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John Donne and the Cultural Contradictions of Christmas

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Of the many things that we don't know about John Donne our ignorance of the day of his birth has a certain priority. This ignorance is first a function of Donne's own failure to see the date inscribed in the written record and second of Izaak Walton's having omitted mention of the month and day when, in the opening sentence of his biography, he wrongly announced 1573 as the year of Donne's birth. Walton probably did not know Donne's birthday, and the fact that the date is missing from the record constitutes part of the record. Its absence invites interpretation.

In our time, the labors of the textual editors for the *Variorum Edition* have been dramatizing as never before the fact that Donne's poems did not originate punctually at fixed moments of inspiration; they kept being altered as they were transmitted in manuscript, and the traces of Donne's life to be found in them are difficult to fix. It might be supposed that greater stability could be ascribed to works that Donne prepared for entry into print. Yet Donne's sermons also resist incorporation into familiar temporal patterns that are compatible with that belated secular viewpoint denominated by Walter Benjamin "homogenous, empty time."[1] Even when a heading for one of the sermons specifies an occasion or when some internal reference seems to locate the discourse in relation to an external event, the printed record always floats across a plurality of origins. Walton tells us that Donne did not read sermons that he had already written. Donne spoke from notes and then composed his sermons for publication, sometimes many years after they had been delivered. We cannot know how, and how much, the printed texts differ from what Donne said from the pulpit, any more than we can know how much he expanded, adapted, or deviated from the notes he had prepared. Nor is there reason to suppose that each of the extant sermons was based on notes used only once; there is evidence that Donne, like many other preachers and teachers, drew on some materials on multiple occasions.[2] Without subscribing to a barren dogma whereby no text is allowed to be grounded in a

determinate historical moment, we can be confident that attempts by editors to trace Donne's poems and sermons to stable moments of origin and to fit them into a fixed chronology are fraught with interesting difficulties. Just as Shakespeare needs to be, and is being, "unedited," so also does Donne, his sermons as much as his poems.

1

In the first major collection of Donne's sermons, the posthumously published *LXXX Sermons* of 1640, pride of place was given to seven that Donne had preached on the anniversary of the birth of Christ. In the sermon marked as having been preached at St. Paul's on Christmas Day, 1625, Donne recorded some striking reservations about the practice of observing birthdays. Citing an observation from one of the church Fathers "That none of the Saints of God, nor such as were noted to be exemplarily religious, . . . did ever celebrate with any festivall solemnity, their own birth-day,"[3] Donne goes on to instance for contrast with the saints, whose feasts were regularly celebrated on the day that marked the anniversary of their death, Pharaoh and Herod. The Scriptures tell how each, in celebrating his own birthday, polluted the festival with another person's blood. This prompts Donne to offer a reflection that must seem odd to anyone accustomed to supposing that the birthday of Jesus should be looked upon by Christians as an occasion for great joy: "the just contemplation of the miseries and calamities of this life, into which our birth-day is the doore, and the entrance, is so far from giving any just occasion of a festivall, as it hath often transported the best disposed Saints and servants of God to a distemper, to a malediction, and a cursing of their birth-day." In its turn this reflection leads into a quotation from the Book of Job that runs clean contrary to the spirit of Christmas reveling: "*Cursed be the day wherein I was born, and let not that day wherin my mother bare me be blessed. Let the day perish wherin I was born, let that day be darknesse, and let not God regard it from above*" (6: 332-33).

These sentiments are typical of Donne's Christmas sermons, and they are reminiscent of a side of his personality that, before he became a preacher, he seems to have expressed at least intermittently at Christmastime, once in his early twenties when he was at Lincoln's Inn and again at the time of the wedding of the Earl of Somerset and Lady Frances Howard. It is generally supposed that Donne's reluctance to participate in the wedding festivities was an expression of his unwillingness fully to endorse the scandalous marriage. When we consider, however, that the unusual eclogue which frames his

epithalamium is prominently dated in its heading 26 December 1613, Donne's apparent reluctance can be seen also in another light. At the start of the epithalamium proper it is declared that the "old yeare," though on its "death bed" and scheduled to die "within five dayes," has been "rescu'd" by a "mightier fire" than the sun, that is, by the "inflaming eyes" and "loving heart" of the couple. This introduces the motif of the dying and rising of the spirit of vegetation from ancient European winter festivals. In particular the English version of the ritual enacted at Christmastime in the St. George plays lurks in the background. These were rude dramas in which the main dramatic substance was a fight that ended with the arrival of a doctor to bring the slain back to life and of which the upshot was regularly the mummers' request for money. Frequently these plays, like other Christmas customs, blurred boundaries between the sexes. Typically, they represented as their two central figures a man and a woman, with the man dressed in the skin and tail of an animal and called "the fool" and his companion played by a man dressed in women's clothes.[4] Christmas customs that involved an exchange of gender roles provide a subtext for Donne's stanza celebrating "Equality of persons" and proclaiming that "the bridegroome is a maid, and not a man" and that "the bride / Becomes a man."[5] By ascribing to the couple the power to effect resurrection, or at least resuscitation, the opening stanza of the ephithalamium positions the Earl and Lady Frances in the place of Christ, whose birth, according to the Christian appropriation of ancient European fertility rites, had taken place in the dead of winter and revealed to sinful humanity the redemptive purposes of divine love.

As for the eclogue that frames the epithalamium, it will be recalled that it begins with a character named Allophanes reprehending the absence of his friend Idios from the warmth and festivity and royal presence at court. He chides Idios for foolishly spending Christmastime in the "solitude" of the country as if it were "Lent." Idios, he says, should be where "the sun stays longer up" and "The Prince's favour, is diffused o'er all" and where "zeal and love . . . / . . . make . . . an everlasting east." Idios replies by proposing an elaborate parallel between "Kings" and "their pattern, God" on the grounds that a King can "enlarg[e] narrow men" and "bestow" even on "reclused hermits" his "blessing." Allophanes persists in upbraiding Idios for his naiveté in supposing that he can secure the King's favor without being in physical proximity to Somerset, in whose "breast / . . . the King's counsels and his secrets rest." Having it both ways, Donne in the person of Idios provides the requisite "nuptial song" and also sets in motion a contest between

the King's gaze and the couple's "loving heart." That is, he manages to suggest that James's notice of a "reclused hermit," who is "dead, and buried" in the country and needing to be brought back to life, would be a proof that the King was acting on the pattern of God. For at the birth of Christ "More of heaven's glory" was shown to rustic shepherds than to Herod's royal court.

