in this quatrain, however much we may try to warp it to agree with the military simile of the following lines. It just makes no sense to speak of seeking to "mend" a city, for example. Thus in spite of the thematic consistency of the opening phrase "Batter my heart" with the conceit in the second quatrain, there is no single kind of imagery in the octave. Instead, Donne has relied on various Biblical descriptions of God's dealings with man to establish four sets of alternative terms, each set of which makes a metaphorical unity in the poem, even where the individual parts would not so harmonize if quoted in their original Scriptural contexts.¹² Furthermore, Donne has carefully selected and disposed the verbs of lines 2 and 4 to indicate just what kind of experience he is asking God for. The Scriptural passages alluded to in line 2 all portray God and man in potential or formal relationship, not in real union: God seeks admittance to the human heart, sustains the creature with breath, proffers spiritual illumination, makes reform possible. But line 4 calls for something much more radical and real: God must break through the door, send a blast of his spirit, scorch out impurities, recreate the inner man. This line clearly describes a religious conversion, an overpowering manifestation of God's spirit which breaks down all barriers

between Him and His estranged child. In the sonnets discussed above, we have seen Donne quail in a terrible sense of sinfulness, contemplate the crucifixion, even envision his own future glorification, but none of these poems seems so urgent, so essential to the poet's actual spiritual life as this in which he utterly gives himself over to the will of his Maker.

The second quatrain supports this reading of the first with a conceit depicting the poet as "an usurpt towne" ineptly defended by the "weake or untrue" viceroy, Reason, a description which accords with Paul's assertion in Romans i.20 that man's understanding should be adequate to keep him on the Godly path. (The conceit of these lines may be an elaboration of Paul's image of the devil as a spiritual bandit in II Timothy ii.26.) Then the sestet introduces a metaphor of Christ and the soul as lovers and records Donne's final desperate plea for divine intervention:

Yet dearely'I love you, 'and would be loved faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy:
Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee. (9-14)

New Testament precedents for such sexual imagery are not uncommon (cf. Rev.xxi.9, Eph.v.22-25), but II Corinthians xi.2 seems most apt to enlighten the poem here: "...I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." From this metaphor comes

much of the substance of this sestet: the "betrothal" to Satan (called Christ's "enemy" in Matthew xiii.39), which reflects the poet's as-yet-unregenerate nature; the request for divorce, elaborated in still other Biblical language (cf. Lk.xvi.13, or Isa.lviii.6: "Is not this the fast that I the Lord have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness...and that ye break every yoke?"); the desire to be ravished. The image of seige in the second quatrain finally culminates in lines 12-13, lines which echo such scriptural verses as Romans vi.18-- "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness"--and John viii.36--"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." The last four lines complete the sonnet in a masterly way: they both harmonize the sexual and military image of the middle lines and, in using paradox, relate that synthesis to the first quatrain rhetorically. Perhaps such an intricately fashioned poem is the necessary vehicle for such a crucial and complex theme.¹³

In substance "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!" (Grierson XV) resembles "As due by many titles," the first sonnet in the 1633 edition. This later consideration of God's gestures of love and concern for man, however, works to a quite different end: whereas in the former sonnet God's many theoretical "titles" to Donne merely heightened his anxiety that he might be

his family. Line 5 recalls John i.14 in characterizing the origin and status of Christ, God's first and only "blood" son: "...the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Line 6 then qualifies line 5 with a comment on the eternality of the Son that accords with such passages as John i.1-- "In the beginning was the Word...." Specifying both the godhood and the manhood of Christ, these two lines together anticipate the theme elaborated in the sestet. Finally, in the last two lines of the quatrain, Donne completes his sentence with the words of most importance to himself: he has been made a brother of Christ, a child of God, through adoption. The concept of adoption occurs about half a dozen times in the writings of Paul, the only Biblical writer to use it, but Donne seems to have Romans viii.15-17 specifically in mind: "...ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...." (Gardner, DP, p. 72, cites these verses as Donne's source and notes his agreement with the Vulgate and the Rheims translations in using "Coheire.") To the ideas in this passage Donne adds an allusion to the Pauline doctrine of predestination (in the word "chuse") and a reference to the "Sabbaths

endlesse rest" described in Hebrews iv, thus completing a quatrain densely packed with Biblical material.

The quotation from Romans viii above not only shows the Biblical source of the adoption image in lines 5-8, but also links it with a testimony of the inner witness of the Spirit in the believer's heart, the consideration of Donne's first quatrain here. It therefore seems likely that this passage is the germ from which the whole sonnet grew, for, in the conclusion of verse 17 of that same chapter, the Apostle qualifies the promise of inheritance: " We are joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him..." And Christ's suffering is the third main point of Donne's "wholsome meditation":

The Sonne of glory came downe, and was slaine,
Us whom he'had made, and Satan stolne, to unbinde.
'Twas much, that man was made like God before,
But, that God should be made like man, much more.
(11-14)

Redefining the relationship of Christ and man as that of savior to sinner--they were previously called "Coheires"--, these lines indicate the role played by God's "only begotten" Son in the "adoption" of His wayward human children. And these lines, like all the poem, owe much of their doctrine and imagery to Scripture.

