

# **John Donne: Apostate Catholic, Visionary Anglican**

**Paul Oliver**

By way of introduction, the first third or so of my paper will be mainly biographical as I attempt to account for Donne's transition from good Catholic boy to leading spokesman in middle age for the Elizabethan settlement. (My reasons for saying 'Elizabethan settlement', even though James had been on the throne for more than a decade when Donne was ordained, will, I hope, become clear in due course.) The rest of my paper will be more ecclesiological and even a bit theological as I attempt to pin down the kind of Anglican that I believe Donne morphed into. My overarching theme is that the unusual trajectory of his life led him to espouse a very distinctive vision of Anglicanism.

I'd like to begin, however, by clarifying my use of two of the words in my title. Firstly, 'apostate'. The application of the notion of apostasy to Donne has proved surprisingly controversial (especially in the US, where his reputation is guarded by literary critics of a very conservative RC stamp). But 'deconversion', the term favoured by psychologists of religion to denote the process by which a person detaches him/herself from a religion or religious denomination, possibly but not necessarily to embrace another, implies, it seems to me, that there has been a conversion in the first place, which certainly wasn't the case with Donne or numerous others like him. The other term used in this connection, 'disaffiliation', is slightly less clinical-sounding but similarly problematic.<sup>1</sup> I persist in using 'apostate', therefore, in the sense canonised by Pope Benedict XIV in 1748 to designate someone who consciously abandoned the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholicism in favour of those of another denomination and thereby incurred the guilt, in the eyes of his ex-co-religionists, of committing the ultimate act of betrayal.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the word 'Anglican', which used to be regarded as a Victorian coinage and, therefore, anachronistic applied to the Elizabethan or Jacobean Church of England: in fact

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<sup>1</sup> See Heinz Streib, 'Deconversion', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles Farhadian; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 271-96.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XIV, *De synodo diœcesana libri tredecim* (2 vols; Rome: Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, 1806), ii, 192; cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone; 3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 88.

it looks very much as if the word was coined by none other than James Stuart himself, who in 1598 referred to ‘papistical and Anglican bishops’.<sup>3</sup> I apologise on his behalf for the slur but you need to bear in mind that he was trying to reassure the Presbyterian-minded Scots that he did not intend to foist a foreign model of episcopacy on them. (The Kirk had not yet succeeded in abolishing bishops.) So I make no apologies for using ‘Anglican’ either.

Here am I, then, being biographical—with the important caveat that I have of course had to be ruthlessly selective (time is short). When Donne was born, sometime in the first half of 1572, anyone who had predicted the way his life would unfold would have been very unpopular with his family, who were immensely, and understandably, proud of their Catholic lineage. As an adult (and an Anglican!) he boasted of having come from

such a stocke and race, as, I believe, no family, (which is not of farre larger extent, and greater branches,) hath endured and suffered more in their persons and fortunes, for obeying the Teachers of Romane Doctrine than it hath done.<sup>4</sup>

On his mother’s side he could claim descent from Thomas More. Donne mother’s uncle, Thomas Heywood, a secular priest, was executed for saying Mass in 1574. Her brothers, Donne’s uncles Ellis and Jasper Heywood, were both Jesuits. Jasper, who had escaped to the Continent after being expelled from fellowships at Merton and All Souls’, was appointed to run his order’s underground mission to England in 1581 and will have been at least an occasional visitor at the Donnes’ London home: Donne would write that he had his ‘first Breeding and Conversation with Men of a suppressed and afflicted Religion, accustomed to the despite of death’.<sup>5</sup> Jasper was finally captured in December 1583 and imprisoned in the Tower, where he was visited by William Weston, the priest appointed to succeed him, accompanied by Donne’s mother. Incredibly (in view of the risks it entailed), it would seem that on one occasion they decided to allay suspicion by taking with them the twelve- or thirteen-year-old Donne. He

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<sup>3</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: Writings on the Reformation* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 219.

<sup>4</sup> *John Donne: Pseudo-martyr* (ed. Anthony Raspa; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>5</sup> John Donne, *Biathanatos. A declaration of that paradoxe, or thesis, that Self-homicide is not so Naturally Sinne, that it may never be otherwise* (1648), 17.

later recalled having been present at ‘a Consultation of Jesuites in the Tower, in the late Queenes time’.<sup>6</sup> (We know, too, that as a boy he was also taken to the executions of condemned priests and watched other Catholic bystanders using the priests’ remains as the focus of their prayers to the new martyr-saints.)<sup>7</sup> Then, in May 1593 his younger brother Henry died of the plague in Newgate, having been imprisoned there for sheltering a young Jesuit in his rooms at Thavies Inn. Otherwise, Henry would have been executed, just as the priest was a few months later: the ‘Act against Jesuits and Seminary Priests’ passed in 1585 made it a capital offence for a Catholic priest to enter or remain in the country and for anyone to shelter or assist one.<sup>8</sup> No wonder Donne claimed that he had ‘beene ever kept awake in a meditation of Martyrdome’!<sup>9</sup>

At some stage in the early to mid-1590s Donne started to identify himself as an Anglican. One of the really frustrating things for his biographers and critics is that, despite the survival of a couple of hundred letters from his pen, mostly to close friends, he nowhere clarifies when exactly he abandoned the faith of his fathers. That said, his earliest extant letter dates from around August 1597, and it’s entirely possible that it was largely accomplished by then.<sup>10</sup> There may, of course, have been an interval of many months between his abandonment of Catholicism and espousal of Anglicanism. In the preface to *Pseudo-martyr*, Donne’s defence of the government line in the Oath of Allegiance controversy, published in 1610, he wrote that that there had indeed been a period when he had studied with an open mind ‘the whole body of Divinity, controverted betweene ours and the Romane Church’ before coming to a decision as to which was the true church.<sup>11</sup> We need, though, to treat his account with some caution because one of his objectives in writing *Pseudo-martyr* was to gain royal favour, and it was bound to look better if he was able to give the impression that it was unprejudiced theological research rather than considerations of a personal nature that led him to the Church of England. Something we *do* know is

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<sup>6</sup> *Pseudo-martyr*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>8</sup> J. R. Tanner, *Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485-1603 with an historical commentary* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 155-6.

<sup>9</sup> *Pseudo-martyr*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> E. M. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 303-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Pseudo-martyr*, 13.

that in the winter of 1597-8 he went to work for Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper. As an ex-papist himself, Egerton would have had some sympathy with Donne. However, he had long since put it all behind him and developed a strong enthusiasm for evangelical Protestantism. In any case, as the holder of one of the highest offices of state, he could not have afforded to have a known recusant in his employ: if Donne secretly harboured any papistical tendencies at this time, he will have needed to put on a very good act to convince Egerton that his allegiance was now to the Church of England.

