

2010

Spiritual and Material Crosses in the Works of John Donne

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SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL CROSSES IN THE WORKS OF JOHN DONNE

By

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THESIS

Submitted to
Northern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Graduate Studies Office

2010

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January 29, 1985

ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL CROSSES IN THE WORKS OF JOHN DONNE

By

Angela Aliff

Donne centralizes the core of his identity as a believer in the image of the cross, the multi-dimensional imagery of which often results in simultaneous literal and figurative meaning. Such an image provides Donne with ideal material for his metaphysical conceits because the image speaks to both the physical eye and the mind's eye. In fact, Donne repeatedly illustrates in his poetry that physical sight provides a vehicle for the enhancement of spiritual insight. Donne's treatment of the image of the cross in his poetry and sermons reveals his belief that God, knowing that man's spirituality cannot be extricated from his physicality during his earthly existence, chose to communicate truth through the image of the cross, a simultaneously physical and metaphysical reality. As a result, he eagerly embraces the use of images in worship and encourages his audience to do likewise as one of his many attempts to unify English Christendom.

Because Donne's poem "The Crosse" presents his most condensed grouping of statements regarding the cross and the image of the cross, this project uses the poem as its core, supplemented by sermons and other poems, to analyze Donne's teaching regarding the image of the Cross.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank her husband Erik, without whose support and many sacrifices this project could not have been completed; her thesis director, Dr. Robert Whalen, in whose classroom the project was born and through whose mentoring the project came to fruition; and Northland International University for its financial support.

The thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spiritual and Material Crosses in the Works of John Donne.....	1
Works Cited.....	34
Notes.....	35

SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL CROSSES IN THE WORKS OF JOHN DONNE

By the time Donne had earned his prominent position as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, his congregation, along with the majority of England's citizens, had experienced decades of religious controversy. One object of continuous debate was the validity of using images in worship. Thomas More, eloquent spokesperson of Catholicism until his ultimately fatal disagreement with Henry VIII, maintained that the Old Testament commandment against worshipping images did not preclude the one who merely displays reverence for an image, "not fixing his final intent in the image, but referring it further to the honour of the person that the image representeth, since that in such reverence done unto the image there is none honour withdrawn neither from God nor good man, but both the saint honoured in his image and God in his saint" (qtd. in Phillips 44). Henry's dismissal of the authority of the English Catholic Church resulted in the difficult evaluation of the practices of the national church. He desired autonomy for the English church without a full dismissal of Catholic rituals and ceremonies. Clearly associated with Catholicism, the use of images in worship quickly became controversial.

In his work, *The Reformation of Images*, John Phillips provides an account of the pendulum of governmental decree and popular belief regarding images during the English Reformation and Renaissance. Phillips reveals that in spite of the Edward VI's iconoclasm and Mary's reactionary attempts to reinstitute images in worship, the disagreement about the definition of idolatrous or acceptable religious images prevented the English people from ever confidently or consistently instituting specific

policies. Revered images removed from the public during Edward's reign were redisplayed during Mary's reign and defaced during Elizabeth's reign. Recognizing the importance of political unification, Elizabeth sought to extend her *via media* to include religious images. As Phillips observes, Elizabeth compromised between the positions of Henry and Edward. "The Elizabethan injunctions never condemned all images; only 'abused images, tables, pictures, paintings. . .' were criticized"; however, Elizabeth soon found that "a subtle phrasing in her injunctions" could not prevent the illegal iconoclasm already practiced in England (115-16). James, following Elizabeth's precedent of ambiguity, made little effort to define terms or confront the controversy and left the debate to church leaders who could not come to an agreement. William Perkins, a Puritan theologian, staunchly advocated that the controversy be resolved by a complete rejection of images in worship:

It may be objected, that we may lawfully make an image of Christ, and that this image is no Idol. I answer: it is not unlawful to make or to have the Image of Christ, two caveats being remembered. The first, that this Image be onely of the manhood: the second that it be out of use in religion. For if otherwise it be made to represent whole Christ, God, and man: or, if it be used as an instrument or a signe in which, and before which, men worship Christ himselfe, it is by the former doctrine a flat Idol. (Perkins)

However, although he appears to attempt to create a sense of unity among church leaders by admitting that a lawful image of Christ is possible, his statement that men

cannot use such images in religion directly opposes the teachings of John Donne, who believed that images could strengthen the spiritual insight of the believer, thereby guiding the believer in his act of worship of God.

In her article “Squint-Eyed, Left-Handed, Half-Deaf,” Jeanne Shami argues that Donne’s own sermons and other prose reveal a deliberate choosing of a *via media* to unify the Church. After identifying opposing arguments, Donne sought “to achieve the most broadly inclusive middle ground of charitable interpretation and conformity” while emphasizing the responsibility of religious leaders to give preeminence to interpretation of the Bible as a whole. Donne’s teaching on the use of images in worship supports Shami’s explanation of Donne’s hermeneutic.

On the one hand, Donne admits that images are not necessary to worship though he sees no harm in their proper use: “And this is true, that where there is a frequent preaching, there is *no necessity* of pictures; but will not every man add this, That if the true use of Pictures be preached unto them, there is *no danger* of an abuse; and so, *as Remembrances* of that which hath been taught in the Pulpit, they may be retained” (*Sermons* 7.162). On the other hand, Donne readily condemns both Catholics and iconoclasts: “Woe to such advancers of Images, as would throw down Christ, rather than his Image: But *væ Iconoclastis* too, woe to such peremptory abhorrrers of Pictures, and to such uncharitable condemners of all those who admit any use of them, as had rather throw down a Church, then let a Picture stand” (*Sermons* 2.46). Donne reveals the personal significance he places on images in “Holy Sonnet 13,” when he internalizes

the picture of Christ crucified and looks to the image to assuage his own fear of judgment.

