

John Donne: Key Dates

- 1572 Between 24 January and 19 June: born in parents' house in Bread Street, London, the third of six children of John Donne, a prosperous ironmonger, and Elizabeth (*née* Heywood)
- 1583 December: uncle Jasper Heywood, head of Jesuit mission to England, imprisoned
- 1584 23 October: matriculates, with younger brother Henry, at Hart Hall, Oxford
- 1588 (Or 1589): begins to study at Cambridge (disputed)
- 1591 ?May: admitted to Thavies Inn as law student
- 1592 6 May: transfers from Thavies Inn to Lincoln's Inn
- 1593 Early May: Henry imprisoned in Newgate for harbouring a Jesuit and dies of the plague
- 1596 Volunteers for military service under Essex; June-August: serves with force that sacks Cadiz
- 1597 July-October: on ill-fated 'Islands Expedition'; ?November: appointed secretary to Lord Keeper Egerton and moves into York House in the Strand
- 1599 26 September: bears sword at funeral of Egerton's son Thomas
- 1601 October-December: sits in Parliament as MP for Brackley; December: secretly marries Ann, daughter of Sir George More and Egerton's niece
- 1602 2 February: reveals marriage to Sir George; briefly imprisoned in the Fleet; dismissed from Egerton's service; 27 April: legality of marriage upheld in Court of Audience
- 1607 June: applies unsuccessfully for post in Queen's household
- 1608 November: applies unsuccessfully for secretaryship in Ireland
- 1609 February: applies unsuccessfully for posting as secretary with Virginia Company
- 1610 Publication of *Pseudo-Martyr*
- 1611 Publication of *Ignatius His Conclave*
- 1612 Travels on the Continent with Sir Robert Drury
- 1614 April-June: sits in 'Addled' Parliament as MP for Taunton; makes last attempt to gain state employment (as ambassador to Venice)
- 1615 23 January: ordained deacon and priest by John King, bishop of London; shortly afterwards appointed royal chaplain and made DD at Cambridge by royal mandate
- 1616 16 January: appointed rector of Keyston, Hunts; 7 July: appointed rector of Sevenoaks, Kent; 24 October: appointed Divinity Reader at Lincoln's Inn
- 1617 24 March: preaches first of five sermons at Paul's Cross; 15 August: death of wife
- 1619 12 May: sets sail with Doncaster's expedition to Germany, to which he acts as chaplain (returning 1 January 1620); 16 June: preaches before Elector Palatine in Heidelberg
- 1621 September: told by James that he is to be dean of St Paul's; 22 November: installed as dean
- 1622 18 April: instituted as rector of Blunham, Beds; 15 September: preaches at Paul's Cross in defence of James's *Directions to Preachers*
- 1623 November: seriously ill with relapsing fever, which gives rise to *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (published 1624)
- 1624 18 March: appointed vicar of St Dunstan's-in-the-West
- 1625 27 March: death of James I; 3 April: preaches first sermon delivered before King Charles
- 1626 7 February: elected prolocutor of Convocation; 11 and 17 February: York House Conference
- 1629 22 November: preaches final sermon at Paul's Cross
- 1630 Autumn: falls ill while visiting newly married daughter Constance; 13 December: makes will
- 1631 January: mother dies; 25 February: preaches last sermon (*Deaths Duell*); 31 March: dies

John Donne: Apostate Catholic, Visionary Anglican

Nearer to [God], and to the institutions of his Christ, can no Church,
no not of the *Reformation*, be said to have come, then [than] ours does.

1 Well; I may now receive, and die; My sinne
Indeed is great, but I have beene in
A Purgatorie, such as feared hell is
A recreation to,'and scant map of this.

(*John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (ed. W. Milgate; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 14)

2 Would it not anger
A Stoicke, a coward, yea a Martyr,
To see a Pursuivant come in, and call
All his cloathes, Copes; Bookes, Primers; and all
His Plate, Challices; and mistake them away,
And aske a fee for comming?

(*Satires*, 24)

3 [T]rouble 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, where all things necessary for salvation are administred to thee, and where no erroneous doctrine ... is affirmed and held, that is the Hill, and that is the Catholique Church.

(*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'), v, 251)

4 [W]e 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.

(PS, iv, 106-7)

5 *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.

(PS, viii, 125)

6 I should rather accompany them, who out of their charitable moderation, doe beleve, 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.

(PS, viii, 137)

7 There must be a holinesse to the Lord, and that presented by *Aaron* the Priest to God, that the people may be *acceptable to the Lord*; So that this seale of the living God, in these Angels of our text [Rev. 7:2-3], is, The Sacraments of the New Testament, and the Absolution of sinnes, by which (when Gods people come to a Holinesse to the Lord, in a true repentance, and that that holinesse, that is, that repentance, is made knowne to *Aaron*, to the Priest, and he presents it to the Lord) that Priest, his Minister seals to them, in those his Ordinances, Gods acceptation of this degree of holinesse, he seals this Reconciliation between God and his people.

(PS, x, 55)