The characterization of Christ as the "Sonne of glory" who was "made like man" derives from John i.14 (quoted above), while the contrasting parallel, "that man was made like God" involves the Biblical commonplace

of Genesis i.27. Such verses as John i.3 and Ephesians iii.9 authorize the assertion in line 12 that man was made by the Son, and Donne's description of Satan's corruption of the Son's creature as a stealing generally reflects Paul's image of the devil as a marauder in II Timothy ii.26: Paul there exhorts Timothy to work patiently with sinners "that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." Donne clearly had some such conception as this in mind in identifying the effect of Christ's death as that of "unbinding" stolen man.

Whereas "Batter my heart" was essentially a colloquy, a plea for regeneration, "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!" is almost wholly an analysis, the poet's understanding poring over some of the evidences of God's love for him. But if he seems certain of God's love in this latter poem, his contemplation merely leaves him profoundly perplexed: it is humanly incomprehensible that God, "by Angels waited on/ In heaven" (3-4) should "make his Temple" (4) in the human breast or that he should "adopt" mortals, already "having begot a Sonne most blest" (5). But the climatic paradox is that he should sacrifice his only begotten Son to reclaim the lost human baggage, "stolne stuffe" (10) which He has absolutely no need for and which, from the human standpoint, He would seem to be better off without. This is the ineffable

enigma which Donne ponders here. The poetic result is not more a clarification of the love of God than a revelation of the poet's awe in the face of the mystery.

Although we cannot be certain of the order in which these poems were composed, it seems highly probable that Donne wrote the twelfth, "Father, part of his double interest" (Grierson XVI), immediately after "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!" for this last sonnet expands one of the major ideas of the previous poems in terms employed there and shares the same tone of confidence. Specifically, Donne here elaborates the theme that through His sacrifice, the Son enstated man as a co-heir with Him and replaced the legalism of the old dispensation with a new testament of love. In developing this conceit, Donne continues to rely on Biblical doctrine and imagery.

Rehearsing the Son's "double interest" to God's kingdom, the first quatrain defines the means by which Christ has elevated the poet to citizenship:

Father, part of his double interest
 Unto thy kingdome, thy Sonne gives to mee,
 His joynture in the knottie Trinitie
 Hee keepes, and gives to me his deaths conquest.
(1-4)

The Son's place in the Trinity is well attested in Scripture (Jno.xiv.26, e.g.) as in His victory over death, though Donne's wording here recalls most specifically I Corinthians xv.54-57. In that passage Paul generally speaks of the defeat of death as a fact to be realized

in the resurrection, but verse 57 describes that triumph as a present reality in language which closely parallels Donne's fourth line: "...thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Furthermore, the image of the believer as a citizen in the kingdom of God derives from such texts as Colossians i.12-14. This passage not only supplies the citizenship metaphor but certifies Christ's sacrifice as the means of man's naturalization:

"... [Let us] give thanks unto the Father, which hath made us...partakers of the inheritance of the saints ...Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood...."

In order to make his conceit consistent, Donne has replaced the metaphor of redemption with the imagery of conquest from I Corinthians iv, but much of the conceptual substance of this first quatrain lies in these verses:

An implicit part of that ideational material is the concept that Christ sacrificed Himself for love of lost man. The second quatrain brings this theme to the surface and, in further legal imagery, introduces the notion of the two testaments which the Eternal Son has made with humankind. Lines 5-6 follow Revelation xiii.8 in characterizing Christ as a "Lambe...from the worlds beginning slaine" and allude to the enlivening effect of that Atonement in accordance with, for example, Colossians ii.13: "...you, being dead in your sins...hath he quickened

together with him...." Lines 7 and 8 then refer to the "two Wills, which with the Legacie/ Of his and thy [God's] kingdome, doe thy Sonnes invest." The concept of the Trinity in line 3 explains the reference to the dual rule of Christ and God in the kingdom, and we have noted above one Biblical source for this imagery of enstatement (Col. i). The poet's use of the word "Sonnes," however, suggests that he has the fourth chapter of Galatians in mind here. In that chapter Paul expounds the new doctrine of adoption by grace, presenting it as the replacement of the old concept of servanthood under the law:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (vss.4-7)

Not only do these verses authorize the poet's use of the word "Sonnes"; they explain his phrase "two Wills" as the enslaving law of the Old Testament and the liberating grace of the New.

