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Penance and Passion Week: John Donne's Sermon on Psalm 6:6–7, and Charles I

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John Donne preached six sermons on texts from Psalm 6, the first of the Penitential Psalms.[1] That employing the text of verses 8–10 has been assigned delivery in 1623, April–June, and those with texts from verses 1, 2–3, 4–5 (twice), have been thought to have been "delivered in the two years before his illness" (that is, before November 1623). However, the sermon on verses 6–7 is inscribed as "Preached to the King at White-hall, upon the occasion of the Fast, April 5, 1628" (8:192–218). I. A. Shapiro argued that this sermon was probably not specifically written down for delivery, and Paul Stanwood views it as a reworking of an earlier version, linking it with sermons delivered at Chelsea in October 1625, because of the plague in the City of London.[2] It is speculated that Donne both revised his text—with and by notes he had used—and wrote out a sermon basically previously given. If so, we have no specific occasion and thus no specific suggested date for an "original" version of the sermon, except its being part of a series evoked by the

[1]Sermons are quoted from *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959–1962); they will be cited parenthetically by volume and page numbers. Reference is also made to *LXXX Sermons*, ed. John Donne, Jr. (London: Printed for Richard Royston and Richard Marriot, 1640).

[2]I. A. Shapiro, "Donne's Sermon Dates," *Review of English Studies* 31 (1980): 54–56; and P. G. Stanwood, "Donne's Earliest Sermons and the Penitential Tradition," in Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi, eds., *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross* (Conway: University of Central Arkansas Press, 1995), pp. 366–379. Visitation of the plague raged from May to its height in August 1625.

plague in 1625. The full text—the beginning and ending being suggested as reflecting the date in 1628 against its middle in 1625—needs to be examined. Of particular concern here will be the emphases in the published version on fasting and its significance, on humiliation, on "postulatory," and on the import of its opening sentence: "This is *Davids* humiliation: and coming after his repentance and reconciliation, *Davids* penance." It was first published by Donne's son, in *LXXX Sermons* (1640).

I must first digress, however, to say something about the dating of the sermon and its relationship with other sermons on Psalm 6. The dating is not really pertinent to my remarks here since all agree that the published version and date are valid. The date of 1623 cited before for the sermon on verses 8–10 is assigned by Potter and Simpson (6:1–2) on the basis of a similar discussion and set of metaphors in that sermon (6:1, 39ff.) and in a letter to Sir Robert Ker, prior to April, May, or June 1623 (thus, correcting Sir Edmund Gosse's dating of the letter as February or March 1624[3]). The letter was published in Sir Tobie Mathew's *Letters* (1660).[4] It appears on pp. 305–307 (the significant description specifically on p. 306), and is headed: "*A Letter from* J. D. *to* Sr. Robert Carre *Knight, when he was in* Spain, *about severall matters*." Stanwood comments, with an inaccuracy as to the recipient: "A reference in the sermon to a 'flat Map upon a round body' (6:1–2 and 59) [referring to Potter and Simpson's discussion] coincides with a similar remark in a letter to Sir Tobie Matthew of 1623."[5] On the basis of notes in Trinity

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[3]See Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's*, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co.; London: William Heinemann, 1899), 2:189, 191–192.

[4]Mathew, *A Collection of Letters, Made By S^r Tobie Mathews K^t with a Character of the most Excellent Lady, Lucy, Countesse of Carleile. By the same Author. To which are Added many Letters of his own, to severall Persons Of Honour, who were Contemporary with him* (London: Printed for Henry Herringman, 1660).

[5]Stanwood, "Earliest Sermons," p. 369. Kate Gartner Frost has written, "In a series of sermons on the Penitential Psalms delivered in the two years before his illness" (that is, before Donne wrote Devotions in November 1623), assuming delivery of most of the sermons on Psalm 6 and perhaps others in 1622–1623 (see *Holy Delight: Typology, Numerology, and Autobiography in Donne's "Devotions*

College, Dublin, MS 419, apparently by a John Burley (ff. 72v–76), dated 16 October 1625, recording statements from one of the sermons on Psalm 6:4–5, Stanwood suggests that "Probably all of the sermons on the Penitential Psalm 6 were occasioned by the plague," when Donne was in Chelsea.[6] Thus possibilities of dating may be for at least one of them in 1623 (although that is the so-called "final" one), in 1625 or in revision at that time, and in 1628 for reuse and revision of the sermon on verses 6–7. Stanwood separates parts of the sermon on verses 6–7 thus: "the first sixty-four lines (in Potter and Simpson's edition) and the final forty lines are all that make the sermon distinctive for this occasion."[7] That means only the first paragraph and the last paragraph of the sermon. In sum, then, if the sermon on verses 8–10 were written shortly after the letter to Ker, it would suggest that all these psalms should be dated 1623. But such an assumption is not necessarily accurate, and other assumptions that they were all written about the same time and in order in 1625 are also not certain. The implication of no significant revision in the middle section of the sermon on verses 6–7 is likewise not certain.