In fact, throughout his religious poetry and sermons, Donne centralizes the core of his identity as a believer in the image of the cross. He imitates the writers of the Gospels and Epistles in his use of the word *cross* to identify the literal wooden cross of Christ and the suffering involved in his crucifixion, to imply the heavenly mission fulfilled by Christ and the benefits resulting from his sacrifice, and to indicate the personal responsibility of the Christian figuratively to imitate Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The multi-dimensional imagery of the cross often results in simultaneous literal and figurative meaning; as a result, the image of the cross provides Donne with ideal material for his metaphysical conceits because it speaks to both the physical eye and the mind's eye. In fact, Donne repeatedly illustrates in his poetry that physical sight provides a vehicle for the enhancement of spiritual insight. Accordingly, he eagerly embraces the use of images in worship and encourages his audience to do likewise. In the complexity of the image of the cross, Donne finds a workable solution to the problem of believers' physical limitations in discerning spiritual realities.

The poem "The Crosse" presents a particularly intricate condensation of Donne's complex relationship with the Cross even as Donne defends the use of images in worship against those Puritans who believed that all images should be removed from worship and devotion. He answers their objections with a series of paradoxes, primarily in reminding his opposition that the believer should not only revere the image of the cross but also *be* an image of the cross. Though at times Donne will use the word *cross*

to reference a single, specific concept, he commonly incorporates the word *cross* to invoke multiple associations, biblical and otherwise, simultaneously. In particular, he uses the word *cross* to identify the literal wooden cross of Christ and the suffering involved in his crucifixion, to imply the heavenly mission fulfilled by Christ and the benefits resulting from his sacrifice, and to indicate the personal responsibility of the Christian figuratively to imitate Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

The poem begins with an indication of the speaker's spiritual obligation to the Cross. Donne's first argument suggests the believer's duty to imitate the attitude of Christ toward the Cross, "Since Christ embrac'd the Crosse it self, dare I / His image, th' image of his Crosse deny?" (ll. 1-2). The paradoxical imagery of Christ's embracing of the cross indicates not only willingness but also eagerness to partake of the suffering of the cross. Donne readily equates the image of the cross with Christ's own image, treating the denial of the cross with the seriousness of a denial of Christ himself. Such a choice was harshly condemned by Christ in Matthew, "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (10:33). Donne assumes a direct correlation not only between Christ and the image of Christ but also between the cross of Christ and the image of the cross, and his correlations confirm the great significance he attributes to images. Because he was not present at the time of Christ's crucifixion, Donne's mind provides the gateway to his experiencing the magnitude of Christ's suffering and the implications of his death. The graphic imagery of Old Testament prophecy and the personal accounts of the Gospels undeniably communicates details necessary to render a detailed mental image.

In his discussion of the importance of images to Donne, Jeffrey Johnson quotes the following passage from one of Donne's sermons: "Now the *sight* of God in this text, is the *knowledge* of God, to *see* God, is but to *know*, that there is a God. . . . So that our labour never lies in this, to prove to any man, that he *may* see God, but onely to remember him that he *hath* seen God: not to make him beleeve that there is a God, but to make him see, that he does beleeve it" (*Sermons* 4:168, 169 qtd. in Johnson 81).

Donne recognized that man's physical limitations often necessitate empirical experience of truth, yet he also recognized enabling work of the Holy Spirit causing the believer to see with spiritual vision truth that cannot be obtained through the senses. As Johnson points out, Donne "persistently argues for a use of pictures and images, both those created by human hands and those painted in the mind that, when properly applied, serve to aid one's spiritual vision" (63). For Donne, the cross provides a link between empirical and spiritual experience. Although the believer obtains salvation only through a supernatural work in the soul, the believer's conformation to the image of Christ is revealed externally in the physical realm of the believer's earthly existence. The subtle rhetoric in the first two lines of "The Crosse," correlating Christ and the cross to the image of Christ on the cross, continues to connect the physical with the spiritual throughout the remainder of the poem.

In identifying himself with Christ through the image of the cross, Donne frequently emphasizes the significance of embracing the shame associated with the cross. Lines 1-11 of "The Crosse" reveal the tone of Donne's opening rhetorical questions through his choice words, *deny*, *despise*, and *scorning*. Donne declares the

audacity of the believer's refusal to share in Christ's sufferings because the believer is actually ashamed of Christ; he presents himself as a foil to such defectors by boldly proclaiming his own loyalty to Christ, the cross, and the suffering associated with the cross. In a sense, Donne shames those who are ashamed of the shame of the cross. Donne expresses similar thoughts in "Holy Sonnet 15," Donne reveals the great depth of Christ's suffering and great significance in the shame involved:

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

According to Donne, the humility required of a creator to stoop to man's low state to redeem his wayward creation results in a magnificent two-part paradox with the cross as its center: Man was made like God, and God was made like man. Originally God made man in the image of God, but as Donne later discusses in "The Crosse," the image of God is hidden in fallen man until God, as a sculptor, takes the excess away to reveal his own image in the life of the believer (ll. 33-36). The re-revelation of the image of God in the believer occurs as a direct result of experiencing crosses as a share in the suffering of Christ. Thus, the cross provides the crucial element necessary in making the image of man and the image of God one and the same.

Yet the greater paradox involves the shame of God's willingness to be made in the image of man through the reincarnation, life, and death of Christ. Again, the cross provides the crucial element: in this case, the climactic moment of God's existence as

the man Christ occurs at the point of crucifixion. With the cross as their central image connecting the physical realm to the spiritual, both paradoxes involve shame: God's being made flesh in the image of man necessitates Christ's willingness to suffer shame, and man's being made in the image of God necessitates the believer's suffering shame in imitation of Christ. Because of the direct correlation between the image of the cross and the shame necessary to unifying man with God, Donne strongly asserts in "The Crosse" that to deny the image of the cross is to deny Christ himself.

Donne then continues his argument against his Puritan opposition by moving from the volatile term *image* to the equally volatile term *altar*. Altars, along with images, had been removed from most churches during Edward's purge and replaced during Elizabeth's reign with wooden holy tables, and the altar made its first major reappearance in the Church in 1616 as a result of Laud, Dean of Gloucester's reform (Phillips 155). As with the cross, Donne defends the image of the altar² by invoking its representational power; both the cross and the altar deserve reverence as reminders of vicarious atonement and the mercy of Christ.