References in the Somerset epithalamium to kindling a fire that brings "warmth, and light, and good desire" suggest another, more playful, basis for the reluctance to participate in the festivities that Donne wrote into the figure of Idios. Donne's surname, about which we know him to have been especially self-conscious, implicated him in curious way in customs connected with the Yule-log.[6] One facet of keeping Christmas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the practice of finding a massive piece of wood, frequently a grotesque and rugged root of a tree, and of dragging it into the great hall or kitchen with rejoicing and merriment. Already in the Townley mysteries the practice had been called "drawing Dun out of the mire," and the word "dun," which was used to refer to a horse of a particular color, was attached to the Christmas-block or Yule-log in the phrase "Dun the carthorse" who sticks in the mire. In the old Christmas gambol some members of the party first played at drawing "dun" out, and their object was precisely not to succeed, so that others would come to help and gradually everyone would be tugging and pulling, the fun arising out of the pretense that the log was resistant and expressing itself in the feigned awkwardness of the revellers. Once the log was brought in and set ablaze, it was customary to save a small piece of it for lighting the next year's fire. At the end of frame-eclogue for the Somerset epithalamium, when Idios, having long resisted participating, proposes that he will now burn the song that he has brought, Allophanes rescues it for the "common" celebration of "this Festivall," and denies Idios the opportunity to serve as priest at a sacrificial oblation.

The names Idios and Allophanes seem to be related to one of the readings for the Christmas liturgy, and their appearance helps to distance Donne, whom they both represent, from the couple whose passion, which resuscitates the old year, is an inversion of Christ's. Idios, whose name is sometimes translated as "the private man," is reminiscent of the Greek term in the opening of John's Gospel (see also 13: 1) for those to whom the Logos came, "his own," although "they knew him not." "Allophanes" represents another aspect of Donne, as Heather Dubrow has proposed, but it is less the one that frequented plays and visited ladies and proved the very monarch of wit than the one who was reluctant to enter holy orders. Allophanes does not mean "in

another voice," as Grierson and others have claimed. The basis of "phanes" is not *phone*, but *phane*, manifestation, the root of our word "epiphany," so that the word means "one who seems like another."[7] Like Idios, it owes something to a verse in the opening of the Fourth Gospel: "He was in the world, . . . and the world knew him not." It suggests the disguises worn at court during Christmastime by maskers and mummers, in accord with customs dating back at least as far as Edward III.[8] It may also offer a veiled comment on both the bridegroom and the bride. In any event, Donne's poem is deeply implicated in traditional Christmas celebrations. The eclogue in particular shows that Donne was pinning his hopes on James, who did in the event notice his aptness for making sermons, more than on Somerset, for whom his poems seem finally not to have been collected in the months before he took orders and to whom they were therefore not dedicated. Those who wish to save the poet from implication in the morally dubious Somerset affair have done what they could to illustrate his ambivalence about the marriage and the whole system of patronage,[9] whereas it may have seemed to Donne himself, who acknowledged that his marital history was what was best known about him at court, that he lived in a glass house and was in no position to cast a stone at a woman alleged to have been taken in adultery.

Hesitance fully to participate in Christmas festivities appears at other moments in the record of Donne's life as well. It shows up in the curious fact noted by Bald that in 1594, having been elected Steward of Christmas at Lincoln's Inn, Donne declined the office. The steward was a particular instance of the old "Lord of Misrule," who served as master of the revels. Typically, he was appointed some weeks before Christmas Day, and it fell to him to provide jokes and sports for the whole season and to command carol singers, mummers, jugglers, and players for the inn or great house in which he held sway. Instead of taking charge of the festivities at Lincoln's Inn, Donne took the option of paying a fine.[10] Whatever his reasons for this action, it is fair to note that, in Elizabethan and Jacobean times, Christmas was the principal annual holiday and the festivities over which Donne declined to preside were elaborate and lavish. Characteristically, they involved a range of traditional pastimes. During the twelve days churches and other buildings were decorated with holly and ivy. Boxes were disbursed to servants and to the poor, and at the new year the more well-to-do exchanged gifts. Seasonal fare included substantial quantities of roast beef, brawn, and mince pie, and a specially brewed Christmas ale. For entertainment, in addition to singing and dancing, card-playing and other forms of gambling were characteristic,

and Queen Elizabeth is known to have been an enthusiastic participant. If in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* Sir Toby Belch embraced the role of Lord of Misrule which Donne had eschewed only a few years earlier, Malvolio cast into a secular voice the sorts of criticisms that had widely connected Christmas revels with papists and pagans. It certainly seems possible that, for all the ridicule of Malvolio in Shakespeare's play, Philip Stubbes was right when he charged, in *The Anatomie of Abuses*, that "more mischiefe is [at Christmastime] committed than in all the yeere besides . . . what masking and mumming! wherby robberie, whordome, murther, and what not, is committed!"[11] (Had Somerset and Lady Frances not been so brazen, they might have married in another season.)

Already by the 1580s Christmas had become a charged subject for debates about the national religion and the nature of English society. In the Europe of Antiquity and the Middle Ages there had been "good material reasons for having a last great feast at which, before the onset of the most severe weather, all but carefully conserved stocks of salted meat and cereals were consumed."[12] By the late sixteenth century, however, a more modern ethos looked upon Christmas revels as an outdated residue from times gone by and connected them particularly with the recusant community, which used the season to honor Mary and "the holy family."[13] Celebrating Christmas was one way in which Elizabethan Catholics kept alive their sense of identity, and the autobiography of the Jesuit John Gerard tells how their lusty celebration of Christmas made recusants particularly conspicuous. If, as many social historians now claim, allowing a Lord of Misrule served to provide a sort of safety-valve within the body politic, charges about the fundamental connection between Christmas celebrations and popery nonetheless threatened to define some kinds of revelling as openly seditious. The poem, "The Popish Kingdome," translated from the Latin by Barnabe Googe and sometimes appended to *The Anatomie of Abuses*, helped to disseminate the idea that Christmas festivities were a prime occasion for idolatrous sedition. The poem chronicles a series of abuses, beginning "Three weekes before the day" of Christmas, under pretense of celebrating the liturgical season of Advent, and extending well after the new year, even as far as Candlemas Day, the 2d of February. One passage in particular suggests a context for understanding a feature of Donne's letter of 2 February 1602 to his new father-in-law. Knowledge of this context may help to explain something that Donne professed in that letter not to understand, why he "stood not right in [George More's] opinion."[14] As the poem has it, "Three weekes before the day

whereon was borne the Lorde of grace," young rowdies go knocking on doors and exact from unwilling householders various pay-offs—"peares, and plumbs, and pence"—in exchange for refraining from violence. In a tone of disdain the poet complains that "Boyes and Girles" alike are suffered to

> runne in euery place,
> And bounce and beate at euery doore, with blowes and lustie snaps,
> And crie, the aduent of the Lorde. . . .