If Donne's remark about studying the differences between Roman and Reformed theology with an open mind is true, then he had already ceased to think like a Roman Catholic by the time he embarked on his period of theological research. If it is true, therefore, it tells us only that Donne apostatised, not why he did so. Nor do we come any closer to an explanation elsewhere in his surviving writings. For all the earnestness of its advice about how to find 'true religion', even his famous third satire 'On Religion', which dates from this period, doesn't allow us to deduce anything about Donne's own quest.<sup>12</sup> It may be a record of what he was doing at the time of its composition; it may record what he felt he ought to have done but didn't. We're ultimately left to speculate about his motivation. Perhaps the experience of persecution, which could easily have had the effect of reinforcing his devotion to the family religion had instead fuelled a late-onset adolescent rebellion against it. Perhaps, being intelligent, rational and, for his period, not especially credulous, he found himself unable to accept as an adult what he had been taught as a child:<sup>13</sup> in *Pseudo-martyr* he is scathing about the extrabiblical miracle stories Catholics were expected to believe.<sup>14</sup> Maybe a specific event such as his brother's death or the enactment of yet further anti-Catholic legislation in 1593 gave his Catholicism its deathblow.<sup>15</sup> It may, of course, have been all or none of these factors. Because we know so little about this aspect of Donne's life, we have no idea to what extent he followed what would seem to be the normal path of those who switch denomination, according to which dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the old object of allegiance give way to the

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<sup>12</sup> *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (ed. W. Milgate; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 10-14.

<sup>13</sup> John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (2nd ed.; London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 17, 19.

<sup>14</sup> For example, *Pseudo-martyr*, 000.

<sup>15</sup> Carey, *Life, Mind, Art*, 10-11; Tanner, *Documents*, 159-63.

convert's fervour for the new, coupled with a degree of disorientation.<sup>16</sup> In view of the pervasive nature of the Catholicism he had inherited and the fact that the rest of his family remained committed to it, we might well expect Donne to have felt disorientated—nostalgic even at times. The verse dating from the early to mid-1590s does, indeed, appear to reflect mixed feelings. Determining the nature of those feelings with any certainty is, however, impossible.<sup>17</sup>

When considering motivations for Donne's apostasy, we also need to factor in his unrelenting desire for high office in the form of a post at court or as a diplomat. There were plenty of lay recusants who managed to escape execution but none of them had the sort of career path that Donne had planned for himself. So his apostasy and the post of secretary to Egerton constituted early steps towards that goal. Fortunately for both the Church of England and the canon of English literature, he made the miscalculation of a lifetime in December 1601 by secretly marrying Lady Egerton's fifteen-year-old niece Ann More. When his indiscretion came to light, he was dismissed from Egerton's service and briefly imprisoned; his father-in-law instituted legal proceedings to challenge the validity of the marriage, but to no avail. Donne found himself at the age of thirty out of work, entirely without prospects, heavily in debt and with a wife to support. In the words of the epigram attributed to him by Izaak Walton, his first biographer, it was a case of 'John Donne, Ann Donne, Un-done', to which Walton added ruefully, 'and God knows it proved too true'.<sup>18</sup> For twelve years Donne was out in the cold, and he felt it keenly. Being a desperately miserable time, it was, of course, exceptionally fertile creatively: most of his religious verse and probably quite a lot of his secular verse as well as several of his prose works date from this period. But the (very considerable) effort he lavished on chasing desirable appointments, such as that of English ambassador to Venice for which he petitioned in March 1614,<sup>19</sup> was all wasted. Even the well-placed men and women whom he had identified as potential advocates on

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Compare, for example, Satire IV, ll. 1-4 with Satire V, ll. 63-8 (*Satires*, 14, 24).

<sup>18</sup> Izaak Walton, *The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert and Robert Sanderson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 29.

<sup>19</sup> R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 290-1.

his behalf with the king were powerless to help: James knew all about Donne's marriage and felt that it made him unfit for confidential employment.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, from 1610 the king played an intermittent but increasingly active role in Donne's life. We're told that when he read *Pseudo-martyr*, he 'descended to a persuasion, almost to a solicitation of him to enter into sacred Orders', promising that if its author would agree to be ordained, he would be pleased to advance his career.<sup>21</sup> (It was just as well that James did not know Donne's true opinion: in a letter to his close friend Sir Henry Goodyer in which Donne discusses the shortcomings of the official defence of the Oath, he claims that 'both sides may be in justice, and innocence'!)<sup>22</sup> It was not the first time that it had been suggested to Donne that he should seek ordination. One of the happier offshoots of this period was his intimacy with Thomas Morton, who will play a number of walk-on parts in the main body of my paper. A hugely respected and prolific anti-Roman controversialist, he may have employed Donne in the capacity of what would now be known as a research assistant. It was a job for which Donne had excellent credentials—and it's noticeable that many of Morton's anti-Roman works date from the period 1605 to 1610, the same period that produced Donne's *Pseudo-martyr* and his hilarious satire against the Jesuits, *Ignatius His Conclave*. But Morton, too, was all for Donne getting himself ordained: on his appointment as dean of Gloucester in 1606, he offered to make a lucrative living in his possession over to Donne by way of inducement.<sup>23</sup> The then royal favourite, James Hay, a handsome Scot who had accompanied James south on his accession, also did his best to persuade Donne to seek ordination (indeed, he would later claim to have been the first to do so).<sup>24</sup> But for all Donne's fascination with religion, the priesthood did not feature in his plans. For one thing, it was widely regarded as being beneath the dignity of a gentleman. A few years into his ministry, Donne wrote a verse letter to one Mr Tilman, who had just been ordained, congratulating him on having ignored 'Lay-scornings of the Ministry':

Let then the world thy calling disrespect,

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<sup>20</sup> Bald, *Life*, 160-2.

<sup>21</sup> Walton, *Lives*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> John Donne, *Letters to severall persons of honour* (1651), 160.

<sup>23</sup> Walton, *Lives*, 32-3.

<sup>24</sup> Bald, *Life*, 304.

