

JOHN DONNE'S DOUBLE VISION: BASIC DUALITIES  
IN THE SERMON LITERATURE

APPROVED:

*Sam Henderson*  
Major Professor

*Les Cole*  
Minor Professor

*E. S. Clifton*  
Chairman of the Department of English

*Robert B. Toulson*  
Dean of the Graduate School

JAA

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This thesis is concerned first with establishing the basis for evaluating John Donne's sermon literature as a thematic whole. Second, in order to demonstrate this thematic unity and continuity, this study shows how Donne employs several bodies of imagery which reflect his double vision of man and sin and provide the basis for discussing the basic dualities in the bulk of Donne's 160 extant sermons.

This thesis is divided into five chapters: following the first chapter, The Introduction, there is a chapter on The Sermons and the Critics; Chapter III is on Donne's Dual Vision of Man; and Chapter IV is on Donne's Dual Vision of Sin; Chapter V is the Conclusion.

The first major section, Introduction and Chapter II, which deals with several critical approaches to the sermon literature, reveals the several major approaches which critics have taken in earlier analysis. In general, these include the biographical, cultural, and the aesthetic approaches. Many of these approaches are valid as far as they go, but most of them are weak in that the critics tend to read too much into the sermons and generally handle them in a piecemeal fashion.

The second major section, Chapters III and IV, deals with the two dualities which are basic to an understanding

of Donne's double vision, which is a controlling principle in evaluating his sermon literature as a thematic whole. Contributing to the sense of wholeness in the sermons is Donne's consistent use of numerous bodies of imagery which demonstrate Donne's double vision: of man as a sublime mixture of flesh and spirit, of sin in terms of original and actual. Most of the discussion in this thesis revolves around the images which illustrate these basic dualities in the sermon literature.

Although this thesis gives considerable attention to Donne's gloomy, often macabre, description of man's bestiality and sin's awful consequences, there is some attention given to the positive elements which help to offset the darker aspects of the sermons. In the final analysis, this thesis demonstrates that the Christian view of man and sin from century to century is often predominantly a matter of semantics and emphasis. It is also rather obvious that the paradoxical vision is closely related to the double vision, and that the essential unifying element in the sermons is Donne's special emphasis upon certain basic dualities which are the product of this vision.

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THESIS

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Allen D. Beck, B. A.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As the pastor of the famous St. Paul's Cathedral in London, John Donne had large audiences and numerous admirers of his sermon literature; indeed, his sermons were sometimes cited as models of the craft. As with the sermons of many other notable preachers, however, the passing decades eventually erased the interest in, and the influence of, Donne's sermon literature. Not the least significant explanation for this diminishing interest was the lack of a scholarly compilation and readily available edition of his extant sermons; hence, Evelyn Simpson<sup>1</sup> made a monumental contribution toward a renewed evaluation of Donne's sermon literature with her publication of a ten-volume edition of the 160 extant sermons.

Although this new edition has revitalized interest in the sermons, the sheer volume and complexity of the sermons have tended to discourage extensive scholarship in this body of material. In addition, some of the thornier aspects of the theological matter of the sermons have caused critics to avoid

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<sup>1</sup>John Donne, The Sermons of John Donne, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956).

some important concepts that provide a thematic unity in the sermons that up to now has not been fully realized.

A rather segmented evaluation of the sermons has been the most obvious result of this critical timidity. Instead of considering the entire body of sermons, most critics have been content to examine them piecemeal. For instance, some have been struck by Donne's emphasis upon death, particularly in his last sermon. Other critics stress the predominantly pessimistic tone of the sermons, even though they fail to adequately explain the underlying cause. Still other critics have preferred to speculate about the biographical or personal elements which they can read into the sermons. Because imagery is important in Donne's poetry, a few critics have attempted to classify and discuss the metaphorical aspects of his sermon literature.

Most of these studies, however, fail to coherently discuss Donne's special genius for reconciling the irreconcilable; indeed, this unique ability to harmonize irreconcilables is a distinguishing feature of Donne's sermons. His ingenious double vision provides an underlying unity to the entire range of the sermons. Despite the recent availability of Donne's sermons and the consequent stimulus to scholarly investigation of the sermons, most critics have failed to see the significance of Donne's peculiar double vision, his awareness of certain basic dualities, which is a major source of cohesive power in his sermon literature.

The main object of this investigation is to broaden and deepen the somewhat limited insight into the underlying unity in Donne's sermon literature. Only Dennis Quinn's undeveloped assertion that "the sermons demonstrate . . . Donne's astonishing power to unite perennially wedded yet warring forces . . ." <sup>2</sup> reveals a depth of insight into the source of the basic continuity which supports and relates a major bulk of the sermons. The main thematic unity of the sermons derives from the familiar old concepts of the duality of man and the duality of sin. Indeed, as Quinn viewed it, the old concept of original sin, which is one facet of sin's dual nature, "subtly dominates and unifies these sermons." <sup>3</sup> Some have recognized these dualities in the sermons but have failed to see or to emphasize their unifying and cohesive interaction. This study reveals that the two primary concepts which pervade the sermons and give them a basic unity are the duality of man and the duality of sin. Indeed, throughout the sermons, particularly in the imagery, Donne alternately views man as physical and spiritual and sin as original and actual.

In order to validate the need for such a study, critical opinion will be reviewed and refined in greater detail in

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<sup>2</sup>Dennis Quinn, "John Donne's Principles of Biblical Exegesis," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LXI (April, 1962), 329.

<sup>3</sup>Dennis Quinn, "Donne's Christian Eloquence," English Literary History, XXVII (December, 1960), 298.



the next chapter. The two succeeding chapters will demonstrate in greater detail the concern of Donne with the duality of man and the duality of sin. Also, because imagery is an important key to all of Donne's thought, his imagery will be given extensive consideration in discussing these two important, yet neglected, concepts.

Ultimately, this study will demonstrate the significance of Donne's dual vision of man and sin in his sermon literature. Because the total corpus of the sermons is vitally concerned with these two basic dualities, to a greater degree than studies up to this time have indicated, this investigation will provide a basis for a better appreciation of the intrinsic wholeness of the sermon material. It will become apparent that the often-noted pessimism and darkness of tone stem largely from the built-in paradoxes. Finally it will become obvious that a considerable body of the imagery in the sermons is directly related to and inspired by Donne's awareness of these dualities. Less significantly, it may even be suggested that an awareness of the importance of these dualities in the sermons could prove beneficial in a re-examination of Donne's poetry.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SERMONS AND THE CRITICS

A cursory examination of critical opinion will reveal that the dual nature of man and the dual nature of sin are more important to Donne than they are to the critics. In their puzzlement over certain aspects of Donne's sermons, the critics have rather studiously ignored some of the more basic conceptual aspects of the sermons, perhaps out of fear of getting too involved in theological matters. Nonetheless, some of these concepts, most especially those involving certain basic dualities, cannot be ignored or neglected if one is to arrive at an adequate understanding of the corpus of Donne's sermon material. This critical neglect is, in large part, a main justification for this thesis. A review of the body of critical material dealing with Donne's sermon literature will substantiate the need for this study.

Critical commentary of Donne's sermons falls into three basic categories of emphasis. The first category may be labeled biographical or personal. In this area, most critics have been highly speculative. On one hand, Evelyn Simpson, whose monumental compilation of John Donne's 160 extant sermons in ten large volumes provided the primary reading for

this thesis, acknowledges that Donne's sermons convey "the unmistakable flavor of the man's personality, and the study of it is an exciting experience."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, she sees Donne as an orthodox seventeenth-century Anglican minister whose peculiarities and inconsistencies in no way made him anything other than a basically sane and healthy preacher of the gospel. Indeed, she asserts in a later note that in his sermons there is an unmistakable personal presence of John Donne, a real man with real conflicts:

He was no recluse, unable to feel for human weakness, and no hypocrite, claiming a saintliness which he did not possess; but a man of like passions with his hearers, a man whose history they all knew, whose penitence was as real as his sins had been, whose experience had taught him humility, compassion, and trust in the mercy of God.<sup>2</sup>

She continues in a further elaboration of this point.

It is this note of intense personal religious experience which gives to the Sermons their unique power. Behind their eloquence and elaborate rhetoric we hear the voice of a human soul, tortured at times by remorse for past sins, agonizing with his hearers to rescue them from temptations of which he knows the awful power.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Donne, The Sermons of John Donne, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956), I, 83. All subsequent references to the text of the sermons are from this edition and hereafter will be noted with volume and page number in parentheses following each quotation.