What is said to be most disturbing about the season of Advent, however, is that the "might" of "dreadfull deuils blacke and grim" is unleashed, and

> In these same dayes young wanton Gyrles that meete for mariage bee,
> Doe search to know the names of them that shall their husbandes bee.

The poet goes on to tell in detail about a ritual practice according to which "girls" of marriageable age used the weeks just before Christmas to watch a handful of onions, on each of which they bestowed the name of some potential lover. Whichever is the "first [to] sproute, doth surely beare the name of their good man." An unarticulated hysteria inspired by some phallic implications of this practice is made more apparent in a report about another: once a young woman had identified her future husband, she sought to learn what he will be like by sticking her hand into a "woodstacke" and pulling out "a faggot sticke":

> Which if it streight and euen be, and haue no knots at all,
> A gentle husband then they thinke shall surely to them fall.
> But if it fowle and crooked be, and knottie here and theare
> A crabbed churlish husband then, they earnestly do feare.

Having enumerated a series of offenses that are said to be routinely perpetrated during Advent, the stanza ends by tying them all firmly to the effects of Catholic doctrine:

> These things the wicked Papistes beare, and suffer willingly,
> Bicause they neyther do the end, nor fruites of faith espie:
> And rather had the people should obey their foolish lust,
> Than truely God to know, and in him alone to trust.[15]

When in his first letter to his new wife's father, Donne announced that he and Anne had "adventured equally" and that they had married "about three weeks before Christmas," he gave George More factual information that made it possible to associate their action with the traditional period presided over by a Lord of Misrule and during which "wanton girls" sought to find themselves husbands. In these respects Donne's letter may have given George More grounds to suppose that a temporary reign of misrule could be brought to a hasty conclusion.

Having thus committed "the remarkable error of his life," Donne spent the rest of his years, as Walton has it, repenting. Just what are readers of Walton's *Life* to understand that Donne had to repent? It cannot be his marriage in the sense suggested by Shakespeare's Beatrice when she forewarns her cousin Hero of the sequence that runs from "wooing" and "wedding" to "repentance." For Walton himself grudgingly admits about the marriage that although Donne "would occasionally condemn himself for it," it was not "attended with an heavy repentance"[16] and it proved an occasion of grace. What Donne repented was rather the seeming unfitness for a "sacred calling" that he had shown when he married Anne without her father's permission and the wasteful reluctance to embrace a priestly vocation that characterized nearly the whole period of his married life. In Walton's account the years between the marriage and Donne's ordination were marked by "many strifes within himself concerning the strictness of life, and competency of learning, required . . . [to] enter into sacred orders." Walton intimates that all along Donne knew he had been "marked" by God as the great biblical strugglers, Paul and Moses and Jacob, had been.[17] His "conversion" consisted not in a transfer of his allegiance from Rome to Canterbury but in his long-delayed acceptance of an eternal calling, which then provided the definitive perspective from which all the other events of his life were to be seen, since Donne's ministry served to redeem the time he had squandered. If in writing Donne's life Walton did not trouble to learn his birthday, he prominently, climactically, incorporated the information inscribed on Donne's tomb, which included the dates of his ordination, his appointment as Dean, and his death.

Walton's authority for his interpretation of Donne's mature life as one long period of repentance derives largely from the sermons, for which he wrote the *Life and Death of Dr. Donne* as an introduction. The Christmas sermons, which follow immediately after the Life in the folio, are just one index of the penitent Donne. Yet their prevailing tone reveals a consistent

reluctance to take unmeasured joy in the season. In speaking about the Nativity of Jesus as he did in the sermon for 1625, as a day on which Jesus' "mothers swathing him in little clouts" was all one with "*Iosephs* shrowding him in a funerall sheete" (6: 333), Donne was proclaiming one of the recurring themes of what he wrote about Christmas. The sermon for the following year begins with the assertion that "THE WHOLE life of Christ was a continuall Passion; others die Martyrs, but Christ was born a Martyr. He found a *Golgotha*, (where he was crucified) even in Bethlem, where he was born. . . . His birth and his death were but one continuall act, and his Christmas-day and his Good Friday, are but the evening and morning of one and the same day" (7: 279). A similarly sober tone marks the acknowledgment with which the sermon for 1627 begins: "IT HATH BEEN suspitiously doubted, more then that, freely disputed, more then that too, absolutely denied, that Christ was born the five and twentieth of December, that this is Christmas-day" (8: 130).

In acknowledging objections to the celebration of Christ's birth Donne was evincing a certain sympathy with those who were, with increasing vehemence, leveling the charge that the feast of Christmas has no basis in the Bible, that it was a belated innovation, and that it involved popish appropriations of pagan rites and superstitions. In Elizabethan and Jacobean England those who opposed the keeping of holy days regularly insisted that seasonal festival days had originated in pagan times, that they had been imposed upon Christianity by the papal church, and that they were in violation of the commandment to keep the sabbath holy. There is good reason to suppose that objections to the sports common on these days lay not in a distrust of mirth per se but in a sense that conspicuous displays entailed offensive disrespect for those whose religious sensibility was different and who were thus made to feel their exclusion.

As it happened, on the day when Donne preached his first sermon as the newly installed Dean of St. Paul's, the controversy about keeping Christmas was acted out at some remove from London. Across the Atlantic it was the first Christmas Day in Plymouth Plantation, and Governor Bradford called upon the people to work as usual. Many excused themselves from working, however, on grounds of "conscience." Bradford, who reported the incident and remembered it, as he said, to have been "rather of mirth then of waight," agreed to respect their consciences until, returning from work himself, he "found them in the streete at play, openly" and put an end to it, telling them that it "was against his conscience, that they should play and others worke." It was acceptable, he told them, to make devotions privately in their houses,

but "ther should be no gameing or revelling in the streets."[18] Not too much should be made, by the way, of the fact that Donne preached on Christmas Day: it was a requirement of his office as Dean of the Cathedral.

