

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF JOHN DONNE

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THE CRUCIAL role played by analogy and image in religious discourse is, of course, widely acknowledged, and it is also a commonplace of contemporary publicists that theology is strongly influenced by the social context in which it is written. The connection between these two assertions is the fact that the analogies and images used in the language of religion are frequently drawn from social experience directly or are borrowed from social and political rhetoric. While it is true, on the one hand, that this is not the only way religious formulations are influenced by historical factors and, on the other, that these analogies and images are not always derived from social or political experience, it nevertheless appears to be the case that some of the most widely used images of God and analogies of divine action are social or more specifically political in their primary reference.¹ In view of this fact, there is a surprising lack of detailed studies of the way in which these images and analogies have operated in the development of Christian doctrine.

In this article² I wish to consider how these analogies and images, drawn in part from contemporary social and political experience, were employed in the religious discourse of John Donne. I do not, of course, attempt anything like a systematic account of his religious beliefs;³ rather I shall suggest that the political analogy, which sees the king in relation to his realm as analogical to God in His relationship to the universe, and the closely connected but distinct social image of God the Holy Trinity as a model for the life of the nation, play a central and unifying role in

¹ See David Nicholls, "Images of God and the State," *TS* 42 (1981) 195–215; and "Divine Analogy: The Theological Politics of John Donne," *Political Studies* 32 (1984) 570–80.

² Abbreviations of Donne's principal works quoted in the text are as follows: B: *Biathanatos* (London: John Dawson, 1646); D: *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1959); E: *Essays in Divinity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1952); PSM: *Pseudo-Martyr* (London: Walter Burre, 1610); S: G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, eds., *The Sermons of John Donne*, 10 vols. (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1953–62). The spelling and certain typographical features of the original text have been modernized. I am grateful to the late Helen Gardner for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article; it will appear as a chapter in my forthcoming book *Deity and Domination 2: Divine Analogy and Political Rhetoric in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1989).

³ See Itrat Husain, *The Dogmatic and Mystical Theology of John Donne* (London: SPCK, 1938), and E. M. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948).

the theology of Donne, giving it more coherence than is generally perceived. I do not deal directly here with his political theory, which I have briefly discussed elsewhere, but am concerned rather with the way in which the political and social structures of England, and Donne's conceptualising of these structures, influenced his theological imagery, language, and thought, particularly in his sermons.

DONNE'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

John Donne was born in 1572⁴ and brought up as a Roman Catholic at a time when recusants were harried and persecuted as traitors. His mother belonged to the family of Thomas More, his maternal uncle was a Jesuit, and his brother died in gaol, having been arrested for harbouring a priest. He studied at Oxford and then possibly at Cambridge. In 1592 he became a law student at Lincoln's Inn and later secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, whose niece he secretly married in 1601. Being disowned by her family, the couple lived in poverty for some time. Much of Donne's love poetry belongs to the period prior to his marriage, but he continued to write religious and secular verse and also composed four prose works: *Pseudo-Martyr*, a work designed to encourage Roman Catholics to take the oath of allegiance to James I; *Ignatius His Conclave*, a satirical attack on the Jesuits; *Biathanatos*, a casuistical discussion of suicide; and the *Essays in Divinity*. The latter two were first published posthumously. Having some years earlier renounced his allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, Donne was ordained in the Church of England in 1615. As reader in divinity at Lincoln's Inn and later as dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, he became perhaps the most celebrated preacher of his day. In addition to various collections of sermons, his other works include *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, written after a serious illness. He died in 1631.

Scripture, as interpreted by the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine, is the principal authority to which Donne appealed. Other authors to whose writings on the Christian faith he turned include medieval canon lawyers and theologians (among whom Aquinas has a special place) and Continental Protestants such as Calvin, Beza, and Peter Martyr. While it is true that the frame of Donne's thought can in general be called "medieval," he was in many respects influenced by Renaissance

⁴ For details of the life of Donne, see R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).

philosophy and contemporary scientific theory.⁵

Donne's theology, like that of John Henry Newman, is principally to be found in sermons and in occasional essays and poems rather than being expounded in systematic form; this explains in part why his contribution to Anglican theology has been largely unappreciated. As a devotional writer, in verse and prose, his reputation is assured, but in studies of the development of 17th-century theology he has practically been ignored. In an article on Donne's religious development, John Sparrow wrote of the way that devotion, "as opposed to speculative theology," played an increasingly important part in his life and thought as he grew older.⁶ Furthermore, the sermons have too often been read in a search for purple passages (or "golden words") rather than for the exposition of Christian faith which they contain. One writer on Donne's preaching promises that whoever perseveres in reading the sermons "will be rewarded with finding passages of the noblest eloquence ever heard from an English pulpit."⁷ Such a reading of Donne's sermons is sure to miss the point of preaching and has resulted in the unfortunate practice of reprinting snippets of sermons in selections of his work. Even T. S. Eliot failed to perceive his theological significance. Referring to his religious ideas as "a vast jumble of incoherent erudition on which he drew for purely poetic effects," he asserts that Donne "merely picked up, like a magpie, various shining fragments of ideas as they struck his eye."⁸

A more important reason for the neglect of Donne's theology is that its tenor is uncongenial to those English theologians who, over the past 150 years, have created "Anglican theology." His religion—"clinging heaven by the hems"—offends those who insist upon pure motives,⁹ and his overwhelming sense of sin, leading him to the brink of despair, as John Carey has well illustrated,¹⁰ is a far cry from that optimistic

⁵ See M. P. Ramsay, *Les doctrines médiévales chez Donne* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1916); L. I. Brevold, "The Religious Thought of Donne in Relation to Medieval and Later Traditions," in O. J. Campbell et al., *Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne* (New York: Macmillan, 1925); and C. M. Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1937).

⁶ J. Sparrow, "Donne's Religious Development," *Theology* 22 (1931) 153.

⁷ F. E. Hutchinson, "Donne the Preacher," *Theology* 22 (1931) 156. In his book *The Spirit of Anglicanism* (London: Black, 1965) H. R. McAdoo hardly mentions Donne and there is only one excerpt (on hell) from his sermons in the compendium on *Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1935) edited by P. E. More and F. L. Cross.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1972) 138-39.