Donne's sermon on Psalm 6, verses 6 and 7, is delimited to two verses, but its content, organization, and what I suggest as its political implication move into an expanded realm that encompasses the full psalm and yields an intentionality for this sermon as delivered in 1628 and later published. The text is: "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. / Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies." The occasion is the Saturday before Palm Sunday, the initiation of Passion Week. Saint John Fisher, in his sermon on this psalm delivered in August 1507 and published in 1508,[8] emphasizes David's penance in these verses through his tears and weeping, leading Fisher to exclaim the mercy of almighty God (that is, "the medicine" that

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Upon Emergent Occasions" [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990], p. 7 and n. 100).

[6]Stanwood, "John Donne's Sermon Notes," *Review of English Studies* 29 (1978): 313–317.

[7]Stanwood, "Earliest Sermons," p. 369.

[8]Fisher, *This treatise concernynge the fruytfull sayinges of Dauyd the kynge & prophets in the seuen penytencyll psalmes* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, [16 June 1508]). Further editions: 1509 (two), 1510, 1515 (?), 1518 (?), 1525, 1529, 1555.

sinners need to repair both body and soul) extended to all who are penitent.[9] A standard reading of this psalm is that David has fallen into the sin of pride and it is spiritual rather than bodily sickness that besets him. Donne, in his sermon on the psalm, after having paid much attention to the tears and weeping, exclaims: "here is a precept of God, implied in this precedent and practise of *David*, That as long as the sense of a former sinne, or the inclination to a future oppresses thee, thou must not close thine eyes, thou must not take thy rest, till, as God married thy body and soule together in the Creation, and shall at last crowne thy body and soule together in the Resurrection, so they may also rest together here, that as thy body rests in thy bed, thy soule may rest in the peace of thy Conscience, and that thou never say to thy head, Rest upon this pillow, till thou canst say to thy soule, Rest in this repentance, in this peace" (8:203). While his words on the text's tears and weeping can have much meaning for his general audience, this whole passage and its summary just read imply strong double meaning when we remember this was a 1628 presentation in words like "former sinne" and "future," "thy Conscience" and "repentance," remembering that it *precedes* "reconciliation" and "humiliation." Furthermore, the words and ideas revolving around "former sinne" and "future," as well as "crowne" will echo in sermons delivered soon after this one in April 1628.

Donne also considers "tears" in his sermon on Psalm 6:8–10; for example (6:1, 48) he writes: "And therefore *Lacrymæ fœnus*, sayes S. *Basil*, Teares are that usury, by which the joyes of Heaven are multiplied unto us; the preventing Grace, and the free mercy of God, is our stock, and principall; but the Acts of obedience, and mortification, fastaing, and praying, and weeping, are *Fœnus*, (sayes that blessed Father) the interest, and the increase of our holy joy." Note the reference to "fasting" in conjunction with weeping and obedience, and the "mortification."

The basic belief of Psalm 6 is that everything happens through God's will, and thus our afflictions express His attitude toward our "sinning."[10]

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[9]I use the modern text *Exposition of the Seven Penitential Psalms. In Modern English with an Introduction by Anne Barbeau Gardiner* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998); here pp. 14–15. Future references to this edition of Fisher's text will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[10]For discussion of psalms, see such important volumes as C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (New