Whatever Donne's willingness to mark the festivals that he regarded as having been duly appointed by the church, it is nonetheless striking that, in all the Christmas sermons that he preached between the first and second issuings of the Book of Sports, in 1618 and 1633, there are (so far as I have been able to discern) no allusions to the troubling "politics of mirth" that Leah Marcus has documented with reference to works by Ben Jonson and others.[19] By contrast, already in 1609 Lancelot Andrewes had taken the occasion of preaching a Christmas sermon before King James to propose that the "fulnesse of time" in which, according to St. Paul (Gal. 4: 4-5), "God [had] sent his Sonne" called for "*fulnes of Breade*, . . . *of brauerie*, . . . *of sport*, and *pastime*" among those who would mark the day.[20] When, sixteen years later, Donne preached on the same text from Galatians, he made no reference to those sorts of celebratory fulness, no doubt partly because 1625 having been a year of severe plague it would have been tactless, but also because, in keeping with the traditional use of Advernt as a preparation for the second coming of Christ, he consistently thought of Christmas Day as a type of the Day of Judgment. He never talked about any ways of celebrating Christmas besides those that involved prayer and meditation.[21] In this sense he gave no solace to the vigorous supporters of the *Book of Sports*, and he showed respect for dissenters.

In the first years that Donne's *LXXX Sermons* were in print there was at least one salient feature of the way the collection begins that may actually have made it attractive to the opponents of Archbishop Laud. The volume opens with the Christmas sermon for 1622, one that presumably Donne had preached in the early years of the Thirty Years' War and shortly before the unsuccessful embassy to Spain designed to secure a royal marriage between Charles and the Infanta. Donne probably put it into written form in the months after the accession of Charles, when he wrote out a number of his sermons during his sojourn at Chelsea. The theme of the sermon is the need that all people have to be reconciled, both to God and to one another, and the whole discourse is pointed finally towards a climactic pronouncement against the prospect of reconciliation between the Protestant Church of England and the Church of Rome, whose doctrine, Donne insists, comes from "the Devill." In the 1640s this sermon could serve to recommend Donne even to the newly dominant forces who were otherwise disinclined to accord respect to a

representative of a church governed by bishops and a king. Still, by its organization according to the liturgical year, which was conventional, *LXXX Sermons* prominently displayed that Donne had kept Christmas as a feast and had preached on festival days. After Christmas had been changed, in 1644, from a feast day to a fast day,[22] and once the legislation of 1647 was in place outlawing the celebration of Christmas altogether, it was certain that the former Dean of St. Paul's would be remembered as having been firmly aligned with the King's party. Two hundred years later, Donne was at least equally unlucky in the timing of the second major edition of his sermons.

2

Although we are not yet accustomed to acknowledging it, there were two distinct yet related Donne revivals in the nineteenth century. The second, for which the first was the pre-condition, took place in the 1890s well in advance of Grierson's edition of the poetry in 1912. The extent and proportions of this Donne Revival will be much better known than ever before when the volumes of the *Variorum Edition* of Donne's poetry appear. For there is a substantial and hitherto largely undocumented body of criticism of Donne's poetry from the last decade of the nineteenth century.

What the Donne Variorum will not show and is likely to obscure is the Donne Revival of the early Victorian period, the revival not of the poet but of Walton's Donne. The centerpiece of this revival was the six-volume collection of *The Works of John Donne, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's*, published in 1839. Its editor was Henry Alford, who was to become "one of the most voluminous writers" of the Victorian era.[23] His handsome and influential edition of Donne, which he called in the introduction his "first literary labour," started off with the seven Christmas sermons. Donne's sermons were in fact Alford's central interest. Although at first he had considerable difficulty finding a publisher for them, once John W. Parker took on the project, he was able to expand his original intention to provide a large selection and to offer them all. He also included the *Devotions* and, in the final volume, a number of Donne's poems. It was altogether consistent with his conception of Donne's importance to England in the 1840s that he selected for inclusion the *Divine Poems* and a few other poems of a "theological . . . stamp." He avoided what he insisted was the "misrepresentation" of Donne's "genius" found in his copy-text, the 1633 edition, with its "strange jumble of subjects and . . . [an] arrangement . . . where Hymns and Love-elegies . . . are recklessly placed in company." Unlike Walton, however, on whom he

otherwise relied, Alford did not wish Donne's secular verse erased from the record. He called, in fact, for "the whole Poems" to be "well edited," and recommended that "the Satires especially would repay the labour."[24]

As an undergraduate and Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, Alford had moved in the circle of the Tennysons, Arthur Hallam, and James Spedding, who was to be the editor of Bacon. His observation that he had omitted from his edition of Donne the full complement of poems on the grounds that "the character" of his work was "theological"[25] rightly suggests, however, that he was motivated to undertake the work on religious grounds. From childhood he had had his heart set on going into the church, and he composed his first sermon at age ten. He began reading Donne's *LXXX Sermons* in 1831, when he was in his early twenties, and claims immediately to have recognized that their "republication [was] . . . highly desirable," well in advance of receiving encouragement for the project from the aging Coleridge, who had been marking up the margins of Wordsworth's copy of the sermons. The basis for Alford's enthusiasm comes clear in his own poetry. *The School of the Heart and Other Poems*, published in two volumes in 1835, contains the long title poem in which one section is prominently headed by an epigraph from Donne. It also reprints many short poems that Alford had published before his twenty-second birthday. These included a sonnet headed "Written in an Interval of Melancholy Foreboding Respecting the Church," in which the speaker, in a manner reminiscent of Wordsworth's address to Milton in "London, 1802," invokes the memory of Herbert and Crashaw, who "set our smoldering energies on flame." The sonnet on the facing page shows more clearly that Alford had adopted another perspective that would come a century later to be associated with the claim that a "dissociation of sensibility" had set in after Donne: its theme is the belatedness of current piety, which has no "song of praise" to offer the Lord "in these latter days" that has not already been "sung" in "ages" past.[26]

When Alford set out to edit Donne's sermons as the "first literary labour" of his adult life, he was caught up in the enthusiasm for Anglo-Catholic origins that characterized the Oxford movement. He was just then newly ordained and was beginning what would prove to be a distinguished scholarly career. He went on to make his name as a first-rate textual scholar. He early recognized the superiority of German textual criticism of the New Testament, and spent several months in Bonn in 1847. Over a twelve-year period he brought out a variorum edition of the Greek New Testament in which he gave the various readings in more detail than English readers had ever seen. Some

features of Alford's Greek Testament made it influential for the next half century: along with the various readings, it provided glosses for many words with reference to Hellenistic usage, and Alford printed all this information in a form meant to give the user the grounds for coming to an independent judgment about the readings and the senses of the words. It would be gratifying, one supposes, to discover that it was in virtue of his first editing project, *The Works of Donne*, that Alford was subsequently able to work out interpretive canons that so closely resemble those embraced in our time by the editors of the *Variorum*. But Alford freely confessed that in editing Donne he had not really known what he was doing, lacking as he did sufficient learning to edit older authors who had written in English. He gradually distanced himself from the Oxford movement and pursued other literary labors as far flung as making a blank-verse translation of the *Odyssey* and serving as editor of the *Contemporary Review*.