Donne reveals the paradox of a life that benefits from Christ's work on the cross yet displays loathing rather than gratitude in his next argument, which strengthens the intensity of the spiritual and political obligation: "Would I have profit by the sacrifice, / And dare the chosen Altar to despise?" (ll. 3-4). The numerous benefits of Christ's sacrifice, including redemption and reconciliation, have been given freely to the believer; therefore the vehicle of such gifts should not be despised. The unusual phrase *have profit* in line 3 may also suggest an allusion to one of Christ's experiences. Having

entered Jerusalem, Christ found the temple full of sellers and buyers profiting from the market of sacrificial animals. After overthrowing the money tables and seats, he taught the people, "Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11:17). Donne may be demonstrating the danger of despising the altar of the cross by invoking the image of Christ's fierce wrath toward those in the temple who used the sacrificial system for their own profit.

Only four lines into the poem, Donne has already utilized all three biblical contexts of the cross. Christ embraced his literal cross, after which the controversial image of the cross is fashioned. In addition, by embracing the cross Christ allowed man to profit from his work on the cross, redemption, reconciliation, and victory. Donne also highlights the imitative suffering of the Christian: to accept the image of Christ is to take up the cross and follow; to despise the cross after reaping its benefits is unacceptable.

By line 5, Donne's tone has become fully confrontational, "It bore all other sinnes, but is it fit / That it should bear the sinne of scorning it?" (ll. 5-6). Having established the close connection between Christ, the cross, and the image of the Cross, Donne directly states what he had previously only hinted at: that scorning the Cross, and thus, the image of the Cross, constitutes direct sin against Christ. In a powerful play on words, Donne references the imagery of Hebrews 9:28, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (KJV). The cross bore Christ, who bore the sins of many; as a result, those who scorn the cross, in effect, add to the weight of sin on the cross. Again, Donne's purpose is two-fold. He strengthens his argument against the Puritans, who,

like William Perkins, deny that images can have any place in worship. In addition, he asserts the irony that the Christian who chooses to avoid “taking up the cross” or suffering in imitation of Christ has chosen to add to the suffering of Christ as he bore the sins of the world.

The final rhetorical question, “Who from the picture would avert his eye, / How would he flye his paines, who there did dye?” continues Donne’s direct correlation with the suffering of the Christian and the need for the image of the cross in worship. In other words, Donne questions what kind of person could ignore the pain of an individual undergoing such suffering, or merely avert his eyes from the distasteful scene as the priest and Levite did in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The verb *flye* suggests that its subject is overcome with fear much like a deserter flees from the field of battle. Indeed, because Christ waged war upon sin and death as he suffered on the cross, those who avoid the image of Christ’s suffering truly are deserters. Such a response reveals gross ingratitude toward the cross given Donne’s reminder that Christ’s suffering resulted in vicarious atonement for the world.

In addition, Donne associates the averting of the eye from the viewing of the image with the choice to ignore the suffering of Christ. The visual depiction of the physical suffering of Christ, when contemplated, intensifies the emotional response of the believer and causes a more genuine worship. Sight is connected with an emotional and spiritual response in “Holy Sonnet 13,” when the beautiful form of Christ crucified assures the speaker of Christ’s mercy, “This beauteous forme assumes a pitious minde”

(l. 14). The sense of sight also provides both a problem and its resolution in “Holy Sonnet 1”:

I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
 Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
 Such terrour, and my feeble flesh doth waste
 By sinne in it which it t’wards hell doth weigh;
 Onely thou art above, and when towards thee
 By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe (ll. 5-10)

Because the object of a person’s vision affects the emotional and spiritual states, the despair and death that surround the speaker threaten to weigh the soul downwards; only by looking to his creator can the speaker rise again. Donne’s intentional use of the imagery of physical sight to represent a spiritual battle supports his determination that because images provide a link between the physical and spiritual, images are conducive to proper worship.

The physical and emotional suffering of Christ reappears in Donne’s works as an object of his admiration.¹ In a Trinity Sunday sermon, Donne explains that when envisioning the Savior,

I see him in the third notion, *Iesus*, accomplishing my salvation, by an actuall death, I see those hands stretched out, that stretched out the heavens, and those feet racked, to which they that racked them are foot-stooles; I hear him, from whom his nearest friends fled, pray for his

enemies, and him, whom his Father forsook, not forsake his brethren; I
see him . . . hang naked upon the Crosse; (*Sermons* 2.308)

Not only was Christ rejected by his own people, but he also was at the time of his arrest forsaken by his own disciples. The emotional pain of rejection by the people he loved would have been intense. Donne discusses his own part in causing Christ's pain in "Holy Sonnet 11," "My sinnes, which passé the Jewes impiety: / They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I / Cruicifie him daily, being now glorified" (ll. 6-8). Popular consent held the Jews responsible for the murder of Christ; however, Donne clearly states the greater magnitude of his own continual denial of Christ to the inferiority of the Jews' one-time ignorant decision to crucify Christ. The ambiguity of the participial phrase "being now glorified" creates a twofold emphasis. When read to modify the pronoun *him*, the phrase communicates the ongoing suffering of Christ: in spite of Christ's achieving glorification and claiming his divine right, Donne admits that he still frequently commits the sin of rejecting Christ. When read to modify the pronoun *I*, the phrase communicates the paradox that Donne would continue to reject Christ in spite of having received salvation and the hope of eternal glory. Rather than condemning the Jews as the primary guilty party, Donne uses their part in Christ's crucifixion to emphasize his own greater guilt in causing Christ pain by rejecting him. Implied in lines 7-8 of "The Crosse" is the underlying idea that Donne cannot ignore or fly from the pain of Christ because it is Donne himself who has caused that very suffering. The believer becomes an integral part of the image of the cross whether he is fully surrendered to embrace the cross or not. When surrendered, the believer imitates the life of Christ in patiently

enduring suffering through which he gradually becomes a more accurate depiction of Christ. Donne cautions, though, against unwillingness to conform; for by rejecting Christ, the believer actually adds another sin, the sin of scorning, to the burden of the cross (ll. 5-6).