(The seven penitential psalms were traditionally viewed in the medieval church, as Paul Stanwood has pointed out,[11] as countering the seven deadly sins; for Psalm 6 the sin that is deterred is anger.) This point of God's anger and "afflictions" being visited upon humankind for their sinning should be uppermost in our minds as we read Donne's sermon addressed to the King at this most meaningfully religious and atoning period in a believer's life. (The date given the sermon is, of course, Old Style, making Palm Sunday, 6 April; Good Friday, 11 April; and Easter, 13 April.) Collects in the Book of Common Prayer for this period are thus interesting: that for Passion Sunday, 31 March, reads, "We beseech thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon thy people; that by thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord"; that for Palm Sunday reminds that "all mankind should follow the example of his great humility," while that for the Tuesday before Easter recalls that the Son "gave his back to the smiters and hid not his face for shame." Fisher stresses the sin of pride when he examines David's need for true penance, and remarks, "When David had the will to know himself guilty and said, *peccavi Domini*, my Lord God, I have offended, immediately all his sins were forgiven" (p. 7). He was brought into being, Fisher reminds his audience, not "in vain and for nothing" (p. 15) but "to know God; . . . to love God; and . . . to remember and to give thanks to God." And significantly for us to consider in looking at Donne's sermon, according to Fisher, such reasons cannot be discharged in hell or in purgatory, but only in continuance in this world (p. 16). Donne's references to Purgatory in this sermon suggest agreement: "If upon admittance, that these after-afflictions might be called punishments, they had not inferred a satisfaction, and thereupon super-induced a satisfaction after this life, and so a Purgatory" (8:215).

York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906); Norman H. Spaith, *The Psalms: A Short Introduction* (London: The Epworth Press, [1945]); Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (London: SCM Press, 1962); Stanley L. Jaki, *Praying the Psalms: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2001); J. M. Neale and R. F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, 4 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1976; as well as vol. 6 of *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1955), which includes the Psalms.

[11]Stanwood, "Earliest Sermons," pp. 371 and 376, n. 10.

Donne's sermon is influenced by its occasion and suggests a political intentionality, while showing a more meandering development and more "emotional" undercurrent than Fisher's. Or than that by Robert Rollock, a Church of Scotland minister and University Principal at St. Andrews, Edinburgh, who was an advocate for the unity of church and state, as well as an early exponent of covenanat theology (1600).[12] "This is a Psalme of Prayer," says Rollock; "*David* . . . prayeth to God that he would remoove his anger and scourge" (p. 35), stressing God's wrath and anger (pp. 38–39, 45). Psalm 6, where the psalmist is ill and his death seems near, and other penitential psalms, have been linked with the *Devotions* (1624);[13] for example, Psalm 38:3, twice appears in the Prayer of Devotion 2; Psalm 6:2; 38:11; 32:3–5, respectively, in the Expostulations of Devotions 4, 5, and 10. A concept of penitence and contrition underlies the *Devotions* as a sense of human failure toward God and of God's displeasure and His mercy. The lack of linkage in this sermon to his own previous and contemporary situation—not only its beginning and ending—separates this sermon from others on Psalm 6 and points to a different linkage, instead to its stated occasion and its attendant different contemporaneity. The first sentence reminds his audience that "This is *Davids* humiliation," a most significant word for this sermon: only *after* repentance and reconciliation, leading to a humiliation, is David's penance achieved. The "humility" of the Collect for the next day (to be repeated until Good Friday) and that associated with the Christ becomes "humiliation" with further connotations

[12]Rollock, *An Exposition Vpon Some Select Psalmes of David, conteining great store of most excellent and comfortable doctrine, and instructions for all those, that (vnder the burthen of sinne) thirst for Comfort in Christ Iesus. Written by that faithfull seruant of God, M. ROBERT ROLLOK, sometimne Pastour in the Church of Edinburgh* (Edinbvrgh: Printed by Robert Waldegraue, 1600), pp. 35–80 (Psalm 6); future references to Rollock's text will be cited parenthetically by page number. It should also be remembered that the psalms are numbered differently in the Catholic (Vulgate) and the Authorized versions; the Penitential Psalms are, thus, 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142 (Catholic), but 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143 (most Protestant). Further, the Catholic and some Reformed versions count the headings of the psalms as verses; thus, in Psalm 6 there are 12 verses in Catholic versions and 10 in the Authorized version.

[13]Donne, *Devotions vpon Emergent Occasions* (London: A. M. for Thomas Iones, 1624).

