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"Sensualiter tangitur": The Christ Child "Born a Martyr" in John Donne's Sermon for Christmas 1626

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God cloth'd himselfe in vile Mans flesh, that so
He might be weake inough to suffer wo.
HSSpit, ll. 13-14[1]

An Uneasy Manger

In a late Christmas homily, Donne employed a traditional image of the newborn Christ as the *Schmerzenskind*, or Child of Sorrows. This image associates the griefs and pain of the birth in Bethlehem with the suffering of Calvary, and its intent is to show that Christ is born a "Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Is 53:3). His suffering and his salvific mission are inextricably linked, and he is the Savior from the time of his entrance into the world. Rather than using the traditional image for its traditional purposes of arousing devotion and explaining the links between the Incarnation and the Eucharist, Donne seems to argue that the Child Jesus, and by association, Christ in the Eucharist, is not "sensualiter tangitur"—touched bodily—but merely seen. He is seen as a sign that the congregation cannot under–stand except as Simeon understood the infant at the Presentation.

[1] *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne: The Holy Sonnets* vol. 7.1, ed. Gary A. Stringer, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

Donne vaults at the beginning of the sermon from the Christ Child's suffering to the theology of the Eucharist suggested by meditating on his mission to suffer and die. Thence, he vaults again to portraying the aged Simeon's encounter with the infant as a model for Anglicans potentially tempted to think of the Eucharist as a physical encounter with Jesus. Along the way, the wounded child disappears. The infant Jesus starts out close to us and our humanity, and unites time as well as the divine with the human in his Incarnation and his Passion. Finally, however, Donne privileges sight over touch and future understanding over present union, as even Simeon seems to end up with no Christ Child to embrace, and the congregation with no sure sense of the vision he says they have beheld.

As Elina Gertsman points out, images of the Proleptic Passion feature signs of the Christ Child's destiny to suffer:

> Such signs can be explicit—as in the Buxtehude altarpiece (ca.1410), where the Christ Child, seated at his mother's feet, interrupts his reading in order to contemplate the instruments of his future torture and death (here the cross, the nails, the spear and the crown of thorns)—or implicit—as in Jan van Eyck's Lucca Madonna (ca. 1436), which likens the Virgin to the altar, and the nursing Christ Child, seated on a piece of fabric, to the Host placed on a corporal.[2]

Donne probably saw such images during his travels in Europe and encountered them in reading several of his favorite Fathers of the Church: Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure. He might also have found the Proleptic Passion in more recent Jesuit authors, to whom the image was very significant. Unlike most modern Christians but very like his contemporaries and predecessors, Donne thinks of the cradling in the manger as a source of pain and sorrow to the Child. The poverty of his birth is not mentioned sentimentally, but with real understanding of its indecorousness and discomfort.

Donne furthermore relates the Incarnation to the Eucharist and Passion, a traditional medieval conflation of images deriving from a

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[2] Elina Gertsman, "Signs of Death: The Sacrificial Christ Child in Late-Medieval Art," *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!* eds. Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 67.

tradition of Nativity hymnody that we can trace back at least to the third-century St. Ephrem the Syrian and the fourth-century fathers, Sts. John Chrysostom, Augustine, Hilary, and others.[3] Aristide Serra even argues that the image derives from linguistic parallels between the description of Christ's swaddling in Luke's account of the Nativity and his description of Christ's burial.[4] Donne's choice to locate a catechesis on proper Anglican understanding of the Lord's Supper in a Christmas homily introduces the fundamental dissonance in this late sermon.[5]

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[3] See Theresa Kenney, "The Manger as Calvary and Altar," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 29-65.