Donne finishes his discussion of the obligation to the cross by answering his rhetorical questions with his own personal creed. "From mee, no Pulpit, nor misgrounded law, / Nor scandal taken, shall this Crosse withdraw. / It shall not, for it cannot" (ll. 9-11). Donne simultaneously pledges his own loyalty to the cross and implies that the Puritans who rejected the use of the cross in worship have also rejected their responsibility to take up the cross. In lines 9-10 Donne openly defies their preaching, their teaching, and the scandals they created over the use of the cross in worship.

Donne then puns in each of the uses of the word *crosse* in the following lines.

for, the losse

Of this Crosse, were to mee another Crosse.

Better were worse, for, no affliction,

No Crosse is so extreme, as to have none. (ll. 11-14)

He emphasizes the general idea of the cross as affliction by making "No Cross" an appositive for "no affliction" in lines 13-14, and he implies three levels of affliction caused by a theoretical loss of the cross. First, the loss of the image of the cross used in worship would cause distress because of its benefits in worship. On a greater level, the loss of the ability to take up the cross and follow Christ would create an inability to conform to Christ's image and thus a failure to accomplish the responsibility of the

believer. Most significantly, the loss of the cross on which Christ was crucified would result in affliction of the most extreme kind, since hope for eternal life rests on redemption through Christ. Donne appears to find courage in meditating on his preference to bear his cross rather than lose the cross altogether, particularly because without the tangible experience of sight, his faith will suffer.

The next portion of "The Cross" reveals a series of unavoidable, unmistakable manifestations of the cross in life and the world. Donne arranges his examples from specific to general, from personal to global. He first uses the personal experience of the sacrament: "Who can blot out the Crosse, which th'instrument / Of God, dew'd on mee in the Sacrament?" (ll. 15-16). Whether he refers to both Baptism and Communion or only one of the two Protestant sacraments is unclear. The cross could be said to have been representatively bestowed upon the Christian during Communion, when the believer takes in remembrance of the broken body and blood of Christ. The verb *blot* could then suggest a blotting out of the blood of Christ and subsequently the work of Christ.

Most likely Donne intends to invoke the imagery of Baptism, when the bishop or priest places a cross on an infant's head during the baptismal ritual. The implication that no one can blot out the cross and the verb *dew'd* suggest water imagery that would signify a reference to the English practice of Baptism and its representation of a covenant between God and man. The sacrament of Baptism appears repeatedly in Donne's sermons as an experience of great import because of its connection to the

imitation of Christ's death. Donne describes Baptism as a visual representation of conformity to Christ's death.

For as in putting on Christ, *sanctification* doth accompany *faith*, so in baptisme, the imitation of his death (that is, *mortification*) and the application of his passion, (by fulfilling the sufferings of Christ in our flesh) is that *baptisme into his death*. . . . (that he that is truly baptized into *the name* of Christ, is also baptized into *his death*) (*Sermons* 2.165)

Donne later explains that Baptism requires faith, which is necessary for the overcoming of sin. Therefore, Baptism is a way for parents to demonstrate their faith that in dedicating a child to God, they entrust him with the child's care and future decision to embrace the cross.

Donne intensifies the magnitude of such a decision elsewhere in his sermons by comparing the partaking of Christ's death, which does not necessitate immediate physical sacrifice, to martyrdom. He explains that "not only loss of life, but loss of that which we love in this life; not only the suffering of death, but the suffering of Crosses in our life, contracts the Name, and entitles us to the reward of Martyrdome. All Martyrdome is not a *Smithfeild* Martyrdome, to burn for religion" (*Sermons* 2.186).

Donne seems to have held martyrdom in fascination and great esteem. His comparison of taking part in Christ's death with martyrdom illustrates a passionate desire to fulfill the role of the martyr. His statement in *Litanie: The Martyrs*, "Oh, to some / Not to be Martyrs, is a martyrdome" parallels a portion of the imagery in "The Crosse": "No Crosse is so extreme, as to have none" (*Martyrs* l. 8-9 and "The Crosse" l. 14). Whether or not

Donne hoped to experience literal martyrdom, he did encourage himself and his congregation with the prospect of achieving the martyr's crown without having "to burn." If Donne does imply the sacrament of Baptism in lines 15-16 of "The Crosse," along with Baptism's association with martyrdom, then the following two lines become a proclamation of liberty to personally choose the death of the cross.

Donne's next example refers to a simple motion, "Who can deny mee power, and liberty / To stretch mine armes, and mine owne Crosse to be?" (ll. 17-18). He uses his ease in physically stretching out his arms to form the shape of a cross to correspond inversely to the impossibility of separation from the cross. The obvious allusion to Christ's death with arms outstretched and nailed to the cross reminds the reader once again of Donne's determination to imitate the suffering of Christ. The power and liberty to do so were established already by the work of Christ.

Donne then moves from his personal focus to include his audience in observing the manifestations of the cross:

Swimme, and at every stroake, thou art thy Crosse,

The Mast and yard make one, where seas do tosse.

Looke downe, thou spiest out Crosses in small things;

Looke up, thou seest birds rais'd on crossed wings; (ll. 19-22)

The physical formation of a cross requires as little from Donne's audience as it did from Donne, a simple outstretching of the arms to swim. In the midst of a sea at storm, a person can see the formation of a cross raised high above a ship's deck. The idea of the sea at storm is possibly figurative, as well as literal; since storms reoccur in devotional

literature as metaphors for difficulties or trials, Donne reminds his readers to look to the cross for comfort and strength during difficult times. In summary, Donne challenges his audience to observe the world around them and to note crosses everywhere, on the ground and in the air.

The final shift in examples takes the audience to a perspective outside the globe, revealing that "All the Globes frame, and spheares, is nothing else / But the Meridians crossing Parallels" (ll. 23-24). Donne's perspective requires that he and his audience transcend their sublunary existence in order to view the world with perfect vision. Such vision results in the understanding that crosses, lines of latitude and longitude, form the structure of the globe itself. Again, Donne makes a definite point of connection between the physical and the spiritual. Because the believer is limited by finiteness and physicality while on earth, Donne uses the physical crosses manifested everywhere in nature as a bridge that allows the believer to experience intangible truth. Donne proclaims in defiance that he himself can stretch his own arms out to become an image of the cross; he implies that, in a much more significant way, all of creation reaches out to form crosses in defiance of those who would eliminate images from worship.