attached as well as Saint Basil's "mortification." Donne recalls that Ephrem took David's "labour . . . to conceale his penance and mortifaction, from the sight and knowledge of others" (8:199), but now, in Psalm 6:6–7, David "has opened himselfe to God, he opened himselfe to the world too; . . . here he sayes, Come, and I will tell you, what I have done against my God" (8:199). This leads to a long discussion of tears and quotation of numerous fathers, emboldening the advice that "thou must have teares first: first thou must come to this weeping, or else God cannot come to this wiping; God hath not that errand to thee, to wipe teares from thine eyes, if there be none there; If thou do nothing for thy selfe, God finds nothing to doe for thee" (8:201). Each member of the congregation may be "thou," at least in general terms, but is not Charles also "thou"—and with much more meaningfulness? The sermon is indeed, as Dennis B. Quinn remarked, a lecture:[14] it is very long, it is filled with references and their sources, it delves into history and doctrinal concerns, and its edification is much stronger than, for example, the explicatory intent of the sermon on Psalm 6:8–10. As Fredric Jameson argued and exemplified in *The Political Unconscious*, "surface meanings" do not necessarily present the full political perspective of a literary work,[15] and here we have a strong example of "the priority of the political interpretation" that may underlie a literary work.

The significance of the Fast and fasting is examined, indicating its relationship as evidence of penitential presence through its "humiliation" of the "sinner": "And in our distresses, where can we hope, but in God? and how shall we have access to God, but in humiliation? We doubt not therefore but that this act of humiliation, his fasting was spread over *Davids* other acts in this Text" (8:193–194). Simpson points out (8:19–20) that Charles "had ordered a public fast in consequence of the naval and military disasters which had occurred in the war which England was waging against France and Spain." Donne wrote, "Not to fast when the times require it, and when Authority enjoynes it, or not to beleeve, that God will be affected and moved with that fasting, and be the better enclined for it is . . . a despairing of the State, a despairing of the Church, a despairing of the grace of God to both, or of his mercy upon

[14]Quinn, "Donne's Christian Eloquence," *ELH* 27 (1960): 296.

[15]See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 17.

both" (8:193). Fasting in Church doctrine (Catholic and State Church) has always been viewed as a proper expression of humility, of humiliation, as penance, and as a sign of religious devotion. "If we must not call fasting (as fasting is but a bodily abstinence) a religious act, an act of Gods worship, yet it is a Basis, and a foundation, upon which other religious acts, and acts of Gods worship are the better advanced" (8:193).

What I have been citing is found in the first long paragraph of the sermon, that section that Stanwood separates as being one of the sections that is distinctive in this sermon for its published date. Yet Donne's very pointed remarks therein have an edge, presented before the king, that should not be dismissed. His second sentence itself tells us much: "And yet here is no Fast; It is true; No Fast named; *David* had had experience, that as the wisest actions of Kings, (of Kings as Kings over Subjects) so the devoutest actions of Kings, (of Kings, as humble Subjects to the King of Kings, the God of Heaven) has been misinterpreted" (8:192). Indeed, I wonder whether Donne might have read and remembered Rollock's final statement on Psalm 6: "For there shall remaine a Church of God vppon the earth, even vntil the second coming of Christ, albeit al the Kings of the earth conspire against the same" (p. 66).

After that first paragraph in Donne's sermon and before moving to the specific psalmic text, Donne introduces the importance of prayer for the penitent, and it, of course, is a further sign of humiliation toward the Godhead. "Yet the soule that inanimates, and quickens all, is prayer; and therefore this whole Psalme is a prayer; And the prayer is partly Deprecatory . . . And partly Postulatory. . ." (8:194). (The sermon on Psalm 6:8–10, also is said to be part Deprecatory, Postulatory, and Gratulatory [6:1, 40], indicating of that second part only that "our duty is to pursue that way, to continue in prayer" [6:41]. "Postulatory" is an interesting word in the sermon under discussion: it implies a nomination ecclesiatically to higher status which is to be sanctioned by a higher authority, even to the point of specifically suggesting a kind of sanctification. Does this concept fully apply to the ordinary parishioner?) Hinted at is the aim of meaningful devotion throughout Passion Week following to its end on Good Friday and the sacrifice of the Christ, a parishioner thereby advancing his religious being in God's eyes. The example of Jesus, his suffering ("passion"), and his translation to His higher status with His resurrection (the psalm is specifically said to be

"Postulatory") should be echoing here. Prayer, for Donne we see, involves both self-accusation and argument for God's acceptance of the penitent for absolution through an eradication of all that is sinful in his past. "[God] will much more heare us, as *David*, when we make outward declarations too, because that outward declaration conduces more to his glory, in the edification of his servants" (8:195). The tone is not that of Fisher's personal element: it is deprecatory and postulatory, a pointed (and emotion-raising) message. It is difficult to place this as some kind of counsel for an audience that has specifically suffered a visitation of the plague. What "humiliation" could, in that circumstance, be cogent? Donne ends this paragraph: "As, I say, hee [David] began with reasons of that kinde, arising from himselfe, so he returnes and ends with the same humiliation, in the reasons arising from himselfe too" (8:195). The sermon may be counsel for the people in his audience but we must remember that Charles I is part of that audience and the sermon is specifically delivered before the king, and in 1628 there was much afoot politically for the king to acknowledge, over which to humiliate himself, to correct his pride, to act as a "King over Subjects."