<sup>2</sup>Evelyn M. Simpson, editor, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne (Oxford, 1924), p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

She even sees Donne's use of and choice of images in terms of a personal concern for lost souls. Hence, she says, "Donne tries to come to grips with his hearers, many of them ignorant and uncultured, and he finds imagery of the greatest help."<sup>4</sup> He must have told himself, according to Simpson, that no comparison is too high or too low, even the loathsome and morbid, if by it he might "reach the understanding of some poor soul."<sup>5</sup> Thus, she validates not only Donne's imagery but his use of excessive emotion in preaching. In fact, she believes that the purple passages which flowed from his pulpit reflect a genuine passion for souls, permissible in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, her description of Donne's evangelistic appeals is full of biographical implications: "He would not be saved alone; he stretched out imploring hands to the men and women who were sinning as he had sinned . . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the biographical critics see Donne's preoccupation with disease and death in his sermon literature as a natural reflection of the personal circumstances which were a part of his environment. Simpson and Bettie Doebler are aware of this possibility, but Edmund Fuller's comment is the clearest:

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

Though he is far from Puritan theology, there is still a dark, occasionally even morbid, tone to much of his preaching, which reflects aspects of his temperament as well as the dramatic contrasting of lights and darks so typical of his age. Death and disease and pain and danger hovered close to men in Donne's time; 1625 saw one of the great plagues that assailed London.<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly, throughout his life, Donne was faced with the prospect of death and disease: His younger brother died in prison at the age of nineteen; Lucy, a favorite daughter, died in her prime; death robbed him of his Queen, many friends, and eventually his wife. During most of his life, he personally struggled with the discomfort and danger of disease. One of Simpson's comments indicates the mental agony which this may have produced: "His frequent ill-health caused him to cry out at times against his body as the prison or the tomb in which he was confined."<sup>8</sup>

A few critics completely lose their biographical balance. For instance, Margaret Blanchard sees Donne's sermons as a "struggle with a silent God."<sup>9</sup> Arnold Stein agrees that "it is not thought which Donne explores, but his own thought and

<sup>7</sup>Edmund Fuller, editor, The Showing Forth of Christ (New York, 1964), p. xvi.

<sup>8</sup>Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup>Margaret M. Blanchard, "The Leap into Darkness: Donne, Herbert, and God," Renaissance, XVII (Fall, 1964), 50.

mind, and experience."<sup>10</sup> These critics make Donne's sermons more their biography than his. They have suggested, erroneously, that a study of Donne's concepts makes little or no worthwhile contribution to one's appreciation of the sermons as literature, but only to one's understanding of and appreciation for the preacher. This is a serious fallacy which is a natural result of too much emphasis upon the personal or biographical elements in Donne's or anyone else's work of art. If Donne's sermons are worth investigation, they have a wholeness and value outside of their author.

While a second area of emphasis by the critics may be discussed in terms of the historical heritage, much of this emphasis is similar to the biographical or personal emphasis previously mentioned. Of course, most critics recall that Donne's early intellectual development was nourished by medieval theology:

The mediaeval preoccupation of Donne was no doubt, as Dr. Evelyn Simpson points out, largely due to his Roman Catholic upbringing and to the Jesuit tutors who had charge of his education as a youth.<sup>11</sup>

Critics generally observe that medieval theology was fed by the church fathers and, of course, the Bible. The patristic influence is reflected in Donne's sermons: William Mitchell

<sup>10</sup>Arnold Stein, "Donne's Harshness and the Elizabethan Tradition," Studies in Philology, XLI (July, 1944), 17.

<sup>11</sup>William Fraser Mitchell, English Pulpit Oratory (New York, 1962), p. 183.

counts "sixty-four references to Augustine, thirty-seven to Jerome, thirty-two to Bernard, and twenty-nine to Tertullian."<sup>12</sup> At one extreme, Itrat Husain believes that Donne was basically a medievalist despite Donne's rejection of some of the darker concepts of God which were prevalent during the middle ages.<sup>13</sup> Simpson's moderate appraisal of the confusion which swirled around Donne among those who lived in London during Donne's own day is more common:

The Puritans suspected him of an inclination to Popery, while Laud's party at one time thought him in league with the Puritans. His theology was too mediæval in some respects and too modern in others.<sup>14</sup>

Basically, despite a rather general view that Donne fled from medievalism, most critics recognize a legitimate medieval heritage in Donne's sermons.

A few critics attempt to explain what they see as Donne's pessimism and even morbidity in terms of the Renaissance. For example, Joan Bennett sees Donne's morbidity as a Renaissance interest in physiology.<sup>15</sup> Doebler also sees Donne's darkness in terms of the Renaissance mind. Doebler believes that Donne's sermons reflect the work of a

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>13</sup>Itrat Husain, The Dogmatic and Mystical Theology of John Donne (New York, 1938), p. 117.

<sup>14</sup>Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup>Joan Bennett, Five Metaphysical Poets, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1964), p. 36.

craftsman attempting "to recreate the constant themes of human experience in a fresh and meaningful way."<sup>16</sup> Disease and death were "meaningful" to his audience; hence, the fresh and often startling use of horrors seen in Donne's London was not really in bad taste or too morbid to be decorous for his audience. In other words, it is argued that Donne's sermons were the deliberate product of a Renaissance concern for a strong rhetoric and Renaissance callousness to suffering and death.

A third category of emphasis found in many critical evaluations is related to the death-damnation theme. So many discussions and legends have revolved around Donne's views of death that further discussion seems redundant. Yet, one cannot escape dealing with Donne and death. For example, his first sermon and his last sermon deal with the subjects of death and damnation. Doebler says, "for Donne, death must be dealt with each moment."<sup>17</sup> Margaret Blanchard takes a look at Donne's "Leap into Darkness."<sup>18</sup> Sister Mary Caroline discusses Donne and death in relationship to existentialism.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Bettie A. Doebler, "Donne's Debt to the Great Traditional Old and New in His Treatment of Death," Anglia, LXXXV (June, 1967), 31.

<sup>17</sup>Doebler, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup>Blanchard, pp. 38-50.

<sup>19</sup>Sister Mary Caroline, "The Existentialism of John Donne," Xavier University Studies, VII (March, 1968), 37-50.



R. A. Bryan discusses "John Donne's Use of the Anathema."<sup>20</sup>

D. R. Roberts looks through modern glasses at "The Death Wish of John Donne."<sup>21</sup>

A brief investigation of Simpson's comments reinforces this critical emphasis upon the death-damnation theme. For instance, according to Simpson, Donne's early sermons reveal a "preoccupation with sin and damnation rather than with grace and salvation" (I, 120). The later sermons contain "terrible and magnificent accounts of the horror of eternal separation from God. . . . He [Donne] sees that the essence of damnation is not in flames and brimstone, but in perpetual exclusion from the source of life and light" (V, 23). In one sermon, Donne again "turns aside to the thought of death, which was never far from his mind" (VI, 17). Throughout his sermons, including many of his best, he has "a morbid obsession with the idea of death, especially the physical decay which attends death."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the total corpus of Donne's sermons suggests that death and dissolution in the grave are fearful realities.

<sup>20</sup>R. A. Bryan, "John Donne's Use of the Anathema," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LXI (April, 1962), 305-312.

<sup>21</sup>D. R. Roberts, "The Death Wish of John Donne," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXII (December, 1947), 958-976.

<sup>22</sup>Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne, p. 55.

He sees conception, birth, life, and death as different parts of an unbroken cycle--from darkness to darkness. For example, in an early sermon Donne describes the womb as a terrible tomb:

In the wombe wee have eyes and see not, eares and heare not; There in the wombe wee are fitted for workes of darkness, all the while deprived of light; And there in the wombe wee are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood, and may be damned, though we be never borne.

Neither is there any grave so close, or so putrid a prison, as the Wombe would be unto us.  
(X, 232)

In a fatalistic elaboration, Donne declares that man is born to die:

Wee have a winding sheet in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up in that winding sheet, for wee come to seeke a grave.  
(X, 232-233)

Typically, one chokes and gags on the bones, jelly, and brains of the dead:

Painters have presented to us with some horroure, the sceleton, the frame of the bones of a mans body; but the state of a body, in the dissolution of the grave, no pencil can present to us. Between that excrementall jelly that thy body is made of at first, and that jelly which thy body dissolves to at last; there is not so noysome, so putrid a thing in nature.  
(III, 105)

The universality of death is also expressed in macabre terms:

All the ground is made of the bodies of Christians, and therein hath received a second consecration. Every puff of wind within these walls, may blow the father into the sons eye, or the wife into her

husbands, or his into hers, or both into their  
 childrens, or their childrens into both.  
 Every grain of dust that flies here, is a  
 piece of a Christian.

(VI, 362)

Despite Donne's morbid emphasis upon death and dissolution,  
 there is an undergirding tone of faith which makes even the  
 darkest descriptions less stifling:

One humour of our dead body produces worms,  
 and those worms suck and exhaust all other  
 humour, and then all dies, and all dries,  
 and molders into dust, and that dust is  
 blowen into the river, and that puddled  
 water tumbled into the Sea, and that ebs  
 and flows in infinite revolutions, and still,  
 still God knows in what part of the world  
 every graine of every mans dust lies.

(VIII, 98)

The passages cited above do indeed indicate that Donne seems  
 often preoccupied with death and dissolution, and the vividness  
 of his phrasing and imagery in dealing with these themes is  
 startling to the modern reader.

Similarly, an emphasis upon damnation can be illustrated.  
 Donne views existence in hell as an "eternal gnawing of the  
 conscience" (III, 107), an eternal falling down a bottomless  
 shaft to "the bottomlesse bottome of Hell itselife" (V, 202).  
 It is eternal blackness, an "everlasting exclusion from the  
 Father of lights" (II, 360). It is a place of "all fire" and  
 all blackness and "all eternity, in one. entire, and intense  
 torment" (I, 195). Thus, "the image of God burns in us in  
 hell, but can never be burnt out of us" (I, 160). Hell's  
 torments never cease for "millions of millions of generations,

for they shall live so long in hell, as God himself in heaven" (II, 357).