Having established the Christian's obligation to the cross and discussed manifestations of the cross, Donne transitions into explicating the necessity of the Cross. "Materiall Crosses then, good physicke bee, / But yet spirituall have chiefe dignity" (ll. 25-26). The transitional statement does provide some common ground with the Puritans who would otherwise disagree with him on the value of the image of the cross, for regardless of their personal views regarding images in worship, all Protestants

would attest to the necessity and preeminence of the Cross. However, in spite of the transcendence of spiritual crosses and the limitations of physical crosses, Donne views the two as inextricably linked.

As Johnson explains, “Donne defends the use of pictures by implying that they are crucial for salvation, since he links the word of the Holy Spirit and the memory, that very interaction of the divine and human which he describes elsewhere as ‘the art of salvation’” (*Sermons* 2:73 qtd. in Johnson 65). According to Johnson, Donne’s thought regarding the memory comes from Augustine, who maintained that the memory is that which “the soul absorbs into itself through the bodily sense” and kept until the will causes the mind’s eye to probe the memory “that it might be formed by that which the memory retains, and that there may be a similar vision in thought” (88). Thus, information collected by the physical senses is internalized into the belief of the soul, subsequently affecting the will of man in making choices, particularly choices of spiritual import. Ultimately the purpose of the material crosses is to bring about spiritual crosses, the more significant of the two. Accordingly, Donne insists that material crosses are necessary, even in salvation, because of their effect on the mind.

In his exposition on spiritual crosses, Donne’s first metaphor describes the cross in terms of medicine, a possible allusion to an account told in three of the gospels, “But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:30-32). In these verses, Christ reveals that his purpose on

earth included a provision of the ultimate cure for sin, man's spiritual terminal illness. His ability to provide the cure depended upon his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, at which time he took upon himself the sin of the world, relieving the world of its disease. In "The Crosse" Donne describes the spiritual crosses of suffering as highly potent medicine that benefits the believer's physical existence as well as improves his spiritual state. In *A sermon preached at Lincoln's Inn*, Donne features a similar idea,

woe be unto him that hath had no crosses. There cannot be so great a crosse as to have none. I lack one loaf of that dayly bread that I pray for, if I have no crosse; for afflictions are our spirituall nourishment; I lack one limb of that body I must grow into, which is the body of Christ Jesus, if I have no crosses; (*Sermons* 2.166).

In this passage, Donne unmistakably explicates a spiritual concept in physical terms. Afflictions, a form of physical suffering, provide the believer with spiritual nourishment.

Donne then slightly adjusts his metaphor to clarify that the preservation the cross provides may eliminate the need for any medication whatsoever if the alchemical process of distillation, Donne's next metaphor, takes place. "Then are you your own physicke, or need none, / When Still'd, or purg'd by tribulation" (ll. 29-30). In his allusion to alchemy, Donne conjures the desire of the previous few centuries to find a process that could turn inferior metal into gold or could provide the universal remedy. Having already explained that tribulation, the suffering associated with the cross, provides the necessary cure for the world, Donne most likely refers to the quest for the production of gold. In fact, he may have been alluding to Peter's treatise on suffering, which includes

the idea “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:” (I Peter 1:7). Like the refinement of gold through fire, Alchemical distillation supposedly refined material into its quintessence, its purest, most perfected state. Donne chose an appropriate metaphor, for in taking up the cross, the Christian purposes to begin the process of sanctification by conforming to the image of Christ and eventually joining him in perfection in heaven.

Understandably, the suffering of the believer produces its most beneficial results only when the suffering is voluntary. Donne explains, “For when that Crosse ungrudg’d, unto you stickes, / Then are you to your selfe, a Crucifixe” (ll. 31-32). Donne once again indicates the foolishness of rejecting the image of the cross in worship by reminding his audience that when surrendered to the will of God, the believer himself becomes a crucifix, an image of Christ’s suffering. The idea of the Cross sticking to the believer connotes the imagery of seals made with an engraved emblem pressed into warm wax to identify or authenticate a document³. Donne implies that when the believer submits to the sanctifying work of the cross, the believer is then sealed with the image of the cross and subsequently identifiable by the sign of the cross: conformity to Christ. In *A Sermon Preached to the Earl at Exeter*, Donne lingers substantially over the significance of the image of the seal.

These two seales then hath God set upon us all, his *Image* in our soules,
at our *making*, his *Image*, that is his *Sonne*, upon our bodies and soules,
in his *incarnation*; And both these seales he hath set upon us, then when

neither we our selves, nor any body else knew of it: He sets another seale upon us . . . in the Sacrament of *Baptisme*, when the seale of his *Crosse*, is a testimony, not that Christ was *borne*, (as the former seale was) but that also he *dyed* for us; there we receive that seale upon the *forehead*, that we should conforme our selves to him, who is so sealed to us. (*Sermons* 2.160)

Reiterating the connection between the body and soul, Donne directly states that the image of Christ forms a physical seal upon the body in the incarnation. Without hesitation he denies that images should be avoided in worship because of their physical and spiritual significance. To Donne, the seal received upon the forehead during Baptism, typically a cross pressed to the infant's forehead, directly correlates the physical experience of receiving the cross to the deep spiritual significance of receiving the cross. Donne's statement in lines 31-32 of "The Crosse," that the believer actually becomes a crucifix, reminds his audience that the immensity of meaning in the image of the cross far surpasses petty arguments over the validity of incorporating images in worship.

The final metaphor in Donne's discussion of the necessity of the Cross compares the suffering of the cross to the process of creating a sculpture. Michelangelo Buonarroti once explained that a block of marble contains any number of potential images within its mass, but the artist's hand must penetrate to reveal what lies beneath the surface. Donne may have had this particular principle in mind when he wrote

As perchance, Carvers do not faces make:

But that away, which hid them there, do take.