In the sestet Donne synthesizes other pertinent Scriptural texts with this passage from Galatians iv to elaborate the advantages of the new dispensation and celebrate the institution of it:

Yet such are thy laws, that men argue yet
Whether a man those statutes can fulfill;
None doth; but all-healing grace and spirit
Revive againe what law and letter kill.
Thy lawes abridgement, and thy last command
Is all but love; Oh let this last Will stand! (9-14)

In referring to the question whether man can keep the law as a continuing dispute, lines 10-11 look back to the Pauline text cited above, for the Apostle's purpose there was to persuade the Galatians of the futility of observing "days, months, and times, and years" (vs. 10). And Donne's terse summary of the matter--"None doth"--recalls Paul's related declaration that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight....For all have sinned..." (Rom.iii.20,23). Translating line five's assertion that Christ's death "with life the world hath blest" into legal terms, the last four lines, however concentrate on the second "Will," the "all-healing grace and spirit" which "Revive again what law and letter kill." And these lines combine another Pauline comment--"...the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Cor.iii.6)--with John's declaration that "...the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (i.17). The couplet concludes the sonnet by finishing the analysis of the law of grace and urging its continued sway, synthesizing the language of Galatians v.14--"...all the law is fulfilled in one word...Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"--with Christ's appellation of this commandment as a "new" one in John xiii.34.

These sonnets published in 1633 testify to their

author's concern with spiritual matters in the years immediately preceding his ordination. They reflect a probing self-examination from which he emerged perhaps resigned to worldly obscurity; they certainly record the spiritual exercises necessary if one is ever to find contentment in the service of God. To go even further, I would suggest that in these poems lies the story of Donne's conversion. This interpretation rests on the assumption that no man writes poems of this kind lightly or perfunctorily, even should his lack of poetic talent produce a wooden effort. And of Donne's skill in exact, subtle poetic expression there can be no doubt. We have biographical evidence that external circumstances forced Donne to recognize, in these years, that he was to rise in God's house, if at all. Such a realization would force any man, but particularly one in Donne's dire straits, to consider the things of God closely, and these poems reveal that Donne's examination of spiritual concerns was far from superficial. If he was originally nudged toward God by outside pressures, it seems to me that he found himself caught up in an enterprise of great pitch and moment as he moved in that direction.

I have cited above Gardner's view of the overall organizational pattern in these twelve sonnets. A closer examination, however, puts us in contact with the progress of a soul from something very near despair to

real, even if temporary, confidence of salvation. A simple comparison of the first sonnet with the last indicates this radical change. But a scrutiny of the intervening poems reveals the progress of that change. Briefly, I offer the following psychological reading of the poems.

The first six sonnets form a more or less coherent sequence on the theme of the Last Things, the fifth ("If poysonous minerall, and if that tree") disturbing the order in the manner discussed above. But excepting the very real fear of damnation, revealed primarily in "As due by many titles I resigne," these poems do not generally reflect a quest for salvation worked out in fear and trembling, a religious experience felt on the pulses. They exhibit rather a cerebral approach to Christianity. One factor contributing to this impression is the hypothetical, futuristic nature of the beginning from which each poem evolves: Donne projects himself onto a sick-bed, to the moment of death, to the last resurrection, to the scene of Death's final destruction at the hands of the Son. And none of these events is an immediate reality in his life. Furthermore, most of the lines which treat of forgiveness and salvation are tentative in tone or doctrinally incomplete, not indicative of regeneration as a completed fact. The conclusion of "Oh my blacke Soule" explains the power of Christ's

blood to cover sin, but the poet does not claim to have received that cleansing; the vision of leaving the "world, the flesh, and devill" and thus being "imputed righteous" in "This is my playes last scene" is not properly grounded in an acknowledged faith in Christ's sacrifice; the repentance and subsequent forgiveness of sin in "At the round earths imagin'd corners" remain to be enacted at the end of the poem; God's "forgetting" sins in "If poysonous min-eralls" is cited as a possibility, not a realized actuality; and the death of Death is an imaginative event that no man has as yet witnessed. Thus at no place in these sonnets does the poet claim the actual experience of spiritual regeneration or exhibit the confidence that such an event would provide.

In the second set of poems, however, the poet's words take on a deeply personal tone. Sonnets 7, 8, and 9 center on the paradox of the crucifixion and record the poet's sense of his own sin in the face of that condemning fact. In "Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side," Donne confesses, "...I/ Crucify him daily..." and resolves to "admire" Christ's "strange love"; his overpowering guilt leads him to value himself below the "more pure" brutes in "Why are wee by all creatures waited on?"; and he desperately seeks assurance that Christ will not "ad-judge... [him] unto hell" in "What if this present were the worlds last night?"