But goe thou on, and pittie their neglect.<sup>25</sup>

It doesn't take long to work out that Donne was providing versified reassurance for himself as well as for the newly-ordained priest. Perhaps that was the poem's sole motive: it was a reply to one that Tilman had written expressing his sense of unworthiness for so high a calling, but there is nothing in Tilman's poem to indicate that its writer was remotely concerned about the world's attitude to the ministry.<sup>26</sup> In *his* poem Donne deals with the laity's lack of appreciation by extolling the role of the priest: 'What function is so noble', he asks, 'as to bee / Embassadour to God and destinie?'<sup>27</sup> But what Donne had really wanted to be was ambassador to Venice.

However much it offends our more enlightened notions of what makes a good candidate for ministry, when Donne entered the Church, he regarded it as his last chance of a stable career. In his final year as a layman, he was still seeking employment at court. But when he saw James in the late summer of 1614, the king continued to press him to enter holy orders. So, a month and a half before taking the fateful step, Donne rode up to Newmarket, where James was staying, to tell him of his plans and remind him of his promises to advance him.<sup>28</sup> James was evidently suitably reassuring—and proved as good as his word. Donne was ordained in January 1615 at the hands of the bishop of London, John King, who by a happy coincidence had been Egerton's domestic chaplain at the same time as Donne had been his secretary. A few weeks later Donne was ordered to attend James on a visit to Cambridge with a view to receiving the degree of doctor of divinity. By mid-April he had been made a royal chaplain, which meant that his exile from court was over for good. In the autumn of 1617, he was appointed Divinity Reader at Lincoln's Inn, one of his old stamping-grounds (he had been a student there at the time of his brother's death). Then in 1621 came the move to St Paul's.

Since he made a virtue of necessity by being ordained, there is, unsurprisingly, no evidence to support Walton's claim that Donne's ordination coincided with a conversion experience rivalling that

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<sup>25</sup> *John Donne: The Divine Poems* (ed. Helen Gardner; 2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 33.

<sup>26</sup> For a fuller account see P. M. Oliver, *Donne's Religious Writing: A Discourse of Feigned Devotion* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 198-202.

<sup>27</sup> *Divine Poems*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Bald, *Life*, 290-3.

of his favourite Father, St Augustine.<sup>29</sup> Acting on hints dropped by Donne, Walton did his best to impose an Augustinian conversion paradigm on Donne's life. But there was no conversion because there was no major spiritual or moral upheaval. At the same time, Donne's case would suggest that regarding the priesthood as a last resort is *not* in fact incompatible with being a suitable candidate for it. Paradoxically, he took his new life very seriously from the outset. On the very day of his ordination he wrote to his friend Sir Edward (later Lord) Herbert, the elder brother of the poet George Herbert, to share his mixed feelings of pride and unworthiness for the office to which he had been raised.<sup>30</sup> He had a new seal made in the form of a cross attached to an anchor to mark his ordination and wrote a Latin poem about it to the younger Herbert, also a friend.<sup>31</sup> If that sounds like a typically theatrical gesture on his part (this is, after all, the man who posed in his shroud for an artist only three weeks before his death), it nevertheless points to the same underlying reality as the letter to Edward Herbert, namely Donne's sense that some profound alteration has taken place in his life as a result of being, in the words of the poem, 'Adscitus domui Domini' (admitted to the house of the Lord), which suggests that he regarded ordination as a kind of second baptism. Moreover, having decided that the Church represented his only option for stable employment, he seems to have made a solemn contract with himself to be the best priest that he could be if (in line with his general ecclesiological outlook, about which more anon) we take 'priest' to mean ordained minister of the word and sacraments, especially the Word, for without in any way sidelining the sacraments, it was as a preacher that Donne consistently defined himself, using St Paul's half proud, half anguished cry *Vae mihi si non evangelizavero*, 'woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel' (1 Cor 9:16), which he uses in a variety of abbreviated forms, giving it the feel of a phrase to which he reckons he has ownership rights.<sup>32</sup> He saw preaching as a matter of spiritual life or death. He told the members of Lincoln's Inn:

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<sup>29</sup> Walton, *Lives*, 37-8; cf. Oliver, *Donne's Religious Writing*, 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> *John Donne: Selected Letters* (ed. P. M. Oliver; Manchester: Carcanet/New York: Routledge), 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Divine Poems*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> *The Sermons of John Donne* (ed. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson; 10 vols; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953-62); hereafter 'PS'), ii, 52, 164, 309, 350; iv, 195; vi, 93, 104; vii, 134; x, 126 etc.

howsoever God may afford salvation to some in all nations, yet he hath manifested to us no way of conveying salvation to them, but by the manifestation of Christ Jesus in his Ordinance of preaching.<sup>33</sup>

He makes the point even more strongly in the sermon he was commissioned to preach at Paul's Cross in September 1622 with a view, ironically, to justifying James's repressive *Directions to Preachers*: since preaching is '*Gods Ordinance, to beget Faith*' (he is using a favourite pun on ordinance/ordnance), 'to take away preaching, were to disarm *God*'.<sup>34</sup> As far as preaching is concerned, if we exclude the basic assertion that it is an 'ordinance' of God and/or the Church, the claim that it is 'the ordinance of God, *for the salvation of soules*' is the one that Donne makes with the greatest frequency.<sup>35</sup> One of the earliest English Protestants, Hugh Latimer, had voiced this perception with wonderful concision when preaching before Edward VI in 1549, six years before being martyred in The Broad: 'take away preaching, and take away salvation.'<sup>36</sup> When it came to preaching, Donne's stance harked back to the heady early days of the English Reformation.

Having been brought up to believe that the Roman Catholic Church was the one true Church, there must have been a time when Donne had needed to satisfy himself that the Church of England was Catholic *as well as* reformed. But his remarks in a letter written in his mid- to late 30s to the effect that the Roman and Reformed (in the sense of non-Lutheran) Churches are 'sister teats of [God's] graces, yet both diseased and infected'<sup>37</sup> shows that he had resolved this issue well in advance of being ordained. Once he had been ordained, the more he was inclined, in public at least, to praise the Church of England's virtues and downplay any signs of disease or infection. He felt confident enough that it was both a true church and part of *the* true Church to be able to reassure his old patron James Hay and his household, in another sermon delivered in 1622, that they did not need to look abroad for something more authentic:

trouble not thy selfe to know the formes and fashions of forraine particular Churches; neither of a Church in the lake, nor a Church upon seven hils; but since God hath planted thee in a Church,

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<sup>33</sup> PS, v, 45.

<sup>34</sup> PS, iv, 195.

<sup>35</sup> PS, v, 258 (emphasis supplied). In addition to the examples quoted see PS, i, 294; ii, 170, 253-4; v, 45, 246, 253, 261; vi, 85-6, 93, 217, 264; vii, 127, 394, 400; viii, 42, 43, 47, 173, 310; x, 49, 53-4, 60.