[4] Serra states, "What dominates is the fundamental concept, which consists precisely in the presence of the pannolini (swaddling clothes) in the manger and the lenzuolo (linens) of the tomb. This type of 'basic garment' in both situations appears also to have the value of a sign to the eyes of the Evangelist." See Aristide Serra, *Sapienza e contemplazione di Maria secondo Luca 2, 19.51b* (Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 1982). Serra cites M. D. Goulder and M. L. Sanderson, "St. Luke's Genesis," *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1957), pp. 12-30. St. Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundam Lucam*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), p. 49. Cf. "The Manger: Ritual Law and Soteriology" in John Duncan, Martin Derrett, *Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp. 48-53. Cf. "Il significato della mangiatoio" in the same volume, pp. 54-59. Cf. St. Ambrose, *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento*, *CPL* 152 *PL* 16 817-83. O. Faller, M. Petschenig, eds., *Sancti Ambrosii Opera CSEL* 79 (Vienna-Leipzig: F. Tempsky, 1964), pp. 225-81. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, "The Third Theological Oration": he remarks that Christ "was wrapped in swaddling cloths—but He took off the swathing bands of the grave by his rising again"; Nazianzen, "Select Orations of Saint Gregory Nazianzen," p. 308. Cited in Mary Dzon, *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), p. 336, n. 255. Lastly, see Matthieu Somon, "The Ineffability of Incarnation in Le Brun's *Silence* or *Sleep of the Child*," in Walter Mellon, Lee Palmer Wanderl, eds., *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 137-60.

[5] Eleanor McNees has argued that Donne's approach to eucharistic issues allows him to concentrate on the recipient's "conformity with Christ through self-sacrifice." She maintains that Donne adhered to Anglican orthodoxy in rejecting transubstantiation but accepting that the sacrament was not just a sign but a seal, and, moreover, a sacrifice. I think McNees's arguments are valid, but also that Donne is not resting easy in this compromise. This late

Whereas in his *La Corona* sonnets, collapsing time between himself and the events of Christ's childhood does not introduce any sectarian polemic (though controversial elements exist even there), this public composition, spoken before a mixed congregation at St. Paul's, shows Donne veering between a Catholic, sacrificial understanding of the Lord's Supper and a reformed, memorialist understanding.[6] Moreover, since he fixes upon the figure of Simeon the prophet as the exemplum of that proper Anglican understanding, Donne entangles himself in problematic issues of mediation and, surprisingly, reliance on apocrypha, and soon forgets the Child he set out to praise on the day of his birth.

Robert Whalen has already noted the strong Roman Catholic undercurrent that flows through this late sermon. Donne's use of the Proleptic Passion aligns his sermon with the medieval and continental traditions conflating the moment of consecration with the Incarnation. As Donne says in this sermon, "The end of all digestions and concoctions is assimilation, that the meat may become our body."[7] Like the Child with his divine knowledge of his mission, the congregation

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Christmas sermon reveals further conflict. See Eleanor McNees, "Donne and the Anglican Docrine of the Eucharist," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* (1987), pp. 94, 97, 101.

[6] Theresa M. DiPasquale has discussed the links between "Nativitie" and this sermon specifically, remarking, "The command, 'Kisse him,' as it appears on line 13 of 'Nativitie' recalls not only Donne's interpretation of Psalm 2, but also his Eucharistic reading of a scriptural event that occurred during the period of time covered in the 'Nativitie' sonnet: old Simeon's embrace of the child Jesus at his presentation in the temple. . . . Simeon's embrace of the child, his reference to the vision he beholds, and his prophecy of Mary's woe are all reflected in 'Nativitie,' where Donne tells his soul to see Christ 'with . . . faiths eyes,' to kiss him, and to go into Egypt with the sorrowful mother" Theresa M. DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999), p. 71. See also Theresa M. Kenney, "'Kisse him, and with him into Egypt goe': John Donne and the Christ Child of 'Nativitie,'" in her *All Wonders in One Sight: The Christ Child Among the Elizabethan and Stuart Poets* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2021).