The recurrent, juxtaposed themes of Christ's death and Donne's sin combine with the temporal location of the poems in the present to impart a sense of immediate spiritual struggle to these poems. But in spite of the neo-platonic assurance of mercy attested in "What if this present were the worlds last night?" the conflict is not yet resolved. In thus narrowing his focus to the essential spiritual truths, however, Donne has brought himself to the very brink of salvation.

Finally comes the crucial statement. "Batter my heart" catches the poet in the act of making the all-important spiritual gesture of acknowledging his own helplessness to cast off sin and beseeching the Lord to re-make him according to His will. Significantly, the two poems which follow show the poet confident of his own adoption, of his share in God's kingdom. In proclaiming the death of Death a present reality in the poet's life ("...thy Sonne...gives to me his deaths conquest"), in echoing the imagery of law used in sonnet 1, and in celebrating love's replacement of the legalism which only brought initial despair, the last poem provides a satisfying sense of happy resolution to the spiritual struggle reflected in this series of meditations. It appears that God did indeed make Donne new.

It seems likely that these poems do stand as the objective correlative of Donne's soul-struggle in these

years, but this account of the spiritual experience traced in these sonnets does not require a biographical interpretation. As "mere" poetry they still excite religious and esthetic awe, and I have tried to show the artful and pervasive use of Scripture which contributes greatly to this excellence. The poems are rich in Biblical phrase and idea, a characteristic which lends them a peculiar power over the Biblically knowledgeable Christian, but they are not mere meterized homily. We have noted Donne's dramatic presentation of event, his poetic (at least) realization of psychic struggle, his skillful use of various rhetorical forms, his creation of new conceits out of established Biblical language. These elements please even the non-religious reader. For those (increasingly) few Christian poetry-lovers, the enjoyment is double.

One last point suggests itself. A recognition of the thorough suffusion of these poems with Scripture must lead us to reconsider the extent to which the processes of the meditation make their influence felt. Theoretically, the memory furnishes material for the compositio loci and then the other two faculties take over to discourse on the theme and express the exercitant's emotional response to the total experience. But we have noted Biblical allusions in significant numbers even in those sections of the poems which record the operation

of the understanding and the will. The ubiquitous presence of these Scriptural elements suggests that Donne's memory plays a leading role, even in passages of analysis and colloquy, and that the originality of a poet who, like Donne, has his religious consciousness largely shaped by Scripture must be understood not as a creation of something new under the sun, but perhaps in the Miltonic sense of bettering what is borrowed or the Popean sense of artistically perfecting the expression of what "oft was thought."

Notes to Chapter IV

¹Grierson, in his 1912 edition, supplies this heading, having found it in the manuscripts he consulted.

²I follow Martz, p. 50, in this analysis of the poem.

³For a depreciation of the views of Martz and Gardner on the influence of the Ignatian meditation in these poems see Stanley Archer, "Meditation and the Structure of Donne's 'Holy Sonnets,'" ELH, XXVIII (June, 1961), 137-47. It is unnecessary for me to solve the debate here, since the uses I make of Martz's and Gardner's theories of the meditation are slight and since their terms serve my purposes well enough.

⁴I am following Gardner in this ordering of the sonnets; her arrangement has won the approval of recent editors such as Shawcross and A. L. Clements, John Donne's Poetry (New York, 1966). I will continue to use Grierson's text here, however, and will indicate in parentheses the number he assigned to each poem in his 1912 Oxford English Texts edition and in the 1933 one-volume redaction.

⁵I have indicated above my belief that Donne begins to get personally involved in the rather public and intellectual poems of La Corona. In fact, it is only by

comparison with some of the "Holy Sonnets" discussed here that those of La Corona seem somewhat impersonal.

⁶Gardner, pp. xlviii-xlix, argues that these poems were sent to the third Earl of Dorset in 1609. Former editors had thought the poems introduced by the sonnet "To E. of D. with six holy Sonnets" were the first six of La Corona. I find Gardner's case convincing.

⁷J. B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit, 6th ed. (London, 1962), p. 268. Leishman believes the sonnet to Dorset introduced the first six poems of La Corona and accepts the improbable premise that Donne sent La Corona first to Mrs. Herbert, then to Dorset two years later, "pretending that his Lordship's own muse had inspired them...."

⁸We should note that the doctrine here contradicts that of the previous poem, where Donne asserts that his soul will consciously enjoy the presence of the Creator immediately at death. Gardner, pp. xliv-xlvii, notes this contradiction and suggests that Donne had not yet made up his mind on this point.

⁹Proverbs ii.16 warns against loving a "strange woman," for "her house inclineth unto death" (vs. 18). Donne's use of "strange" here suggests this passage, since Christ's love of his human enemies (who will make up his Bride, the church) leads him to death.