⁹ "About Donne there hangs the shadow of the impure motive" (*ibid.* 345).

¹⁰ John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London, Faber, 1983) 52 f. Here as elsewhere in the book Carey somewhat oversimplifies the contrast between "Catholic" and "Protestant" positions. "The early seventeenth-century Protestant," we are told, "did not believe that the Church or the sacraments could confer grace" (*ibid.* 56). Is it being

“incarnationalism” which frequently passes for Anglicanism. This tragic sense of being lost or deserted by God, an anxiety about one’s own salvation, is not, however, as Carey believes, something characteristically Protestant but is to be found in much Catholic devotional literature. In Donne’s case it led to a strong emphasis upon the Fall and upon the need for salvation. His theology, as Coleridge noted,¹¹ is a theology of the cross. Donne’s religion, and the theology that went with it, is altogether too extravagant for those who like to make a judicious selection of learned divines from Hooker, through Andrews and Taylor, to Maurice, Gore, and Temple, as exemplifying “Anglican” theology. On the other hand, his firm insistence on the Catholic nature of the Church of England and his hostility towards Puritanism alienated him from the evangelical tradition. Neither the Parker Society nor the editors of the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology saw fit to include his works in their series. “Why,” demanded Coleridge, “are not Donne’s volumes of sermons reprinted at Oxford?”¹²

A third reason why Donne’s contribution to the development of theology has not been taken seriously is that he has generally been consigned to the field of “Eng. Lit.” In Oxford’s Bodleian Library, for example, his *Sermons* are to be found not in the theology reading room but with English literature. Those who have written about Donne’s religion have rarely been theologians and have generally failed to note the significance of the specifically theological aspects of his work.

Donne was ordained into the priesthood of a church which was beginning to question the hegemony of Calvinistic theology. With bishops like John Overall, Lancelot Andrewes, and Richard Neile, England saw a reaction against a narrow and scholastic form of Reformed dogma—particularly on the interpretation of predestination—and the re-emergence of a more Catholic understanding of the Christian faith. Although the Elizabethan bishops and other vocal elements in the church had, almost to a man, adopted some variety of Reformed teaching, it is likely that the queen herself reflected the unease of many lay people and parish clergy. Although it may properly be said that the Elizabethan and Jacobean establishment was “unreservedly Protestant,”¹³ this is as much

suggested that Donne is a Protestant in this sense? Again, if Protestantism is a recipe for the spiritual “anguish” which Carey finds in Donne’s writing, how does he account for that absolute conviction on the part of many Puritans that they were of the elect, how does he explain the characteristically Protestant notion of “assurance”?

¹¹ *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Murray, 1836) 88.

¹² *Ibid.* 88. An edition of Donne’s sermons was later published in 1839, edited by H. Alford.

¹³ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) viii; see also

a political as a theological description.

To speak of the rise of Arminianism as a "revolution" and its leading proponents as "religious innovators"¹⁴ is therefore to misrepresent the situation and to assume more theological uniformity in the Elizabethan church than in fact obtained.¹⁵ It is undoubtedly true, as Nicholas Tyacke argues, that "Puritan" and "Anglican" cannot clearly be distinguished at this period, but this is because the Church of England has always contained different theological tendencies, none of which can properly claim to be exclusively Anglican. What has been peculiarly Anglican has been a conception of church government which permits a considerable variety of theological traditions to exist side by side. The English so-called Arminians were more concerned to resist the imposition of a narrow and intolerant Calvinistic scholasticism than to impose some supposedly "Arminian" theological position on the church of their day.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to think that all predestinarians were Puritans or Calvinists, or that "predestination" was the distinguishing feature of Calvinism. In his "Learned Discourse of Justification," Richard Hooker clearly accepted a notion of predestination (as had St. Thomas Aquinas) but it would be misleading to call him a Calvinist *tout court* or a Puritan.¹⁶ Calvinism involved other elements, including some fairly definite ideas about church government. It is therefore no mystery that strict Calvinists were unhappy to find themselves in an episcopal church. To regard Donne as belonging to some kind of Arminian party would be to misconceive the situation. At the time of the Synod of Dort (1618–19), Donne clearly supported a moderate Calvinism, firmly rejecting the Arminianism of the Remonstrants on the one hand and the ultra-Calvinism of the "supralapsarians," like Gomarus, on the other. In later

D. D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill; Univ. of North Carolina, 1982) 4.

¹⁴ Nicholas Tyacke, "Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution," in Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1973) 132, 143; see also Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, 1590–1640* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1987). Tyacke supports this theory of Arminian innovation by referring to the practice of private confession before Communion, advocated by Overall and Andrewes, as "novel" ("Puritanism" 130). This is misleading, as private confession had been recommended in the most Protestant of publications, the second Prayer Book of Edward VI.

¹⁵ See the excellent article by Peter White, "The Rise of Arminianism Reconsidered," *Past and Present* 101 (1983) 34–54, and P. G. Lake, "Calvinism and the English Church," *ibid.* 114 (1987) 32–76.

¹⁶ W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *Studies in the Reformation: Luther to Hooker* (London: Athlone, 1980) 157, where he also points to the greater respect which Hooker has for human reason than is to be found in the leading Reformers.

sermons, as we shall see, he was somewhat critical of all ideas of a double predestination.¹⁷

A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Karl Rahner has lamented the way in which the doctrine of the Trinity has had remarkably little impact on the religious experience and thinking of Christians. "Christians," he writes, "for all their orthodox profession of faith in the Trinity, are almost just 'monotheist' in their actual religious existence."¹⁸ It would, he asserts, make very little real difference to the theology of most Christians if the doctrine of the Trinity were abolished. In the religious works of John Donne, however, we find an attempt to take Trinitarianism seriously as the central Christian doctrine in the light of which other aspects of the faith must be interpreted. The Trinity is, for Donne, the hub from which radiate the beliefs of the Church, finding in it their unity and coherence. It is central both to theology and to Christian devotion—in his own words, "Bones to philosophy, but milk to faith."¹⁹ Donne's Trinitarian vision of God is both supported by and itself supports a social and political theology based upon that political analogy and that social image referred to in the opening paragraph of this article. The doctrines of creation, sin, incarnation, atonement, ecclesiology, as well as the sacramental and devotional life of the Church, are held together by a conception of God as plurality in unity, illustrated by Donne's experience of living in what he called "a monarchy composed of monarchies" (S 3:80). Then again, his ideas of law and prerogative, political obligation and rebellion, the duties and responsibilities of the monarch, hierarchy, social justice, and the relations of church and state in a Christian commonwealth centre on a notion of political authority analogous to that exercised by God Himself. The appeal which the doctrine of the Trinity held for Donne is clearly related to his love of paradox, his taste for cultivating "disjunction and junction equally and at the same time,"²⁰ and his conviction that God is, for human reason, a mystery. We must now turn to a more detailed analysis of Donne's political theology.