[7] John Donne, "Sermon 4 Preached at St. Paul's on Christmas-Day, 1626, Luke ii. 29 and 30," in John Donne, *Sermons*, ed. by Evelyn Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955-57), pp. 57-78.

cannot forget that even their beholding his birth is a confirmation that they are entering into the night of his Passion. Yet perhaps more than in any of his poems on the Nativity, Donne reveals in this sermon how very deep the rift is in his sensibilities, in his comprehension of the sacramental presence of Christ. Placed against the Holy Sonnet cited at the head of the chapter and the *La Corona* sonnets dealing with the Christ Child, the sermon seems to eschew any sense of emotional closeness with the Child himself, and to confine itself to application of the lesson of the day on the Presentation in the Temple to the congregation assembled in St. Paul's. But Donne keeps his audience on tenterhooks as he walks a tightrope between reformed and Catholic understandings of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As Whalen has pointed out, we see this "confusion of identity" in "the preacher of the 1626 Christmas sermon who engages in anti-Roman scorn while nevertheless endorsing a sacramental theology differing little, if at all, from that of his perceived Roman adversary."[8] The most potentially explosive thing Donne does is preach on reception of Communion while discussing Christ's infancy; he knows the history of the image of the suffering Child and its association with the Roman Catholic doctrine on the Real Presence.[9]

Donne, however, strategically defines the type of assimilation he has in mind for the congregation's communion: he parallels the identity between the birth of Christ and the Eucharist with a proposed identity between the speaker and congregation on the one hand, and on the other, with the devout Simeon, who was promised by God that he should see his salvation with his own eyes. The believers at St. Paul's who received Communion that Christmas day were like Simeon in seeing the promised one. Donne makes them all present at the event through his imaginative evocation of it, and invents a new Gospel event with a new cast of characters. The congregation and the preacher are assimilated into the prophet who prayed to see the Messiah before his death, seeing not only a Child in a manger but also the sacrifice he came

[8] Robert Hilliard Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 193. See also the entire chapter in Whalen, "Sacrament and Word: Ceremony, Pulpit, Predestination," in *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert*. PhD dissertation. University of Toronto, 1999, pp. 97-138.

[9] See Kenney, "The Manger as Calvary and Altar."

into the world to complete. Donne shows the congregation how to be upstanding examples of Christians who see and believe but who do not know—or seek to know—the tech–nicalities of how they behold what they behold. They may see the one who was "born a martyr," but he must not "sensualiter tangitur"—be touched by the senses.

The Showing Forth of Christ

> 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; for to his tendernesse then, the strawse were almost as sharp as the thornes after; and the Manger as uneasie at first, as his Cross at last. 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. And as even his birth, is his death, so every action and passage that manifests Christ to us, is his birth; for *Epiphany* is *manifestation*…. Every manifestation of Christ to the world, to the Church, to a particular soule, is an Epiphany, a Christmas-day.[10]

It is notable that in the sermon Donne calls Christ's birth and death "but one continuall act." He thinks of Christ's life as unified over time by the intention, will, and activity that make an act singular and entire. By invoking this understanding of Christ's life, Donne shows himself familiar with the patristic tradition that sees the divine purpose of Christ who is God fulfilled in each and every aspect of his life on earth. Looking upon the expanse of time with the divine and eternal perspective, the Christ Child offers his whole life as well as his death as his sacrifice.[11]

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[10] John Donne, *Sermons*, vol. 7, p. 57.

[11] The idea is complicated by a potential corollary, the deduction that Christ might suffer eternally. Paul Gavrilyuk discusses this possibility in *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Because he always beholds the beatific vision as God, Christ's suffering is of a unique kind. In any case, it is considered heretical in Catholic thought to believe that Christ suffers eternally. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "God's Impassible Suffering in the Flesh: the Promise of Christology," in James F.

Donne had also written of Christ's suffering over the span of his life on earth as his martyrdom in *Lit*:

> The Martyres.
> 10. And since Thou soe desirously
> Didst long to Dye, that long before thou couldst,
> And long since, thou no more coldst Dye,
> Thou in thy scattred Mistique Body wouldst
> In Abell dye, and euer since
> In thyne lett theyre blood come
> To begg for Vs, a Discreete Patience
> Of Death or of worse lyfe; for, oh, to some
> Not to bee Martyres, ys a Martyrdome.[12]

Abel and the other martyrs who prefigure Christ in the Old Testament, as well as martyrs through the centuries, are not just types of Christ, but Christ himself in his scattered mystic body. Donne makes the figure of Christ-Child-born-a-martyr serve this purpose of unifying all the Church in his one Body; we might think of Ernst Kantorowicz's work on *The King's Two Bodies*, which in itself is related to the doctrine of Christ's body being the Church.[13] For Donne, Christ always has these two bodies. He extends himself through time in the body of his chosen people and of his Church, and he always is who he is because of his divine being, his omnipresence, and his divine freedom from the constraints of time. Thus, Christ is reigning and controlling the world even as a child. He is always and everywhere the God before whom idols

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Keating and Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 127-49, esp. pp. 144-47.