From the examples of critical opinion cited in this chapter, it is clear that certain definite bodies of critical opinion have been formed in regard to Donne's sermons, and some perceptive critics have lent their efforts to the shaping of these bodies of opinion. Nonetheless, as was indicated near the beginning of this chapter, the total critical overview of Donne's sermons still leaves awkward gaps and unanswered questions. Most important, critical opinion has failed to deal adequately with the importance of certain fundamental dualities in Donne's sermons, specifically, the duality in the nature of man and the duality of the concept of sin. The critics have not altogether ignored these important themes. Some, like Simpson, Husain, and Moloney, do discuss Donne's concepts of man and his concepts of sin, but they fail to see the cohesive effect and special contributions that these wedded opposites make to the total thematic unity of Donne's sermon literature. Particularly since the Simpson edition, a few critics like Quinn have been perceptive enough to recognize the duality of Donne's double vision of man and sin and the subsequent worth of such a vision, but no one has made a deliberate effort to demonstrate the full significance of these two dualities.

The central focus of this thesis is on these two fundamental dualities. The succeeding chapter will explore systematically and in detail the dual nature of man to demonstrate its importance as a thematic entity in Donne's sermons and to show further that much of Donne's imagery evolves from this basic duality. Therefore, a major portion of the examples will, of necessity, be the figures of speech "by which he bodied forth things unseen and made them almost visible to his hearers."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

## CHAPTER III

### DONNE'S DUAL VISION OF MAN

When one approaches the English Renaissance through the literature of the period, he is apt to form an exaggerated view of the degree of secularization in the period. As Douglas Bush<sup>1</sup> and others have clearly demonstrated, the great bulk of the writing of the period remained mainly didactic and oriented toward religion. It is similar easy assumptions about secularization that give many readers an unbalanced view of John Donne. Even some of the most highly regarded critics have so focused on Donne's secular writings that they have been unable to achieve a balanced whole view of the man and his writings. Particularly, the general critical neglect of the sermons has contributed to a seeming lack of awareness of certain theological and religious concepts that are central to an understanding not only of the sermons but of much of the secular poetry as well.

Of major importance in an adequate understanding of Donne's sermon literature is what may be called his dual vision of man, a concept which is the focus of this chapter. Donne's

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1962), p. 37.

belief in, and indeed insistence upon, the quite old and much-debated duality of man, that is, the spiritual and the physical, does much to explain some seemingly puzzling aspects of Donne's writings and helps to account for the tonal quality of much of his work. The truth is that Donne's double vision of man emphasizes the fact that the two contradictory principles, earthly and heavenly, co-existed in a state of tension. This tension was a basic fact of Donne's times, and it is a recurrent theme in his sermon literature. The conclusion is that, though there were many new ideas in ferment, the old struggle between the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh persisted in the minds of men and in a large portion of the writing of the time. A further conclusion is that, though the secular vision is one important aspect of Donne's times, the sacred vision as revealed in his sermons is quite important. Also, just as much of the so-called secular vision often incorporates spiritual terminology and sacred concepts, as in much of his secular poetry, the sacred literature contains concrete images which makes use of the physical materialistic world. A psychic tension seems to be particularly inherent in this double vision of man.

Some have called this psychic vision, this tension, a trait which characterizes the metaphysical poets. It is equally valid to see this same tension, this same duality, in his sermon literature, for a major concern in his sermons is

the metaphysical paradox which exists in the material and spiritual world--the body and soul, the sinner and sin.

Anyone aware of the general contradictory aspects of the Renaissance should not be surprised or disconcerted to discover in the sermons that much of the verbalization of Donne's dual vision of man is couched in medieval terminology. It will be apparent also to anyone who reads extensively in the sermons that on the whole they reflect orthodox Christian concepts that would have been compatible with Donne's audience. Somewhat in the same way that Milton was to employ certain conventions for poetic purposes in Paradise Lost, poets and preachers alike in Donne's time continued to discuss and write about man in terminology and employing imagery drawn from long-accepted doctrines and beliefs. Even in the face of the so-called "new philosophy," the traditional view of the cosmic position of man as somewhere between the angels and the animals, as something both spiritual and physical, remained widely accepted. Similarly, the concept of the four basic elements was yet to be displaced by newer doctrines. Donne found these and other traditional concepts convenient and comfortable and reflects them extensively in the sermons.

First, man is of the earth, earthy. Donne accepts that the earth is the lowest rung on the materialistic ladder. Accepting the account in Genesis, Donne sees man's wretched earthiness as the ultimate substance of man's creation: "God



made man of earth, not of ayre, not of fire."<sup>2</sup> Throughout the sermons, Donne reveals a particular fondness for discussing man's physical nature in terms of earth.

Indeed, to Donne's audience, no element was more despicable than the dust which contaminated the whole world; hence, he says of man, "thy flesh is but dust held together by plaisters; Dissolution and putrefaction is gone over thee alive" (II, 83). Man is a crumbling clod from the "great field of clay, of red earth" (V, 70). Donne says "I am a clod, in the midst of a world of clods" (V, 70). Speaking to his London audience, he says, "Thou art earth; he whom thou treadest upon is no less . . . it is a low thing, to be but earth" (IX, 63). Man's body was made from the lowest of elements; indeed, God took a "clod of red earth" and made that "wretched clod" of "contemptible earth" into a body (IV, 352). Men are the "sons of Dust"; they have corruption for a father and a mother (II, 87). Man is but "an earthen vessel" (IX, 62), "a bag of mud" (I, 181), a "muddy vesture of decay,"<sup>3</sup> "a vessell of excrement . . . pampered covers of rotten soules . . . [and a] barrell of dung" (V, 172).

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<sup>2</sup>John Donne, The Sermons of John Donne, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956), IX, 63. All subsequent references to the text of the sermons are from this edition and hereafter will be noted with volume and page number in parentheses following each quotation.

<sup>3</sup>Evelyn M. Simpson, editor, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne (Oxford, 1924), p. 99.

Man's despicable earthiness is further emphasized by the transience of the body. Donne says, "whilst I speake, that body is mouldring, and crumbling into lesse, and lesse dust" (VIII, 92). Indeed, man's "mud walls . . . waste away faster, than God meant at first, they should" (II, 83). It is God's hand that "shall crumble these bodies into dust againe" (VII, 322). The numerous vicissitudes of the body serve to accentuate the despicable depravity associated with Donne's dusty discussions of man's body:

One humour of our dead body produces worms [which] suck and exhaust all other humour, and then all dies, and all dries, and molders into dust, and that dust is blown into the river, and that puddled water tumbled into the sea, and that ebs and flows in infinite revolutions . . . .  
(VIII, 98)

Thus, the bright sun of faith, which sometimes peeps through, is usually eclipsed with whirlwinds of crumbling clods, contemptible red clay, and wretched, rotting bodies of earth (IV, 352). Indeed, using coarse, macabre language, Donne uniquely dramatizes a prevalent view of man's physical nature.

Moving up the hierarchy of the elements, Donne views man as a "watery" creature; consequently, man is "a sponge filled with tears: and whether you lay your right hand or your left upon a full sponge, it will weep" (IV, 337). Men are sponges which "suck in, and powre out foule water" (IV, 190). Indeed, man's "spungy covetous" nature must pour out, as well as suck in bloody money (III, 65). Tears are "the blood of a

wounded soul" (V, 54). Man is a channel of water. The water of sin fills and overflows the banks of his soul, bringing a deluge of sin which covers the entire earthen field of man's being. It follows that all of man is a sea of bloody water. Every artery in man's body is a channel, carrying the waters of sin into the bowels of his soul (IV, 286). Every vein is a dirty pipe, a "sewar" carrying the "streame of our corrupt nature" (IV, 225), and foul water that is naturally in man, "infused from his parents" (II, 120). He sees man's brackish "balsamum" (VI, 116) and "peccant humour" (III, 179) which overflows man's "crooked channel" (IV, 225) as a universal flood (VI, 115) which was "poysoned in the fountain" (IV, 148). It is as if Satan had created man from the dust and breathed sin like water into man until man became a dying soul full of muddy water.

Moving further up the scale, but to a lesser degree, Donne discusses man's physical nature in terms of the air. Obviously, the higher on the elemental ladder one goes, the more difficult it is to portray man's physical nature. Hence, Donne uses very few images related to air to demonstrate this concept. He does, however, observe that man's concern for outward appearances may be related to air: indeed, "nothing inflames, nor swells, nor puffes us up more than . . . that empty, aery, frothy love of Names and Titles" (II, 304). Again, Donne attempts to explain this "airy" nature of man

in terms of man's origin. Referring to the account in Genesis, he remembers that man's body of clay incorporated a living soul when God breathed air into it. Thus, the creation of man's physical life included a divine mixture of air which is a basic element in man. Donne's description of man's creation makes this clear:

But as when man was nothing but earth, nothing  
but a body, he lay flat upon the earth, his  
mouth kissed the earth, his hands embraced the  
earth, his eyes respected the earth; And then  
God breathed the breath of life into him.  
(VI, 69)

Elsewhere, Donne complains: "God made everything something, and . . . man, nothing" (VIII, 177). Basic, then, to Donne's double vision of man is this "airy" nature of man's physical origin.

Finally, man's physical nature is boiling with fire. His hot temper and burning desire send the fever raging like a fire through the forest of man's life. It is quite obvious in Donne's sermons that sex or lust is the biggest flame in man's fleshly furnace. The flames of lust, and ambition, and "other flames in this world" (IV, 339) melt the white "snowball" of man's soul. He says, "there is that within thee that melts thee, as fast as thou growest" (I, 273). Thus, he sees man as a continuous flame. He is born in the fire and lives in the fire of lust in his youth, and in his age in the fire of ambition" (IV, 327). He asserts that even in "our good dayes we have some grudgings of that fever" (V, 353).

