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Sacred and Profane Love in Donne

*Our business is, to rectifie
Nature, to what she was . . .
("To Sir Edward Herbert at Julyers," 11. 33-4)*

Despite a number of recent studies arguing for continuity in Donne's career, the common interpretation of Donne's treatment of love and marriage still depends on the drawing of a sharp distinction between the sceptical naturalism of his early satirical and erotic verse and the asceticism of his devotional poetry and prose, with some of the more mature and suffering of the love poems (usually associated with Donne's marriage) providing an uneasy hyphen which only serves to emphasize the dichotomy.¹ This dichotomized reading of Donne's career issues in, or is sustained by, marked differences of opinion in the interpretation of the basic intention and essential implications of Donne's treatment of love. These problems of interpretation are further confused by and contribute to contradictory interpretations of Donne's relation to the main intellectual traditions of the period, whether essentially medieval or Augustinian or modern and sceptical or, just now, Calvinist.² The dominant view, though not unchallenged, is still Bredvold's reading of a fundamental dualism (as between body and soul, faith and reason, the natural and the spiritual) in Donne.³

My examination of Donne's portrayals of human and divine love in some characteristic early and later work, in the light of consistent principles developed in his prose, supports current efforts to see a deeper consistency in Donne's work than is generally acknowledged. Although I can present only a summary of the evidence here, I hope the reader will find it suggestive enough to pursue the argument further.

Donne's consistent orientation in the treatment of human and divine love is to reestablish and strengthen an ideal of continuity and relation between human and divine, natural and spiritual. He works towards this end through principles of participation, hierarchy and correspondency, as can be seen in his patterns of imagery and biblical

allusions and types which give a clear (if at times ironic) direction to his writings. That direction is towards the overcoming of dualism. It moves towards integration through the restoration of order to human faculties so that they may act well, and participate in and contribute to God's sustaining love for all. Donne's portrayals of love look to the process of beginning "to repair the ruins of our first parents" through sensitive and responsive experience in time.⁴

Donne's works reveal his knowledge of the ideological conflicts between sceptical naturalism and ascetic idealism, and these conflicts seem to underlie a polarization in his own experience between sceptical youth and saintly maturity.⁵ But examination of Donne's works as a whole and in the context of his times suggests deeper continuities. The polarizations and dualisms reflected throughout Donne's works are not in Donne; they are in his milieu. Against the extreme tendencies and rigid orthodoxies which divided his age, Donne seeks to establish a central position which will do justice to the full range of human experience.

The polarizing conceptions of man which Donne confronts have been fully documented. At one extreme are ascetic and spiritualizing mysticisms of various kinds, such as the mystical Neoplatonism of Pico della Mirandola or Cardinal Bembo or the mystical Neo-Augustinianism of John Colet. At the opposite extreme are sceptical and empirical naturalisms, such as the libertinism associated with Montaigne and his followers, the sceptical realism of Machiavelli and his school, the empiricism of Telesio, Galileo and Bacon. Between these extremes were dogmatic and inflexible institutions, whether Reformed or Roman. Attempts to relate the natural and spiritual orders were thought by many to be disintegrating under these centrifugal forces.⁶

In his prose Donne uses the history of similar extremes in doctrinal opinion to chart a central course. Donne develops particularly the moderating principles of the Fathers of the Church who confronted and at times succumbed to similar extremes of rationalist naturalism or rationalist mysticism but who sought to preserve generous principles for their times.⁷

Donne does not merely oppose the natural to the spiritual in an invincible dualism; he rejects dualism, whether as absolute antagonism or separation between natural and spiritual. Donne vividly depicts conflict, disorder — indeed human corruption and depravity. What critics used to think of as Donne's morbid preoccupation with the corruption of the natural and physical is simply an insistence on the effects of the Fall and sin; but the point of this insistence is that these effects can and must be offset to a degree by grace. His characteristic

preoccupation is with the regenerating effect of grace which restores the natural to its legitimate functions and makes it an instrument of the spiritual. The natural cannot, for Donne, perform its function without the restorative and sustaining support of the spiritual, and the spiritual in men requires the restored natural as its instrument. The natural and spiritual depend mutually on each other for their ultimate fulfilment, although that fulfilment can occur only at the end of time.⁸

Donne rejects dualistic tendencies to work towards the restoration of prelapsarian integration in all human actions and social relations. In seeking this integration Donne uses two fundamental principles that his devotional prose makes explicit. One, the principle of participation, implies other principles of subordination, hierarchy and correspondency throughout created being. The other, the Augustinian sense of sin, disorders all these relations. These ideas are essential for understanding Donne's characterization of human and divine love.