[12] John Donne, "The Letanye," in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 7.2, ed. Jeffrey S. Johnson et. al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020). See Nancy Wright, "The Figura of the Martyr in John Donne's Sermons," *ELH* 56.2 (Summer 1989): 293-309. Wright's main point has little to do with Donne's notion of Christ as martyr, but she does briefly talk about Christ as the fulfillment of the figura (p. 297). See also her reference to Erasmus in n. 2, 306 for a good example of sixteenth century understanding of the seeing of Christ through the descriptive words of the Scriptures.

[13] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).

fall. Donne is equally sure that Christ not only really suffered, but also always intended to, and entered the world to do so. Donne's assertion that Christ was born a martyr focuses the congregation's attention on not only the fact of the Incarnation but also its purpose. This idea, too, is connected to the belief that Christ's salvific sufferings begin at his conception.

Donne's sources for this idea are many. For early views of the Christ Child's power as an infant, he could have turned to St. Athanasius's works, with which he was very familiar, as Peter McCullough points out.[14] St. Athanasius recalls in chapter 6 of his treatise on the Incarnation, "And, again, Isaiah says, 'Before the Babe shall be old enough to call father or mother, he shall take the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria from under the eyes of the king of Assyria' (Isaiah 8. 4)." And, in section 36 of the same chapter:

> Then, again, what king that ever was reigned and took trophies from his enemies before he had strength to call father or mother? Was not David thirty years old when he came to the throne and Solomon a grown young man? Did not Joash enter on his reign at the age of seven, and Josiah, some time after him, at about the same age, both of them fully able by that time to call father or mother? Who is there, then, that was reigning and despoiling his enemies almost before he was born?

Athanasius reiterates his point in section one:

> We can trace the paternal descent of David and Moses and of all the patriarchs. But with the Saviour we cannot do so, for it was He Himself Who caused the star to announce His bodily birth, and it was fitting that the Word, when He came down from heaven, should have His sign in heaven too, and fitting that the King of creation on His coming forth should be visibly recognised by all the world. He was actually born in Judaea, yet men from Persia came to worship Him. He it is Who won victory from His daemon foes and trophies from the idolaters even before His bodily appearing—namely, all the

[14] *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 191.

> heathen who from every region have abjured the tradition of their fathers and the false worship of idols and are now placing their hope in Christ and transferring their allegiance to Him. The thing is happening before our very eyes, here in Egypt; and thereby another prophecy is fulfilled, for at no other time have the Egyptians ceased from their false worship save when the Lord of all, riding as on a cloud, came down here in the body and brought the error of idols to nothing and won over everybody to Himself and through Himself to the Father.[15]

Donne was familiar with other sources—the Nativity and Epiphany sermons of Augustine, Bede, and Bernard, for example—that reiterate many of Athanasius's points. Once readers start looking at patristic descriptions of the newborn Christ, they will find everywhere the image of the Mighty Babe I have elsewhere treated in the poetry of Robert Southwell.[16] Like many other poets of his generation, Donne almost certainly read Southwell's "Burning Babe," particularly if, as Gary Bouchard and others have argued, he actually knew Southwell in his youth.[17]

Donne repeatedly emphasizes Christ's identity as *Oriens*, the rising sun, thoroughout his career. This identification allows him to reiterate the conjunction of the beginning and end of Christ's life in images reinforcing the doctrines of Christ's resurrection and his eternity. One thinks immediately of the conflation of time between Christ's birth and

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[15] St. Athanasius, Λογος περι της ενανθρωπησεως του Λογου ("Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi"), *PG* 25:158. For a translation, see *On the Incarnation*: *The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi* (Crestwood: NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1998), p. 68.