He warns men to approach this fire cautiously, for there was a fire ignited under Adam's fig leaves that has burned and damned many a wretched soul (V, 82). Indeed, man's conception in the fire perpetuates a flaming nature which is kindled and rekindled until man is either quenched by the water and the blood, or he is absorbed into the everlasting inferno "where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not."

Furthermore, fire is an obvious paradox in Donne's sermon literature. Fire like water has both positive and negative possibilities. There are several notable religions, the Hindu as well as the Christian, which emphasize the cleansing or purgative nature of fire. Donne most certainly was aware of Isaiah's unclean lips being purged by the coals of fire and the Roman Catholic concept of purgatory; nevertheless, as the previous citations indicate, the significant fire images are rather negative.

Most of Donne's considerations of physical man are related to nature. This was logical in Donne, for he was always trying to lead his congregation from the physical to a consideration of the spiritual potential of man. Throughout the sermons, Donne emphasizes the concrete images which were mostly related to man's physical nature because basic to Donne was his recognition of the prevailing preeminence of the physical.

Donne's use of animal imagery offers further evidence that his dual vision of man emphasizes the physical. Donne

is not always original, but he is usually apt. In most cases, his references to animals are negative and debasing to both the animal and the man. It is not his intention to laud the prowess, grace, or beauty of an animal, but rather to present the darker animalistic characteristics common to both man and beast. He draws his illustrations from the barnyard of domestic animals, the forest of wild animals, and the earth of creeping creatures.

The unclean animals in his barnyard include goats, hogs, horses, mules, and asses. The goat, as was typical in medieval bestiary lore, is used repeatedly as a symbol of man's lecherous, libidinous nature, to the degree that at times licentious man is equated with a goat; indeed, Donne insists that the gospel can change "that licentious Goate" into a man (IX, 58). Although many of man's social diseases and sicknesses come from this "intemperance, and distemper of the Goate" (V, 254), man's vile and goatish nature is "ever in a desire to proceed in that sin" (V, 254). He whips the licentious goats who congregate with the sheep for wanton reasons (VII, 135). He repeatedly attacks lust as the fever of youth and the root of all sins committed during this stage of development. In any event, he tries to castrate the goats with the gospel sword. In this way, he hopes to bring them into the fold with the sheep and lambs.

Although there are more goats than any other foul-smelling animal in his barnyard, there are a couple of horses,

a mule, and even an ass. "Horsy" men support rebel causes until they are dark with sweat. "Horsy" men cohabit with the doltish mule until "he hath more of the Asse than of the Horse in him" (IX, 377).

Of course, no barnyard would be complete without the stench of a few muddy hogs. Donne kicks the "hog" men who love the mud and filthy gutters of drunkenness and fornication (V, 254). When man steps into an occasional sinful mudhole, he is again demonstrating his "piggish" nature.

Donne's forest of wild animals includes the fox, the wolf, and the lion. Other wild animals are mentioned, but not in connection with man's physical nature. The shrewd fox like men were thought to be common in seventeenth-century London. The most common characteristic of one of Donne's foxes is his concept that the fox is "that brutal nature that is in us" (I, 225). He may have been remembering the savage, cruel King Herod whom Jesus called a fox. He also refers to the brutal nature of the king of beasts, the lion. More typical, however, is Donne's view that ambition is a characteristic of lions and men. Donne is not opposed to kings, but he is opposed to the ruthless willingness of ambitious men to devour others on their way to positions of power. Lions may run with wolves to oppress the rest; a moneyed man may be a "usurious wolfe" (VII, 135). A critical man may be a "ravening wolfe." Typically, again and again, Donne views

man's flesh as his beast; consequently, even the best of men is a little like some animal.

Conversely, the worst of men may be worse than most animals. Consequently, Donne must resort to the small "earthy" creeping creatures in order to catalogue his concept of man's lowest physical potential.

Worms, spiders, fleas, ants, bees, toads, snakes, and vipers swarm and slither in and out of his rather "earthy" mind. Man is a worm in life and death. Indeed, Donne's repetitive insistence that he is a "worm" is, at times, rather like nagging rhetoric than powerful imagery. On the other hand, no critic of the sermons has been able to escape Donne's "everlasting gnawing worm" (VI, 72).

Darker still is Donne's concept that man is lower than any and all of these groveling and crawling creatures. He says, "I am a man and no worm; for man is so much lesse than a worm, as that wormes of his own production, shall feed upon his dead body in the grave, and an immortal worm gnaw his conscience in the torments of hell" (IX, 137). When sinful man is compared with the beast, "they shall finde many times in the way, the Beast, the better man" (IX, 377). The beast's lot is better than man's, for "we cannot live so freely as beasts doe; and . . . we cannot dye so absolutely as beasts do" (IX, 70). Although "the Horse and Mule may say . . . Behold, man is become as one of us" (IX, 376),



Donne continues to see man as "inferior to Beasts" (IX, 374). "I am a creature, but so is a contemptible worme, and so is a venomous spider as well as I, so is a stinking weed, and so is a stinging nettle" (V, 249). Indeed, "the wormes that we breed are our betters" (IV, 302).

It is not the purpose of this study to compile a complete catalogue of Donne's imagery. Nonetheless, the range and extent of the imagery reflecting man's physical nature are so striking as to require some further documentation. For instance, in the multitudinous references from the sermons, he refers to man as "a barrel of dung," a "bed of clay," a "quiver of poison arrows," "a sack of bones," a "basin of blood," a dirty water "glasse," a "bag of mudd," an earthen vessell," "a sink of uncleannesse, a tabernacle, a Synagogue of Satan," "a house . . . not clean," a "broken vessell," "a Sewar of all sinne," a "box of poyson," a "muddy vesture of decay," "the matter to which the soul gives form," "a vessell of excrements," "a dark and dirty prison," "a bed of curious plants," "a rotten carcasse," "a vessell of uncleannesse," a "rusty coin," "a piece of wadded paper," "a cabinet of the soule," a "Beast," "an Adam," "a Giant," "a clod," "clay," "wax," and numerous other dark and dirty images which appear intermittently throughout the sermons.

There is another side of Donne's concept of man's body which is a little more positive. Traditionally, the negative

view of man's body has been prominent in sermon literature, but Donne is at times in the sermons quite willing to accept the flesh. Indeed, he says, "my body is . . . no burden to me; my body is better now, then my soule was before. . . ." (V, 250). Periodically, he presents a dignified concept of the body. In fact, according to Evelyn Simpson, despite the prevalence of numerous negative descriptions of the physical in his sermons, "no writer is more emphatic in his statement of the true dignity of this ailing, tortured flesh, which in spite of all its weakness was not disdained as a tabernacle by the Son of God Himself."<sup>4</sup> Neither does he forget to mention that the flesh was created by God to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, to be resurrected and restored to full perfection; in fact, Donne's optimistic view of the Christian's resurrection and everlasting life in the body is typified in the following lengthy passage:

But there was a part in every one of them, that  
 could not die; which the God of life, who  
 breathed it into them, from his own mouth, hath  
 suck'd into his own bosome. And in that part  
 which could die, They were dead, but they are not.

. . . . .  
 As soon shall God tear a leaf out of the Book of  
 Life, and cast so many of the Elect into Hell fire,  
 as leave the body of any of his Saints in  
 corruption for ever.

. . . . .  
 since all these dead bodies shall be restored by  
 the power, and are kept alive in the purpose of  
 Almighty God.  
 . . . . .

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

When time shall be no more, when death shall be no more, they shall renew, or rather continue their being.

. . . . .  
it is not an annihilation, no part of Gods Saints can come to nothing.

. . . . .  
As between two men of equal age, if one sleep, and the other wake all night, yet they rise both of an equal age in the morning; so they who shall have slept out a long night of many ages in the grave, and they who shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord Jesus in the aire, at the last day, shall enter all at once in their bodies into Heaven.

. . . . .  
And our afternoon shall be as long as Gods forenoon; for, as God never saw beginning, so we shall never see end; but they whom we tread upon now, and we whom others shall tread upon hereafter, shall meet at once, where, though we were dead, dead in our several houses, dead in a sinful Egypt, dead in our family, dead in our selves, dead in the Grave, yet we shall be received, with that consolation, and glorious consolation, you were dead, but are alive.

Enter ye blessed into the Kingdom, prepared from you, from the beginning. Amen.

(VI, 363-364)

Donne makes a notable attempt, not always successfully, to wed flesh and spirit, for he sees man as neither all flesh nor all spirit, but a necessary, if not always harmonious, blend of both. The marriage is, in fact, a paradox for he weds contrary principles to form one being (V, 208). The relationship is so intimate that the body and soul communicate and share their respective defects and diseases. Thus, Donne observes a psychosomatic relationship in some illnesses:

". . . the inordinate sadnesse of his Soule, shall aggravate and actuate the sicknesses of his body" (VIII, 188).