A DIVINE MONARCH

Donne was, of course, an unrepentant monarchist. God had in His mind and purpose, declared the poet, an idea or model of all that He

¹⁷ On Donne's relationship to Calvinism at the time of the Synod of Dort, see Paul R. Sellin, *John Donne and "Calvinist" Views of Grace* (Amsterdam: Boekhandel, 1983).

¹⁸ Karl Rahner, "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise 'De Trinitate,'" *Theological Investigations* 4 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974) 79.

¹⁹ Helen Gardner, ed., *The Divine Poems of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 17.

²⁰ Carey, *John Donne* 262.

would create, "but of monarchy, of kingdom, God who is but one, is the *idea*; God himself in his unity, is the model, he is the type of *monarchy*." "All governments," he continued, "may justly represent God to me, who is the God of order, and fountain of all government, but yet I am more eased, and more accustomed to the contemplation of heaven . . . as heaven is a kingdom, by having been born and bred in a monarchy: God is a type of that, and that is a type of heaven" (S 4:240-41).

Donne compared a polytheism which "broke God in pieces, and crumbled and scattered God into as many several gods as there are powers in God" to the "cantonising" of "a glorious monarchy into petty states, that could not subsist of themselves, nor assist another" (S 3:262). As we shall see, Donne rejected tyranny, but anarchy for him was even worse: "As in civil government . . . a hard king is better than none, so when we consider religions, idolatry is better than atheism" (S 9:145, cf. 7:431). The fool who says in his heart "there is no God" is also likely to say "I would that there were no king" (S 4:252). The devil first leads people to disobey their parents and their immediate superiors, "first to think it liberty to be under no governor, and then, liberty to be under no God" (S 7:407). In a period of civil tumult it is natural that some form of order, even if tyrannical, be preferred to chaos; this tendency reaches its apotheosis in the work of Thomas Hobbes. It is interesting to compare the ideas of Isaac Newton, who wrote in a somewhat more settled political atmosphere. He believed atheism to be less dangerous than idolatry.²¹

Donne was sceptical about the power of reason and particularly in his early writings urged the value of doubt:

doubt wisely; in strange way
to stand enquiring right, is not to stray;
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go.²²

There is, however, no contradiction between scepticism and authoritarianism; in fact, the two frequently go together. Doubts about the reliability of reason often encourage people to search for political and religious security in authoritative institutions or customs. In his sermon commonly entitled "Death's Duel," Donne reminded his congregation that "the mysteries of our religion are not the objects of our reason, but by faith we rest on God's decree and purpose" (S 10:237).

²¹ Isaac Newton, "A Short Scheme of the True Religion," in H. McLachlan, ed., *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ., 1950) 48 f.

²² "Satyre III," in J. Hayward, ed., *John Donne: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (London: Nonesuch, 1942) 129.

OMNIPOTENCE, ARBITRARY POWER, AND TYRANNY

As Donne believed in the unity of God, so he asserted the omnipotence of the Deity. "Power" is God's first name in the Bible and is "the name which he sticks to in all the work of the creation" (S 6:107). Two of the three principal Old Testament names for God signify absolute power: Elohim and Adonai. Conceived of under the latter name, "the Lord may give and take, quicken and kill, build and throw down, where and whom he will" (S 7:66, cf. 8:128). This aspect of Donne's thinking is sketched with a shudder of horror by the 20th-century critic, whose god has become a benevolent grandmother and whose heaven is little more than a family reunion. Yet Donne also warned against the ideas of naked power and omnipotence; it is "the sanctuary of heretics." God is almighty and is the embodiment of power, yet it is "a power digested into a will" (S 8:250). It would be a great mistake to ground the resurrection of Christ on the mere power of God; it must be seen as a consequence of His loving will which has been revealed to us (S 4:357). God does not do all He can do, and in the earlier *Essays in Divinity* Donne reminded his readers that "God hath not, or is not, such an Omnipotence, as can do all things" (E 79); He cannot do what is impossible or what is contrary to His nature. Nevertheless, Donne clearly recognized power as one of the principal attributes of God and would have had little sympathy with latter-day ideas of a powerless God. He saw power as a particular characteristic of God the Father (S 10:231) but also wrote of the "absolute power" of Christ (S 2:189).

Although Donne recognised a certain unpredictable aspect to the dominion exercised both by God and by the earthly sovereign, and was in this respect an apologist of absolute government, he rejected the model of arbitrary and unlimited power which was assumed by some of his contemporaries and which became increasingly popular as the 17th century proceeded. As insecurity increased in England and as civil war became imminent, the claims to unquestioning obedience became more strident, as did insistence on the monolithic nature of authority. Donne was firm in his rejection of tyranny both with respect to divine and to human systems of domination. God's kingdom, he insisted, is "a kingdom and *no more* not a *tyranny*." We have a "God that governs us by his *word*, for in his word is truth, and by his *law*, for in his law is clearness" (S 3:125-56, cf. 2:180). God is, indeed, to be feared as a sovereign (S 3:284), but in God we find "a reverential, a majestic, not a tyrannical terribleness" (S 8:124). Despite the positivism of the Late Middle Ages and of the Reformation period, a strong tradition had continued into the 17th century which insisted that law is something other than the dictate of a sovereign, whether human or divine. It was represented by Hooker

in the preceding century and had clearly influenced the thinking of Donne. It was to receive new life in the writings of Leibnitz.