For principles of participation and subordination, Donne draws on Patristic and Scholastic thought. Donne's thought here seems markedly Thomist since Aquinas sought to establish a perfect continuity between the natural appetite which impels every being to seek its particular good and the disinterested love of God. Since every being except God exists only by participation in the absolute being of God, no individual is closed upon himself. All are part of a greater whole. A part naturally loves the good of the whole more than its particular good. A being who is such by participation loves naturally absolute Being more than its own participated being. Men thus naturally love the good of God more than their own. The love of self and of other creatures, rightly understood, derives from the love of God.⁹ This sense of all created reality participating in a single divine being and so subordinated and ordered to that being is fundamental for Donne and he applies it to his understanding of human psychology and human and social relations.¹⁰ All for Donne are ideally relations of participation and subordination and in this way participate in the divine. Donne's treatment of hierarchy and correspondency in nature derives from such principles of participation. But Donne is painfully aware that Scholastic nature contrasts profoundly with fallen reality. For Donne, then, these principles are not a matter of "mystical correspondency" derived from medieval thinkers like Bonaventure.¹¹ All believe that created being should manifest the mind of God. Donne's application is rather that in every human activity in time, men are called to participate in a process and a pattern which manifests itself in all things. It is a network of relations making demands upon men at every point. It is vitally dynamic.

What underlines this dynamic for Donne is simply failure or the Augustinian sense of sin. God imprinted in human nature his Image, everything men need (*Sermons*, IX, 174). All of created being figures forth by nature the power and governance and goodness of its Creator.¹² God's natural image in men cannot be utterly removed, not even in hell, Donne avers in agreement with St. Bernard. Only annihilation can obliterate this image, yet it is defaced by sin. Sin disorders the whole complex of relations and correspondencies.¹³

Donne stresses the imperfection, weakness, indeed, the devastation of man. "I would not make man worse than he is, nor his condition more miserable than it is. But could I though I would?"¹⁴ But this emphasis on human misery, including physical disease, pain, death, and corruption is not morbid. On the contrary, the weakness of the body is a gift whereby men may more readily understand their self-derived spiritual death. This total death of the human person is not a source of despair but of hope because it is the measure of the need for God. Augustine underscores men's need for divine grace at every stage and in every condition of nature; original sin and its consequences bring this need strongly to human awareness and in this restricted sense constitute a blessing as well as a curse, the divine operation of bringing good out of evil.¹⁵ In this Augustinian context, stress falls on God's saving action, using men's imperfections to draw them to him, not annihilating and purging utterly but setting men's affections and faculties in right tune. But Donne stresses as heavily the human responsibility to cooperate with divine grace at every point and engage responsively and actively in the process of restoring the natural human condition and relations. Men are free to respond or not. Those who refuse cut themselves off from the possibility of happiness in this life or hereafter.¹⁶

The two principles, participation and sin, or Creation and Fall, lead to a third fundamental preoccupation as a consequence, the process of restoration: ". . . our businesse is, to rectifie/ Nature, to what she was"

Donne's concern with this process which draws natural and spiritual into relation, despite perversity and failure, is already present in his earlier verse and remains consistent throughout his career. A reexamination of some characteristic poems in these terms and in the light of consistent principles developed throughout Donne's prose will show in part how he achieves these effects. I shall refer here to his portrayal of love and women in the *Satires*, *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets*, *Holy Sonnets*, and *Hymns*.

Satires

Donne's five *Satires* confront fragmentation; they expose it as a corruption of God's original design; and they offer a positive response. They present ideal virtue in the figure of a woman, who must be loved. They focus on the process of bringing that love into action by restoring the relation of body and soul.¹⁷

"Satire I" places a densely contemporary portrayal of the frivolity of an inconstant fop against a firm background of religious value. The speaker as satirist addresses the fop:

Why should'st thou (that dost not onely approve,
But in ranke itchie lust, desire, and love
The nakednesse and barenesse to enjoy,
Of thy plumpe muddy whore, or prostitute boy)
Hate vertue, though shee be naked, and bare?
At birth, and death, our bodies naked are;
And till our Soules be unapparrelled
Of bodies, they from blisse are banished.
Mans first blest state was naked, when by sinne
Hee lost that, yet hee was cloath'd but in beasts skin,
And in this course attire, which I now weare,
With God, and with the Muses I conferre. (11. 37-48)

This passage concentrates on the discipline of "course attire" which can bring the body back into the service of the soul to "conferre" with God and with the Muses. The speaker first establishes an opposition between body and soul but also stresses their relation. What is needed is acceptance of the body and then discipline which brings body and soul into relation, not simply escape from the body. The ultimate union of body and soul, a point of reference of essential importance for Donne throughout his works, is adumbrated here in the figure of naked "vertue" as contrasted with the figure of the naked whore (body without soul). The description of "vertue" as naked is consistent with the iconographic representation of Truth, but the description further implies vulnerability. She is "bare" in a moral sense, not only unadorned but unarmed, unprovided-for (1. 41). She is the figure of an idealized woman embodying spiritual value here and in all the *Satires* and in Donne's *Anniversaries*, but she is neglected and abandoned.