This marriage of flesh and spirit is clearly portrayed in the imagery. For instance, because he accepts the scriptural view of woman as the weaker part, the flesh becomes the female principle, the spirit the male. He calls his flesh, his wife (IX, 320). He warns against trying to divorce the body from the soul in this life. To sell either one is to cheapen both (VIII, 71). The body, as the wife, is called the "mother of sin" (VII, 106), Adam being the father of all sin. Any sin is an unfaithful act which weakens both partners in the marriage of body and soul; to join the body or soul to some sin is adultery (VII, 109). He calls the creation of man a marriage, for "He breathed into us two lives" (VII, 69). He criticizes the Saducees, who would have "all body," and the "Pharisee all soule," while "God hath made us both" (IX, 168). Like the husband and wife, man's spirit and flesh often quarrel and fight. He says, "sin hath put a war upon us; the flesh and the spirit fight against one another" (V, 352). The man and wife must share their moral responsibilities; likewise, sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit involve both and condemn both. Hence, he says, "thy wife, thy flesh, thy weaker part, may insinuate much into thine actions, even when thy spirit is at strongest, and Thou in thy best confidence" (IX, 32). Thus, the very tension which Donne sees in the nature of man is not unlike many unhappy marriages. In essence, then, the only separation of flesh and spirit comes

with death. Generally, he says, "Death is the Divorce of body and soule" (VI, 71). Sometimes, however, he says that "death is not . . . a divorce of body and soule, but a sending of both divers wayes, the soule upward to Heaven, the body downward to the earth" (VIII, 168).

It can be seen from some of the citations above that what seems to be the prevailing gloom and pessimism of the sermons is ameliorated to a considerable degree by cumulative optimism that derives mainly from Donne's occasional stress upon man's spiritual side. For it is quite obvious that when the whole corpus of Donne's sermons is taken into account, man is clearly envisioned by Donne as that paradoxical creature of both body and spirit. Man is more than just a body. He is that being just a little lower than the angels whose corporeal nature is altered by the presence of a living soul. In other words, he is a creature of both flesh and spirit. As might be expected, the imagery of the sermons reflects vividly Donne's realization of man's spiritual side. Occasionally, Donne sees man's miraculous resurrection potential in terms of the great mythical phoenix, which was fabled to live for five hundred years, to be consumed in fire by its own act, and to rise in youthful freshness from its own ashes. Because the mythical salamander had the power to endure fire without harm, Donne gives it eternal possibilities (IV, 327). The mythical unicorn thunders out of Donne's forest in an

effort to "reform all abuses in State, and Church at once" (X, 168). Those who remember Donne's famous last sermon, "Death's Duell," will feel much of this optimism even in a situation that would normally be somber. Donne was more spirit than flesh in this last great sermon, which deals with the eternal destiny of the body and the soul.

Throughout his sermons, Donne contends that man's basic divinity is a permanent part of his eternal existence. He says, "the image of God burns in us in hell, but can never be burnt out of us" (I, 160). Indeed, he says in a late sermon, "till the soule be burnt to ashes, to nothing (which cannot be done, no not in hell) the Image of God cannot be burnt out of the soule" (IX, 81). Man's divine nature has been corrupted: it is compared to a "peece of rusty copper, in which those lines of the Images of God which were imprinted in [the] Creation are defaced and worn, and washed and burnt, and ground away, by . . . many sins" (III, 250). This divine impression, however, can never be fully and completely obliterated, "for it is, radically, primarily, in the very soule itselife" (IX, 81). Thus, man's spiritual nature, unlike the physical body, can never be destroyed though it is cast down into hell, for man's soul contains too much of the divine.

In the last analysis, when the total body of the sermons is taken into account, the prevailing gloom and pessimism

which seem to have impressed so many commentators are dispelled to a considerable degree by what must be thought of ultimately as simply the basic optimism of Christianity itself. Some of this optimism derives from Donne's realization and acceptance of man's duality, the realization that gross as he may be in the physical realm, in the realm of the spirit he is a creature who reflects the divinity of deity.

## CHAPTER IV

### DONNE'S DUAL VISION OF SIN

For the purposes of analysis and emphasis the second of the basic dualities, the dual nature of sin, has been somewhat arbitrarily excluded up to this point. In view of that, it should be emphasized here that the old concept of the dual nature of sin is as basic to an understanding of Donne's sermons as the dual concept of the nature of man. Indeed, in the chronological frame of reference in which Donne operated, it would have been impossible to separate these two basic dualities. The sense of man's sinfulness, which to the modern mind seems often to cast a heavy pall over earlier sermon literature, did not necessarily carry the same sense of gloom and pessimism to Donne's age. As Donne's sermons reflect, Christianity had long since found the means to accommodate the paradox incorporated into the concepts of sin and salvation. Man's moral declivity has haunted the spirit of every man in all ages, and for this reason the subject of sin has usually interested those who feel a need for a more intelligent awareness of themselves and the world in which they live. In this respect, every man has a little



of Hamlet in his nature. For many centuries the accepted Christian view was that man's depravity is explainable mainly in terms of his sinfulness. A thing which the modern mind forgets or ignores about sinfulness is its dual nature, or the concept of original sin on the one hand and actual sin on the other.

Donne's appraisal of sin's dual nature is couched in the old theological terms. Theologically, Donne discusses sin in terms of original sin and actual sin. The former deals with the origin or "root" of man's declivity, the latter with the results or "fruit" of that declivity.

Because original sin is closely related to man's beginning, it becomes almost synonymous with man. Since the concept of original sin was largely accepted as a matter of primary certitude, Donne uses the concept without belaboring the aspects which were to become controversial later. For example, he says:

The body, being without sinne, and the soule  
being without sinne, yet in the first minute,  
that this body and soule meet, and are united  
we become in that instant, guilty of Adams  
sinne, committed six thousand years before.  
Such is our sinne and uncleannesse, in  
Originall sinne, as the subtillest Man in  
the Schooles, is never able to tell us,  
how, or when, we contracted that sinne, but  
all have it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Donne, The Sermons of John Donne, edited by Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956), V, 172. All subsequent references to the text of the sermons are from this edition and hereafter will be noted with volume and page number in parentheses following each quotation.

Obviously, he does not really understand what original sin is, but he is quite sure that it exists.

Not unlike Augustine and Paul, Donne feels the burden of Adam's sin; hence, he cries, "who shall deliver me from the body of this earth?" (VI, 117) Original sin is the "tartar," "the leaven," "the poyson in my blood," the "tyrant," "the unquenchable fire," the "brand of hell itself," the "sin that dwelleth in me," the "serpent in my bosom," the "universal debility" (II, 82), the inward "bleeding" (III, 238), the internal infection, inward "wound," the inward perversity, the "infectious poyson," the "disease," the "sop" in all men's mouths, the "mother-sinne," "the foul'd heart," the "gnawing worm," the "viperous nature," the "distemper," "the curse," the "heart of sin," the "rednesse from Adam," the "body of death," the "Fall," the "corruption," and the "body of sinne" which degrade and destroy man's noble potential. Hence, every man is destined to commit actual sins, for all men are born under a curse from which they must suffer. Of course, man may rebel against this tyrannical prince, enthroned in his soul at birth (II, 116); indeed, he must rebel against the tyrant of original sin, or it "will preoccupate all, and become all" (I, 192). This tyrant sits upon the "Throne" of man's heart and lives in the "Palace" of man's soul (II, 100). "It doth not only dwell, but reign" in the mortal body; not only

reign, but tyrannize, and lead us captives under the law of sin which is in our members" (VI, 117).

Original sin is the leaven which corrupts man, who is born as a "child of wrath" (VII, 136). Thus, at birth, man's entire nature is impregnated and "sowred with Original sin" (VII, 136) leaving him "smothered up in massa damnata, in that leavened lump of Adam, where he was wrapped up in damnation" (I, 273). Man's soul, which has the savor of death in it, as it is leavened throughout with sin, must stink in his own nostrils if he is to know the joy of the first resurrection.

Original sin is the first link in a chain of navel cords. Since the creation of Adam, man has never lost his ties with his posterity because in Eve "their navell was not cut; that is, They were still incorporated into their mother, to earth, and to sinne" (V, 187). Thus, "if I take the first linke, and draw up that, the whole chain follows" (II, 126). Original sin, like an unbroken umbilical cord, runs through and ties together every generation of man.

The ultimate source of original sin lies in the poisonous temptation of Satan's serpent. Indeed, original sin is the devil's poison, for the "devill had so surprized us all, as to take mankind all in one lump, in a corner, in Adams loynes, and poysoned us all there in the fountain, in the roote . . ." (IX, 247). It is "an

infectious poyson, and such a poyson, as strikes the heart" (I, 178). Original sin is so basic to man's nature that it is called "so inseparable a venim" (II, 52), as "a natural poyson in us . . ." (III, 116).

Original sin is viewed as a disastrous "fall." Indeed, he says, we lie "weltering in . . . blood . . . ; we lye still, we feel no pain, but it is because we have broke our necks" (V, 189). Furthermore, "we fell by Adams fall, into the durt . . . ; we fell upon a heape of sharpe stones too" (V, 173). He acknowledges that "Adam at his best had . . . a possibility of standing" (VI, 116), but his was such an ignoble and disastrous fall that all men "not only by this fall broke our armes, or our legs, but our necks" (VI, 116).

Obviously, Donne can neither fully blame Satan nor Adam, for he cannot fully absolve every man from his particular responsibility. Thus, Donne says, "we are borne low and yet we fall every way lower . . ." (VI, 211). Man's "ignoble fall" (V, 198) results in two lame feet: "we are lame of one foot hereditarily . . . and we have lamed the other foot, by crooked, and perverse customes." Perhaps Donne's concept of original sin offers a too-simplistic explanation for man's moral dilemma, but the solutions, suggested by Donne, motivated numerous sinners to struggle "upstream" against their own moral declivity.