<sup>36</sup> *Sermons by Hugh Latimer* (ed. G. E. Corrie; Cambridge, 1844), 155.

<sup>37</sup> *Letters*, 102; cf. 29.

where all things necessary for salvation are administred to thee, and where no erronious doctrine ... is affirmed and held, that is the Hill, and that is the Catholique Church.<sup>38</sup>

For Donne, the Reformation was not an event that took place across the English Channel, as it had been to some extent for Hooker and certainly was for Lancelot Andrewes<sup>39</sup>—and even more so, of course, for William Laud. Donne took a deep pride in the Elizabethan settlement. We find him telling the newly crowned Charles and his court that our consolation here on earth is that God ‘reaches out his hand’ to all who come to him: ‘And nearer to him, and to the institutions of his Christ, can no Church, no not of the *Reformation*, be said to have come, then ours does’.<sup>40</sup> God must have been the inspiration for the reformed English Church, Donne had previously argued, because ‘we had not the model of any other Forreign Church for our pattern’. He spells out what he saw this as meaning in practice:

we stript not the Church into a nakedness, nor into rags; we divested her not of her possessions, nor of her Ceremonies, but received such a Reformation at home, by their hands whom God enlightned, as left her neither in a Dropsie, nor in a Consumption; neither in a superfluous and cumbersome fatness, nor in an uncomely and faint leanness and attenuation.<sup>41</sup>

Which brings us to the question of where exactly Donne sat on the Jacobean and early Caroline Anglican spectrum. In a book I wrote in the 1990s I identified him as someone who disdained factional labels and resolutely avoided party membership. I pointed out, as evidence of the inclusive nature of his understanding of the Church of England, that his bequests included both a medal commemorating the Synod of Dort, held in 1618-19 to debate the main tenets of Calvinist teaching, *and* pictures of saints, which were of course popular with the Arminians, (or Laudians or High Church party or ‘avant-garde conformists’, to use Peter Lake’s preferred term).<sup>42</sup> As the remark about how the English Reformation did not divest the Church ‘of her Ceremonies’ in the manner of the Continental churches demonstrates, Donne had a great respect for order and ceremonial in public worship, vitally important components of the Arminians’ liturgical programme—not because they were important to the Arminians but because

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<sup>38</sup> PS, v, 251; cf. vi, 284.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin, 2004), 510.

<sup>40</sup> PS, vii, 409. See also ii, 234; iii, 176; iv, 98, 133, 137; v, 294-5; viii, 38.

<sup>41</sup> PS, iv, 106-7; cf. Satire III, ll. 50-2 (Donne, *Satires*, 12).

<sup>42</sup> Oliver, *Donne's Religious Writing*, especially 3-5; Peter Lake, ‘Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge, and *Avant-Garde* Conformity at the Court of James I’, in Linda Levy Peck (ed.), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 113-33.

he saw them as major planks of the Elizabethan settlement, his enduring commitment to which was such that his sympathies lay far more with the Continental Reformed tradition that helped to shape that settlement than with the thinking of those who were critical of it in the reigns of Elizabeth's two successors. Of course, by 'ceremonies' Donne meant only those established by the Prayer Book: the Arminians strove for the reintroduction of many that were not. The apogee of their campaign in the form of the painted hangings, sumptuous vestments and elaborately choreographed ritual fleetingly glimpsed through the dense smoke in the chapel of Peterhouse would have confirmed for Donne, as it did for many others, that Arminianism led straight back to popery. (But then the Peterhouse style was too much even for Laud.)<sup>43</sup>

While seeming to imply that the Church of England's retention of bishops is one of the factors that counts in favour of its superiority, Donne doesn't call their absence from other churches a defect. He has no wish 'to disparage or draw in question' the arrangements of those churches, drawing on the conventional argument from necessity: '[t]hey did what was lawfull in a case of necessity', he says, 'but Almighty God preserved us from this necessity'.<sup>44</sup> (But, then, Richard Hooker was more relaxed on this head than his nineteenth-century admirers were comfortable with, although he did call the absence of bishops from Reformed churches a 'defect and imperfection' to be lamented.)<sup>45</sup> So if Donne believed that episcopacy was *iure divino*, it didn't cause him to unchurch those churches who lacked it or to declare their orders invalid, any more than it did James, who certainly believed episcopacy to be *iure divino*.<sup>46</sup> Donne had a very 'high' ecclesiology but he was no High Churchman. Having established to his own satisfaction that the Church of England was both a true church and part of the one true Church, he was not likely to fall in with the Arminians' campaign to reinvent it. The men with whom he would have aligned himself had he been a party man were evangelicals like Morton, King and Joseph Hall,

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<sup>43</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth-Century Essays* (London: Fontana, 1989), 83-5, 108.

<sup>44</sup> PS, x, 130. See also viii, 308.

<sup>45</sup> *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker* (ed. W. R. Speed Hill et al; 7 vols; vols i-v: Cambridge, MA and London: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press; vols vi-vii: Binghamton, NY and Temple, AZ: MRTS, 1977-94), i, 264. See also MacCulloch, *All Things Made New*, 287.

<sup>46</sup> Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 456. See also PS viii, 163, where Donne weighs the evidence for and against believing St Paul to have been a bishop.

another friend who was made a bishop—not that they were party men any more than Donne was.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, there is no indication that Donne was anything other than proud to possess the Dort commemorative medal. As the most representative gathering of the churches of the Reformation to date, the synod was bound to elicit his interest. Although long thought to have been an embodiment of the strictest sort of Calvinism, ‘more recent scholarship has emphasised the degree to which the canons [of Dort] represent a careful and judicious compromise, often surprisingly moderate in their doctrinal formulations’.<sup>48</sup> What’s more, the British delegation, in accordance with their royal mandate, exercised a significant moderating influence on the synod’s proceedings which is visible in its published canons.<sup>49</sup> I shall return to the Synod of Dort later. Suffice it to say at this stage that on both of the aforementioned counts Donne was able to show unfeigned enthusiasm for it. On 18 April 1626, preaching before Charles, he stuck his neck out and praised the ‘blessed sobriety’ with which the British delegates had ‘delivered their sentence’ and what he believed to be its complete concurrence with the teachings of Scripture.<sup>50</sup> This was in marked contrast to Lancelot Andrewes, who on one occasion belittled Dort by speaking mockingly of the lack of episcopal representation at the synod—despite the fact that the British delegation was led by George Carleton, the bishop of Llandaff, who played a major part both at the formal sessions and behind the scenes, all of which Andrewes knew.<sup>51</sup> Andrewes made his view of Calvinism’s famous Five Points plain enough when criticising those who think they ‘can tell you the number and the order of [God’s secret decrees] just, with 1, 2, 3, 4, 5’.<sup>52</sup> That was back in 1621. But by 1626 Charles will have been getting accustomed to adverse criticism of Dort.<sup>53</sup> How he reacted to Donne’s warm praise of the British contribution to it is not, alas, recorded.