Let Crosses, soe, take what hid Christ in thee,

And be his image, or not his, but hee. (ll. 33-36)

In order to reveal the image of Christ in the believer, suffering must chip away at the qualities that hide the image of Christ within. Donne surely alludes to Colossians 3, “your life is hid with Christ in God” (3:3). The passage then goes on to describe various character flaws that must be removed from the life of the believer, such as fornication, covetousness, and anger. In conclusion, Donne exhorts the reader to be so like the image of Christ that upon examination, the observer will see Christ.

After establishing the necessity for the Cross, Donne elaborates upon the protection provided by the cross against a variety of evil influences. Throughout his works, Donne refers to the proactive ability of the cross in defending the believer against sin by alluding to the metaphor in Colossians, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;” (2:14). The cross cancels the believer’s past and present offences against God. In reference to the Satan’s claim upon the souls of humanity, Donne asserts that “as Christ Jesus hath nail’d his hand-writing, which he had against us, to the Cross, and thereby cancelled his evidence; so in his descent to hell . . . he hath burnt his Library, annihilated his wisdom” (*Sermons* 2.121). In another sermon, Donne recreates the imagery of the legal document to represent a bill of divorce between God and man. He reminds his audience that any flaw in the divorce document rendered it void, including underlining, blots, or drops. He then encourages, “Drop the teares of true

compunction, drop the blood of thy *Saviour*, and that voyds the *Bill*: And through that *Spectacle*, the blood of thy *Saviour*, looke upon that *Bill*, and thou shalt see, that that *Bill* was nayld to the *Crosse* when he was naylde, and torne when his body was torne, and that hath cancelled the *bill*" (*Sermons* 2.91). Donne implies that Christ's redemptive work finishes only when the individual has recognized Christ's cancellation of the bill and shed tears of repentance. He reinforces the significance of viewing the image of the cross by emphasizing that it is the spectacle of the crucified Christ that assures the believer of the bill's cancellation.

Donne discusses the application of such sermon topics in "The Crosse" in lines 41-58. As he deals with the pitfalls that the believer must overcome, he frequently uses the word *cross* as a transitive verb. The Catholic practice of crossing oneself, enacted as a part of formal church rituals as well as outside of the church, demonstrated an awareness of and respect for the authority of God. Without hesitancy Donne accepts this practice as an embracing of the image of the cross in the life of the believer, and he continues to pun on the phrase *cross* oneself with his own notions of crossing one's joy, senses, eyes, heart, and thoughts. In addition, during Donne's time *to cross* was a verb commonly employed to denote the following: to cancel by marking with a cross or by drawing lines across; to strike out, erase; to meet adversely; to encounter (*OED* 4.a., 11.a). Donne extends the definition to imply specifically that to cross sin is to actively ensure its cancellation by countering it with the cross. Thus, each pitfall must be crossed literally and figuratively.

First, Donne reveals the danger of pride in lines 37-40:

But, as oft Alchymists doe coyner prove,
 So may a selfe-dispising, get selfe-love.
 And then as worst surfets, of best meates bee,
 So is pride, issued from humility.

Recalling the metaphor of alchemists, who were known in Donne's time for the tendency toward forgery, Donne warns against the possibility that the believer will come to love himself for despising himself. False humility constitutes the sin of pride, which Donne compares to the negative consequences of overeating, "as worst surfets, of best meates bee, / Soe is pride, issued from humility" (ll. 39-40). Paradoxically, humility easily produces pride; therefore, paradoxically, Donne admonishes the believer to "Crosse / Your joy in crosses, else, 'tis double losse" (ll. 41-43). The danger in humility results in a believer's life when the believer looks at the enormity of his own difficulties, often in comparison with others, and judges himself that he is a worthy image of Christ. Though Donne admits to pride in his own life later in the poem, he most likely directs his censure of false humility toward overly introspective puritans.

The constant awareness of self appearances also presents a pitfall; in a sense, the believer must actively work against trials because they create in him the pride of improving his reputation in the eyes of other believers. An understanding of the puns on the word *crose* illuminates the lines since as a verb the word has had numerous definitions, particularly during Donne's time. On the surface level, Donne communicates that the believer must thwart or oppose receiving joy in crosses, in spite of the fact that they must be born willingly. However, more significantly the verb could

also have meant *crucify*, relaying the idea that as with all other sins, the sin of pride must be put to death with Christ.

While the sin of pride stems from the untrustworthiness of the heart, a variety of other sins stem from the untrustworthiness of the senses. As a result, Donne cautions, “And crosse thy sense, else, both they, and thou / Must perish soone, and to destruction bowe” (ll. 43-44). Of the faculties, Donne reveals that the eye presents the most temptation. Its tendency to see only good objects without taking adversity from the bad prevents the ability to “scape a snake” (l. 46). Donne alludes to the original temptation of Eve by the serpent in the Garden of Eden and possibly also to the New Testament references to the serpent as a tempter. For example, Paul warns the Corinthians, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (I Corinthians 11:3). Eve, deceived into seeing only the beauty of the forbidden fruit, failed to recognize the consequences of her disobedience until her fall.

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked. (Genesis 3:5-7)

Ironically, the Genesis passage provides an intriguing contrast between physical and spiritual sight which certainly would have arrested Donne's attention. The serpent informs Eve that eating the fruit will open her eyes to the insight brought about by moral knowledge; by physically looking at the food, Eve determines that it is good. After Adam and Eve both commit their first sins, look upon their physical state with shame through spiritual sight. The epic biblical account of humanity begins with Adam and Eve's sin, continues as Christ's cross provides the gateway between the physical and the spiritual, and ends with the eventual reconciliation of man and God in heaven.

