

Another Perspective on Donne in the Seventeenth Century: Nehemiah Rogers's Allusions to the *Sermons* and "A Hymne to God the Father"

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So far as I have been able to determine, rather extensive references to and uses of Donne's work by Nehemiah Rogers have not been noted.¹ According to the *DNB* Rogers lived from 1593 to 1660. He was a clergyman who enjoyed the favor of the King and commendation by Archbishop Laud: the *DNB* says that Rogers was "as uncompromising a royalist as a friend of Laud's was likely to be." Through influential friends, however, he was allowed to continue preaching in Essex during the Commonwealth. Rogers found three volumes of Donne's sermons useful in several ways in his own writing. He respected Donne greatly: the most common epithets reflecting this esteem are "a Reverend Divine," "learned and reverend Divine," "a learned Doctor," and "a great Divine." Rogers always refers to Donne as "Dr. Donne." He usually cites his specific sources in Donne's work, but one is surprised many times at the extent of his borrowing: it seems as if he has taken a sentence or two at points, but a close examination of his source in Donne may reveal many sentences or even paragraphs used or adapted. The primary interest in Rogers's uses of Donne is what they imply about Donne's reputation and influence at this time.

The specific allusions occur in four books published between 1640 and 1662. From a solitary allusion in 1640, the rate of reference to Donne increases to a total of ten citations in the 1662 book alone. This book was Rogers's last, a posthumous publication. In *The Good Samaritan* (1640) Rogers refers (on p. 198) to a passage from Donne's *A Sermon upon the XX. verse of the V. Chapter of the Booke of Iudges* (1622). In *The Fast Friend* (1658) allusions are on pages 11, 12, 97-98, 313, 362, and 398: the references in this work are to *LXXX Sermons* (1640). In 1659 Rogers's *The Figg-less Figg-Tree* (pp. 30, 83, 248, 329, and 480)

again alludes to Donne's *LXXX Sermons*, but also to *Fifty Sermons* (1649). Finally, *The Rich Fool* (1662) on pages 28, 82, 109, 121, 166 (mispaginated as 196), 172, 179, 185, 242, and 390 refers both to *LXXX Sermons* and *Fifty Sermons*. One may best see how Rogers employs Donne in a sample of these allusions.

Some passages use Donne's work to teach preachers, as well as Christians generally, their proper tasks. In *The Good Samaritan* Rogers argues that it is not stooping too low for a man, however great a scholar, to teach the rudiments of faith and then cites the following (p. 198):

... (saith *Canisius*) we make Catechising our *Profession*, and in that *Profession* (saith he) we have *S. Basil*, *S. Augustine*, *S. Ambrose*, *S. Cyrill* in our Society: In that indeed they have as *Catechisers*, but go no further; for as they as *Jesuites* those Fathers leave them. He goes on, *Si nihil aliud*, &c. If nothing els, yet this alone should provoke us to a greater diligence in *Catechising*, that our Adversaries the *Protestants* do spend so much time in *Catechising*. It seemes this was our use and in intermitting it, we intermit one of our best advantages.

Beside this passage Rogers cites "D. Dun on Jud. 5.20. p. 57." Actually, Rogers has used a portion of page 56 (mispaginated as 58), as well.²

Rogers also feels that the preacher must recognize proper distinctions between the self and the pride of self. The use of one's own experience to teach others is both effective and permissible, but the proper mixture of humility is necessary. Again, Donne bolsters his argument. In *The Fast Friend*, p. 11, Rogers states:

But *St. Paul* disclaims the *Preaching* of himself, 2 *Cor.* 4.5. and by denying it in his own practice, he seemes to condemn it in all others; and is not this to preach a mans self, to teach by our own example?

But this preaching of a *mans self* is of another nature: To cry up our own parts, and excellencies, we are forbidden; but thus far a man may and ought to preach himself, to preach out of his own history, and by his own Example: *Solomon* did thus preach himself to good purpose in his *Ecclesiastes*; and in so preaching the best Arguments are raised to prove his salvation, saith a Reverend Divine.

Beside the last sentence appears "Dr. Donn." The passage referred to is on page 574 of *LXXX Sermons* (Simpson and Potter, IX, 279). An examination of the source in Donne reveals that Rogers also has appropriated Donne's comment on St. Paul.