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<sup>47</sup> On Morton’s and King’s churchmanship see Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), 253-65.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), xliii.

<sup>49</sup> For a summary of the contribution of the British delegates see Milton *Catholic and Reformed*, 418-22. On their moderating role see Milton 2005, xxxvi-ii.

<sup>50</sup> PS, vii, 127.

<sup>51</sup> Paul A. Welsby, *Lancelot Andrewes, 1555-1626* (London: SPCK, 1958), 170; Milton, *British Delegation*, xxxv, 193.

<sup>52</sup> *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes* (ed. J. P. Wilson and J. Bliss; 11 vols; Oxford, 1841-54), iii, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 429-30.

But Donne's relationship with Continental Protestantism was far from monolithic and in an attempt to characterise his stance as accurately as possible, I should like to focus for a few minutes on the sermon he delivered in June 1619 at Heidelberg, a city that was a pocket of Calvinism in a country otherwise largely split between Lutheran and Roman Catholic allegiances. He was travelling as chaplain to a diplomatic delegation led by James Hay, now Viscount Doncaster, sent by the king to mediate between Ferdinand II of Bohemia, Holy Roman Emperor-in-waiting, and his Protestant subjects following the rebellion in Prague the previous year over the curtailment of their freedom of worship—the event which started the Thirty Years' War.<sup>54</sup> Heidelberg being the capital of the Electoral Palatinate, the principal auditors of Donne's sermon were the Elector, Frederick V, who would shortly be crowned rival King of Bohemia, and his wife, James's daughter Elizabeth, both of whom were Calvinists by conviction as well as upbringing. Because Frederick was head of the German Protestant Union and Elizabeth was the daughter of the most powerful Reformed ruler in Europe, their wedding in London in 1613 had been seen on all sides as 'forging a pan-European Protestant alliance against popery', a glancing allusion to which can be seen in the sycophantic epithalamion Donne penned in honour of the occasion.<sup>55</sup>

Announcing his text as 'For now is our salvation nearer then when we believed' (Rom 13:11b), Donne used the opportunity afforded by the Heidelberg pulpit to address the nature of sacraments and ceremonies. He distances himself from the scholastic and Tridentine view of the sacraments as 'channels' of *grace*. They 'exhibit and convey' grace: the words of consecration spoken by the priest at the eucharist do not 'infuse nor imprint this grace, which we speak of, into that bread'. The sacrament does not work *ex opere operato*. On the contrary, 'whosoever receives this sacrament worthily, sees evidently an entrance, and a growth of grace in himself'. Donne approvingly cites Calvin in support of the view of grace which he is expounding and closely follows the account of the operation of the

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<sup>54</sup> On the Doncaster embassy see Bald, *Life*, chapter 13.

<sup>55</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 490; *Epithalamions*, 7 (ll. 39-40).

sacraments in Calvin's *Institutes* in which the reformer scorns the idea that they *convey* grace.<sup>56</sup> Earlier Donne had quoted Calvin on the importance of discernible *signs* of grace and alluded to his description of the sacraments as 'seals' of God's promises.<sup>57</sup> But in spite of the presence in the sermon of remarks which were likely to go down well with the whole of his congregation, the theology that locates the 'reall presence' of Christ 'in the worthie receiver of the sacrament' being as much the official doctrine of the Church of England as of its Continental counterparts<sup>58</sup> (as Hooker put it: 'The elements do not 'containe in them selves that grace which with them or by them it pleaseth God to bestowe'),<sup>59</sup> a number of considerations suggest that ingratiating himself with the Elector and the other non-Anglicans listening to him was not at the top of Donne's agenda. As so often when preaching at Whitehall, he demonstrated his independence as well as his awareness of his auditors' preferences. While Continental Reformed Protestants agreed with their English brethren about the pre-eminence of the dominical sacraments, they were suspicious of non-biblical ceremonies since they believed that all the essentials of worship were laid down in the New Testament.<sup>60</sup> Calvin himself particularly deplored the practice of placing 'any Ceremonies whatsoever, the offspring of human brains' on the same footing as 'those solemn mysteries in which the sum of our salvation is contained' (i.e., baptism and the eucharist celebrated with appropriate liturgical austerity).<sup>61</sup> And yet, following on from his discussion of God's gift to the Jews of the Mosaic Law and a system of 'outward religious worship' to further their salvation, Donne refers provocatively to the patristic habit of applying the term *sacrament* not merely to the sacraments but to 'other sacramental, and ritual and ceremonial things ordained by God in the voice of his Church' on the grounds that they 'advanc'd ... the working of grace'. He really could not be more explicit: 'they further salvation.'<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> PS, ii, 258; John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. Henry Beveridge; 2 vols; London: Clarke, 1953), ii, 503; cf. A. C. Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 281 (2nd Helvetic Confession). See also PS, vii, 267.

<sup>57</sup> PS, ii, 254-5; John Calvin, *In librum Psalmorum, Iohannis Calvini commentarius* (Geneva, 1557), 247; idem, *Institutes* (ed. cit.), ii, 506.

<sup>58</sup> Hooker, *Works* (ed. cit.), ii, 335.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. See also Thirty-nine Articles, 25.

<sup>60</sup> See Cochrane, *Confessions*, 288 (2nd Helvetic Confession).

<sup>61</sup> *Tracts and Treatises of John Calvin* (trans. Henry Beveridge; 3 vols; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2002), iii, 275.

<sup>62</sup> PS, ii, 255.