The role of sight in the fall of man provides Donne with sufficient reason to cite the eye as the sense most prone to temptation. Donne advises that "the eye needs crossing, that can rome, / And move; To th'other th'objects must come home" (ll. 49-50). Donne's insinuation that the eye is the most dangerous of the faculties comes from the popular belief that when beholding an object, the eye physically reaches out to touch what it sees. While other faculties must come into direct contact with an object that tempts them, the eye goes out to find trouble; therefore it must be crossed, thwarted, and figuratively sacrificed in order to gain victory over sin. As with externally good objects, objects with unsightly qualities should be crossed in the same manner as pride; the best defense of the believer is indifference toward objects and temptation.

In addition to the eye, the heart also needs crossing, "for that in man alone / Pants downwards, and hath palpitation" (ll. 51-52). The rapid pulsations of strong emotion lead the heart to rapidly move back and forth from dejection to forbidden heights. Donne re-examines the danger of the dejection and humility, a false pride, and

pride itself. While his multiple references to the sin of pride suggest that Donne may have struggled particularly with pride, his immediate movement from a discussion of the pride of the heart to a discussion of pride in the brain's ability implies that he strongly endeavored to avoid pride in his own mental capacity.

And as the braine through bony walls doth vent
By sutures, which a Crosses form present,
So when they braine works, ere thou utter it,
Crosse and correct concupiscence of witt. (ll. 55-58)

While the eye reaches out to find temptation, the brain contains it, venting its thoughts by way of sutures, the fault lines of the skull. Donne, noting that often words reveal hidden thoughts, layers the metaphor so that the venting sutures also refer to lips, the point at which the mouth vents words. The resulting irony is that the lips, which form a horizontal line, create a cross against the vertical frame of the body (l. 56). Ironically, the mouth's cross is the point of decision for the brain. If successful, the believer will "cross and correct" the temptation to indulge in excessive wit before the words leave his mouth. Donne arranges the metaphor so that victory over wit is achieved at the cross, both of the mouth and as the place of victory over sin.

Donne concludes his poem with details regarding the faithfulness of the cross's work in the lives of believers. The arrangement almost implies a contract; he summarizes the required behavior of the believer toward the cross as well as the promised work of the Cross in the believer's heart.

Be covetous of Crosses, let none fall.

Crosse no man else, but crosse thy selfe in all.
 Then doth the Crosse of Christ worke faithfully
 Within our hearts, when wee love harmlessly
 The Crosses pictures much, and with more care
 That Crosses children, which our Crosses are. (ll. 59-64)

First, the believer must sincerely desire crosses, wasting no opportunities to suffer for Christ's sake. Donne's guidance resembles that of Paul, who reveals his attitude toward his personal suffering, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (I Corinthians 12:9).

Secondly, the believer must fulfill the personal responsibility to cross himself without crossing others; again, Donne invokes multiple levels of meaning. Crossing oneself involves thwarting the sinful tendencies of the senses, heart, and mind; in addition, crossing "thy selfe in all" necessitates the taking up of the cross to imitate Christ. Neither type of crossing can be accomplished for another person, and the believer should not create affliction for others by living selfishly.

Third, the believer must love the image of the cross. Donne carefully juxtaposes his reference to the argument over images between his explanation of the believers' responsibility to avoid strife and to love each other. In exhorting believers to love images of the cross harmlessly, "Then doth the cross of Christ work faithfully / Within our hearts, when we love harmlessly / That cross's pictures much," Donne concedes the

possibility of loving the cross's images harmfully, a result of the improper use of images in worship (ll. 61-63). Fourth, Donne reminds believers that even more important than loving images of the cross is loving the children of the cross. His statement seems to be a final attempt to reconcile those who cherish images and ceremony in worship with those who condemn images and ceremony as popery.

However, the last statement of the poem, that the cross's children are the believer's own crosses, contains a bit of irony. St. Paul encourages believers to carry each other's crosses by restoring brothers in sin and bearing each other's burdens: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2). As Donne has explained throughout "The Crosse," the believer becomes an undeniable image of the cross of Christ; therefore believers themselves carry greater significance than any other physical representation of the cross. The final line of the poem reveals that the children of the cross, those who believe in Christ and take up his cross, are to be loved with more care than even pictures of the cross. In this context, the poem ends with a loving gesture toward all believers: an invitation to unity and love.

In spite of the invitation to unity, the multi-layered connotations of the word *Crosses* in the final line also allows Donne to make one final jab at his various opponents even as he is inviting them to unify in Christian love. As Donne has already discussed, crosses are emblematic of Christ and should be taken up willingly; on surface level he kindly suggests that his audience fulfill the law of Christ by uplifting each other. Even so,

the cross as an image of suffering permeates the poem. When Donne suggests that “wee love . . . with more care / That Crosses children, which our Crosses are,” he implies that some fellow believers, namely those who disagree with him on the use of images in worship, are themselves instruments of suffering. Of course, Donne, in keeping with his previous applications in the poem, acknowledges that suffering enables the cross to “worke faithfully / Within our hearts.” Rather than compromising any part of his argument for the importance of the image of the cross in worship, he humorously implies the failure of his opposition’s argument. In protesting images in worship, Donne’s opposition unwittingly become images of the cross themselves, ironically creating the kind of trial that Donne believes will mold him to Christ’s image.

Donne resolves the seeming disconnect between the physical reality of humanity and the spiritual reality of the believer with the complexity of the image of the cross. Donne’s treatment of the image of the cross in his poetry and sermons reveals his belief that God, knowing that man’s spirituality cannot be extricated from his physicality during his earthly existence, chose to communicate truth through the image of the cross, a simultaneously physical and metaphysical reality. Donne’s emphasis on the significance of images extends throughout his teachings on the cross, and provides the most significant consolation to the believer enduring the suffering of the cross. According to Donne, the experience of the cross in the life of the believer provides the greatest assurance of God’s work in his life. He describes the appropriate response to such a sign, “when God affords thee, this manifestation of his crosse, in the participation of those crosses and calamities that he suffered here, when thou hast this sign of the

Son of Man upon thee, conclude to thy self that . . . as thou hast the signe, though shalt have the substance, as thou hast his Crosse, thou shalt have his Glory” (*Sermons* 2.319). Donne repeatedly speaks of the confidence that the sign of the cross provides in his life as his personal defense against his personal battle with doubt over his election.