The continuation of the passage insists on a paradoxical relation between the innocent nakedness of the body at birth and death and the bliss of the soul after death. The speaker cannot see the ideal union of body and soul, but his appeals to the state of innocence, the Fall, and men's ultimate end are substantial. This biblical pattern, the circles drawn by first and last things, birth and death, provides a background of ultimate values against which the action of the poem can be meas-

ured. The implications of these references are not taken far. While the speaker evidently claims too much and is himself subjected to ironic undercutting, yet a positive direction towards relating body and soul for a higher purpose remains. The satire's sustained ironic attack on inconstancy in love ("If thou which lov'st all, canst love any best," l. 14) resonates throughout the *Satires* and Donne's love poems and devotional poems and prose.¹⁸

The *Satires* describe contemporary experience as a process of degeneration, as a type of the biblical age from Creation to the Flood. But they fade away from their positive affirmations. Only "Satire III" reverses the degenerative cycle. Only "Satire III" fully embodies the figure of an ideal woman, "Truth," and identifies her as a biblical type. Through its positive affirmations it assumes a central, normative place.

In conducting the pursuit of "our Mistresse faire Religion" the satire exposes the worldliness and perversity of Renaissance naturalism, but also of prevailing religious practices. The principal churches are brutally characterized as women and their votaries have the perverted motives of human lovers. "Careless Phrygius" abhors "All, because all cannot be good, as one/ Knowing some women whores, dares marry none" (ll. 62-4). Graccus, the indifferent, "loves all as one" (l. 65). The inconstant fop from "Satire I" appears here as Graccus and will appear again in "The Indifferent" and other poems and in Donne's sermons. These attitudes are historically rooted; they are extremes Donne everywhere opposes. They are explored and exposed ironically in the speakers of Donne's satiric *Songs and Sonets*. As parodies and inversions of proper love they suggest ironically the right direction for love. Elsewhere Donne works out seriously the sense in which all women should be loved, as reflections of divine goodness.

The satire's celebrated section on the search for truth provides a positive response. There is one and only one truth, and she must be sought. Donne urges a purposeful questioning of the reality behind the image — not scorn, or adoration, or protestation. Donne's phrasing glances again at sceptical atheism, Papistry, and Protestantism, as well as at erotic motives. The search is historical; it is guided by norms; it is also intensely personal.

On a huge hill

Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
Reach her, about must, and about must goe;
And what the hills suddennes resists, winne so;
Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,
Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night.
To will, implies delay, therefore now doe:
Hard deeds, the bodies paines; hard knowledge too

The mindes indeavours reach, and mysteries
 Are like the Sunne, dazzling, yet plaine to'all eyes.
 Keep the truth which thou' hast found . . . (ll. 79-89)

Donne emphasizes active effort, a process in time. The imagery expresses ascent, a spiritual ascent, but through physical and fearful difficulty, drawing body and soul into relation. The extreme and unexpected abruptness of the hill must be won in this winding and tortuous way. The imperative to succeed so far is the imperative of death. Urgent action is needed but it is purposive action requiring the "bodies paines," the "mindes indeavours," and the clarity of vision that can see "mysteries," dazzling — that is almost blinding in intensity — like the Sun, "yet plaine to all eyes." The last image refers to faith and culminates the hierarchy of powers that issue in a fully human act: body, mind, and spiritual vision answering to deeds, knowledge, and mystery. This ascending hierarchy is human, comprehensible, and not reductive. Donne develops this hierarchy of powers and faculties throughout his works.

The specific truth Donne evokes is an individual faith, but the only norm he provides is the painful, difficult experience. The effort in time, which demands a total concentration of human powers, is everything. But the search involves everyone. The truth is available historically; it is in history ("aske thy father . . .") and simultaneously is transcendent and universal. "Truth stands . . ." It is personal but available to all and so objective. Thus it is individual and corporate, a perfect ideal realized only imperfectly and through effort and pain, in imitation of crucifixion. "Satire III" thus implies the figure of the church as the "mystical bride" of the Scriptures, eternally perfect, outside of time, but only imperfectly realized through effort and pain in time and in individual experience.¹⁹ This biblical type of a woman stands behind Donne's *Satires* and early poems. God's beloved, the faithful community, the "shee" of Donne's *Anniversaries*, she is the woman from the Song of Songs and the Book of Revelation: a woman wandering and waiting, Spenser's Una, contrasted to the actual women in the poems. This mystical figure is always present by implication (whether ironically or positively) in Donne's portrayals of women.