[16] See Theresa Kenney, "The Christ Child on Fire: Southwell's Mighty Babe," *ELR* (Sep 2013): 415-45.

[17] Bouchard, "A Meditation of Martyrdom: Southwell and John Donne," in his *Southwell's Sphere: The Influence of England's Secret Poet* (South Bend; St. Augustine's Press, 2019), pp. 101-150. See also Jack and Lorraine Roberts, "'*To Weave a New Webbe in Their Owne Loome*': Robert Southwell and Counter-Reformation Poetics," in *Sacred and Profane: Secular and Devotional Interplay in Early Modern British Literature*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Richard Todd, Alasdair MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996): 62-77, esp. 74-76.

death enacted through Good Friday's liturgical coincidence with the Feast of the Annunciation in the 1608 poem, "Vppon the Annunciation, when Goodfriday fell vppon the same daye":

> All this, and all betweene, this day hath showne,
> Th'Abbridgment of Christs storie, which makes one
> (As in plaine Mapps, the farthest West is East)
> Of th'Angells Ave,'and Consummatum est.[18]

In the beginning of the 1626 sermon, Donne does not just speak of the Child's might or omnipresence or the extension of his body throughout the Church, but he also focuses on Christ's suffering. Donne mentions the tenderness of the newborn baby, whose skin would be as sensitive to the pricks and stings of the dry hay in which he had to be laid as the man's skin later would be to sharper thorns. Donne's mention of the super-sensitivity of Jesus' flesh might pass unnoticed by the modern reader, but it was a medieval commonplace. The phrase "for, to his tendernesse then, the strawes were almost as sharp as the thornes after," certainly seems to draw the listener's attention to the softness and vulnerability of a baby's skin, contrasted with the thicker and sturdier flesh of a man.

Here Donne reveals his knowledge of the tradition of Christ's distinction as being the only man born only of woman. To medieval and renaissance medical experts, this meant that he had inherited only the flesh of his mother, not the flesh of an earthly father. Therefore, unlike most men, Jesus had a woman's skin's sensitivity to pain, heat and cold: he was extra vulnerable. Carolyn Walker Bynum has noted this point in

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[18] Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 7.2, ed. Jeffrey S. Johnson et. al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020). See Raymond-Jean Frontain, "When First and Last Concur: Closure in John Donne's "The Annuntiation and the Passion," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* (25.3 2012): 175-81. Frontain says elsewhere that, in his Latin poem "To Mr. George Herbert," "Donne finds, as he did in the compass conceit of 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' (line 36), that his end lies in his beginning." "Donne's Biblical Figures: The Integrity of 'To Mr. George Herbert,'" *Modern Philology* (1984): 288.

her *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*: "the flesh Christ put on was in some sense female, because it was his mother's."[19]

In addition to having this greater tenderness, Christ also was thought to have felt pain more acutely than the ordinary human being because his senses were perfect, unlike an ordinary man's. Esther Cohen reviews the most important sources discussing the sensitivity of Christ's perceptions:

> The perfectly and uniquely equal complexion of Christ recurs often in scholastic writings. Bonaventure and Aquinas in the thirteenth, Durand de Saint-Pourçain and John Duns Scotus in the fourteenth, and Gabriel Biel (ca. 1420-95) in the fifteenth all discussed this aspect…. Since pain came through the sense of touch, which was necessarily aware of humors and changes in the body, equality of complexion was necessary for bodily perfection. The better complexioned the body, the better the soul perceives the pain, and Christ's was the best-complexioned body of all, for it was formed directly by the Holy Ghost. Its human element came only from the Virgin Mary's purest blood.[20]

Donne's listeners still adhered to the psychology of humors, believing in the medical importance of feminine physical sensitivity. Donne proceeded from the initial point about Christ's suffering as an infant because his audience could follow his "concetto": the whole earthly life of the whole Christ is present in the sacrament, which is the memorial at least of his Passion, if not something more. The suffering of Christ's birth and lodging in the rough stable is part of the redemptive suffering of the Cross, not separate from it. The valorization of the Christ Child's pain is as notable as the collapse between Nativity and Passion: for Donne, the suffering of the Christ Child clearly manifests his love for

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[19] Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 256.