Nor is Donne content to leave it there. When he returns to the subject of these other ‘sacramental and ceremonial things, which God (as he speaks by his Church) hath ordained’, he focuses on two examples from English liturgical practice: the sign of the cross which the priest was required to make over the infant at baptism, and what he calls the ‘adoring of God in a devout humiliation of the body’ in the act of receiving the eucharist—kneeling, in other words.<sup>63</sup> (Continental Reformed Protestants received communion sitting, of course: kneeling would have indicated an idolatrous attitude towards the elements.) At home both the baptismal cross and kneeling at communion had long been the subject of bitter controversy; both had recently been repoliticised as a result of James’s attempt to bring Scottish liturgical practice into line with English—or what the latter was supposed to be.<sup>64</sup> Only the year before Donne preached in Heidelberg, Thomas Morton, now bishop of Chester, had written a defence of both practices.<sup>65</sup> In 1618, too, a bishop at the opposite end of the ecclesiological spectrum, John Buckeridge, who was Laud’s tutor at St John’s, had preached and written in support of kneeling for communion: in similar language to what Donne would employ at Heidelberg the next year, Buckeridge had argued that the practice expresses ‘the humiliation of our outward man, as well as the humiliation of the inward’.<sup>66</sup> As we can see from Donne’s use of the word ‘ordained’, he regarded these ceremonial practices as exemplifying the Church’s prerogative ‘to decree Rites or Ceremonies’, quite irrespective of any positive value the sign of the cross and kneeling had of themselves.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, when he returns to the practice of kneeling at communion in a Candlemas sermon, this is the line he takes: while ‘indifferent in it selfe’ and ‘not absolutely necessary’ for salvation, kneeling for communion is nevertheless ‘enjoyed by lawfull authority, and to resist lawfull authority, is a disobedience, that may endanger any

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<sup>63</sup> PS, ii, 258.

<sup>64</sup> Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 49. The sign of the cross was on the agenda at the Hampton Court Conference of 1603.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Morton, *A defence of the innocencie of the three ceremonies of the Church of England* (1618). On the circumstances surrounding the publication of Morton’s pamphlet see Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, 259-60.

<sup>66</sup> John Buckeridge, *A sermon preached before his maiestie at Whitehall, March 22.1617* (1618), 29.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Thirty-nine Articles, 20.

mans salvation’!<sup>68</sup> But it is clear from the Heidelberg sermon that he also ascribed positive spiritual value to ceremonies.<sup>69</sup>

In the context, then, of a sermon on a *comparatively* unproblematic text, Donne utilised two ceremonies that continued to prove stumbling-blocks for those on the ecclesiological left in support of an apologia for an enduringly contentious aspect of the Elizabethan settlement in one of the centres of Continental Calvinism at what was sensed, both at home and abroad, to be an extremely delicate time for the fortunes of European Protestantism. He was saying, in effect, ‘On many points the Church of England is in complete accord with her Continental Reformed brethren but on others it has a lot to teach them’. It’s noticeable, too that, on this occasion, when he might have been expected to do so more than on any other, he makes no mention of the acknowledged right of individual churches to decide on ceremonial matters for themselves.<sup>70</sup> But where, I hear you asking, does all of this leave Donne with regard to the church he had abandoned? On the basis of private remarks that he made as a layman such as the one about the Roman and Reformed religions being ‘sister teats of [God’s] graces’ on the one hand and the unfettered enthusiasm for the Reformation that he displayed as a priest on the other, we might be tempted to conclude that whatever hostility to Rome he had felt at the time of his change of allegiance had gone underground only to re-emerge after his ordination, and that his mature perspective on the churches resembled the harshly dichotomistic one articulated by John Jewel in the early days of the Elizabethan settlement. (I’m thinking of the passage at the end of Jewel’s *Apology* where he’s discussing the Council of Trent and represents the Church of England and the Continental Reformed churches as standing on one side of an unbridgeable divide with Rome standing all alone on the other.)<sup>71</sup> It’s surely far more likely, however, that just as Donne declared himself torn on the question of the Oath of Allegiance in private but dealt with it unambiguously as a polemicist, there will have been a split between what he said on the subject of the Roman Church in the pulpit and what he believed (and, for all we know, voiced in private). We might not have any dated or datable letters that bear directly on this

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<sup>68</sup> PS, vii, 332, 333.

<sup>69</sup> See also PS, vii, 320 (an example from January 1627).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Thirty-nine Articles, 34.

<sup>71</sup> *The Works of John Jewel* (ed. J. Ayre; 4 vols; Cambridge, 1845-50), iii, 106.

but we do have his *Essayes in Divinity*, thought to have been completed in the period immediately before his ordination—and which, incidentally, forces us to see that period of his life from a rather different perspective to the essentially materialistic one I offered you earlier.<sup>72</sup> In one of the most surprising sections of this deeply serious work Donne outlines the idea of a united superchurch constructed on the basis of one of the existing churches putting an end to ‘disputations, and misapprehensions’.<sup>73</sup> While the Anglican Church is his preferred model, even Rome is not ruled out: since its adherents ‘keep their right foot fast upon the Rock Christ’, he writes, ‘I dare not pronounce that [Rome] is not our Sister’.<sup>74</sup> This extraordinarily generous vision is all the more eye-catching since the passage also highlights what Donne sees as one of Rome’s major faults. It confirms, too, that on the eve of his ordination as a priest of the Church of England he was still thinking of Rome as a church, albeit a very flawed one, whose members can work out their salvation. In doing so, he was tapping into the rejection, by Hooker and others, of the concept of the small, pure ‘true church’ of orthodox believers in favour of the Augustinian notion of the mixed, imperfect Catholic Church, which logically entailed regarding all the churches, Rome included, as technically on a par with each other.<sup>75</sup> It helps to remember that this was a period when many other Anglicans were still identifying the Pope as the Antichrist. One of these was of course the king, who (with that wonderful knack he had for confusing people) also declared himself happy to recognise the pope as patriarch of the West.<sup>76</sup>

There is no denying that the conventional sort of anti-Roman invective was a major feature of Donne’s sermons almost from the start. His first Paul’s Cross sermon was full of it. He used an early St Paul’s sermon to point out the similarities between ‘the Italian Babylon’, as he calls it nine times, and its Chaldean counterpart.<sup>77</sup> But it strikes me as highly implausible that the moment Donne was ordained, he decided that Rome was the Antichrist after all. My argument is supported by the fact that, as the

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<sup>72</sup> *John Donne: Essayes in Divinity* (ed. Anthony Raspa; Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), xvi-xxxiv.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 58-9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>75</sup> Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, chapter 3, especially 146-9, 150-7; Hooker, *Works* (ed. cit.), i, 202-6.

<sup>76</sup> Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 93-8; *The Political Works of James I* (ed. C. H. McIlwain; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 127.

<sup>77</sup> PS, x, sermon 6.