Even though the concept of original sin seems to incorporate automatically an oppressive fatalism, Donne's

age did not accept original sin passively. Man is challenged to "let not sin have dominion over [him]" (II, 115) as he opposes "the insolency of that Tyrant" (II, 115). Furthermore, he tells man to look to Christ in the war against this tyrant who gained control in a battle with Adam in the Garden of Eden (V, 352).

Donne's concept of original sin encouraged his constituents to look below the surface. Hence, the heart of a man becomes important in improving the whole man; indeed, "the heart is the man" (IX, 175). Thus, when God says "my Son, give me thy heart, God means the whole man" (IX, 175), for God must annihilate "the former heart, which was all sin" (I, 192). Donne calls man's heart a foul "bag of sinne," "a bag of mudd," a dark corner for spider webs, a "heart of clay," a "heart of wax," a "marble heart," a "frozen heart," a "hairy heart," "a rusty heart," and a wounded heart.

Knowing the root of man's sinful condition, Donne was able to offer symbolic solutions to man's moral weaknesses. The root of sin which is in man requires "a cutting downe," "a stubbing up," and a "shaking off" of all rottenness (II, 200). Or man's heart of sin "must be cast up," and replaced with a new heart (I, 192). Christians must allow God to "file off the rust of our hearts," and proceed to "a daily polishing of the heart" (I, 199). Even at best, following

baptism, "Every man is so far from being tota lux, all light, as that he hath still within him, a dark vapor of originall sinne, and the cloud of humane flesh without him" (III, 355).

In dealing with actual sin, as opposed to original sin, Donne shows an awareness of the relationship between the two. As the root is to the fruit, the heart to the hands, the mind to the tongue, so original sin was to actual sin in Donne's double vision of sin.

Donne felt that there are degrees of actual sin: big sins and little sins. He would excuse neither; indeed, he often showed more concern for the "little gnats" than the big "camels." This is not to imply that he would swallow the one and gag at the other, for he condemned almost every conceivable sin. He condemned public sins and clandestine sins, sins of omission and sins of commission, big sins and little sins. In fact, according to Logan Pearsall Smith, "the great subject of Sin especially preoccupied him."<sup>2</sup> Donne was unwilling to compromise on most sins of a personal nature. It was only in the area of official public life that he seemed unable to categorically condemn wrong.

Donne was not afraid to condemn any personal act or thought which might be conceived as sinful. He condemned the obvious sins: adultery, lying, cheating, stealing, and

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<sup>2</sup>Logan Pearsall Smith, editor, Donne's Sermons Selected Passages (Oxford, 1954), p. xxv.

murder. He even equates worldly comfort with serious sin: to love "a warm bed . . . a warm studie . . . a warm profit" better than the church is to warm with Peter by the fires of betrayal (IV, 377). He equates the desire to sin with the act of sin:

Those sins which I have done, and those  
which, but for thy grace, I should have  
done, are all, my sins. Alas, I may die  
here, and die under an everlasting  
condemnation of fornication with that  
woman, that lives, and dies a Virgin,  
and be damn'd for a murderer of that  
man, that outlives me, and for a robbery,  
and oppression, where no man is damnified,  
nor any penny lost. The sin that I have  
done, the sin that I have done is my sin.  
(II, 102)

Neither does Donne exonerate the temptress though she may be somewhat ignorant. Thus, a woman is shooting sinful arrows of temptation when ". . . she paints, . . . curls . . . Sins . . . gazes, and is gazed upon . . ." (II, 57). Hence, "there's an arrow shot at random"; that is, she may not have aimed at a particular mark (II, 57). Of course, sexual intercourse even for the sake of procreation was viewed as a sinful necessity. Indeed, he described his own conception as a sin. Thus he says to God, "Thou didst create me in health, but my parents begot me in sicknesse, and I have complicated other sicknesses with that" (V, 338).

There are several major images which Donne uses to portray sin. One of the more significant is the use of the

arrow. Although he makes reference to arrows in many of his sermons, one entire sermon is an extended metaphor of arrows. Because of its complexity and surprising elements, it is an ingenious masterpiece.

Temptations become sins, and sins become arrows. These "poysoned arrows" may come from a world of quivers: including a woman's quiver, "God's quiver, and the Devil's quiver, and our own quiver, and our neighbors quiver . . ." (II, 56). "God's arrows are . . . arrows that draw bloud from the eyes" (II, 68); consequently, though God is not the author of sin, "He shoots a sin; . . . as sin is a punishment of sin, he concurs with it" (II, 67). It was men who shot the arrows which wounded and crucified Christ; indeed, every wound in Christ is considered the result of man's arrows; thus, Christ was shot in the "Head torn with thorns," in the "feet pierced with nayles," and in the soul (II, 71). The devil, a neighbor, or any man may "shoot us in the back, even when wee had a purpose of departing from that sin, and kil us" (II, 57). Other arrows may only wound a man. However, "an arrow, that finds a man asleep, does not wake him first, and wound him after" (II, 59); indeed, one may be wounded with a neighbor's whispering sins which pass like an arrow "through another mans eare, into mine heart" (II, 58). Furthermore, men may be wounded with arrows of "vaine-glory," of "hypocrisie," or "pride," of "chambering," and



of "wantonnesse." Hence, almost every kind of arrow seems to pierce this one sermon.

The arrows sermon is a masterpiece which serves to demonstrate that Donne's power lay not so much in his ability to name and condemn sin, but in his talent for visualizing and dramatizing the destructive potential of all kinds of actual sin. As in the imagery that he employs to embody the basic duality of man, in embodying the abstraction of sin, he employs frequently the four basic elements: earth, water, air, and fire.

Following the pattern established in the imagery reflecting his concept of man, Donne often describes actual sin in "earthy" terms. He believes that the qualities of sin are not unlike dirt. When man sins, he is thrusting his "hands into new dirt . . ." (VII, 336). He sees old unrepented sins as "the old dirt . . . baked upon . . . hands . . ." (VII, 336). When man strays into unclean ways, he is defiling his feet (II, 109). Sin moves, like sand, across the roadway of life (X, 239), filling man's eyes and mouth with dust. The particles of sand cannot be ignored, but they are not as awesome as a rolling rock. Thus, Donne says, "when we see sand, we are not much afraid of a stone; when a man sees his small sins, there is not so much danger of great" (III, 57). Just as the traveler must wash the dust and grime from his person, so must sin be washed away

in the "waters of repentance" (II, 306), and in "the infinite sea of the blood of Christ Jesus" (I, 205). Man cannot himself always wash away the "mud" (II, 306) of sin, but the current of the waters must [do that] work . . ." (II, 306). Before retiring each night, man should sweep his dusty conscience and wash his defiled feet (I, 205), for it is easier to wash away each new day's dirt than to cleanse the flesh of the caked mud of old sins. In a similar way, Donne argues that it is much easier to dissolve a "single clod of earth" (IX, 172) and "a graine of dust in the ocean" than it is to wash away and dissolve "an intire Iland . . . in the Sea . . ." (IX, 172).

Paradoxically, Donne sometimes uses the same water imagery for actual sin as he uses for sin's antidote. In fact, the dark, polluted waters of sin flow freely throughout Donne's sermons. In the first place, Donne likes to use the metaphor of a swimmer. Deliberate sin is like making a dive into unknown waters (I, 196). Man can never be too cautious about dangerous waters. He warns, "beloved, if we fear not the wetting of our foot in sin, it will be too late, when we are over head and ears" (II, 109). While lying on the beach, a man must be careful, for the rising tide may carry him out into the deep waters of sin. He recalls that "David was ignorant, that he saw not the Tide, as it swell'd up upon him" (II, 95). As with David, the tide of sin soon carries

man out into the mainstream of sin. Swimming and thrashing in the water, he sometimes sinks below the waters with one dry hand held high: "sin may come to the eye and yet the hand be above water . . ." (II, 110). Eventually, if the water of sin is "above our head . . . the brain is drown'd . . ." (II, 110). While man swims in sins, "they are risen and swollen as waters, they compass us, they smother us, they blinde us, they stupefie us, so they are above our head . . ." (II, 97). Hence, a sinner is like a drowning swimmer--"iniquities will be over [his] head . . . as the overflowing of waters" (II, 113).

Everything is distorted by the waters: man's vision of the heavens and man's image under the waters. Thus, everything seems distorted and crooked to God, "who sees not his own Image in that man, in that form as he made it" (II, 113). A drowning man gulps and drinks the foul water of sin. "When man hath drunk iniquity like water" (II, 113), he is helpless and hopeless; indeed, "he that is under water, hath no aire to see by, no aire to hear by, he hath nothing to reach to, he touches not ground to push him up, he feels no bough to pull him up . . ." (II, 96).