As for the publishing house that brought out the six volumes of Donne's *Works*, John W. Parker had its shop in the West Strand. In the 1830s it was publishing books on a wide variety of subjects in history, science, world literature, and many other fields, including the abolition of the African slave-trade, with titles ranging from *Elizabethan Religious History* to *Notes on Indian Affairs*. By the 1840s it was actively involved in promoting Christian socialism. It was also an official printer for Cambridge University Press, for which it brought out books for persons of modest income.[27] Publishing Donne was a large undertaking, more ambitious than anything for which Alford had hoped at first. Yet one of Alford's editorial principles immediately qualified Donne's work for inclusion among the sorts of projects in which Parker and his son were interested: Alford modernized the spelling and punctuation of Donne's sermons, bringing them into general conformity with standard nineteenth-century usage and making them accessible to the growing number of literate persons.[28]

Since the commencement of the California edition of Donne's sermons, Alford's edition, where its existence has been acknowledged at all, has been maligned. In the 1950s, Theodore Gill, for instance, announced that Potter and Simpson were offering the sermons in a form "clearly closer to the author's intention than in any earlier publication," even the 1640 "folio." He proposed that thanks to their "superlative scholarship" we now have "in a very real sense, *first* editions of Donne's sermons." He claimed, moreover, that Alford had "expurgated" the sermons for "nineteenth-century" readers and insisted that once the California edition was complete, "Alford [could] be

pushed far back on [the] shelves."[29] Yet anyone who dusts off Alford's edition can see that such charges are based on an utterly superficial acquaintance with it. In his introduction Alford conscientiously mentioned there that when he first began his project, before the Parkers agreed to print all Donne's extant sermons, he had "contemplated" a "selection" and had omitted "one or two passages containing allusions, common at the time when they were delivered, but likely to offend modern readers." He went on to say that the omissions were no more than these one or two and to assure readers that they were getting all the rest of the sermons in "their original unmutilated form."[30] Close inspection of his edition shows that Alford had cut two passages from the last of the seven Christmas sermons, the one not marked in its heading for a particular year. One cut is about fifteen lines long. It is a striking passage in the course of which Donne observes that while the Scriptures often ascribe various body parts to God they never say that God has "shoulders." Donne then suggests that this involves a tacit recognition that "shoulders are the subjects of burdens, and therein the figures of patience, and so God is all shoulder, all patience" and in the person of Christ "suffers patiently a quotidian Crucifying" through "our dayly sins" (9: 135-36). A second omission is much briefer and comes from the peroration. Alford omitted Donne's reference to the "joy" of Christian martyrs as "such a joy, as would worke a liquefaction, a melting of my bowels" (154). Here, presumably, Alford was not bowdlerizing. In the King James Bible, "bowels" regularly appears as the translation for the Hebrew *meim*. Even after Donne's death, it continued to be used in English to refer to the seat of pity and strong emotion, as in the title of Richard Sibbes's commentary on the Song of Solomon, "Bowels Opened," and in Bunyan's remark that "bowels becometh pilgrims." Alford's suppression of the passage acknowledged a marked change in the dominant sense of the word. It was of a piece with his subsequent participation in the first major revision of the language of the Authorized Version.[31]

There were other, more profound and pervasive, changes from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth that made Donne's Christmas sermons an infelicitous introduction to the six-volume *Works*. The institution of Christmas as we now know it, as the major annual festival in many societies across the world, as a season anticipated by hundreds of millions of people, and most eagerly by children, as a time for family gatherings, and as an unparalleled economic opportunity for business, is largely discontinuous with Christmas as Donne and his contemporaries knew it. It is a fabrication of mid-Victorian England, when many new customs (from decorating a tree

to sending cards and awaiting Father Christmas) were combined with a few old ones to create the so-called "traditional" Christmas. This invented tradition was a phenomenon never before known. In the eighteenth century, partly in the wake of the puritan suppression of the feast in the seventeenth, Christmas had diminished from the importance it had had in Tudor and Stuart times and had been removed from the public celebrations at court and in the great houses to private observances in ordinary homes. Traditional customs had fallen into desuetude, and between 1790 and 1835 *The Times* made no mention of the occurrence of Christmas. The 1830s witnessed a resurgence of interest, however, reflected especially in newspapers and periodicals.[32] Through the middle decades of the century an idealized Christmas that was supposed to have been kept in "merrie olde England" was newly fashioned. Its construction depended precisely upon the fiction that it was a vestige of a golden age. The ideal was expressed in a growing body of Christmas literature, much of it as revealing of Victorian anxieties about political instabilities and a lack of social harmony as it is about the customs of the season. The constructed longing for Christmases of old took on an almost definitive narrative form in *A Christmas Carol*, first published in 1843. Dickens had been contributing to the nostalgic idealizing even earlier, in the description of Christmas at Dingley Dell in *Pickwick Papers* (1836), while on the American side of the Atlantic Washington Irving's depiction of "Old Christmas" in his *Sketch Book* offered the sort of imagery of roaring fires and horse-driven coaches en route to Grandmother's House that is still typical of many illustrations of the season. Once the appeal of Christmas became sentimental, as in Dickens' use of it as "a metaphor for human sympathy,"[33] once people took for granted that it was a family holiday, a time for indulging children with trees and presents from Santa Claus, once it became "traditional," the possibility that a significant number of persons would read Donne's Christmas sermons with understanding and appreciation was virtually obliterated.

In the era of the Oxford Movement Donne, too, was embraced as an object of nostalgia. He was remembered as an exemplary precursor and, as Walton had depicted him, a father of the English Church. It seemed appropriate and promising that the new edition of his *Works* should begin not with "Metempsychosis" or "The Flea" but with the Christmas sermons. Yet however much the sermons may have had to offer to Anglo-Catholic theology, they cannot have been much help to the newly active promoters of the "old-fashioned" Christmas. Far from being full of "traditional Christmas spirit,"

Donne's Christmas sermons were long and learned and replete with intellectual challenges. They suggested ways of keeping the season that would have been as uncongenial to the Bob Cratchit family as they were to Scrooge himself.