He articulates such doubt in “Holy Sonnet 13.” Upon questioning the status of his soul at the world’s sudden end, his thoughts immediately search for the picture of Christ crucified in his soul. After a few agonizing moments, Donne reminds himself of his often used explanation that physical appearances represent the inward character. In the past, he had appealed to his mistresses to overlook his ugliness by praising them for their beauty, a sign of inward pity. Donne then applies the correlation between the external and the internal to his present situation, “so I say to thee, / To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign’d, / This beauteous forme assumes a piteous minde” (ll. 12-14). Once again, Donne looks to the image of Christ, marked in his soul. Overwhelmed by the beauty of the picture of Christ on the cross, the epitome of mercy, Donne confidently assumes that Christ’s pity will prevail over judgment.

Donne humbly and beautifully expresses the personal significance of images in his own worship in “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward.” The effect that the spectacle of Christ crucified imprints upon Donne’s mind never diminishes. He describes his emotional reaction to the image,

Yet dare I’almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;

What a death were it then to see God dye? (ll. 15-18).

Though the weight of the physical reality of literally viewing Christ's suffering seems incomprehensible to Donne, he admits that Christ's suffering is present within his memory. As Jeffrey Johnson observes, "The sight, though not the eyes, of the persona is activated as his 'Soules forme bends toward the East' (l. 10) and, in Augustinian fashion, his memory apprehends 'That spectacle of too much weight'" (Johnson 86). The inner sight that internalizes physical images to produce spiritual images causes the speaker to submit to the cross.

O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
 I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
 Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
 O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
 Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
 Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
 That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.

The longing of the speaker to conform to the image of Christ compels him to endure great pain, excellently illustrating Donne's complete abandonment to the purging force of the holiness of God. As in "The Crosse," Donne invites Christ to reveal himself by removing the flaws that hide his image, refusing to be satisfied until the image of Christ is clearly revealed in his life. Meditation on physical and spiritual images of the cross allows Donne to know Christ and his suffering; the actual experience of becoming an image of the cross, accomplished through grace, allows God to know Donne. The

complex imagery of the cross in all its physical and spiritual contexts allows Donne to share with God the reciprocal experience of knowing made complete in eternity: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (I Corinthians 13:12).

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NOTES

¹Donne's most graphic account of the crucifixion occurs in his final sermon, *Deaths Duell*. He somewhat shockingly describes Christ's body, "There now hangs that *sacred Body* upon the *Crosse*, *rebaptized* in his owne *tears* and *sweat*, and *embalmed* in his owne *blood alive*. There are those *bowels of compassion*, which are so conspicuous, so manifested, as that you may *see them through his wounds*" (*Sermons* 2.247). Donne cannot resist describing the gruesome physical form of the crucified Christ without inserting a metaphysical comparison between the Christ's entrails exposed by violent flogging and compassion unveiled by Christ's sacrifice. The soundness and wit of Donne's metaphor occur as a result of the popular figurative use of the word *bowels*, which appears frequently throughout the KJV New Testament in reference to the heart or the seat of tender emotion. The Greek word for *bowels* is *σπλάγγνον*, which also provides the origin of the English word *spleen*. Donne's resulting imagery offers the idea that when whips tore open the body of Christ, they left exposed both his entrails and his emotions, revealing the magnitude of his suffering and of his compassion. Perhaps even more shocking than the vivid description of Christ's body in *Deaths Duell* is the response to the broken body of Christ recommended by Donne a few sentences later,

There wee leave you in that *blessed dependancy*, to *hang* upon *him* that *hangs* upon the *Crosse*, there *bath* in his *teares*, there *suck* at his *wounds*, and *lye downe in peace* in his *grave*, till hee vouchsafe you a *resurrection*,

and an *ascension* into that *Kingdome*, which hee *hath purchas'd for you*,
with the *inestimable price* of his *incorruptible blood* (*Sermons* 2.37).

Intended to be Donne's final words to his congregation as well as a kind of spiritual legacy, the sermon concludes with an extraordinary personal craving on Donne's part to embrace the physical suffering of Christ to the point of his welcoming death.

Communicating in imperatives, Donne urges his congregation to respond with the same passionate aspirations.

²Donne also draws on imagery related to the altar in *La Corona: Ascension*, "O strong Ramme, which has batter'd heaven for mee, / Mild lambe, which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path; [. . .] Oh, with thy owne blood quench thy owne just wrath" (ll. 9-10, 12). Both the ram and the lamb, used to atone for sin in the Old Testament sacrificial system, provide illustrations of the redemptive work of Christ as Donne alludes to Isaac, a literary type of Christ. In an event that foreshadowed the eventual sacrifice of Christ, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. After establishing Abraham's loyalty, God prevents him from killing Isaac and provides a ram to replace Isaac as the sacrifice. Donne combines the strength associated with the ram's horns with the idea that Christ opened the way to heaven with his vicarious death. The "Mild lambe" of the poem recalls the submissive willingness of both Isaac and Christ in fulfilling the will of their fathers.

³ Donne often refers specifically to the sealing of a marriage document or a bill of divorcement. In Donne's sermons, divorcement from the physical body results in the consummation of the union between God and man, but its prerequisite is the heroic

reclamation of the soul by Christ's work on the cross. As graphically illustrated in "Holy Sonnet 14," the soul cannot be reclaimed by Christ without the soul's meek surrender of itself. The soul's desire to be captured by God sheds light on Donne's otherwise unpleasant allusion, "As by the Law a man might marry a captive woman in the Warres, if he shaved her head, and pared her nails, and changed her clothes: so my Saviour having fought for my soul, fought to blood, to death, to the death of the Crosse for her [. . .] having shaved her head in abating her pride, and pared her nails in contracting her greedy desires, and changed her clothes no to fashion her self after this world, my soul being thus fitted by himself, Christ Jesus hath married my soul" (*Sermons* 2.291). In reclaiming his bride by covering her debt, Christ reconciles God and man by restoring the image of God in the believer. The resulting bill of divorcement from Satan and the consequent marriage to God is sealed by the cross, the image that binds the spirituality of God with the physicality of man.