Eventually, he is "brought to the jawes and teeth of death, and to the lippes of that whirlpoole, the grave" (X, 230). A drowning man often panics, causing even greater danger, for "the water that he hath swum in, the sin that

he hath delighted in, shall appear with horreur unto him" (II, 114). A cautious fear is helpful, but a thrashing fear will cause him to swallow the foul waters of sin until the mind and "memory [are] drown'd" (II, 110). A man can drown in the "flouds of wickednesse" (II, 113), "in a deluge" of sin, in "the whirlpoole" of sin (X, 230), and even in a "little creek." Because there is only one unforgivable sin mentioned in the Bible, Donne calls the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost "an important diversion into . . . [a] little creek" (V, 77). Man drowns in this creek because his head strikes "that desperate and irrecoverable rock . . ." (V, 77). God can rescue some drowning men; nevertheless, "in this sea, God holds no man up by the chin" (II, 124). If man is sucked into the "whirlpoole" of sin, the "Father notes difficultatem, the hardnesse of recovering" (II, 96). Although the best remedy is to "keep low these waters, as these waters signifie sin" (II, 114), man may be rescued by the Christ of the miracles; that is, he may change your water into wine . . ." (II, 114). As Donne says, man's only hope is in a miracle from the captain of the stormy seas.

The waters of sin are sometimes "lowe," sometimes "high"; they are sometimes "frozen and congealed"; they fall like rain in "a deluge" and "a flood"; they thaw and melt like snow or ice; the waters of sin flow in river "channels" and "narrow creeks." Sins roll in like the tide and cover the

fields like a sea. Wet dew on fleece and wet tears on cheeks represent sin and more sin. In the striking passage quoted below the insidious nature of actual sin is indicated in terms of "a river," "a flood, a deluge," and a heaping up of the waters of sin into a pervasive "sea" of sins.

As when a River swells, at first it will finde out all the channels, or lower parts of the bank, and enter there, but after a while it covers, and overflows the whole field, and all is water without distinction; so, though we be naturally channels of concupiscencies, (for there sin begins, and as water runs naturally in the veines and bowels of the earth, so run concupiscencies naturally in our bowels) yet, when every imagination of the thoughts of our heart, is onely evill continually; Then, (as it did there) it induces a flood, a deluge, our concupiscence swells above all channels, and actually overflows all; It hath found an issue at the eare, we delight in the defamation of others; and an issue at the eye, If we see a thiefe, we run with him; we concurre in the plots of supplanting and destroying other men; It hath found an issue at the eye, If we see a thiefe, we run with him; we concurre in the plots of supplanting and destroying other men; It hath found an issue in the tongue, Our lips are our owne, Who is Lord over us? We speak freely; seditious speeches against superiours, obscene and scurrile speeches against one another, prophane and blasphemous speeches against God himselfe, are growne to be good jests, and marks of wit, and arguments of spirit. It findes an issue at our hands, they give way to oppression, by giving bribes; and an issue at our feet. They are swift to shed bloud; and so by custome, sin overflows all, Omnia pontus, all our wayes are sea, all our works are sin.

(IV, 286)

The passage just quoted, as others like it, indicate, among other things, Donne's awareness of the Old Testament authority for water as a primary source of all life. Donne employs earth and water images to indicate actual sin to a much greater degree than he uses the two remaining elements. Nonetheless, moving up the scale of the elements, Donne sometimes describes actual sin in terms of its "airy" nature. A sinful man who "multiplies sinnes, like clouds between God and him . . ." (II, 229) cannot recognize the nearness of God. Although a sincere Christian may have "some clouds, some Eclipses, yet there is no total darkness, no total, no final falling away . . ." (III, 117). Whereas God's saints, "by occasion of this flesh have darke clouds, yea nights, yea long and frozen nights of sin . . . Christ was incapable of any such nights or any such clouds, any approaches toward sinne" (III, 354). Thus, sin blinds man of his vision of God, who is the sunlight of heaven. In some ways, sin is but a privation and a separation from the light: "sin is nothing; that is, it hath no reality, it is no created substance, it is but a privation, as a shadow is, as sicknesse is; so it is nothing."<sup>3</sup> Later he adds:

You have sold your selves for nothing;  
Our selves, that is all our selves;  
our bodies to intemperance, and ryot,

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<sup>3</sup>Evelyn M. Simpson, editor, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne (Oxford, 1924), p. 109.

and licentiousness, and our soules  
 to a greedines of sinne; and all this  
 for nothing, for sinne, it selfe,  
 for which wee sell our selves, us but  
 a privation, and privations are nothing.  
 (VII, 79)

In Donne's sermons when actual sin is like fire, man is the fuel. When lust and ambition are kindled, these two hot flames of sin consume the whole man; indeed, the fire of adultery (III, 190) can be kindled anywhere in the body. For instance, he says,

They mistake the matter much, that think  
 all adultery is below the girdle: A man  
 darts out an adultery with his eye, in  
 a wanton look; and he wraps up adultery  
 with his fingers, in a wanton letter;  
 and he breathes in an adultery with his  
 lips, in a wanton kisse.

(III, 318)

The fire of sin melts or consumes man's purity (I, 273). Donne says, "the concupiscences of man, are naturally dry power, combustibile easily, easily apt to take fire . . ." (VIII, 200). Although every man has the fire of sin in his house, the house itself may not be on fire. Hence, "there may be a distemper of heate, and yet no necessity to let blood." Though Donne believes that sins are pardoned, it is clear that, however spotless the outer life, he fears the "fires of lust" and the fires of other sins which may ignite in a man's mind, for he believes that, consciously or subconsciously, man fans the flames of sin. Thus, man may

give fire to concupiscencies with licentious  
 Meditations, either of sinful pleasures past,  
 or of that which we have then in our purpose  
 and pursuit; [or] fewel this fire with meats

of curiosity and provocation; [or] blow this  
fire with lascivious discourses and Letters,  
and Protestations.

(V, 228)

Donne accepts the full responsibility for all of his sins. When a man is burned by the fire of sin, he deserves the painful consequences, even if he cannot remember having played with the fire. It follows that if one is burned, he must have been playing with the fire.

Paralleling and reinforcing the extensive imagery drawn from the elements is a considerable body of imagery drawn from the world of animals. Sin and creatures, particularly the vile or grotesque, become synonymous. Small habitual sins are often called or compared to voracious vermin. Little sins "defile" the body (II, 177) and devour the soul (VII, 335). He warns, "take heed that thy Soul be not eaten up with vermin by those little sins . . ." (I, 197). Small offensive sins are sometimes compared to "dead flyes" (II, 23). Man's good works are often contaminated by petty sins: "dead flyes [which] corrupt . . . our ointment . . ." (IV, 287).

Donne also sees actual sin in terms of the groveling worm: "sinne hath [the] quality of a worm . . ." (III, 180). Like the worm, Sin "gnaws the conscience . . ." (III, 180). Sin has the quality of the worm, "that if you cut it into pieces, yet if those pieces come together again they will re-unite again; sinne though discontinued, will finde his old pieces, if they keep not farre asunder" (III, 180).



Less vile, but more grotesque, is Donne's use of the larger creatures to suggest the immensity of sin. He borrows the "Leviathan," evidently, from the book of Job. He uses this huge monster, whether dragon or whale, to emphasize the formidable nature of sin and its tremendous reproductive powers. He exclaims, "O what a Leviathan is sin, how vast, how immense a body! And then what a spawner, how numerous" (II, 108)! He uses another rather grotesque creature, the whale, to symbolize sin. Using whaling imagery, he compares the preacher to the harpoonist who must carefully use the "harping Iron" lest he endanger himself. When the preacher strikes the conscience of man, he is hitting the whale and sin. Therefore, when the preacher strikes "the marke," which he can hardly miss, he should expect a violent reaction, not unlike the struggling and striving of a wounded whale.<sup>4</sup> In his best whaling passage, Donne says:

The rebuke of sin, is like the fishing of Whales; the Marke is great enough; one can scarce miss hitting; but if there be not sea room and line enough, and dexterity in letting out that line, he that hath fixed his harping Iron, in the Whale, endangers himselfe, and his boate; God hath made us fishers of Men; and when we have struck a Whale, touch'd the conscience of any person, which though himselfe above rebuke, and increpation, it struggles, and strives, and as much as it can, endeavours to draw fishers, and boate, the Man and his fortune into contempt, and danger.

(V, 199)

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<sup>4</sup>This somewhat bizarre metaphor is surprising and interesting even though Melville has long since greatly extended and complicated the meaning of whaling imagery.

With Donne actual sin is never entirely a negative thing. Even when man is caught in the throes of deepest sin, he may derive the benefit of remorse. In other words, before man may move from sin to redemption, he must first show remorse. In some men the sense of remorse is never awakened, and they remain oblivious of the depth of sin into which they have fallen:

[Man] falls not upon flowers, to wallow  
and tumble in his sinne, nor upon feathers  
to rest and sleep in his sinne, nor into a  
cooling river, to disport, and refresh, and  
strengthen himself in his sinne; but he  
falls upon a stone, where he may receive  
a bruise, a pain upon his fall, a remorse  
of that sinne that he is fallen into.

(II, 190)

It is obvious from the passages cited that a controlling principle in Donne's sermons is his view that there are degrees of actual sin. For instance, in the "earthy" section, little sins are usually discussed in terms of small grains of sin, dust, and a single clod of dirt while larger sins become rocks, stones, and a compacted island of mud. In the "water" imagery, raindrops, tears, and dew are contrasted with creeks, rivers, floods, deluges, and a sea of sin. The concept of degrees of sinfulness is manifest in other bodies of imagery. For instance, bruises and cuts are contrasted with a broken neck and deformed or mutilated body. A single hair, coin, feather, and gad of steel are called "little" sins. A few sores and paleness are nothing compared to "gangrene," "brain fever," and "Leprosie."