PLURALITY IN THE GODHEAD

Donne also assailed the idea that political and divine authority must be seen as monolithic and undifferentiated. There is, he maintained, a plurality both in heaven and on earth. "Blessedness consists not in any one thing, but in a harmony and consent of many" (S 3:78). Donne saw the Old Testament and other Jewish writings, the theology of Platonic philosophers and even the Koran, as witnessing to a trinitarianism in God despite their frequent and explicit denials of divine plurality (S 3:264). He employed the social image of God to illustrate his faith; the state to which the Englishman belonged was a plural state. So "there is," he wrote,

not only an onely God in heaven; but a Father, a Son and a Holy Ghost in that God; which are names of a plurality, and sociable relations, conversable notions. There is not only one angel, a Gabriel; but *to thee all angels cry aloud*; and cherubim and seraphim are plural terminations; many cherubs, many seraphs in heaven. There is not only one monarcal apostle, a Peter, but *the glorious company of the apostles praise thee* (S 8:371).

While God ever loves unity, "he never loved singularity." Although alone in heaven, He was never singular (S 5:113). This notion of God alone in heaven raises the question of Donne's view of saints and angels, to which we shall return. Here I wish to explore further the Trinitarian theology which underlies his religious writing.

The Trinity is "the first foundation" (S 6:142), it is the "soul of our religion," yet, the preacher laments, "who amongst us thinks of the Trinity, considers the Trinity?" (S 9:53-54). The incarnate Christ is, indeed, the supreme revelation of God to man, but Christianity is not Christocentric, "it is not limited, not determined, in Christ alone; we are not baptized in his name alone, but our study must be the whole Trinity" (S 6:139). The fact that Donne continually returned to Christ as revealer and as saviour should not blind us to his basic Trinitarianism. But how did the preacher see the Trinity coming to life in the thinking and devotion of the Christian?

In the first place, Donne insisted that each "person" of the Trinity has a different role in the economy of human salvation. With Augustine, Donne saw the image of the Trinity reflected in the three faculties of the human soul (S 9:83), but more significantly it is mirrored in the structure of the Christian commonwealth. The power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the goodness of the Holy Spirit ought to be found respectively in the magistrate, the council, and the clergy (S 9:85). Or, as he

put it on another occasion, as God is three persons, He has correspondingly three kingdoms: of power, glory, and grace. So human sins which challenge the power of God are sins against the Father, those which offend the wisdom of God are sins against the Son, those which reject the goodness and love of God are against the Holy Spirit (S 5:88).²³ In his discussion of sin Donne frequently called upon the political analogy. Sin is a wounding of the "majesty" of God (S 2:192), it is "treason against God" (S 2:314). In a sermon of a later date, however, he pictured sin rather as "disorder, discord, confusion" against the harmony and law established by God (S 7:231). As Itrat Husain has pointed out,²⁴ the fact that Donne adhered to the classical notion of evil and sin as privation of being by no means implies a failure to take sin seriously. There is thus no contradiction between his theological position on this matter and that deep consciousness of the power and reality of sin which is a feature of his religious verse and devotional prose.

INCARNATION, ATONEMENT, AND TRINITY

Much Anglican theology, particularly as exemplified in the Caroline divines, is strongly "incarnational" in the sense of seeing the incarnation of the divine Word as the central Christian truth, in the light of which the whole gospel is interpreted. That is not the case with Donne. Although he of course believed and asserted the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation, he was more concerned with soteriology, in a Trinitarian perspective, than with Christology. He thought of Jesus first and foremost as saviour and, as we shall see, understood the Church and the sacraments less as extensions of the Incarnation than as realizing and applying the saving work of Christ in the world.

Donne held a "monarchical" conception of the role of the Father in the life of the Trinity. The Father is "*principium*, the root of all, independent, not proceeding from any other, as both the other persons do" (S 3:327). Richard Hooker had earlier affirmed that "the Father alone is originally that Deity which Christ originally is not." He was attacked by Calvinists for this assertion of the primacy of the Father, which was but a return to the ideas of many patristic writers. Much of the so-called "Arianism" of 17th-century Anglicans like Samuel Clarke was simply a reaction against a false conception of the Trinity.²⁵ It is interesting to note that Donne's belief in the asymmetry of the divine persons with respect to

²³ Donne referred to the Holy Spirit as manifesting the love, goodness, grace, and "consolation" of God in different sermons.

²⁴ Itrat Husain, *Dogmatic and Mystical Theology* 87 f.

²⁵ Cf. A. Louth, "Manhood into God," in K. Leech and R. Williams, eds, *Essays Catholic and Radical* (London: Bowerdean, 1983) 76.

dependence did not lead him to doubt their equality. Unlike Schleiermacher—who argued against a real distinction between the persons on the ground that it would involve a dependence of the Son and the Spirit on the Father, which would imply an inequality—Donne did not assume autarky as an aspect of divine perfection.

The Father gives His very essence to the Son, but it is the Son and not the Father who became man. What God says in general, “my honour will I give to no man,” applies even to the incarnate Son; the honour that is due to God must not be given to the humanity of Christ Jesus (S 4:314–15). The Incarnation is thus a witness to the humility of the Son. To illustrate the nature and significance of the Incarnation, seen in “kenotic” terms, Donne resorted to the political analogy. “A king,” he declared, “does not diminish himself so much, by taking an inferior person into his bosom at court, as he should do by going to live with that person in the country or city; and this God did in the Incarnation of his Son” (S 3:96). Incidentally, he used the analogy the other way round, when he pointed to the humility of Jesus, recorded in the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel (in his withdrawing when the Jews wished to make him a king), as a model for the way that earthly rulers should withdraw from unjust and unnecessary wars (S 4:187–88). During his sickness of 1623, King Charles sent his personal physician to attend the ailing dean. This led him to meditate on the fragility and mortality of kings. “Their deity,” he mused, “is better expressed in their humility than in their height; when abounding and overflowing, as God, in means of doing good, they descend, as God, to a communication of their abundances with men according to their necessities, then they are gods” (D 51). The poet is here following a medieval tradition which saw the humility of Christ as a model for the earthly ruler, who, in the words of Enea Silvio, as “head of the mystical body of the respublica, is held to sacrifice his life whenever the commonweal demands it.”²⁶