¹⁰Hinging as it does on a conceptual similarity (that of disguising) rather than a sensory likeness, this final analogy shares a quality that is often considered integral to Donne's "metaphysical" style. In my concluding chapter below I will discuss this matter further and attempt to relate such figures of speech as this to Donne's poetic.

¹¹Some years ago a critical debate raged over this poem. It was suggested by J. C. Levenson ("Donne's 'Holy Sonnets,' XIV," Explicator, XI March, 1953 , Item 31) that the first quatrain shows God as a tinker and man as a pewter vessel. George Herman replied in the same publication (XII December, 1953 , Item 18) that the tinker image was emphatically not there: "Donne's extended metaphor seems to be reasonably clear and consistent throughout the poem, and it has nothing to do with a tinker or a pewter vessel--though I cannot say that I fully realize it." He then proclaimed that the conceit of this poem shows the poet as a heart-torn woman and glossed some of the words with NED references, Malory, and several Shakespearean plays. Levenson replied (Explicator, XII April, 1954 , Item 36) that God was too a tinker, and then George Knox, "Donne's 'Holy Sonnets,' XIV," Explicator, XV (October, 1956), Item 2, claimed that both Levenson and Herman were "oblivious of the obvious" and offered his own truth on the matter. Finally A. L. Clements, "Donne's 'Holy Sonnets,' XIV," MLN, LXXVI (June, 1961), 484-89, shed some

Biblical light on the first quatrain, though he does not understand the poem nearly so well as I do. This debate (conveniently summarized in Clements' edition of Donne's poetry) typifies the reluctance critics have shown to go to the obvious source, the Bible, for guidance in understanding Donne's religious poetry.

¹²For example, the sartorial language of line 2, taken from Matthew ix, is not consistent with the vocabulary of regeneration in II Corinthians v which authorizes the phrase "make me new," but Donne turns them to figurative uniformity in the poem.

¹³One objection to my reading of this poem is that Scriptural references can be easily found which indicate that God's normal way of winning the soul is to "knocke, breathe, and shine," though I can find no Biblical authority describing salvation as a "mending." Thus one might accuse Donne of trying to dictate terms to the Lord here, which, of course, would not work. Donne is, however, on firm ground in putting his plea in terms of the Christian paradoxes and in asking for complete conversion. Therefore, in light of the place this poem occupies in the series and in view of the themes and tone in the following two sonnets, this reading seems accurate.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The basic critical suppositions of this essay-- that every true writer draws from his own experience, that his literary heritage is an integral part of that experience, and that it is a profitable undertaking to explore the life-stuff out of which literature is made-- have by now, I trust, been justified with regard to Donne's knowledge and use of the Bible. I began with two intentions, one quite specific, one rather general: first, I intended to identify and explain the poetic function and effect of the Biblical substance in Donne's poetry; second, I hoped to show, in the light of that study, that Donne is, in essential respects, the same poet and (this was a lesser concern) the same man in the secular and religious poetry. The conclusions warranted by my examination of but a portion of the Donne canon are rather few; nevertheless, they seem important and worthy of being stated.

This essay underscores the common observation that Donne's poetry is dramatic, that it has an immediacy, a vibrant inner tension arising from a complexity of thought

and emotion that blurs the distinctions between lyricism and drama.¹ In fact, many of the Songs and Sonets, with their rather fully realized characters and clearly defined situations, are full-blown dramatic monologues. If my study of them began with that tacit premise, the evidence that the Bible serves mainly to characterize the various personae who inhabit Donne's world of love confirms it.² And we have seen a similar tense drama in the Divine Poems, as Donne, in varying degrees of personal involvement, works out his own salvation with fear and trembling before God. In the love poetry Donne uses Scriptural precept, language, and patterns of action to shape the matter of earthly love; in the religious poems, the Christian myth becomes the vehicle of ontological truth in the light of which he must undertake self-examination. Thus the groups of poems I have considered share some of the same material and embody two corresponding myths in which the drama of redemption is enacted in the terms appropriate to each.³

An element contributing to the dramatic nature of this poetry is what Eliot, refining Grierson's identification in the metaphysical poets of a "peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination,"⁴ called a "direct sensuous apprehension of thought," the ability provided by a "unified sensibility" to transmute "thought into feeling."⁵ Certainly one thing Eliot means by this somewhat fuzzy phrasing is that Donne is capable of being

moved by a concept (as well as by a sensory stimulus) and of conveying that feeling in his poetry. That is, Donne can make poetry of an intellectual cast or with a strong element of sheer thought seem immediate and compelling, qualities generally considered integral to the dramatic effect, though by no means exclusive to it.