1620s progressed, he was more and more opposing the tendency (in others, not himself) to take an increasingly hostile view of Continental Protestantism which in practice went hand in hand with the adoption of a more conciliatory tone towards Rome.<sup>78</sup> There is, of course, a sense in which Donne wanted it both ways. In Anthony Milton's words: 'As Rome acquired a truer equality with the Protestant Churches, a certain realignment of the Church of England vis-à-vis the other Protestant Churches was inevitable.' Donne's irritation at the way the wind was blowing as far as the 'realignment of the Church of England vis-à-vis the other Protestant Churches' is concerned can flare up without warning. Preaching in 1627 at the memorial service for Magdalen Danvers, mother of the Herberts, he suggests that 'in cases of *Diffidence*, and *Distrust* in his mercy ... of *presumption* in our selves, or pressing *God* with his *promises*', God demands, '*Ubi Libellus*, Produce your *Evidence*'—exactly as he does 'in cases of *Innovation* of matter of *Doctrine* in his *Church*'.<sup>79</sup> It could, therefore, have given entirely the wrong signal if he had betrayed much sympathy for the church of his childhood in public. At the same time, I am the first to admit that there are elements of Donne's antipapal rhetoric which are so consistent as to militate powerfully against the notion that he was simply concealing any irenic mildness he felt towards Rome, or even pretending to disapprove of her. One of his most frequent complaints is that the Council of Trent had introduced new articles of belief, especially transubstantiation.<sup>80</sup> He shows that he knows about the reference to transubstantiation in the proceedings of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 couched in language that implied that it was already the Church's received teaching about the manner of the eucharistic change<sup>81</sup> but it suits his purpose to treat the doctrine as Trent's innovation because that enables him to represent the council as a turning-point for Rome. The identification of Trent as the moment when the Roman Church was taken over by the 'papalist faction' was part of a metanarrative that gained ground among evangelicals during James's reign and gave fresh weight to the old argument that the Reformation purified an existing church rather than giving rise to a new one; it helped

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<sup>78</sup> In addition to the passages already cited, see, for example, PS, iv, 107; ix, 91 (where 'Antichrist' is code for crypto-popery in the form of Arminianism).

<sup>79</sup> PS, viii, 73.

<sup>80</sup> PS, i, 297; iii, 132, 211, 370; iv, 139; v, 258; vi, 98, 246, 249, 250; vii, 124, 202, 294-6; viii, 67, 263; ix, 361.

<sup>81</sup> PS, vii, 296 (cf. Morton, *Catholike Appeal*, 123); Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum* (ed. Peter Hünermann; 43rd ed.; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2013), 267.

enormously that its proponents were able to point out that the Reformation predated Trent.<sup>82</sup> All anyone could do, according to Donne, was hope that Rome would eventually realise the wrongheadedness of its actions—a thought he voices in his sermon for Christmas 1626, no doubt with a nod to public uncertainty over Charles's plans for the Church of England.<sup>83</sup> In a number of sermons he claims that Rome already regrets making full-blown articles of faith out of matters which had previously been 'indifferently and problematically disputed.'<sup>84</sup> He will have been dismayed when he heard that at the York House Conference, which took place on 11 and 17 February 1626, and at which Arminians (led by John Buckeridge) and evangelicals (led by Thomas Morton!) were pitted against each other ostensibly over the issue of Richard Montagu's inflammatory books, Buckeridge argued that Trent had not erred in 'fundamentals'.<sup>85</sup> I say 'when' rather than 'if' Donne heard. On 7 February he had been elected prolocutor of Convocation, which entailed carrying the views of the lower house of clergy to the upper house and bringing back the demands of the latter to his peers.<sup>86</sup> The fact that he was considered the right man for this delicate job at such a difficult time is further evidence that he was known for his lack of openly declared sectarian allegiances.<sup>87</sup> But his election also means that he could not have avoided the knowledge that York House, far from putting an end to contention, served to accelerate the shift of power in the Church.<sup>88</sup> When Morton dedicated a new edition of his book *The Grand Imposture of the (now) Church of Rome* to Charles in 1628, he felt compelled to stress that, despite its inflammatory title, it was not designed to widen the breach between Rome and Protestants.<sup>89</sup> How things had changed in a few short years.

Whether or not I am right to argue that Donne was caught between a rock and a hard place in continuing to harbour a degree of tolerance, even goodwill, towards Rome at the same time as feeling

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<sup>82</sup> Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 219-20, 243-4, 263-4, 287-9; cf. PS, iv, 139; viii, 67.

<sup>83</sup> PS, vii, 296.

<sup>84</sup> PS, ii, 204; cf. iv, 144; vi, 300-1; vii, 125. See also Morton, *Catholike Appeal*, 101.

<sup>85</sup> Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 244-5. Donne had given a copy of Montagu's first book to Izaak Walton in 1625.

<sup>86</sup> See Jeanne Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 274-5.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 180.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Morton, *The grand imposture of the (now) Church of Rome* (1628), ep. ded.

unable to express it, it remains indisputable that a defining feature of his theological outlook is its inclusiveness—and I now return, as promised, to the Synod of Dort. In the first place Donne will have been relieved that in general terms the synod adopted the infralapsarian position: that is to say, that election and reprobation followed the fall of man, rather than preceding it. Here he is denouncing the opposite viewpoint, supralapsarianism, in a sermon on the verse ‘Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works!’ (Ps 66:3):

*God is love:* And therefore to conceive a cruell God, a God that hated us, even to damnation, before we were ... to conceive such a God as from all eternity meant to damn me ... this is not to professe God to be terrible in his works ... God hath never done, or said any thing to induce so terrible an opinion of him.<sup>90</sup>

Donne’s sermons are full of such passages. He had no truck at any period of his life with any attempt to narrow down the number of the saved. For that reason he will have been especially pleased that the two heads of Cambridge colleges among the British delegation to Dort, Samuel Ward and John Davenant, managed to persuade their colleagues, much against their harder line Calvinist better judgment, of the truth of what is now known as the hypothetical universalist view of the atonement: that Christ died for all, not just all the elect.<sup>91</sup> The more extreme Calvinists who read 1 Tim 2:4 (‘God would have all men saved’) as meaning ‘some of all sorts, some Men, some Women, some Jews, some Gentiles, some rich, some poore’ are, Donne says, ‘too thrifty of God’s grace, too sparing of the Holy Ghost’; by ‘all’, he insists, ‘God does meane, simply All’.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, although the British delegation, and a delegate from Bremen who had started the unlimited atonement ball rolling in the first place, were in a tiny minority on this, and aroused a good deal of opprobrium for their pains, they were nevertheless able to bring their influence to bear: the actual wording of the relevant canon is likely to strike modern readers as still pretty uncompromising, but it does avoid stating that Christ died only for the elect.<sup>93</sup> As a result Ward was able to argue that Dort had defined ‘nothing ... which might gainsay the confession of the Church

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<sup>90</sup> PS, viii, 125.