The atonement was seen by Donne in a Trinitarian context. The redemption of mankind involved a development in the Godhead. “Even to God himself,” he told the congregation of St Paul’s Cathedral on Christmas Day 1622, “there was required something else than God, before we could be redeemed; there was a fulness to be added to God, for this work, to make it *omnem plenitudinem*, for Christ was God before; there was that fulness; but God was not Christ before; there lacked that fulness” (S 4:288). The preacher was, however, careful to guard against the suggestion that God was in some way constrained to act in the way He did. While Donne insisted that all “persons” of the Trinity were involved,

²⁶ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1981) 261.

the work of salvation was from the standpoint of merit the work of the Son:

Christ was sole and alone, no Father, no Holy Ghost trod the wine-press with him; and if in the work of our salvation we consider the mercy, there, though Christ were not sole and alone (for that mercy in the decree was the joint act of the whole Trinity) yet even in that, Christ was equal to the Father and the Holy Ghost. So he is *salutificator*, the very author of this salvation, as that when it came to the act he, and not they, died for us; and when it was in council he, as well as they and as soon as they, decreed it for us (S 5:379).

The mercy of the Father is shown in His willingness to accept any satisfaction for our sins, the work of the Holy Ghost is seen in the application to us of the Father's mercy and the fruits of the Son's sacrifice. Without the work of the Spirit "we are as far from Christ's love now, as we were from the Father's before Christ suffered. But the unexpressible and inconceivable love of Christ is in this, that there was in him a willingness, a propenseness, a forwardness, to give himself to make this great peace and reconciliation between God and man" (S 5:122). We shall consider in due course the peculiar role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation.

As in the New Testament itself, there is no single coherent doctrine of atonement in the writings and sermons of Donne; different images and analogies are used to illustrate what he saw as a mystery. He insisted that redemption was achieved by the power, the justice, and the mercy of God: "mercy is his paradise and garden in which he descends to walk and converse with man: power his army and arsenal, by which he protects and overthrows: justice his exchequer, where he preserves his own dignity, and exacts our forfeitures" (E 86). Although His mercy may go beyond the requirements of justice, God never acts unjustly. At times, as implied above, the preacher thought of atonement in terms of the paying of a debt; he also drew on the analogy of royal pardon, particularly when considering the concept of election, why some respond in faith to God's call and others remain unmoved. "As princes give pardons by their own hands," he declared, "but send judges to execute justice, come to him for mercy in the acknowledgement of thy sins, and stay not till his justice come to thee" (S 4:150). The arbitrariness of royal favour is readily assumed by Donne. Which royal favourite, he asked, would question the liberality of his prince, by enquiring about the fairness or wisdom of his benevolent actions? (E 87).

Having rejected the idea of merit, as expounded by Cardinal Bellarmine, and insisting on God's free pardon, Donne had to face the problem of election. It is by faith and not by works that persons are saved, but God may use our good works in order to build up our faith (PSM 99).

The ultimate cause of our justification is the goodness of God; the material cause is the death of Christ; the instrumental cause, by which each person receives this benefit, is faith; works he calls the "declaratory" element. In the instrumental sense, "*fides justificat sola*, only faith do justify, yet it is not true in any sense, *fides est sola*, that there is any faith where there is nothing but faith." God comes downwards to us but, he continued in a somewhat un-Lutheran manner, we must also "go upward to God" (S 7:229).

Throughout his sermons Donne stressed the sufficiency of divine grace and the idea of election, rejecting all suggestions of Pelagianism or Socinianism. While he appears to have accepted the Synod of Dort's affirmation of a moderate Calvinism, he increasingly emphasised God's saving will for all humankind. Christ is the saviour of all: "He came to save all the world, and he did save all the world; God would have all men, and Christ did save all men. . . . Christ hath excommunicated no nation, no shire, no house, no man: he gives none of his ministers leave to say to any man, thou art not redeemed" (S 6:343-44). He made the same point in his celebrated Paul's Cross sermon of 1629 (S 9:119). So far as anyone is reconciled to God, it is through the work of Christ; "there is no other foundation but Christ, no other name for salvation but Jesus" (S 7:225, cf. S 4:298-99). With Augustine and other Church Fathers, however, he saw the salvation of Christ applying to those who lived before his incarnation, but it is always by faith, "by reaching the hand of faith forward to lay hold upon Christ before he came" (S 4:298).

MYSTERY AND MIRACLE

The doctrine of the Trinity, concerned as it is with the very being of God, was for Donne ultimately a mystery, "not to be chewed by reason, but to be swallowed by faith" (S 5:47).²⁷ As we have noted, he was sceptical about the powers of reason even in the natural sphere (S 7:260), and he was insistent that when it came to religious matters the wisest person will never comprehend, though even the simplest may believe (S 6:142). The "economy" of God's dealings with humans may be understood by divine revelation, but God has not revealed all there is to know about Himself. There are matters, such as the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist or the manner of his descent into hell, which ought not to be probed. Donne illustrated this with reference to his political analogy:

God gives audiences, and admits access in his solemn and public and out-rooms, in his ordinances; in his cabinet, in his bed-chamber, in his unrevealed purposes,

²⁷ Cf. Thomas Hobbes: "it is with the mysteries of our religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick; which swallowed whole, have the virtue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect" (*Leviathan* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1946] 242-43).

we must not press upon him. It was ill-taken in the Roman state, when men enquired in *arcana imperii*, the secrets of state, by what ways and means public businesses were carried: private men were to rest in the general effects, peace and protection and justice and the like and to enquire no more; but to enquire in *arcana domus*, what was done in the bed-chamber, was criminal, capital, inexcusable (S 5: 298, cf. S 9: 256).