This poetic technique is observable in much of the love poetry. The central idea and controlling force of "The Flea," for example, is the would-be lover's argument that the lady's virginity is a mere trifle which she will never miss, an abstract notion that probably does not cause many to burn with lust or shrink in shock. And Donne's excitement by ideas is especially noticeable in the Divine Poems, where he movingly meditates on such abstract concepts as sin, death, love, and redemption. But he ponders these subjects, of course, in concrete, affecting imagery, and it is this linguistic substance which renders the arguments "passionate." Because of the development of the conceit that the flea is the lovers "marriage bed, and marriage temple," the attempt at seduction in "The Flea" allows the emotional outburst when the mistress seems about to crush the insect,

Though use make you apt to kill mee,
Let not to that, selfe murder added bee,
And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.

Similarly, Donne's meditation of judgment evokes the awesome portrait of the last day in "At the round earths

imagin'd corners, blow," a sensuously realized background against which the poet's supplication to be taught "how to repent" seems vital and crucial. On the other hand, a poem like "Annunciation" (the second sonnet in La Corona), which is generally less successful in translating the abstract thought into the concrete image, contains proportionately less of passion and feeling.

It is exactly on this point of the essential function of the conceit that Eliot fails to make his notion of the primacy of thought in Donne's mind and art as clear or convincing as it could be. He speaks of both "the elaboration...of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it" (p. 242) and of the "telescoping of images and multiplied associations" (p. 243) as traits of "metaphysical" poetry, but he does not show that the "recreation of thought into feeling" consists precisely in the postulation of a conceit which can sensuously embody the thought.⁶ The imagery of poetry, the diction which appeals to the senses (mediated, of course, through the mind), is that which gives it sensuousness and makes it passionate.⁷ For his devotional poetry, Donne finds the religious themes and concepts he is drawn to consider already objectified in the fully developed, concrete idiom of the Bible. But in his secular poetry, he is frequently stirred by thoughts for which there are no established figurative expressions; hence he is led to the "far-fetched"

conceits which have so often been noted. His compass image, for example, may not convey the highest degree of emotion possible, but it is immensely more affective than the abstract thought which it figures forth--that the lovers will remain together, though apart.

In reading through the criticism of Donne's Songs and Sonets, one is struck by the frequency with which the extravagant nature of the conceits in them receives mention, yet an investigation of the commentary on the Divine Poems reveals no similar astonishment on the part of critics.⁸ And since there is at least as much dissimilarity between a sheep and a man as between a compass and a pair of lovers, one might well ask why the conceits in the Divine Poems have seemed less ingenious and original to readers than those in the Songs and Sonets. Or, to use an even more apt example, one might ask why Donne's conceit of himself as a map and his doctors as cartographers in the "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse" seems more "metaphysical" than the poem's later conceit that Donne is "both Adams," a figure surely as complicated as the first. The answer to this question, of course, is easy: it is conventional, in Biblical interpretation, to see Abraham's ram as a type of Christ and to relate Adam and Christ to sinful man, but no similar tradition prepares the reader for Donne's identification of himself with a map in the "Hymn" or for his famous compass image in "A Valediction:

forbidding mourning."⁹ The "justness" of a conceit, in other words, depends at least as much upon the familiarity of the comparison and its conformity to a defined critical norm as upon any inherent similarities between the terms of the comparison itself.¹⁰

Though Donne's characteristic conceits in the Songs and Sonets may seem highly original, sometimes even bizarre, I think they are not egregious in the light of his poetic, a theory markedly similar to the tradition of Biblical exegesis in which he worked. In the sermons of his maturity, Donne mentions the common idea that God has revealed himself in two books:

There is an elder booke in the World then the Scriptures; It is not well said, in the World, for it is the Worlde it selfe, the whole booke of Creatures; And indeed the Scriptures are but a paraphrase, but a comment, but an illustration of that booke of Creatures. (Sermons, III, 264)

It seems to me that there is a very real similarity between Donne's handling of Scripture in the Divine Poems and his treatment of the "booke of the Creatures" in his secular poetry. This similarity derives from the two medieval methods of perceiving and understanding the world and the Bible which persisted to Donne's time and which he seems to have attracted to--the four-fold method of Biblical exegesis and the doctrine of universal correspondence.

I have mentioned the four-fold method of Scriptural interpretation in my discussion of the La Corona cycle above. The logical basis of the system is analogy: it

links Old Testament persons and events typologically with New Testament analogues; it tropologically makes moral analogies between Biblical situations and non-Biblical ones; it anagogically connects the temporal with the eternal. Furthermore, as I have suggested above in mentioning the relation of Abraham's ram to Christ, the basis of these traditional connections is often much more dependent on ideational similarity than on sensory likeness: the justice of Burns' simile of the "red, red rose" may involve sensory similarities between the beauty and delicacy of the girl and qualities in the flower (though I suspect that even this comparison involves a suppressed equivocation on the words "beauty" and "delicacy"), but Jesus is like the ram by force of their conceptually similar roles as propitiatory sacrifices. Thus one might say that the four-fold method yokes the most heterogeneous items by tradition together, though, owing to the conventionality of the various relationships and, perhaps, to the Apostolic sanction of it, Samuel Johnson never, so far as I know, disapproved the practice.