<sup>91</sup> Milton, *British Delegation*, 245.

<sup>92</sup> PS, v, 53; cf. ix, 119. The Elizabethan Calvinist William Perkins had expounded the verse using very similar phraseology to that excoriated by Donne: see *A golden chaine, or the description of theologie, containing the order of the causes of salvation and damnation, according to Gods word* (2nd ed.; Cambridge, 1597), 201.

<sup>93</sup> Milton, *British Delegation*, 305-6.

of England'<sup>94</sup> (by which of course he meant the Thirty-nine Articles). Donne must have thanked God with all his heart, in private at least, for this softer strain in English Calvinism.

Naturally, there was never the slightest likelihood that Donne would side with those who made membership of a specific church or party a pre-requisite for salvation.<sup>95</sup> In his sermon for Christmas 1627 he contrasts his own propensity for toleration with its polar opposite:

I should rather accompany them, who out of their charitable moderation, doe beleieve, that some Christians, though possessed with some errors, may be saved, then them, who ... first call every difference from themselves, an error; and then every error, damnable; and doe not onely pronounce, that none that holds any such error, can bee saved, but that no man, though he hold none of those errors himselfe, can be saved, if he think any man can be saved, that holds them.<sup>96</sup>

He isn't boasting of his own open-mindedness but conveying his horror at the potential of religion, or rather religious people, for creating division. Dissension among Christians, he tells the members of Lincoln's Inn, is a 'wall of the Devil's making' and one day Christ will break it down 'and make us all glad of that name, the name of Christians'.<sup>97</sup> And, as dean of St Paul's, he had his own personal reminder of Christianity's ruptured state in the form of his mother, who lived with him at the deanery and died only a couple of months before him, a Catholic to the end. For me one of the most moving moments in Donne's 160 extant sermons is when he offers a vision of heaven as a place where he expects to see 'Prophecies untyed, Riddles dissolved, *controversies reconciled*'.<sup>98</sup> It's as if he has come to realise in the years that have passed since the writing of *Essayes in Divinity* that the ending of 'disputations, and misapprehensions' by means of confessional harmony was a dream, not a prospect. His words bespeak a yearning for religious peace that can only be felt by someone who has known its absence.

I want to finish by leaving you with a hypothesis which, although amenable to further investigation, is by its very nature unprovable. The intensity of Donne's genuinely international vision of the Church was the result, I suggest, of his being an ex-Roman Catholic who, at a time when the energies of so

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<sup>94</sup> James Ussher, *The Whole Works of ... James Ussher* (ed. C. R. Elrington; 17 vols; Dublin, 1847-64), xv, 145.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. PS, x, 169-70.

<sup>96</sup> PS, viii, 137.

<sup>97</sup> PS, ii, 111-12; cf. ii, 280: '[God] loves not schisme ... between them whom he calls.'

<sup>98</sup> PS, iii, 111 (emphasis supplied); cf. iv, 301.

many of his Anglican colleagues were increasingly absorbed in fighting internecine battles, remained passionately interested in the fate of the Church Catholic. Even if the individual churches he felt kinship with as a priest were all Reformed bodies, I can't help thinking that his outward-looking ecclesiology stemmed, at least partly, from the encouragement he will have received as a child to think of his own beleaguered little religious community as part of a much larger whole which was sited mainly on the European mainland. As I said, it's a hypothesis. But in case it seems mere wishful thinking on my part, in its support I'd like to return to the 'sister teats' letter. You need to know that in the section preceding the two sentences I'm about to quote, Donne has been advising his correspondent against giving in to Roman Catholic proselytisers. So the subject is denominational switching. 'You shall seldome see a Coyne, upon which the stamp were removed, though to imprint it better, but it looks awry and squint. And so, for the most part, do mindes which have received divers impressions.'<sup>99</sup> Elizabethan and Jacobean coins were irregular and individual because of the haphazard and inefficient nature of the process of hammering used in their production. The imprint was often off-centre. A second stamping could obviously make a coin look even more individual (and peculiar).<sup>100</sup> Now I don't deny that there is an interpretative conundrum here: according to his own imagery Donne was a restamped coin himself, so why doesn't he draw attention to that? Or is that the joke—that he speaks as if he weren't? In his sermons he sometimes talks as if he has never been anything other than an Anglican all his life.<sup>101</sup> But, joke or not, his point is that a new stamping doesn't completely replace the old: it adds to it. Traces of the old stamp remain there under the new one. A belief system as all-encompassing and distinctive as Tridentine Catholicism couldn't simply be erased, especially when it had been inculcated in childhood.

Consider these additional aspects of Donne's ecclesiology: the assumption, his inclusive vision notwithstanding, that absolute religious truth exists and that it is our duty to search for it; the ubiquity of the institutional Church and its centrality to the process of individual salvation; the availability of salvation to all who seek it, with the implication that individuals have to play their part; the Church's

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<sup>99</sup> *Letters*, 101-2.

<sup>100</sup> John Carey, 'Donne and Coins', in John Carey (ed.), *English Renaissance Studies Presented to Dame Helen Gardner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 151-63. Carey discusses the passage in question at 155-6.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, PS, vii, 421; x, 161, 204.

right to draw up binding statements of faith from which deviation is not permissible; the importance of serious preparation for reception of the eucharist; and lastly the emphasis he placed on auricular confession which as a Protestant he didn't consider a sacrament but the *effects* of which he speaks about in terms which would not have dissatisfied the Fathers of Trent.<sup>102</sup> Aren't these all preoccupations that Donne had developed early in life and which he integrated fully with Anglicanism *as he found it*? He was manifestly not the only Anglican to hold them but what I'm struck by is the tenacity with which he held *all* of them. Even his belief in the absolute indispensability of the preacher, while hardly a tenet of Tridentine Catholicism, is a kind of legacy from his childhood faith, it seems to me, with the figure doing something of saving significance at the altar being replaced in his thinking by one doing something of saving significance in the pulpit. Donne's Anglicanism was, like most of his ideas, a complex hybrid or, to revert to his own metaphor, the product of a reminting which left the initial image partly visible under the new one. But in his case the resulting stamp, far from being 'awry and squint', was centred and sharp.

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<sup>102</sup> See PS, x, 55 (cf. x, 158).