Ernst Kantorowicz has traced how the idea of *arcana ecclesiae* was secularised and employed by James I and others as part of the vocabulary of absolutism.²⁸ Donne interestingly takes the civil use of the term for granted and applies it analogically to God. What should concern us here on earth is God's relations with us, rather than what He is in Himself. As Calvin had maintained, the duty of the theologian "is not to tickle the ear, but confirm the conscience."²⁹ Yet, despite Donne's insistence that "we are to consider God, not as he is in himself, but as he works upon us," he went on in the same sermon to speak of "the eternal generation, the eternal production, the eternal procession of the second person of the Trinity" and of the millions of generations when this Word never spoke (S 6:216). Like later writers who have insisted on "the principle of reserve" and on the regulatory nature of Christian revelation,³⁰ Donne appears to have believed that the restrictions imposed by these principles applied less to himself than to others, and he appealed to such principles only when it suited his purposes.

In his consideration of miracle and its relationship to the regularities of the created universe, Donne again drew on the political analogy. "Nature," he wrote, "is the common law by which God governs us, and miracle is his prerogative." God, he went on, is master of the whole created order and can change what he will, as can the king in his realm. Systems of social order are subject to change by superior authorities; the city magistrate can suspend the normal structure of family order for the greater good, and the higher official may change the civic order, but only the king can change all. So the individual can affect the normal course of nature and cause a stone to fly upward, and the physician can change more, and the devil more than he, "but only God can change all" (E 81). With Francis Bacon, Donne thought of miracles (and analogically of royal prerogative) as exceptions, rarely to be found. Bacon in fact argued

²⁸ Ernst Kantorowicz, *Selected Studies* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin, 1965) 381 f.

²⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1 (London: James Clarke, 1957) 144.

³⁰ The concept of "reserve" was adopted by a number of the Tractarian writers of the 1830s; see R. C. Selby, *The Principle of Reserve in the Writings of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 1975). A radical exposition of the idea that God's revelation is regulative rather than speculative is to be found in H. L. Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought* (Oxford: Murray, 1858).

against extensive use of the prerogative from the analogy of the rare occurrence of miracle.³¹ It might be thought that these ideas of royal prerogative are incompatible with what has been said about the general structure of law according to which God and the king govern their respective realms. Do not these ideas of miracle and prerogative imply that very tendency towards tyranny and arbitrary government which is assailed elsewhere? Bacon and Donne would not have said so, for the essence of their belief in prerogative is that it is the exception to a general law and depends upon that law for its justification. As Kantorowicz writes of another great English lawyer:

Bracton's method is always the same: exaltation through limitation, the limitation itself following from the king's exaltation, from his vicariate of God, which the king would jeopardize were he not limited and bound by the Law. This method may be called dialectical. It relies upon the logic that there cannot be a genuine "prerogative" on the one hand without submission to the Law on the other, and that a legal status above the Law could legitimately exist only if there existed also a legal status under the Law.³²

Though Donne's writings of the middle period of his life suggest an apprehension of cosmic and civic disorder, due to the "new philosophy" which called all in doubt:

'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone,
all just supply, and all relation,³³

in his mature thought, represented in the sermons, God is pictured as holding together a coherent universe: "The correspondence and relation of all parts of nature to one author, the concinnity and dependence of every piece and joint of this frame of the world, the admirable order, the immutable succession, the lively and certain generation. . ." (S 1:289-90). Nevertheless, he acknowledged, even in his earlier writings, a concept of nature, shared with Hooker and derived from medieval adaptations of Aristotle, "that the nature of every thing is the form by which it is constituted, and that to do against it, is to do against nature" (B 41). At times, however, he appears to have extended the realm of reason, "rectified reason, which is the law of nature," into the area even of divine revelation, so that he could assert that anyone who lives according to

³¹ Francis Bacon, *The Dignity and Advancement of Learning* 7:2 (*Works* 5 [London: Longman et al., 1858] 16). Donne, however, confused the issue when he went on to say that whatever God does becomes a part of nature, "so that truly nothing can be done against the order of nature" (E 82).

³² Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* 157-58.

³³ "An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary," in Hayward, ed., *John Donne* 202.

this law of reason is a Christian (S 4:119). There is, Donne therefore insisted, nothing particularly holy about ignorance; the apostles were not ignorant but were learned in the ways of God. Yet "all knowledge is ignorance, except it conduce to the knowledge of the Scriptures, and all the Scriptures lead us to Christ" (S 4:124).

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

The third "person" of the Holy Trinity is He who applies the redemptive work of Christ to the individual Christian in the Church. Having distinguished the eternal procession of the Spirit in the life of the Godhead from the sending of the Spirit in the temporal economy of salvation, Donne maintained that the principal concern of the Christian must be with the latter. The Holy Spirit "takes this man, upon whom the Father hath wrought by creation, and the Son included within his redemption, and he works in him a vocation, a justification and a sanctification" (S 6:128, cf. S 6:280).

The Holy Spirit works in the world most particularly though the Church, the body of Christ. The Spirit dwells in all the holy, but only in Christ does He dwell in all fulness. Yet this fulness is not completely expressed in the person of the historical Jesus. "Lest the cross of Christ should be evacuated, and made of none effect," he declared, "he came to make this fulness perfect by instituting and establishing a church. . . . So that this is Christ's fulness, that he is in a continual administration of his church" (S 4:289). It is interesting to note that Donne here does not speak of the Church as an extension of the Incarnation, as many Anglicans have done, but as a creation of the Holy Spirit in the context of the saving work of Christ. Ecclesiology is, for him, more closely related to soteriology than to Christology. It is as we are incorporated into the Church, "conform ourselves to her, grow up in her, hearken to his word in her, feed upon his sacraments in her, acknowledge a seal of reconciliation, by the absolution of the ministers in her" (S 6:340) that we share the life of Christ.