The four-fold method of interpreting Scripture has a secular parallel in the doctrine of universal analogy, a theory stretching back through medieval times to Plato. On the grounds of this notion, J. A. Mazzeo postulates a "poetic of correspondence" by which to explain the traits of the Donnean conceit.¹¹ Speaking of the medieval period,

Dunbar (pp. 15-18) defines universal analogy as a tendency to seek meaning not in the discrete facts of the phenomenal world or in isolated facets of human experience, but in the relationship which the part bears to the whole scheme of things. And Mazzeo finds the system still current until Baconian empiricism and Cartesian rationalism render it untenable and understands it similarly: "The poetic of correspondence implies an underlying belief in the unity and connection of all things" ("Metaphysical Poetry," p. 233). The system is grounded on the metaphor of God as an artist and implies the organic unity of all parts of His poem of creation. Thus, in the effort to interpret the book of the creatures, the thinkers of the medieval and renaissance periods exercise wit in the discovery of that unity. In the case of a poet like Donne, such efforts result in the concrete metaphoric expression of resemblances which the neo-classical standards of taste cannot accommodate, the ontological basis of them having been lost.¹²

This comparison of the received ways which Donne and his contemporaries had of interpreting the world and the Bible suggests two points: that Donne himself, if he delighted in making original analogies in his poetry,¹³ did not view the resemblances asserted as mere mind-forged manacles, but expected his conceits to be accorded all the persuasive and significative force that any "natural" metaphor is allowed by the Aristotelian critic; that the habit

of making what have so often been called ingenious or extravagant poetic comparisons was at least strongly encouraged by his acquaintance with the symbolic method of Biblical interpretation. In fact, recognition of the substantial Biblical element in the Songs and Sonets and of the likelihood that Donne received university exposure to the four-fold scheme of Scriptural exegesis seems to justify the (at least lightly urged) inference of a cause-effect relationship between the four-fold method and the "metaphysical" conceits of Donne's love poetry. And this is especially true in view of the close relationship between the four-fold method and the doctrine of universal analogy.

Perceiving the analogical basis of both Donne's poetic and his method of Scriptural exegesis not only clarifies the logic by which he conceitedly forges comparisons and makes juxtapositions within the bounds of each of the corresponding orders; it also helps to explain his ready appropriation of Biblical matter for use in the secular poems and the converse tendency to use earthly matter in the devotional poetry.¹⁴ Since both books--the Bible and the creation--exist simultaneously and cast light on each other, it is almost inevitable that their substances be intermingled in the sensibility of a man who believes in the essential oneness of reality.

One last thread of connection between Donne's

handling of the "booke of Creatures" and the revealed Word suggests itself: in the Songs and Sonets in which the Bible serves most importantly, it is used typologically. Such poems as "A Valediction: of my name, in the window," "Twicknam Garden," "The Blossome," "The Relique," and "The Canonization" employ Scriptural patterns which include characters and events that parallel those of the poems. If we see the underlying Scriptural patterns at all, however, we are aware that there is a temporal dimension separating the two terms of the comparison. For example, the sorrowful lover in "Twicknam Garden" cannot actually be Christ or Adam, because we know that they both lived long before Donne ever conceived the poem, and the cruel mistress cannot be Eve for the same reason. This chronological distinctness differentiates typological from other kinds of metaphorical relationships and mediates the identity asserted by conceits in which it is used.¹⁵ And this mediation shields Donne from any charges of indecorousness or sacrilege and prevents the comparison from vitiating his realism.

Donne is a comprehensive poet who evinces a broad range of interests and a wide spectrum of feelings and attitudes.¹⁶ If we understand this scope simply in terms of a chronological continuum bounded on one end by a reckless youth about town and on the other by a sage and

serious devine, however, we distort our view of him unnecessarily and falsify his poetic achievement. In the Songs and Sonets his view of heterosexual love extends all the way from a scornful cynicism to a vision of the lovers' transcendent union; the Divine Poems circumscribe a spiritual experience that ranges from virtual despair to a foretaste of glorification. His approach to experience is thus always that of a full-bodied and spiritually sensitive human being who exhibits the varied reactions and moods of such a darkly wise and rudely great creature, whatever the dominant interest of his life at a given stage. That we see this from the exclusive vantage point of this essay shows just how true it is.

Notes to Conclusion

¹Nearly every critic to comment on Donne in any general way mentions this dramatic element. See, e.g., Leishman, p. 20; Gardner, DP, p. xxi, and SS, pp. xix-xx; Le Comte, pp. 40-45; or R. G. Cox, "The Poems of John Donne," in A Guide to English Literature: From Donne to Marvell, ed. Boris Ford (London, 1956), p. 101. The complexity of attitude in Donne's love poetry is discussed at length in Leonard Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism (New York, 1962), pp. 66-73.