3

For all the security with which the Christmas season is now entrenched in the yearly business cycle of capitalist countries in the West, Christmas is again a locus of controversy in the United States, as school boards forbid the use of the word to name the winter holiday and city councils debate whether the erection of creches on town greens violates the separation of church and state. It is probably fair to say that Christmas has always been controversial. If reformers in Donne's time bristled at the anarchic potential of carnival and condemned dressing up as animals or the opposite sex, they were at least partly anticipated in the fourth century, when Christmas was first celebrated, as Gregory Nazianzen warned against "adorning ourselves with soft clothing," indulging in "rioting and drunkenness," "providing delicacies for the belly," and "striv[ing] to outdo one another in luxury."[34] The New Testament records Christianity's early self-consciousness that the idea of an incarnate God born to be crucified is a "stumblingblock" to Jews and "foolishness" to Greeks (I Corinthians 1: 23). The doctrine of Christmas—of the birth of a transcendent Deity in a human body at one particular moment in time—is an outrageous doctrine from many points of view; and Donne did not shrink from its outrageousness. In what we suppose to have been the first Christmas sermon he ever composed he took occasion to satirize the misguided zeal of a Christian missionary who, upon confronting someone he considered "a *Heathen man*," would inform him that "Thou shalt burn in fire and brimstone eternally, except thou believe *a Trinitie of Persons, in an unitie of one God*, Except thou believe the *Incarnation* of the second Person of the Trinitie, the Sonne of God, Except thou believe that *a Virgine had a Sonne*, and the same Sonne that God had, and that God was Man too, and being the immortall God, yet died." Such a zealot, Donne observes, "should be so farre from [converting] this poore soule, as that he should rather bring Christian Mysteries into scorne" (3: 357). There is, Donne adds, "an easie, obvious way" to dismiss the missionary's proposal: simply decline "to believe in *Hell* it self" (358).[35]

Donne's fascination with the scandalous nature of Christianity's central tenets was already writ large in *La Corona*, where the high doctrines that the missionary wants to enforce on outsiders feature prominently among the

imaginative pleasures available to those who let their minds run free with them. In "Annunciation," the speaker plays with the most improbable conceits. Readers are invited to contemplate the astonishing implications of a doctrine whereby a virgin is a mother and also a sister to her own child and whereby Mary became her "Makers maker" and her "Fathers mother." Into "Nativitie" Donne admits the historic tensions between Judaism and Christianity when the speaker proclaims the infant's escape from the "general doome" wrought by Herod: in our century in particular the possible implication that other Jewish boys were sacrificed that Christ might live is especially appalling. But Donne, who knew something of the experience of survivors, points Jesus's whole life firmly towards his own death, as he regularly did in his Christmas sermons. "Nativitie" ends by emphasizing that the child escaped only to be a partaker of human "woe." "Crucifying," the fifth poem in the seven-part "crown of praise," acknowledges that Christ has always been a sign of contradiction. In its proposal that "weake spirits admire" Jesus and "ambitious [ones] hate" him, Donne may have been consciously acknowledging the deepest contradictions in his own experience.

What is especially intriguing among Donne's many brushes with the potentially offensive aspects of the doctrine of Incarnation is his insistence that the birth revealed God's pre-eminent weakness. "Nativitie" proposes that the nine months in the womb involved a ripening into consummate vulnerability:

> *Immensitie cloystered in thy deare wombe,*
> Now leaves his welbelov'd imprisonment,
> There he hath made himselfe to his intent
> Weake enough, now into our world to come.

If we could take *La Corona* and the sermons as a fair index of Donne's personal attitudes, then we could say that what he loved best about Christmas was not festivity, nor camaraderie, nor traditional spirit, but its allophanic potential: above all, the revelation that God, who is wholly Other and on so many grounds rightly perceived to be our utmost Enemy,[36] is as weak as any human lover. Christmas Day is, in Donne's sermons, the first of Christ's two great comings, relevant to his hearers chiefly for what it tells about the second. The sermons encourage eagerness for the coming of what is called in *La Corona* "*the last and everlasting day*," the day proclaimed at the outset of the seventh and last of the poems, the one that, in complete concert with Donne's habitual reference to seven as the number that signals "infinitie," rounds out

the circle.[37] In the Christmas sermons, too, all world-process is pointed toward a reversal of the day on which infinity embraced limitation; at the Judgment Day, when time will explode into eternity, we can expect our resurrected bodies to be as naked as the babe who, having given up "*immensitie*," burst forth from the limits of the "*cloysterd . . . wombe*." As the first Christmas sermon has it, that "Denudation, that manifestation of all to all" in naked bodies, is the necessary prelude to an administration of justice that throughout history is always impossible, since human dress is a constitutive aspect of "those disguises, and palliations, those colours, and pretenses of *publique good*, with which men of power and authority apparell their oppressions of the poore" and whereby "we [are made] the more miserable, that we cannot see *their ends*, that there is none of this denudation, this laying open of our selves to one another, that will accompany the state of glory, where we shall see one anothers *bodies*, and *soules*, *actions* and *thoughts*" (3: 363). Unlike Dante, who, in keeping with the shameful nakedness of Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit, associated nudity particularly with the damned, Donne sometimes contemplated it among the joys of the blessed. In "The Relique" the boldness of imagining naked resurrected bodies open to one another gives way to bolder imaginings, whereby the bodies of two lovers might, before marching off to judgment, enjoy "a little stay" in the safety of knowing that there is to be no marrying and giving in marriage in the resurrection (Luke 20: 34-36). There the speaker suggests that other potential onlookers, like the gravedigger who had begun to dig up the bodies, might discreetly afford the lovers a little privacy. But in the Christmas sermon, in a more Augustinian vein, Donne turns his hearers' potentially prurient interest in gazing upon naked bodies into a grounds for self-accusation, when he insists that receiving God's mercy requires acknowledging that we need it. The sermon ultimately ties its theme of denudation to its grander theme, the light of Christ, by insisting that in that light, on the last day, there is to be the utmost in privacy: the "denudation" will entail finally a "manifestation" only "of your selves to your selves" (3: 375).

Reference to the grand theme of Donne's first Christmas sermon reminds us that all of his sermons were preached upon a particular text. In 1621 it was John 1: 8, about the Light of Christ; and of the eight texts which Donne chose for his Christmas sermons it may be the only one that, from the point of view of developments in the history of Christmas since the mid-nineteenth century, seems obvious or appropriate. Despite its absence from *LXXX Sermons* and its late positioning in Alford, Potter and Simpson present the Christmas sermon for 1621 as Donne's "manifesto" as a preacher (3: 36-37) and single

out the theme of light as a norm against which to measure all the other Christmas sermons. With this arbitrary canon, they judge the others mostly as failures. The sermon for 1622 is quietly buried in the fourth volume of their edition, and they have nothing to say about it except that it "is not particularly noteworthy." About its prominence as the introduction to Donne's sermons in 1640 and 1839 there is no mention at all.[38] The editors make the sermon for 1627 seem an egregious and impertinent discourse when they speak of its "perversity and aridity" (8: 27; cf. 8: 11) and pronounce that "as a Christmas sermon it is a complete disappointment," since it is not about the life of Jesus. The sermon for 1628 "is not an eloquent sermon," they say, and "by no means a characteristic Christmas sermon," for Donne "regards Christ, not as the Babe of Bethlehem, but as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, despised and rejected of men, and crucified in history by man's unbelief" (8: 27). Even with respect to the sermon for 1624, which contains the oft-quoted passage about God's boundless mercy in which Donne proposes that while "in paradise, the fruits were ripe the first minute, . . . in heaven it is alwaies Autumne" and God's "mercies are ever in their maturity" (6: 172), a passage that Potter and Simpson must admit to be "one of [the] most exquisite passages" in all Donne's sermons—even here, they instruct readers to expect "a number of dull and tedious pages" (6: 14-16).