The two great Gospel sacraments, baptism and Eucharist, were also seen by Donne in a Trinitarian context and are related more particularly to the saving work of Christ. In baptism "we shall find restored in us the image of the whole Trinity, imprinted at our creation; for by this regeneration we are adopted by the Father in the blood of the Son by the sanctification of the Holy Ghost" (S 5:160). God is not, however, tied to the sacraments, though He is always present in them. Donne did not follow Augustine in his belief that an unbaptised person cannot be saved: "God forbid, for who shall shorten the arm of the Lord?" Yet such a person will lack "those graces, so sealed and so testified to them, as God

hath promised they should be in his sacraments" (S 5:163, cf. S 5:139). Baptism is a dying with Christ, so the whole of our life is a baptism. The Eucharist too is a sharing in the death of Christ and a true sacrifice:

The communion table is an altar; and in the sacrament there is a sacrifice. Not only a sacrifice of thanksgiving, common to all the congregation, but a sacrifice peculiar to the priest, though for the people. There he offers up to God the Father (that is, to the remembrance, to the contemplation of God the Father) the whole body of the merits of Christ Jesus, and begs of him, that in contemplation of that sacrifice so offered, of that body of his merits, he would vouchsafe to return and to apply those merits to that congregation. . . . the whole body of Christ's actions and passions we sacrifice, we represent, we offer to God (S 7:429-30).

In using terms like "altar" and "sacrifice" Donne was clearly taking his stand with Laud and the High Church movement against the Puritanism of Archbishop Abbott, which was strongly represented in the city of London. The notion of sacrifice involves our offering to God of the most perfect thing that we can; "no man," he observed, drawing on the political analogy, "would present a lame horse, a disordered clock, a torn book to the king" (S 2:244).

In the Eucharist Christ is truly and objectively present; "we believe the body of Christ to be in the sacrament," he insisted, "as literally, as really as they [Roman Catholics] do" (S 7:193). Yet it is only by faith that his presence is recognised, and "Christ is nearer us, when we behold him with the eyes of faith in Heaven, than when we seek him in a piece of bread, or in a sacramental box here" (S 7:139). As we have noted, for Donne the mode of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist is a mystery; those who deny this presence contradict Scripture, those who assign a particular manner to that presence "have no footing, no ground at all, no scripture to anchor upon" (S 7:296).

Donne's sermons are scriptural both in the sense that they draw explicitly upon biblical material throughout and in the sense that they recognise Scripture as the final authority in matters of doctrine. While it is negligence not to read a royal proclamation and contempt to deny it, "to deny the power from which it is derived is treason." So by not labouring to understand the Scriptures, we slight God, but "not to believe them is to give God the lie" (S 3:208). In line with the Anglican Reformers of his day, Donne insisted on interpreting Scripture in the context of church tradition. The Church echoes the voice of God which sounded forth in Scripture (S 6:223). "That which the church says, the scriptures say, for she is their word, they speak in her; they authorise her and she explicates them; the Spirit of God inanimates the scriptures and makes them his scriptures, the church actuates the scriptures and makes them our scriptures" (S 6:282). The Church is not a judge above the Scriptures,

but the Church determines which books are counted as Scripture and "what is the sense of the Holy Ghost in them" (S 8:228).

Donne maintained that the literal sense of Scripture should take precedence over other senses; "we have a rule," he declared, "... not to admit figurative senses in the interpretation of scriptures, where the literal sense may well stand" (S 7:193). Yet, as preacher and poet, he was well aware of the importance of types and images in religious discourse: "the literal sense of every place is the principal intention of the Holy Ghost in that place: and his principal intention in many places is to express things by allegories, by figures; so that in many places of scripture, a figurative sense is the literal sense" (S 6:62). Scripture, however, is concerned with salvation rather than with speculation and must always be read in the context of the devotional and worshiping life of the Church and the practical life of its members (S 2:308).

Among the most controversial issues of ecclesiology in the early 17th century was the role of the saints in Christian devotion and doctrine. We have noted on the one hand Donne's strong emphasis upon the social nature of God and on the other his insistence that God is a monarch who does not share His power with another. God, he wrote, "is a monarch alone, not a consul with a colleague" (S 4:144). While he criticised the tendency to "depopulate his country and leave him without subjects" (S 5:316) and acknowledged "the ministry and protection of angels . . . and the prayers of the saints in heaven for us," he went on: "Jehovah is the name of the whole Trinity, and there are no more, no queen-mother in heaven, no councillors in heaven in commission with the Trinity" (S 5:360). The saint is a fellow servant of God with us, "though his service lie above stairs and ours below" (S 5:108), and while we may hope for his prayers, we should not continually be resorting to the prayers of particular saints rather than to God Himself. "Why," he demanded, "should I pray to S. George for victory, when I may go to the Lord of Hosts, Almighty God himself; or consult with a sergeant or corporal when I may go to the general?" (S 4:311). He denounced contemporary Roman Catholics for not only challenging human monarchy but also for having "changed the Kingdom of Heaven into an oligarchy" (PSM 247; E 22), and he criticised their language about the Blessed Virgin. Commenting on such popular sayings as "God hath reserved to himself the court of justice, but given to his mother the court of mercy," Donne continued: "howsoever subtle men may distil out of them a wholesome sense, yet vulgarly and ordinarily they beget a belief, or at least a blind practice, derogatory to the majesty and monarchy of God" (PSM 248). These strictures must be seen as a consequence of Donne's Trinitarian theology: they should not be seen as conflicting with a real devotion to

the Blessed Virgin Mary and a lively belief in the communion of saints manifested throughout his life.

As her deeds were
Our helps, so are her prayers.³⁴

THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES

The Church, like God Himself, is "a plural thing" (S 6:152), composed of different dioceses and national groupings. Donne believed that its unity, like its holiness, was but imperfectly manifested on earth in the institutional churches.³⁵ The contrast between the Church as the body and the bride of Christ and the contemporary picture of ecclesiastical conflict and rivalry is reflected in one of his best-known poems:

Show me dear Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear.
What, is it she, which on the other shore
Goes richly painted? or which rob'd and tore
Laments in Germany and here?
Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year? . . .³⁶

This verse should not be taken as evidence for Donne's doubts about the Church of England or as indicating a lack of sincerity in his commitment to her ministry, but rather as pointing to a tragic contrast between the Church in its idea and in its concrete reality. Donne did not adopt in consequence the Lutheran concept of an invisible church but, following Hooker, saw the institutional churches as concrete and necessary, though always imperfect, embodiments of Christ's one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. He rejected the exclusive claims of Rome and the equally intolerant position of many Continental Reformers. The Church of England represented a mean between "a superfluous and cumbersome fatness" and "an uncomely and faint leanness and attenuation" (S 4:106). Those Continental Protestants, with their English disciples, who reject appeals to antiquity, "God leaves to themselves and they crumble into conventicles" (S 7:83).