[20] Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 205. See also P. Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750BC- 1250AD* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985), pp. 47-48, 95-97, 101-103, cited in Constance Classen, *The Colour of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 176 n. 7.

mankind. Sherwood points out that in the Holy Sonnets, "suffering is the measure of love"; this same conviction in medieval texts forms the theme of recent works on pain, suffering, and the passions like Cohen's *Modulated Scream*.[21] The Child Jesus is more sensitive to the touch of the rough hay than the tenderest infant ever born; and yet, he cannot be touched by anyone in this sermon except Simeon, briefly: Mary does not merit a mention, and there is no demonstration of love from the speaker or Simeon to the Infant Jesus. In this work, it is not too much to say that Donne perceives touch as dangerous. He seems, in fact, to prohibit it.

Simeon and Transubstantiation

The connection of the Eucharist with Christ's birth in the "applicatio" portion of the sermon is traditional, but Donne's language is careful here. It is nonetheless remarkable how nearly he approaches the terminology of transubstantiation rejected by the Church of England. Robert Whalen, keenly aware of Donne's theological concerns in the sermon, shows that Donne uses Simeon as a quasi-sacramental medium for the congregation's ingestion of the sermon's moral content:

> Donne's sermon advances as complementary the potentially contrary imperatives of word and sacrament by conferring Eucharistic status on both the "elements" of his sermon and their desired or intended effect on his auditory. Hearing the word thus involves a spiritual ingestion whereby an exemplary moral figure (Simeon at the nativity) is analyzed according to his various attributes or "characters," which are then absorbed and reassimilated by each communicant. It is, then, a vivid, albeit figurative, sacramentalization of the preached word that allows Donne's auditory to maintain reverence for public ceremony and the sacerdotal authority of the minister while experiencing as immediate and visceral the moral exempla he communicates. [22]

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[21] Terry Sherwood, *Fulfilling the Circle: A Study of John Donne's Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 143. Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, p. 205.

[22] Robert Hilliard Whalen, *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert* (University of Toronto, 1999. PhD dissertation), p. 97. Whalen

Donne sacramentalizes the imaginative image he constructs of Simeon, perhaps thinking that he is being true to the strictures one could derive from the Thirty-nine Articles about moralizing biblical prototypes rather than invoking their aid. Whalen, however, believes there is a crypto-Catholic element in this sermon.[23] Building on the foundation laid by Helen Gardner and Eleanor McNees, Theresa DiPasquale has demonstrated that traditionally Roman Catholic liturgical elements appear in Donne's *La Corona* sonnets side by side with more recent Anglican attitudes, so the later sermon's conflation of Catholic and Anglican approaches might in fact be characteristic.[24] The possibility that this sermon exhibits Donne's longstanding habit of trying to reconcile Roman and Anglican approaches is worth considering, although Donne distanced himself from Roman Catholic sacramental theology in public on many occasions, and in 1611 mocked in *Ignatius his conclave* both the beliefs in Purgatory and in transubstantiation as being dogmas created as lately as the 1530s:

> . . . [E]ver since the Councell of *Trent* had a minde to fulfill the prophecies of *Homer*, *Virgil*, and the other *Patriarkes* of the *Papists*; and beeing not satisfied with making one *Transubstantiation*, purposed to bring in another: which is, to change *fables* into *Articles* of faith.[25]

Because Donne also argues here that Simeon was traditionally con–sidered a priest, we might expect that he would describe Simeon holding the child like a priest holding the eucharistic wafer, or we might expect that Simeon's prediction of Mary's future suffering would enter into Donne's meditation. After all, he has already evoked the ancient parallel between the Incarnation and the Passion. Donne tells his congregation in 1626 that they have had a manifestation of Christ like Simeon's in their reception of his Body and Blood that very day "in his holy and blessed Sacrament." So what does Donne mean by reception,

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reworked this thought again in his book by the same title (on p. 109), but dropped some of these observations when he did so.