Songs and Sonets and Elegies

The biblical pattern of ideal spiritual love prophesied in Scripture, to be experienced in glory only at the end of time, and realized only imperfectly in time and individual experience establishes a fundamental frame of reference for Donne, to which he frequently recurs. Christ's "greatest work, when he was come, which was his union and

marriage with the Church, and with our soules, he hath also delivered in a piece of curious frame, Solomon's Song of Songs" (*Sermons*, II, 171; see also V, 168; V, 126-9). This love "as strong as death" (III, 320) echoes through Donne's poems and prose. While it is not to be expected in perfection here, yet it provides a pattern and a means by which men may participate in divine love and enjoy in this life a foretaste of that final happiness. Donne's love poems should be placed in relation to the biblical pattern of love and devotion that the *Satires* work towards.²⁰

Donne has provided his own commentary, however ironically simplified and reductive or hyperbolic, on the range of his love poems.²¹ In "A Valediction: of the booke" he writes to his beloved,

Here Loves Divines, (since all Divinity
Is love or wonder) may finde all they seeke,
Whether abstract spirituall love they like,
Their Soules exhal'd with what they do not see,
Or, loth so to amuze
Faiths infirmitie, they chuse
Something which they may see and use;
For, though minde be the heaven, where love doth sit,
Beauty a convenient type may be to figure it. (11. 28-36)

Donne characterizes their love as ranging from sensual to spiritual, yet he applies this range to a single love. Extremes are wrong. Irony undercuts the hyperboles as well as Donne's usual analogy between love and religion. The stanza distinguishes spirit and sense, soul and body, in love, but then in the last two lines interrelates them and applies them to one love. The human imperative is not to simplify human experience into dualism but to relate natural to spiritual. In a later sermon Donne makes a careful Thomist distinction that looks back over his love poems and other discussions of love and illuminates the direction of his thought here. "Beasts and carnall men, who determine all their desires in the sensuall parts, come no farther than to a delight: but men, who are truly men, and carry them to the intellectual part, they, and onely they, come to Joy" (*Sermons*, X, 214). The distinction is Thomist, but the emphasis on the distinctively human is Donne's, as is the dynamic progression from *delight* to *joy*. Donne's phrasing in the sermon passage recalls specifically the movement from sense to spirit in "The Extasie" when the exalted and spiritualized souls of the lovers consider their bodies and say:

We owe them thanks,
because they thus, Did us, to us, at first convey,
Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
Nor are drosse to us, but allay. (11. 53-6)

In "The Extasie" Donne asserts distinction and continuity and reaffirmed relation through the images and argument. *Sense*, the animating power of the body, is rendered serviceable to the souls of the lovers and, while less "pure" than the rational and immortal soul, is the indispensable *alloy* which enables the souls to act in time. So Donne affirms in the sermon cited that the joy commanded in Scripture is "the rest and testimony of a good conscience, that we have done those things which belong to our calling, that we have mov'd in our Sphere" (X, 214-5). The principle of continuity from sense to spirit and restored relation between them through virtuous action is the same in the poem as in the sermon, though Donne's homiletic application is more general.

The imagery in the *Songs and Sonets* is drawn from correspondency, including hierarchies and levels of being. But Donne handles denotation with great exactness and attention to distinctions as well as analogies. The imagery ranges from inanimate metals, through human psychology, to angels; but Donne consistently differentiates and distinguishes the levels. Attention to the level of imagery is critical because the persuasion of the poem is to accept and move along the series of meanings implied by the imagery. Full perception comes only when senses, imagination, understanding, and will work together for a human act.²²

Donne's cynical poems appear to challenge the characterization of love just described, but their ironic use of imagery of correspondency alerts the reader, rather, to the presence of a satiric speaker or persona.²³ The cynical poems expose the limitations of an impercipient speaker, the most elusive irony of all. The speakers in the cynical poems function through imagery of correspondency but ironically fail to recognize their appropriate human level. Instead of ascending, they move downward by reducing the level of imagery. Reductive imagery ironically exposes the limitations of the speaker. Donne's favoured images of gold and circles illustrate the possible range of implication. The circle is an ancient mystical hieroglyphic for eternity, perfection, and God. Gold is also an ancient symbol of perfection, the noblest metal, and so "the image of solar light and hence of the divine intelligence."²⁴ But these images can be and are reduced by Donne's speakers to the most material and sexual obsessions: gold mines and "centrique parts." The human response is to extend these "poor emblems" into symbols of God. Much of the wit of the poems is in the application of imagery but the wit is ironic, persuading the reader to see more in the situation of the poem.

The speakers who fail to recognize an appropriate level of response are exposed as wilful and perverse. "Song, Goe and catche a falling

starre" represents the cynical poems, although it ironically mirrors the libertine naturalist poems which pretend to celebrate inconstancy and plurality of loves, such as "The Indifferent" ("I can love any, so she be not true," l. 9), "Communitie," "Confined Love," or "Loves Diet." The speaker in "Goe, and catche a falling starre" is disappointed to have discovered (or rather to imagine he has) the ineradicable faithlessness of women. Although the extravagant and impudent imagery of impossibilities serves to tease women, the humour is urbane and human. The poem's spiritual quest, "a pilgrimage" of two lines, falls flat. The poem surprises by shifting from extravagant and grotesque impossibilities (half-legendary and unreal), through the wondrous adventures of contemporary travelers (or at least of their tales) to the hoary antifeminist paradox that "No where/ Lives a woman true, and faire" (ll. 17-8).²⁵ The last stanza applies and reduces the mysterious and numerical hyperboles of stanzas one and two exactly to one woman's infidelity. Even if such an impossible paragon of virtue as "a woman true and faire" might be found, and found "next doore," and even if "shee were true" as long as it takes to write the letter with the strange news,

Yet shee
Will bee
False, ere I come, to two, or three. (ll. 25-7)

As usual with Donne, the logical reversals all come to the same conclusion.