Charles's Lord Chancellor, George Villiers, Lord Buckingham, had sponsored an expedition to the Isle of Rhé to aid French Protestants in 1627. The disastrous defeat, the problem of payment and quartering of soldiers, his earlier (1626–1627) contested appointment as Chancellor of Cambridge University (this by a defiant king after Buckingham's impeachment by the House of Commons for his championing of Richard Montagu in 1626) all combined to influence the election in the Third Parliament, which was in force only from 17 March to 26 June 1628. That is, it was in force as Donne spoke. Donne's sermon was delivered in the midst of this battling and embattled Parliament, which proposed the Petition of Right on 28 May to which Charles assented on 7 June, after argument about taxation, and tonnage and poundage, although much dissent in ecclesiastical matters provoked this bill to begin with. We should remember that the despotic and hated Buckingham was assassinated by John Felton on 23 August 1628. Felton had been a naval lieutenant at Rhé. He was cheered by the people as a hero and with a cry of "God bless thee, little David!" The Petition of Right was enacted, but not much changed in Parliament's relationship with the king. The Petition had objected to many "innovations in

government and innovations in religion."[16] But not much was altered in the people's life, particularly not in religious matters or alterations in Charles's hated French connections. Within a decade the king's actions and duplicities brought on a full schism with many religious and other leaders, followed by the Civil Wars, and the trial and execution of Charles in January 1649.

Is Donne, in this sermon, not suggesting to this autocratic king a confession of "sins" to God at this most special of religious times, though humiliation be exposed, though deprecation be involved, though repentance for one's past actions be shown?

Donne is less formal in the structure of this sermon and its direct explication of the psalmic text in his introduction than others employing a psalm text, but he is likewise concerned with "the edification of [God's] servants." Relating then the words of verses 6 and 7 reporting David's groanings and tears to his listeners, he admonishes, "so ought we likewise to doe, if we will be partakers of *Davids* example" to achieve the mortification, "assumed after repentance, and reconciliation to God" (8:195).

The narration of David's further actions as example follows, leading to the imprinting of God's mark upon him (and those who emulate him) through sighing and groaning: "sigh, and turne forward, to turne upon God, and to pursue this sorrow for our sins, then, in such sighes," which will bring "rest, in the remission of thy sins, then causes . . . the labour that a righteous man is bound to" (8:197–99). The continued *confirmatio* repeats the lessons for the hearers in David's example: the need "to avoid ostentation, and vaine glory, and praise of men," for others take advantage of our tribulations (8:199). The tears, sighs evoked by our concupiscencies "carry up our soule," but rest does not come "till thou canst say to thy soule, Rest in this repentance, in this peace" (8:203). A refutation of commonplace negative reactions, such as the thought that God's corrections are punishments, that old age or blindness or death are results of the wages of sin, is enunciated: "Gods Judgements are not punishments, except there be more anger then love, more Justice then Mercy in them; and that is never" (8:210). After-afflictions might be called punishments, but they are not so. "Trust not to the treasure of the

[16]Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution 1625–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 57.

Church . . . ; No, trust not to the merits of Christ himselfe, in their application to thee . . . except thou remember thy sins in thy bed, and pour out thy teares from thine eyes, and fulfill the sufferings of Christ in thy selfe" (8:216–217). One must submit to heavy penance and not rely only upon the mercy of God until such penance is discharged. The emotional is dominant in the words and, we can be sure, in the delivery. This section of the sermon may apply to a general audience and to a general occasion, and may try to refute a belief that the visitation of the plague was a punishment for humankind's sinning. The reading of either time, 1625 or 1628, might be construed as a result of God's anger and the inflicting of justice, as Rollock's sermon stresses as text, but Donne ameliorates such an interpretation to God's ultimate love and mercy. "Anger" would seem to be most appropriate against this king and his Lord Chancellor.