[23] Whalen (1999), p. 96; p. 115.

[24] Theresa M. DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament*, pp. 58-61.

[25] John Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave*, ed., Timothy Stafford Healy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 9.

when his exemplar is Simeon, who saw with his bodily eyes the savior of the world, but who was not present at the Last Supper? "And actually, and really, substantially, essentially, bodily, presentially, personally he does see him."[26]

It is worth our while to look at each of these words, bearing in mind that in sum, Donne equates the reception of the Eucharist with *seeing* Christ and not receiving him, although Luke also says that Simeon took the Child in his arms (Lk 2: 28). The language is nonetheless remark–ably scholastic. Simeon sees Christ "actually." That means a potentiality has really turned into reality; the presence is, as he goes on to say next, "real." Simeon sees Christ "substantially" and "essentially." Invoking the language of substance and essence can hardly be a mistake here, and by both words Donne means Christ is present in the flesh, and in the divinity. Christ's substance and essence are both his godhead and his human being. Thus, the communicant sees substantially and essentially. The line is equivocal, however, and could indicate that the viewer of the sacrament is the one who is seeing in his own substance and essence, presentially and personally. Why does Donne tread on such controversial ground when his purpose seems to be correction of Roman Catholic interpretations of the Sacrament? In fact, he in one and the same sermon calls adoration of the Sacrament idolatry and asserts that Christ's body and divinity are present in every way the scholastics asserted him to be present in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Donne also plays fast and loose with an important feature of the Gospel narrative to make his point. Here is the story of Simeon as it appears in the King James Bible:

> [25]And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.
> [26]And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
> [27]And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
> [28]Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

[26] Whalen (1999), p. 280.

> [29] Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
> [30] For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
> [31] Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
> [32] A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
> [33] And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
> [34] And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be
> spoken against;
> [35] (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

What does Donne omit in the first half of the sermon? He omits the fleshly contact between Simeon and the baby. Simeon takes the Christ Child into his arms and blesses God, Mary, and Joseph. While the congregation is hearing that they must admit Christ into their hearts in a new birth, a new repetition of the Nativity, they are at first instructed to think of this union as vision and not anything else. Sight is privileged over touch and in particular paradisal vision over immediate contact with God, here on earth.

However, Donne comes to Simeon's taking the Christ Child in his arms later:

> We have not this neither in the letter of the story, no, nor so constantly in tradition, that he was a priest, as that he was an old man; but it is rooted in antiquity too, in Athanasius, in St. Cyril, in Epiphanius, in others, who argue, and infer it fairly and conveniently, out of some priestly acts which Simeon seems to have done in the temple, (as the taking of Christ in his arms, which belongs to the priest, and the blessing of God, which is the thanksgiving to God in the behalf of the congregation, and then the blessing of the people in the behalf of God, which are acts peculiar to the priest). . . .
> (285-86)

Donne's point will be that all the recipients of Communion are priests in their reception of the sacrament that day, but he starts with what

seems like a Roman Catholic point to get to an Anglo-Catholic point. "The taking of Christ in his arms ... belongs to the priest"; "the blessing of God .. [and] the blessing of the people" "are acts peculiar to the priest." Donne leaps from patristic justifications for identifying Simeon as a priest, arguing from tradition for Simeon's *exceptional* acts on God's behalf, acts that remove Christ from the congregation's grasp, only to move to the priesthood of all believers. But how does this image come into the tradition about Simeon? Donne is mum about the actual source, which is the Proto-Gospel of James:

> After three days [following the murder of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist] the priests deliberated who to appoint in Zacharias's place, and the lot fell to Simeon. For this is the one who learned from a revelation of the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen Christ in the flesh.[27]