The images in this poem are not simply reductive. There is something like an ascending series of images in the first stanza, but the progression is blurred and undercut. The objects named are in an ascending hierarchy of being, from "falling starre," to "mandrake roote," "the Divels foot," "Mermaides singing" and on to grave moral considerations of "envy" and the advancement of "an honest minde." A falling-star is a material object, though pure yet less pure than the heavenly fixed stars. The mandrake is a plant, however magical its properties. The devil's cloven foot suggests animality but is part of a spirit wearing a refined body of air (or the like). The song of the sirens is, if anything, a movement of air, and the stinging of envy and the winds of advancement modulate from the physical to the moral. But the series is broken by "past yeares" which are nothing or a memory, except to God. The point of course is that all are introduced as the objects of impossible imperatives, whether riddling or enigmatic or perverse. But they raise "Puzzling questions" even if they "are not beyond all conjecture."²⁶ They tease thought as well as women and they will not hold a stable place. The poem retains moral and logical

terms ("true," "false") but they contrast sharply with the extravagant imagery and argument.

The brilliant if indistinct colours and sounds of the opening, the "ten thousand daies and nights" and the "snow" of "white hairs" at the centre are reduced to the simplest numbers in the last stanza: "one" (l. 19) and, at the last, "two, or three" (l. 27). Numbers are abstract properties but applied to human infidelity they are merely bathetic and humorous. The poem has reduced its ostensible discovery of infidelity in all "fair" women to absurdity.

The poem illustrates the debasement of language and imagery from devotion. The ideal married love of the Song of Songs, "thou art all faire my love," contrasts strikingly with this poem and its like, which ring changes on "true" and "false" love. Drawing on Ovid, Catullus, and Petrarchan Neoplatonism, the poems symbolize the chaos of the seventeenth-century mind. Beneath the humour and fantasy and shifts of tone, Donne shows revulsion and despair but also recognition that these poems are inversions of right order. They expose the frustrations of the speaker who is caught up in the madness and cannot read the book of creatures to get out of the trap he is in. Yet the witty address, the extraordinary ingenuity of image and argument, renders the poems less pessimistic than the antifeminist and ascetic traditions they echo. Even perverse nature, these poems suggest, mirrors obliquely the mind of God. Inconstancy in human affairs is a sin, but as a parody of true love it enforces consciousness of divine constancy.

The *Songs and Sonets* and *Elegies* which are not cynical represent a hierarchy of love relations leading to a fully human love. For Donne human love at its best is contained within divine love, that is, when it imitates God's love and so participates in and contributes to his providential designs. This best human love leads to Christian marriage.

The more serious poems are explorations of order and integration. Behind such poems as "The Dream," "Air and Angels," and "The Extasie" is the suggestion of the Incarnation, the divine expressing itself in human form.²⁷ These poems give an ascending direction to their images, inviting a recognition of the participation of the human at its best in the divine. "The Extasie" refashions established literary conventions in its remarkable drawing of distinctions and relations, beginning with a Saturnalian setting, moving on to the intellectualizing and spiritualizing of sense, then returning dramatically to the body. Arthur Barker has suggested that through the imagery of clasped hands, of the union of affections and souls and minds, of procreation, of church monuments, of gold and circles and a good witness, the poem goes beyond its literary background to imply Christian marriage

with its symbolism of a mystical union.²⁸ The lovers return from the unchangeable world of spiritual union to the world of bodies and "small change" to manifest their love and instruct others by example. By such means these poems actively work to overcome a dangerous dualism. Christian and Jewish Neoplatonism is humanized further and embodied. But the poems go beyond even that in their evidence of real experience.

As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtile knot, which makes us man:
So must pure lovers soules descend
T'affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great Prince in prison lies. (11. 61-8)

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is a companion to "The Extasie." In its imagery of progressively refined circles (from spheres to expanding gold leaf to geometrical spirals) and of gold, we are invited to see again the marriage ring and its symbolism.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate. (11. 21-4)

The alchemical sign for gold, a circle with a dot at the centre, supports the poem's ring symbolism. Donne's later comments on the image of gold leaf support the strong impression both of great value and painful loss in this love. Donne observes that gold can cover the greatest extent of any substance without breaking, but it is not infinite. Gold leaf, while it retains unaltered the quality of gold, loses its use and vapours away.²⁹ These implications are in the image here, so that the poem must go on to stronger assurances and consolations. Love must return to its body. The process of integration and proper order is difficult and painful, although also a source of consolation and joy.