Donne's defence of the Church of England was evidently related to patriotic sentiments that he shared with many Englishmen of his day. Henry VIII's declaration of ecclesiastical independence and the Elizabethan settlement were symbolic of this sense of national identity. The poet's reference to "England to whom we owe, what we be and have" in

³⁴ *Divine Poems* 18.

³⁵ On this aspect of Donne's thought, see D. Baker-Smith, "John Donne's Critique of True Religion," in A. J. Smith, ed., *John Donne: Essays in Celebration* (London: Methuen, 1972) 404-32.

³⁶ "Holy Sonnets," in *Divine Poems* 15. See Gardner's appendix C, on "The Interpretation of Donne's Sonnet on the Church," 121-27.

his verse letter to Mr. Christopher Brooks on the battle for Cadiz reflects this patriotism, and it is rather odd to find John Carey writing of it as an "unexpected patriotic effusion."³⁷ One of Donne's principal objections to an aping of Continental Protestant churches is that they were foreign, and he referred to Roman Catholics as those who "fix their dependencies upon foreign hopes" (S 7:427). Similarly, while he renounced certain doctrines and religious practices of the Roman Catholic Church, such as the idea of purgatory and the doctrine of transubstantiation, his chief complaint against Rome was the political claim made on her behalf, which he saw as undermining the idea of a Christian commonwealth. Donne was in fact a resolute Protestant in his defence of a national church against papal imperialism, which turns kings into mere deputies and guardians of sovereignty (PSM 359). Rome is "a horn above our head, and a foreign power above our native and natural power" (S 6:254). In *Pseudo-Martyr* Donne sketched the connection between Rome and treason: "It becomes not me to say, that the Roman religion begets treason; but I may say, that within one generation it degenerates into it; for if the temporal jurisdiction (which is the immediate parent of treason) be the child of the Roman faith and begot by it, treason is the grandchild" (PSM Pref. 27).

Yet in this treatise he had hoped to persuade Roman Catholics to take the oath of allegiance to James I, which had been instituted in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot. By 1625, however, he was convinced that the loyalty of many Roman Catholics could not be relied upon: "men born of us, and living with us and by us, are yet none of us, no subjects, owe no allegiance" (S 6:254, cf. 7:425). He held firmly to the idea of a Christian commonwealth, which had been stated in classic form by Richard Hooker, as a development of one tradition in medieval political thought, reinforced by a new consciousness of nationality. "God hath made us," wrote Donne, "a little world of our own, this land; he hath given us heaven and earth, the truth of his Gospel, which is our earnest of heaven and the abundance of the earth, a fruitful land" (S 4:251). He celebrated the "light of the reformation" (S 4:98), referring to Roman Catholics as "the other side" and Reformers, like Calvin and Peter Martyr, as "our own men" (S 5:383). Donne saw the Church of England, then, as a national embodiment of the Catholic Church—in alliance with the Protestant churches of the Continent, but at the same time as an integral part of a Christian commonwealth, which took as its model the social life of the Trinity.

³⁷ Carey, *John Donne* 65.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that John Donne made a significant contribution to the development of 17th-century theology. His importance lies in the strong Trinitarian centre, illuminated by political analogy and social image. He also employed these analogies and images in a reverse direction, illustrating political structures and dynamics with reference to his conception of God. Many 16th- and 17th-century theorists, including Bodin, Hobbes, and James I himself, had used the idea of God—the absolute sovereign—as a model for political authority and as a legitimation of arbitrary government. Puritan parliamentarians, who accepted a similar idea of God, generally rejected the analogy. There is, they insisted, no analogy to be drawn between God and the king. God is an absolute sovereign and all men, including kings, are mere subjects of His.³⁸ Donne, however, took another line. Acknowledging a limited validity to the analogy between divine and human structures of authority, he at the same time challenged the notion of God as an arbitrary and tyrannical ruler. While Donne illustrated his Trinitarian theology with reference to his political experience, he also legitimated and at times criticised political structures and policies by appealing to the image of God as perfect community and to the analogy of God's government of the universe.

It is sometimes suggested that the theological positions taken by Donne were determined by an obsequious desire to ingratiate himself with the political powers of the moment.³⁹ This is, however, an oversimplification. Though not averse to flattering his patrons, and always careful not to overstep the limits of permitted dissent, Donne's relationship to the establishment was, in the words of David Norbrook, "not as single-mindedly careerist and sycophantic as is often assumed."⁴⁰ John Carey is properly offended by "the adulation of king and court which streamed from Donne's pulpit,"⁴¹ but it would also have been fair to mention the ways in which analogies of divine and political authority were used by the preacher to prescribe limits to royal absolutism.⁴²

In this article I have been considering how social image and political analogy have influenced the formulation of Donne's theology. Elsewhere

³⁸ David Nicholls, "Deity and Domination," *New Blackfriars* 66 no. 775 (January 1985) 21–23, and 66, no. 776 (February 1985) 76–81.

³⁹ Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne: Coterie Poet* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1986) 183 f.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to David Norbrook for allowing me to quote from his unpublished paper "The Monarchy of Wit and the Republic of Letters."

⁴¹ Carey, *John Donne* 115. See Nicholls, "Divine Analogy" 576–78.

⁴² Fairness, however, seems to be one of those "imaginative choices" or "arbitrary preferences"—which, according to Carey, constitute moral judgment (*John Donne* 14)—that he himself does not appear to have made.

I have dealt with the way in which Donne employs his concept of God to shed light on social and political life. In conclusion, let the poet have the last word. "God himself," he wrote in his *Devotions*,

would admit a figure of society, as there is a plurality of persons in God, though there be but one God; and all his external actions testify a love of society and communion. In heaven there are orders of angels and armies of martyrs, and in that house many mansions; in earth, families, cities, churches, colleges, all plural things; and lest either of these should not be company enough alone, there is an association of both, a communion of saints which makes the militant and triumphant church one parish (D 30-31).