²I do not conclude that the Biblical element causes the dramatic nature of these poems, but that the use of it, along with the other source materials, for dramatic purposes indicates a dominant tendency in Donne's art.

³Donne himself implies the parallel I am making by speaking of his youthful days as his "Idolatry" in "Holy Sonnets" III and XIII.

⁴Herbert J. C. Grierson, "Introduction," Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler (Oxford, 1921), p. xvi.

⁵T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in Selected Essays 1917-1932 (New York, 1932), p. 246. References to this essay are hereafter included in the text.

⁶Later critics have argued that the conceit is vital in this process. In a book which owes a heavy debt to Eliot's essay, George Williamson, in The Donne Tradition (Cambridge, 1930), p. 32, says of Donne: "The conceit, playing like a shuttle between his mind and the world, wove the fabric of his thought, and gave the pattern in which he united his most disparate knowledge and experience into an image...." John Crowe Ransom, The World's Body (New York, 1938), p. 136, claims: "For the critical mind Metaphysical Poetry refers perhaps almost entirely to the so-called 'conceits' that constitute its staple." Allen Tate (On the Limits of Poetry New York, 1948, p. 80), while emphasizing the "logical extension of imagery" as the "leading feature of the poetry called metaphysical," stresses the importance of the conceit. And Cleanth Brooks, in Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill, 1939), p. 15, sees the conceit as the poem: "Most clearly of all, the metaphysical poets reveal the essentially functional character of all metaphor. We cannot remove the comparisons from their poems, as we might remove ornaments or illustrations attached to a statement, without demolishing the poems. The comparison is the poem in a structural sense."

⁷Milton seems to mean something like this in contrasting poetry to logic and rhetoric as "less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate."

(See "Of Education," in The Student's Milton, ed. Frank Allen Patterson [New York, 1930], p. 729.)

⁸The classic deprecation, of course, is found in Samuel Johnson's "Life of Cowley," but many others have followed. For instance, Henry W. Wells, in Poetic imagery illustrated from Elizabethan literature (New York, 1924), p. 128, speaks of the Donnean conceit as a "Radical metaphor." Much of the criticism of modern times has been concerned with refuting the Johnsonian charge: see, e.g., Milton A. Rugoff, Donne's Imagery: A Study in Creative Sources (New York, 1939), pp. 13-19. For a convenient and enlightening summary of the question of Donne's originality in handling the conceit see Cox, pp. 105-08.

⁹This point has not gone unnoticed. Helen Gardner, in The Metaphysical Poets (Oxford, 1961), pp. xix-xxxiv, asserts: "Much stress has been laid recently upon the strongly traditional element in the conceits of metaphysical religious poetry. A good deal that seems to us remote, and idiosyncratic, the paradoxes and the twistings of Scripture to yield symbolic meanings, reaches back through the liturgy and through commentaries on Scripture to the Fathers and can be paralleled in medieval poetry." I have been forced to take this quotation from a reprinting of Gardner's discussion entitled "The Metaphysical Poets" in William R. Keast, Seventeenth-Century English Poetry (New

York and Oxford, 1962), p. 61.

¹⁰In fact, as Gardner says (Keast, p. 54), any metaphor selectively compares the properties or aspects of the two terms involved and directs the reader's attention to those points of similarity and away from any dissimilar ones. Thus any figurative comparison depends on the controlling hand of the artist for effect and significance, even images which are regarded as purely conventional and unsurprising.

¹¹Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "Metaphysical Poetry and the Poetic of Correspondence," JHI, XIV (1953), 221-34, and "Universal Analogy and the Culture of the Renaissance," JHI, XV (1954), 299-304. I am much in debt to Mazzeo in this paragraph.

¹²This is part of what I understand Eliot (p. 247) to mean by his concept of "the dissociation of sensibility."

¹³Gardner (Keast, pp. 51-2) argues that difficulty was a virtue in Donne's poetic and that both writer and reader garnered pleasure from unpuzzling a hard conceit.

¹⁴La Corona uses non-Biblical matter less than the other religious poetry.

¹⁵There is an ontological distinction between the terms of most metaphors--a girl is not a flower, e.g.--,

but the effect of the metaphor consists precisely in linguistically fusing the two terms into a oneness. The typological relationship, on the other hand, asserts not an identity, but a comparison.

¹⁶Leishman, pp. 251 ff., discusses the varied, shifting tendency that characterized Donne throughout his life, but emphasizes the skeptical and cynical--almost Manichean--aspects of his nature, feeling that Donne never had much hope or faith, even after he was ordained.

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