Donne's poems of true love incorporate exactly the attributes of good human love which Donne explores extensively in his sermons.³⁰ They move from joy to compassion. They assess experience with the same realism as the sermons. The ironies and qualifications in the poems derive from the rareness, difficulty, and misinterpretability of good love. Yet this good love imitates and participates in a divine pattern of love that men are enjoined to follow. Donne places ideal human love within the world and within time (whether by paradoxical defiance or transcendence, as in "The Sunne Rising," "The Canonization," "The Good-morrow," or "The Anniversarie"). By accepting a

point of reference outside of time, by asserting the spiritual union of the lovers, but acknowledging the need to go into the world and confront change and decay the poems show how human love can realistically lead to and participate in divine love, despite human limits and failings.

Donne's religious poems express the same awareness.

Divine Poems

Donne's "Holy Sonnets" explore continuities and contrasts between human and divine love in terms of repentance and contrition. They begin with a heightened sense of distance between man and God but move towards the love of God.³¹ They do not repudiate the human love celebrated in Donne's love poems. The only human love the "Holy Sonnets" repudiate is love that is not referred to divine love and is therefore "idolatrous," in Augustinian phrases Donne uses throughout his sermons. But love of creatures and of women is a divine command, if directed to good ends and not wilful self-indulgence.³² The "Holy Sonnets" dramatize the painful effort to turn from the world to the love of God. But the love of God does not exclude love for creatures; it purges, harmonizes, and renders human love subordinate to divine love. But that love is still a natural affection, directed rightly through grace and human effort.

"Holy Sonnet XVII" written after the death of Donne's wife Ann in August 1617 portrays the positive relation between human love and the love of God. It contains a remarkably precise statement of Donne's ideal of human love in relation to God.

Here the admyring her my mind did whet
To seek thee God, so streames do show the head. (11. 4-5)

These profoundly resonant and careful images show that God is the true source of all human good and love, which must then be referred to God.³³ Donne observes pointedly in a crucial passage on the right use of human faculties that the Platonic philosophers placed not only a soul in man but a mind in the soul. "They meant by the minde, the superiour faculties of the soule, and we never come to exercise them." He expands further on the function of these faculties: "The Mind implies consideration, deliberation, conclusion upon premisses; and we never come to that; wee never put the soule home; wee never bend the soule up to her height; we never put her to a tryall . . . what she is able to doe by her naturall faculties . . ." (*Sermons*, VIII, 326). He concludes that the "Minde" means "the deliberate resolutions and executions of the superiour faculties" of the soul (VIII, 327).

Donne's love for his wife, like the search for Truth in "Satire III" (1. 87), was a function of the highest powers of his soul. Such love is continuous with the love of God. The passage suggests why Donne thought the love he and his wife shared differed from most loves. The exercise of the mind is difficult and rare. Yet this is not mysticism but reason; it is the right direction for human love. Donne's phrasing stresses effort leading to a fully human act. In both the poem and the sermon passage Donne describes a proper participation and hierarchy of love, not a disjunction between the divine and the human. Donne acknowledges tension and distinction between the divine and the human but also primarily relation and continuity in love.

"A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany" (1619) uses Donne's actual voyage typologically and contains the most extended treatment of human and divine love in Donne's religious poetry. The "torn ship" is a type of the ark and so of the church. The journey represents preparation for death and becomes a prayer for concentration of all human affections upon God:

As the trees sap doth seeke the root below
 In winter, in my winter now I goe
 Where none but thee, th'Eternall root
 Of true Love I may know. (11. 13-6)

This image recalls a similar seasonal image in "Loves Growth," though there the season is spring and the love human: "Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough, / From loves awaken'd root do bud out now" (11. 19-20). Similarities in the imagery underline continuity and development between human and divine love, as well as difference. The passage in the "Hymne" expresses with similarly marked precision and tact the poem's theme of gradual detachment from earthly loves. But the passage, even in religious contemplation of death, does not repudiate human loves. It suggests preparation, in age and sickness, after an active life, for leaving in death, "these eyes and ears" ("The Anniversarie," l. 15). The poem — as always with Donne — charts a direction along a line. It moves towards the love of God only, although such perfection is unattainable in this life and cannot in any case exclude the love of creatures as they reflect and participate in God's goodness. The image of Christ as "Eternall root / Of true Love," far from repudiating true human love, expresses a causal and organic relation between God's love and human love. Like the image of the stream and its source in the sonnet on the death of Donne's wife, it shows that all good human love, all "true love" derives from God and, indeed, returns through and in time to God.

The poem closes not with "a prayer for death," as Dame Helen Gardner thinks (p. 107), but with a prayer for a disciplined preparation for death. The poem closes with Donne's most quiet acceptance of death, but that is an attempt to see even in sickness and suffering, isolation and darkness, God's redeeming purposes and love.