Other examples show Rogers's heavy dependence on Donne. In *The Figg-less Figg-Tree*, p. 30, Rogers discusses at length the power of teaching with parables, citing the Jews' esteem for this method, as well as Christ's use of parables to teach with authority. He refers to Donne as one of the "learned Divines" who recognize this aspect of Christ's teaching. The student of Donne, however, recognizes that Rogers's entire argument, as well as the details about the history of the parabolic method, is taken from *LXXX Sermons*, p. 690 (Simpson and Potter, VII, 315-16). Many of the allusions are simply Donne's expositions. One example is Rogers's discussion of a portion of Genesis 18 in *The Fast Friend*, p. 362. Both Donne's explanation of Abraham's argument with God about Sodom and his contention that Abraham should have been more importunate (*LXXX Sermons*, p. 522; Simpson and Potter, V, 365-66) are taken almost verbatim by Rogers. To help explain the troublesome, disputatious doctrines of predestination, necessity, and will in *The Rich Fool*, p. 185, he also prefers simply to call on Donne for help: thus, he cites "Dr. Donn" and relates almost precisely Donne's statement extending from "And therefore it is *Durus sermo*, They are hard words, to say, that God predestinated some . . ." through "But this is not Gods Counsaile upon any, to be so far the Author of sin, as to impose such a necessity of sinning, as arises not out of his owne will" (*LXXX Sermons*, p. 330; Simpson and Potter, V, 53-54).

In all of his work Rogers alludes only once to Donne's poetry, and it is to a poem found in *LXXX Sermons*: he refers to "A Hymne to God the Father" included by Walton in his *Life and Death of Donne* prefixed to that volume. On page 398 of *The Fast Friend* is the following:

I come to God to begg pardon for this or that sin committed;
I reckon up so many, Originall, Actuell; Omissions,
Commissions: God pardons them, and forgives them;
and yet I must say (with that learned and reverend
Divine in his heavenly Hymne that he made on his sick
bed to God,) *when thou hast done*, thou hast not done,
for I have more: still I must begg, and daily begg at the
throne of grace, for mercy, till my last thread is spun; and
I be landed on the shore, and *when that is done*, then I
have done; I'll begg no more.

Rogers maintains Donne's argument for original sin and actual sins necessitating forgiveness, but he essentially ignores the sin of fearing death, in favor of a more optimistic achieving of salvation through daily prayer. Rogers's version reverses the sea and shore symbols and offers the implied sea as this world and the landing on the shore as reaching heaven.

Rogers, in essence, seizes upon Donne as a pattern to hold up to preachers, Anglicans, and Christians in general. Totally ignoring Donne's secular work, Rogers finds in the learned and devout "Dr. Donne" a personal exemplar of an ideal clergyman, enforced by Donne's prose statements about the cleric as teacher. Donne's sermons and "A Hymne to God the Father" provide clarification and enforcement of texts, doctrines, and attitudes to be elaborated on for Englishmen primarily at the end of the period of turmoil of the Civil War and Commonwealth (significantly, the books containing the bulk of allusions to Donne were apparently written in 1658, 1659, and 1660). If one judges by the dearth of seventeenth-century references to the sermons found by Keynes, then Rogers seems to be an exception in reading what were apparently unpopular volumes at the time. However, this may be an area not yet scrutinized fully. Our century has been interested in and has examined with some thoroughness the seventeenth-century reception of the poems (e.g., in the Keynes *Bibliography* and the Smith *Critical Heritage*). But the early reception and influence of the prose, especially the *Sermons*, could bear further examination.

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Notes

¹ Indispensable for the study of seventeenth-century references, of course, are Geoffrey Keynes's *A Bibliography of Dr. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), pp. 280-302 (the portion of "Appendix V" that cites references to Donne from 1594 through 1700) and A. J. Smith's *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975), pp. 33-163 (covering 1598-1700). It is interesting that Keynes cites relatively few allusions to Donne's *Sermons*: the predominant criticism, references, and imitations noted are centered on the poetry. Smith specifies that he concentrates on references to Donne's poetry and includes mentions of prose only if related to the poetry.

² The relevant passage from Donne may also be seen in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. E. M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-62), IV, 204-05. In addition to citing the seventeenth-century original editions, I shall provide reference in the text to "Simpson and Potter," with appropriate volume and page(s).