Donne's Christmas sermons have in some respects been badly served in Potter and Simpson's edition. The group of seven, which as seven point to infinity and mark the meeting of eternity and time, has been broken into fragments. The fragments have been repositioned, in order to facilitate constructing a fictional narrative of "development."[39] The new chronological framework erects linear and diachronic time as the norm and belittles cyclical and synchronic conceptions of time. It accommodates, moreover, the complex liturgical sense of multiple times superimposed onto one another into a "fulness of time," to the rather more dull secular perspective according to which Christianity is a religion that flourished in the past. This latter perspective is readily compatible with sentimental ideas about the old-fashioned "traditional" Christmases of one's childhood that bedevil Potter and Simpson's introductions to the Christmas sermons. I have tried to indicate some dimensions of the vast differences between Christmas in the time of Donne and in the time of Dickens, and before concluding I should like to remark that Donne's Christmas sermons may have been attractive and engaging to their first audiences because the texts on which he chose to preach were often surprising, his subjects unconventional, and his approaches deeply challenging. Donne never preached on and rarely mentioned "the Babe of

Bethlehem." Only in 1626 did he choose a text from the infancy narratives in the gospels, and that sermon is about mortality. Its central figure is Simeon, imagined as an old man, at the point of death. Its central purpose is the preparation of our hearts for our own death, so that we might each depart, as Simeon did, "with a contented minde"—from the church service and from life (7: 299). The sermon for 1627, said by Potter and Simpson to reveal Donne's "preversity" by virtue of his having chosen a text from the Book of Exodus, concerns the various excuses Moses gave when he received his calling. The reluctance of the prophet is handled by Donne, who knew something about hesitance to enter God's service, with compassion towards another old man—Moses is supposed to have been eighty years old when God called him—a man who recognized that he needed help.

Rather than showing his perversity, Donne's chosen texts provoke reflection on our need to make intelligent, imaginative choices about what we read and how we read. The opening of the sermon for 1628 begins in "perplexity" about some curious instances in which the Holy Ghost seems impertinently to repeat himself in various "places" in Scripture. The discourse then modulates into a productive meditation on what it is like for a writer or speaker to encounter silence, indifference, or rejection.[40] The sermon for 1622—and this makes it a good introduction to the sermons generally—begins by provoking reflection on interpretive practices and by proposing hermeneutical criteria (4: 283). Donne insists on the care with which the particular text for the sermon must be read and suggests that every biblical text is a "place" within a circuitous "journey" of reading that needs to be plotted out in relation to the map offered by the whole Bible. The advice he offers here may be as applicable to reading his sermons as it is to interpreting Holy Writ. But until we disengage the sermons from the framework established in the California edition, such a hypothesis cannot be tested and potentially fruitful questions about their shape and structure and even their recurring themes are likely to remain unformulated and unexplored.

* * *

In conclusion, I should like to propose that if there is a future for Donne Studies, in the short-term it lies in the work being done on the *Variorum*. *The Variorum Edition* will enable us to see more clearly the limits of that understanding of Donne which began to take shape in the 1890s in reaction to Walton's enduringly popular portrait and was developed from the 1920s to the 1960s. Its gathering of commentary will make a splendid monument

to the scholarship of the past. It will newly enshrine the writer whose astonishing erotic and imaginative energies were celebrated in the intensive study of a few remarkable poems and searched for as fragments to be extracted from his other works and shored up, in editions from Coffin to Carey, against the ruins of the modernist and post-modernist eras. Such a writer will continue to merit occasional mention in the newly established disciplines that make human sexual behavior the privileged object of their study and that are now appropriating so-called canonical literature, which its practitioners possibly assume has always included Donne, as a storehouse of evidence that may be drawn upon for constructing histories of sexuality and theories about gender relations.

The future of Donne Studies in the next century will begin from the demonstration by the textual editors of the *Variorum* that most of the objects of their attention are aliens within the medium of print. It will have to acknowledge that the naturalization of Donne's poems was achieved belatedly, partly as a means of dislodging Milton from his position as twin pillar of English literature but also (and this needs to be said explicitly and to be frankly acknowledged) as a means of overturning Walton's Donne, who was a pillar of the church. It will also need to explore the implications of the ways in which Donne's prose works have been edited, especially ones that were prepared by their author for entry into print and have been disfigured by editors and anthologizers, as inevitably they had to be, for purposes which the author could not have foreseen.[32] We are now in a position to see that "Donne" has long been a site at which particularly complex cultural clashes take place. As an astonishing love-poet, his works have been read in myriad ways and their reception reveals a good deal about the history of sexuality. As a theological writer who is boldly imaginative and unsentimental, Donne offers productive resistance to the lumping of Christian writers into conventional categories so that they may be sealed up in a supposedly traditional past. The attempt to discover the principles on which "Donne" has been metamorphosed and reinvented through four centuries will be best sustained in the sorts of interdisciplinary and comparatist frameworks that are far richer and far more available at our moment in history than they have been to the great majority of persons who have encountered his oeuvres, in whatever forms, in the past. But whether a sufficient number of those who want to read Donne will be willing both to acquire the necessary learning and, having acquired it, to enter the new arenas, and whether they will be admitted to them, remains to be determined. In any event, the time is now at hand to interrogate the *Variorum* and to develop, with unprecedented and sustained attention to

Donne's robust and quirky and unsettling religious imagination, a new theological approach to Donne Studies. Above all, what we now need is a respectful and sympathetic language that can be shared both by persons whose imaginations have been nourished in the whole range of the world's religious traditions and by that group now especially influential in the academy for whom a self-conscious separation from all religion is often a basis of their inspiration.

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Notes

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[1] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, edited with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 261-62.

[2] See, for example, P. G. Stanwood, "John Donne's Sermon Notes," *Review of English Studies* 29 (1978): 313-20.