Donne's portrayals of human and divine love do not support the general perception of a dualism of early profanity and later asceticism in his works. Reexamination of his poems in the light of consistent principles in his prose suggests that his deepest concern throughout his works is with the process which draws natural and spiritual, human and divine into relation, despite difficulty and failure. In this way he seeks to reestablish and strengthen an ideal of continuity and relation between human and divine. His portrayals of sacred and profane love are directed to this end.

NOTES

1. The most comprehensive recent study is Terry G. Sherwood's *Fulfilling the Circle: A Study of John Donne's Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984): "A long view of his writings reveals consistent principles that reach fruition in the mature religious prose" (p. 3 and see throughout). A. E. Barker, "The Seventeenth-Century: Revised Version," *JEGP*, 62 (1963), 617-28, remarked that "we still somehow fail of perception as to Donne's satiric, hortatory, homiletic purposes and techniques" (p. 624) and invited reconsideration of Donne's poetry and prose as a "disciplined effort to induce a response of active and intelligent right-willing in terms of only too immediately present dangers" (p. 626).
2. See Barbara K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. press, 1979): "Calvinism provided . . . fundamental direction to the major religious lyric poets" (p. 14 and also throughout); and especially Paul R. Sellin, *John Donne and 'Calvinist' Views of Grace* (Amsterdam: VU Boekhandel/ Uitgeverij, 1983); but cf. Sherwood's review in *Renaissance and Reformation*, N.S. 9 (1985), pp. 231-2.
3. See John Carey's influential *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber, 1981), extending Bredvold's important studies, "The Naturalism of Donne in Relation to Some Renaissance Traditions," *JEGP*, 23 (1923), 471-502, and "The Religious Thought of Donne in Relation to Medieval and Later Traditions," in *Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne*, Univ. of Mich. Pub. in Lang. and Lit., 1 (1925), 193-232. Robert Ellrod specifically endorses Bredvold's general attribution of dualism to Donne in "Scientific Curiosity and Metaphysical Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," *MP*, 61 (1963-4), 180-97, but such opinions could be cited indefinitely.
4. Donne's poems are cited from *The Poems*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 2 vols. (London: Oxford U. P., 1912), except for *The Anniversaries* which are cited from Frank Manley's edn. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1963). References in the text and notes by volume and page number are to *The Sermons*, ed. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-62). References to Donne's other works are to *Essays in Divinity*, ed. E. M. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952); *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal, London: McGill-Queens Univ. Press, 1975); *Pseudo-Martyr* (London, 1610), *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (London, 1651).
5. See E. M. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), esp. pp. 112-131, and R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), throughout.
6. See for example Herschel Baker, *The Wars of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1952); Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Scribners, 1950; rpt. 1960);

- Arthur E. Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1942; rpt. 1971) and especially "An Apology for the Study of Renaissance Poetry," *Literary Views: Critical and Historical Essays*, ed. Carroll Camden (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 15-43.
7. For documentation see L. A. Mann, "John Donne's Doctrine of Marriage in its Historical Context," Diss. Illinois 1965. See also E. M. Simpson, ed. *Sermons*, X, 345 ff.
 8. I do not pretend to deal here with the complexities of Donne's doctrine of regeneration. Donne's views seem to resemble Milton's as characterized by Arthur E. Barker in "Structural and Doctrinal Pattern in Milton's Later Poems," *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age Presented to A. S. P. Woodhouse*, ed. Millar MacLure and F. W. Watt (Toronto: Univ of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 169-94. See also Sherwood, *Fulfilling the Circle*, throughout.
 9. Pierre Rousselot, "Pour l'Histoire du Probleme de l'Amour Au Moyen Age," *Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Vol. 6, no. 6 (Münster, 1908), 1-104. Cf. Louis-B. Geiger, *Le problème de l'amour chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Montreal: Inst. d'études médiévales, 1952) and Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: The History of the Christian Idea of Love*, tr. Philip S. Watson, 3 vols. (London: S.P.C.L., 1938-39). See *Sermons*, VII, 250; VI, 105; V, 328.
 10. A recent account is Sherwood's *Fulfilling the Circle*, pp. 3-14 and throughout. For further details see Mann, pp. 257 ff.
 11. See St. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*, tr. George Boas, *The Mind's Road to God* (New York: Liberal Arts, 1953); Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* (London: Sheed, 1938).
 12. See *Sermons*, III, 263-5, 144, 196, 327; VIII, 224-5, 230, 286, 336; VI, 423-4.
 13. *Sermons*, IX, 81. See Mary P. Ramsay, *Les Doctrines médiévales chez Donne* (London: Oxford U.P., 1917), pp. 226-9. In following Bernard on God's image even in fallen nature Donne distances himself from the views of Luther and Calvin in their commentaries on Genesis 1. 24-7. See also III, 144 and Barbara K. Lewalski, *Donne's Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 115-141.
 14. Devotions XIV, "Meditation," p. 71.
 15. *De civitate Dei* XIX, 25; XIV, 4. See Hans Staffner, S.J., "Die Lehre des Hl. Augustinus über das Wesen der Erbsünde," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 79 (1957), 385-416. For applications to Donne see Patrick Grant, *The Transformation of Sin* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), pp. 40-72.
 16. See *Sermons*, II, 185; VII, 63; I, 243; IX, 350-1.
 17. See M. Thomas Hester, *Kinde Pity and Brave Scorn* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1982), which supports many of the conclusions here although there are substantial differences. See also W. Milgate, ed. *The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).
 18. See L. A. Mann, "Radical Consistency: A Reading of Donne's 'Communitie,'" *UTQ*, 50 (1981), 284-99.
 19. See Ian Sowton, "Religious Opinion in the Prose Letters of John Donne," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 6 (1960), 179-190. See also *Essays*, pp. 48-52, and *Letters*, esp. pp. 28-30.
 20. Donne echoes Sidney's view that the history of love poetry reverses the imagery of the Song of Songs. See *An Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. J. Churton Collins (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), pp. 10, 31-2, 56-7.
 21. See Grierson, vol. 2, pp. 9-10, and cf. Dame Helen Gardner, ed. *The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).
 22. A. E. Barker, "An Apology for the Study of Renaissance Poetry," pp. 38-40, makes this application to Donne and others.
 23. That Donne's "brilliantly cynical" poems are variously ironic or jesting has been widely recognized at least since J. B. Leishman's *The Monarch of Wit* (1951; 5th ed. London: Hutchinson, 1962), but their specific satiric intention has only recently been convincingly demonstrated. See Sherwood, *Fulfilling the Circle*, pp. 24-25 and 72-75, who notes "the breadth and frequency of Donne's attacks on naturalism" as a serious danger to traditional values (p. 75). See also the discussion of Donne's *Satires* above and the references cited there.
 24. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 119. See Carl Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 343: "The sun is the image of God . . . as gold is the sun's image in the earth." See *Sermons*, VI, 231 for Donne's application of "centricall Gold" to the "Essential Goodnesse" of God. For the circle as a figure of infinity, perfection, and God, see V, 271; IV, 51-2; and VI, 173. See