The leave-taking (the section seen as distinctive for the occasion) both sums up and repeats the edifying message of the sermon: perhaps "at the last day . . . you did Repent, and you did receive the Seale, but you did not pursue that repentance, nor performe the conditions required at your hand" (8:217)—a quite pointed remark when we think of the possible underlying political intention. "[A]fter this fast . . . he will bring us to the Marriage Supper of the Lambe" (8:281), but not without this fast is implied. The return to the beginning of the sermon stresses that this Fast should effect for the *true* penitent the humiliation of the sinner and the ensuing reconciliation with God. There may be relapses and thus after-afflictions, but the repenting at this Fast, issuing in the Passion of the Christ, *should* signify no return to the sins repented (8:214). Throughout, there has been an emotional dimension as the individual sinner is admonished for his sin, for the need to repent, for the signification of the Fast being celebrated.

Penance had been undergoing, since the early sixteenth century, alteration from its Catholic administration. The *Canones penitentiales* were well known, and to counter the "lightening penances and making them arbitrary" which the sixteenth century inherited from the centuries before, later priests tended to give harsher penances with stricter satisfaction for one's sins, of exacting "works" as satisfaction. However, Joannes Wessel Gansfort condemned the practice: "every sentence of

obligatory punishment after the remission of guilt is stupid."[17] And Martin Luther urged penance that could be immediately executed, observing that the Penitential Canons were obsolete, and merely a guide to the confessor and terrifying to the penitent. For the Protestant, with penance no longer a sacrament, penitential expression engaged different, nonprescribed form and closer, individual relationship for the penitent with his God. Sermons on the psalms became increasingly homilies, stressing more and more spiritual edification. We see this nonformal and individualistic concept in Donne's sermons. For after the show of penance through tears, sobs, groans, he warns, "Thou couldest not stop the sin at thine eyes; stop not thy repentance there neither, but pursue it in wholesome mortification, through all those parts, in which the sinne hath advanced his dominion over thee" (8:204); that is, through being "turbatus" (dimmed, consumed, troubled) and through "indignation," that is, the anger of God through which we may "perish in a halfe repentance, before we perfect our Reconciliation . . . if they be hypocritically, or occasionally, or fashionally, or perfunctorily performed, and not with a right heart towards God" (8:205). "There is no person," he asserts, "to whom we can say, that Gods Corrections are Punishments, any otherwise then Medicinall [Fisher's word and modifier], and such, as he may receive amendment by, that receives them" (8:211). Such repentance "hath onely *Terminum à quo*, Something to turn from, and that is sin, and *Terminum ad quem*, Something to turne to, and that is God" (8:213–214). But such repentance is false if there is future sin, not just through a lapse but to a relapse, "if he do not prevent it with these medicinall assistances" (8:215–216).

We understand the message Donne brings to his listeners (in the middle part of this sermon) concerning one's penance when relapse occurs and the need for constant "medicinall" assistance (God's mercy) appertains, but the king is also one of the listeners, and in April 1628—after the political maneuverings of the last part of 1625, of 1626 through April 1628—the dissolutions of Parliament, the treaty of Southampton with the Dutch against the Spanish, naval battles with Spain and the problems of New World commerce, put a meaningful edge of reception

[17]Gansfort, *Farrago rerum theologicarum uberrima* (Basel, 1522), 58b–59a. See Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 339.

theory on all Donne's words for April 1628. And most clearly the final words of this sermon, assigned as they have been to 1628, ring out incisive criticism to one of his auditors: "our glorious God, our gracious Saviour, To him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lambe, first, that as he is the King of Kings, he will establish, and prosper that Crowne, which he hath set upon the head of his Anointed over us here, and hereafter Crowne that Crowne with another Crowne, a better Crowne, a Crowne of immarcescible [unfading, incorruptible] glory in the Kingdome of Heaven" (8:218).

Is Donne, in this sermon, not suggesting to this autocratic king a confession of "sins" to God at this most special of religious times, though humiliation be exposed, though deprecation be involved, though repentance for one's past actions be shown?

In his sermon on Easter Sunday, 13 April 1628, Donne concludes, "Only that man that loves God, hath the art to love himself; . . . to know God himself, in himself, and by himself, as he is all in all" (8:236). Two days later, Tuesday of Easter Week, "Preached to the King at Whitehall," Donne cites Isaiah 32:8 in conclusion: "Thy King, thy Christ, is a liberall God . . . by these liberall things, we shall all stand. The King himselfe stands by it, Christ himself. . . . Accept liberall propositions from his Ministers: and apply them liberally, and chearfully to thine own soule; for, *The liberall man deviseth liberall things, and by liberall things he shall stand*" (8:252).

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