[3] The Father was, as Donne explicitly observes, St. Cyprian. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Donne's sermons are from *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-62). For this quotation, see 6: 332. Other references appear parenthetically in the text.

[4] See William Sandys, *Christmastide: Its History, Festivities, and Carols* (London: John Russell Smith, [c.1851-52]), pp. 113-16.

[5] Quotations from Donne's poetry are from *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: Dent, 1985).

[6] See Sandys, pp. 113-14.

[7] I quote the sound interpretation offered by Patrides, p. 197. Cf. Herbert J. C. Grierson, *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 2: 94. See also Heather Dubrow, *A Happier Eden: The Politics of Marriage in the Stuart Epithalamium* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 194.

[8] Clement A. Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition Christian and Pagan* (1912; reprinted, Detroit: Gale Research, 1968), pp. 297-302.

[9] See for example Dubrow, pp. 178-200. Dubrow has made an especially helpful contribution to our understanding of the poem by decoding its numerology,

so that we can appreciate that the eleven stanzas of eleven lines each signal Donne's suggestion of the couple's serious transgression.

[10] R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 57. It is possible that Donne participated in the revels at Grays Inn, where the celebration in 1594 proved especially memorable: see Sandys, pp. 93-94. For a nineteenth-century antiquarian account of the tradition of misrule, see *The Christmas Book: Christmas in the Olden Time: Its Customs and their Origin* (1859; reprinted, n. p.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1977), pp. 37-41.

[11] Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of the Abuses in England* (Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1965), p. 174.

[12] See J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 20.

[13] See John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 95; *John Gerard: The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, trans. Philip Caraman, With an Introduction by Graham Greene (London: Longmans, Green, 1951), p. 17. See also Chris Durston, "Lords of Misrule: The Puritan War on Christmas 1642-60," in *History Today*, 35 (December 1985), pp. 8, 11.

[14] Quotations from Donne's letter of 2 February 1602 are from Augustus Jessopp, *John Donne: Sometime Dean of St. Paul's, A. D. 1621-1631* (London: Methuen, 1897), p. 31.

[15] Barnabe Googe, trans. "The Popish Kingdom," in *Anatomie*, Kraus Reprint, 1965, p. 324.

[16] See William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. A.R. Humphries, Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1981), II, i, 66-73. Cf. Izaak Walton, "The Life and Death of Dr. Donne," (1675 ed.) in *The Pilgrim's Progress and The Lives of John Donne and George Herbert*, ed. Charles W. Eliot, Harvard Classics (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909), p. 351.

[17] Walton, p. 341. On "Donne's [own] fascination with the remotest origin of his being," see Robert B. Shaw, *The Call of God: The Theme of Vocation in the Poetry of Donne and Herbert* (Cambridge, Mass." Cowley Publications, 1981), ch. 2, esp. p. 40

[18] See *Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation 1606-1646*, ed. William T. Davis (1908; rpt. New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1971), pp. 126-27.

[19] Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986); see esp. pp. 16-18.

[20] Lancelot Andrewes, *A Sermon Preached Before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall, On Munday the 25, of December, Being Christmas day, Anno 1609, By the Bishop of Elie*. London, [1609 or 1610], pp. 31-32.

[21] Referring once to the custom of cleaning one's house at Christmastime, Donne's emphasis fell nonetheless on the importance of cleansing one's soul to receive a visit from Christ. See *Sermons*, 6: 336

[22] This was not a permanent change. In 1644 December 25 fell on the last Wednesday of the month, the day which the government had appointed for fasting.

[23] See the entry on Alford, written by W[illiam] H[enry] F[remantle], in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917).

[24] Alford, Editor's Preface, *The Works of John Donne, D.D., Dean of Saint Paul's, 1621-1631, With a Memoir of His Life*, 6 vols. (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 1: vii.

[25] Editor's Preface, 1: vi-vii.

[26] Henry Alford, *The School of the Heart and Other Poems*, 2 vols. (London: Longman & Co.; Cambridge, J. & J.J. Deighton, 1835), 1: 36-37.

[27] See the catalogue of "New Works Published by John W. Parker" bound into the back of Vol. 6 of *The Works of John Donne*. On the publishing house generally, see the item by Dennis R. Dean in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*: Vol. 106: *British Literary Publishing Houses, 1820-1880*, ed. Patricia J. Anderson and Jonathan Rose (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), 233-36.

[28] Alford cut many words and phrases from Donne's Latin quotations of Scripture and of the Fathers and Doctors of the church. It is difficult to isolate consistent criteria used for the cuts, but it looks as if one criterion that he often used was that, when Donne provided a close translation into English of a Latin phrase, he could omit the Latin. This had the effect of making most of the remaining Latin in the sermons accessible only to those who knew the language, whereas Donne himself had been more accommodating to hearers who didn't have Latin.

[29] Theodore Gill, *The Sermons of John Donne: Selected and Introduced* (Canada: Meridan Books, 1958), pp. 27, 284.

[30] Alford, *Works of Donne*, 1: vi.

[31] But cf. the Christmas sermon for 1628 (*Sermons*, 8: 301, 302), where Alford retains the words "bowels" and "embowelled."

[32] See Sandys, pp. 134-37, 145-46; Gordon Huelin, "Christmas in the City," *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 3, no. 3 (October 1978), pp. 169-70; cf. Golby and Purdue, pp. 35, 40-56, 76.

[33] Golby and Purdue, p. 45.

[34] See *The Christmas Book*, p. 46; cf. Golby and Purdue, p. 24.

[35] Potter and Simpson refer to this passage in their introduction to Vol. 3.

[36] See especially the sermons for 1622 (4: 286-87, 291-92) and 1628 (8: 305).

[37] For a valuable collection of passages from Donne illustrating this interpretation of the number seven, see A. B. Chambers, *Transfigured Rites in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), p. 102.

[38] But cf. Appendix B in 10: 414-17, where Potter and Simpson list for each sermon its position in the folios, in Alford's edition, and in their own edition.

[39] For a trenchant critique of popular assumptions about Donne's "development" as a preacher, see P. G. Stanwood, "Donne's Earliest Sermons and the

Penitential Tradition," a paper read at the eighth annual Convention of the John Donne Society, Gulfport, Mississippi, February, 1993.

[40] Coleridge wrote of this sermon that as a "whole" it is "a noble Sermon—in thought and in diction." See *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 12: Marginalia II*, ed. George Whalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 288.

[41] On the grounds for Donne's fear of being misinterpreted, see Richard B. Wollman, "The 'Press and the Fire': Print and Manuscript Culture in Donne's Circle," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 33 (1993): 85-97.