- also VIII, 336: "Though God be seen in a weed, in a worm, yet he is seen more clearly in the Sun" (an image fusing gold and circle).
25. See Margaret Schlauch, "The Marital Dilemma in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*," *PMLA*, 61 (1946), 416-30.
 26. Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia*, Ch. 5.
 27. See Raman Selden, "John Donne's 'Incarnational Conviction,'" *Critical Quarterly*, 17 (1975), 55-73.
 28. "Recent Studies in the English Renaissance," *SEL*, 1 (1961), 140.
 29. For these implications of "leaf-gold" see *Sermons*, VIII, 240; VI, 57; VII, 403; V, 124; III, 148. For discussion of the circle imagery, see John Freccero, "Donne's Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," *ELH*, 30 (1963), 335-376. For further discussion see L. A. Mann, "'The Extasie' and 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning': Body and Soul in Donne," in *Familiar Colloquy*, ed. Patricia Bruckmann (Ottawa: Oberon, 1978), pp. 68-80. For the application of cyclical patterns to marriage, see A. Kent Heatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of the Numbers in Spenser's "Epithalamion"* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960; rpt. 1972).
 30. For details see Mann, "Donne's Doctrine of Marriage," pp. 416-55.
 31. For the religious poems see Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1962) and Dame Helen Gardner, ed. *The Divine Poems*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). See especially Sherwood, pp. 143-57, and studies cited there.
 32. See *Sermons*, I, 243; II, 132; X, 196; I, 241-2; VII, 390-1; VIII, 82-3; IV, 228; VII, 270-1; IV, 331; VII, 55. The Augustinian point is made distinctly at III, 303. For Augustine see, for example, *Confessions* VII, 17; *De civ. Dei* XIX, 27; *In Evang. In.*, tract. XXIII, 5. See also Nygren, esp. pt. 2, pp. 449 ff.
 33. For biblical sources of the image of stream and fountain, see *Sermons*, X, 306. Donne writes of the "East, the Fountaine of light, and of Life" (IX, 50); he especially associated the East with Christ (VI, 59). Both Greek and Latin Fathers use the metaphors of light from the sun and the stream flowing from its source to explain God the Father's generation of the Son. Tertullian, one of Donne's favoured sources, uses the same images and adds another from a tree and its roots. He explains that although they are all properly called two things, yet they are indivisible and inseparable. He also explains the principle of subordination as follows: "Everything which proceeds from something else must needs be second to that from which it proceeds, without being on that account separated" (*Against Praxeas*, 8). (Patristic references are from William B. Hunter, Jr., "Holy Light in 'Paradise Lost,'" *RIP*, 46 [1960], 9-11.) Donne uses these metaphors with the same set of implications but applied to human love. See *Sermons*, VIII, 224: ". . . God . . . is the roote and the fountaine of all being."