Actual sins, whether they be large or small, must be counteracted if man is not to wallow irretrievably in sin. Donne sees the sinner as "a Patient" in need of a "Spiritual Physician." Christ, of course, is the physician, but He must use the church's remedies, particularly baptism and the Eucharist. The "bloodletting" of repentance is also a common prescription for those with the fever of lust or distemper. He calls man's body "a receptacle of diseases" (X, 198). A stingy man locks his bowels, creating an inward "stinke"; sins are "sores" which bleed and corrupt the whole body; an "ill complexion" is a sure sign of an inward fainting and sickness. Indeed, Donne emphasizes that "he that will cure an ill Eye, must cure the Head; he that will cure the Head must cure the Body; and he that will cure the Body, must cure the Soul" (I, 220).

In spite of the cumulative effect of the imagery dealing with actual sin, which is on the whole depressing, underlying most of it is the implication that sin can be countered, that certain steps can be taken, certain remedies applied, which will offset the effects of sin. It is in this light that Donne admonishes his congregation in the passage below.

As long as a man is alive, if there appeare any offence in his breath, the physician will assigne it to some one corrupt place, his lungs, or teeth, or stomach, and thereupon apply convenient remedy thereunto. But if he be dead, and putrefied, no man askes from whence that ill aire and offence

comes, because it proceeds from thy whole carcasse. So, as long as there is in you a sense of your sinnes, as long as we can touch the offended and wounded part, and be felt by you, you are not desperate, though you be froward, and impatient of our increpations. But when you feelee nothing, whatsoever wee say, your soule is in an Hectique fever, where the distemper is not in any one humour, but in the whole substance; nay, your soule it selfe is become a carcasse.

(III, 364-365)

Of course, actual sins require varied treatment. For instance, some sins are like internal disorders. Thus, when man feeds upon certain kinds of sins, it may produce a stomach disorder which can only be cured by inducing vomiting. Although vomiting is a revolting image, Donne uses it several times. For example, he compares sins to cold and raw meat; "as in a vomit in a bason, the Physitian is able to shew the world, what cold meat, and what raw meat, and what hard and indigestible meat he had eaten" (III, 237). Hence, he compares confession of sins to the physic of vomiting:

Confession works as a vomit; It shakes  
the frame, and it breakes the bed of  
sin; and it is an ease to the spirituall  
stomach, to the conscience, to be thereby  
disburdened. It is an ease to the sinner,  
to the patient.

(IX, 304)

Although no other image is quite so revolting, there are several other rather dark comparisons of sin with the internal physical disorders of man: various fevers, liver and blood diseases, bone and brain infections, and distemper.

The point in all this is not just that sins are revolting, but that they can be ministered, that they can be counteracted, even though the remedies may at times be drastic.

External diseases, infections, wounds and other physical disorders representing actual sin require solutions that lead to spiritual health. For the sinner to regain spiritual health requires awareness, remorse, and "detestation" along with the more easily recognizable remedies such as prayer, confession, baptism, and communion. If these remedies are applied in whole or in part, the renewed spiritual health will show itself in the behavior of the man who has been subjected to these disciplines. It is in light of Donne's recognitions that spiritual wholesomeness can be regained that he will at times exhort his congregation as in the passage below.

Interrupt the prescription of sin; break off  
the correspondence of sin; unjoynt the  
dependency of sin upon sin. Bring every  
single sin, as soon as thou committest it,  
into the presence of thy God, upon those  
two legs, Confession, and Detestation,  
and thou shalt see, that as, though an  
intire Iland stand firme in the Sea, yet  
a single clod of earth cast into the Sea,  
is quickly washt into nothing; so, howso-  
ever thine habituall, and customary and  
concatenated sins, sin enwrapped and  
complicated in sin, sin entrenched and  
barricadoed in sin, sin screwed up, and  
riveted with sin, may stand out, and  
wrestle even with the mercies of God,  
in the blood of Christ Jesus; yet if thou  
bring every single sin into the sight of  
God, it will be but as a clod of earth,  
but as a graine of dust in the Ocean.

(IX, 172)

In the last analysis, Christianity's optimistic nature rescues Donne's sermons from the pit of pessimism. The fatal fall becomes a fortunate fall, increasing man's gratitude toward God. The fact of actual sin fades into insignificance in the presence of a forgiving God. It follows that despite man's defective nature and faulty actions, which are a primary certitude in Donne's dual vision of sin, sinful man can become a saint, a child of God, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

At its broadest this study has shown something of the complexity but at the same time something of the thematic unity and continuity of Donne's sermons. In terms of the most pervasive themes which recur in the sermon literature, Donne makes extensive use of two basic Christian dualities: the dual nature of man, which shows man to be at one and the same time both physical and spiritual; and the dual nature of sin, which distinguishes between original sin and actual sin.

Donne's easily demonstrated awareness of and interest in the major paradoxes of man and of Christianity make it probably inevitable that the sermon literature would employ the paradox to a degree that rivals that of the secular poetry.

Put very simply, Donne's sermon literature is concerned with showing the eternal conflicts that are basic to man in whatever period or circumstance. In the sermons man is not viewed as merely an irrational creature of instincts, passions, and habits, nor is he viewed as a preeminently rational creation of God. Indeed, Donne attempts to dissolve

such sharp distinctions; he accepts man's limitations without discrediting his divine potential. In short, man is viewed as a sublime mixture of opposites--a mixture of spiritual and physical, good and evil, rational and irrational, mortal and immortal.

In some respects, man becomes a victim of his own nature. As an offspring of Adam, man cannot escape the struggle against original sin, which is an inherent part of his nature. At times, this irrational force in man leads to a sense of futility that tends to dominate a considerable portion of Donne's sermon literature. Such a vision does tend to view man as a victim, to be sure, but it also sees man as having those divine potentialities which permit him to endure his sufferings and be significantly enlightened by them in such a way that through Christ and the church victory may be realized even in apparent defeat at the hands of death. In this way, man's conflict with himself leads to a rebirth and an affirmation that faith is the key to ultimate victory.

Ironically and somewhat bitterly, life is death and death is life. Haunted by original sin and actual sin, man can hardly expect to find the abundant life in the here and now. This is not to say that Donne sought to escape life by way of the grave, as some have suggested. However, because he is for the most part a sincere orthodox believer, he sees a Christian death as the only permanent solution to man's



earthly dilemma. Thus, for man to live, he must put aside the filthy robe of flesh; indeed, corruption must put on incorruption; mortality must be swallowed up in immortality.

The unity, universality, and continuity of the sermon literature growing mainly out of the basic dualities which provide the central focus of this study are reinforced, as has been suggested, by the development of an extensive body of imagery. As usual, in the imagery Donne often provokes thought by yoking the unexpected, or he extends a metaphor with provocative details. The sublime and the homely are woven and wedded within the basic structure of the sermons. Without these supporting bodies of imagery, his sermons would lack the vitality and universality which provide them with a continuing relevance.

The central chapters of this study have shown not only a heretofore unexpected or unrevealed thematic continuity in Donne's sermons but have shown also a continuing relevance of the central doctrinal issues of the sermons, even when the terminology seems quaint or archaic to the modern ear. Twentieth-century man has shown himself to be both intrigued by and often anguished over the nature and meaning of life and death and man's capability of making significant choices. The main thematic threads of Donne's sermons show, perhaps, that seventeenth-century man was better able to reconcile life's and man's incongruities than modern man. For the most

part, Donne and his contemporaries could accept, possibly for the last time historically, the paradoxes implied by these incongruities. Donne and his fellows were able to achieve the double vision necessary to reconcile some apparent opposites. They could accept the view that man's basic dignity with his capabilities for action is wedded to his basic depravity with a tendency toward moral declivity. Indeed, the image of God in man struggles for survival in a world which appears to be in subjection to forces unlike God. Thus, man is good and evil, flesh and spirit, mortal and immortal. No one can understand the age of Donne who thinks that his sermons present exceptional viewpoints. Actually, except for Donne's peculiar power to wed perennially warring opposites, his sermons are exactly what one should expect in the time; and Donne's contemporaries, however stimulated, must have felt themselves perfectly at home while listening to them.

In an age like our own which is not attuned any longer to the basic Christian paradoxes, Donne's sermons are likely to seem excessively dark in tone and pessimistic to an age of easy optimism. These impressions develop in the contemporary reader or critic in part because the dark side of the equation is stressed at the expense of the other side. Seventeenth-century man felt no particular obligation to balance the darker side of man's nature and man's destiny

with the always-understood and implied optimism which is an inherent part of Christianity. This study has demonstrated that Donne's supposed pessimism and melancholy is attributable where it exists mainly because of the thematic emphases of the sermons and not simply because Donne is a naturally mordant and pessimistic man.

In the last analysis, this study corrects a fairly extensive warped vision of Donne's sermons. If nothing else it should remind us, as one critic has indicated, that a belief in dualism and paradox does not automatically lead to skepticism and pessimism.<sup>1</sup> The dual vision which Donne's sermons reveal is in reality evidence of his sophistication and perception. In light of the chronological context of Donne's sermons, Douglas Bush is not speaking in hyperbole when he says:

The double vision is, to be sure, the mark of the greatest writers of all ages, especially the ancients; but the Christian religion intensified the paradox by exalting man's sense of his divinity and deepening his sense of bestiality.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John G. Demaray, "Donne's Three Steps to Death," The Personalist, XLVI (Summer, 1965), 371.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1962), p. 37.

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