Although he might have thought he was correcting medieval misconceptions, Donne in essence ends up creating his own apocryphum. He amplifies the short Gospel text of a few verses to a twenty-one-page sermon about the presentation in the Temple with extended commentaries on Simeon, but he has little to say about the historical interaction between the old man and the Babe in his arms. And yet Simeon becomes a prototype of worthy reception of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In what really does seem like self-contradiction, Donne not only encourages his congregation to accept tradition in addition to Scripture, but he also admonishes them to imagine themselves new Simeons, and to apply his imaginative invention of Simeon as a worthy recipient of the Eucharist to their own lives, as they merge themselves with the devout old man. But they are not to think of what they are doing as touching the divine Child,

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[27] Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Plese, trans. and eds., *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 69. The editors date the Proto-Gospel of James to the end of the second century AD, and tell us that the document was "reintroduced in the west by G. Postel in 1552, in a Latin translation of a now unidentified Greek manuscript." They add that Origen refers explicitly to this text in his Commentary on Matthew, p. 32.

although the entire sermon only makes sense if reception is touching. But in the end Communion almost seems inconsequential, because Donne asserts that every day can be Christmas or Good Friday for the congregation:

> To be able to conclude to yourselves, that because you have had a Christmas- day, a manifestation of Christs birth in your soules, by the Sacrament, you shall have a whole Good-Friday, a crucifying and a *consummatum est* [an "it is finished"], a measure of corrections, and joy in those corrections, tentations, and the issue with the tentation; And that you shall have a Resurrection, and an Ascension, an inchoation and an unremovable possession of heaven it self in this world; Make good your Christmas day, that Christ by a worthy receiving of the Sacrament be born in you, and he that dyed for you, will live with you all the yeare, and all the yeares of your lives, and inspire into you, and receive from you at the last gasp, this blessed acclamation, *Lord now lettest thou thy servant, &c.* (280)

The Londoners in the audience can experience this constant reliving of the mysteries of Christ's life if they wait to understand the mysteries they experience until they, too, are ready to depart this world in peace:

> All that we consider in *Simeon*, and apply from Simeon, to a worthy receiver of the Sacrament, is how he was fitted to depart in peace. . . . All that God had said should be done, was done, for, as it is said, *v.* 26. It was revealed unto him, by the Holy Ghost, that hee should not see death, before he had seene the Lords Christ, and now his eyes had seene that salvation. *Abraham* saw this before; but, but with the eye of faith, and yet rejoyced to see it so, he was glad even of that. *Simeon* saw it … but, but, with the eye of hope; of such hope *Abraham* had no such ground; no particular hope, no promise, that hee should see the Messiah in his time; *Simeon* had, and yet he waited, he attended Gods leasure; But hope defer'd maketh the heart sick, (saies *Solomon*) but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life. His desire was come; he saw his salvation. (293)

Donne seems aware he is walking in a minefield, and gingerly picks his way though it. The believer can feel that he has achieved his desire if he but sees Christ: then his hope is fulfilled. Then he can say with Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Communion becomes seeing, not receiving, not touching.

Donne's choice of the Nunc dimittis as his text is perhaps in itself somewhat retrograde, although Cranmer had included both the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis in his rite of Evensong in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, and as Whalen points out, Richard Hooker commended the frequent singing of it.[28] Donne explicitly repeats portions of Simeon's Canticle, which many during the Reformation had tried to delete from the prayer life of ordinary Christians.[29] Oddly, although the Psalms were seen as having universal applicability, the Canticles of Zechariah (the Benedictus), the Virgin Mary (the Magnificat), and Simeon (the Nunc Dimittis) were so tied to the monastic and priestly recitation of the canonical hours of the church, the Roman breviary, that there was an active attempt to eradicate them as allowable prayers.[30] Donne nonetheless chooses this very canticle as his sermon text.

Donne also treads very close to dangerous topics throughout the sermon with his emphasis on Simeon as an exemplar of holiness—almost a mediator of the congregation's devotion—a topic to which he continuously returns. Donne, like any preacher, extends the realizations and interpretations of the sermon out to include his audience as well as himself. However, he latches on to an intermediary to get from Christ's day to 1626. Just as he uses St. Joseph to mediate his own presence at

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[28] Edward Cardwell, ed., *The Two Books of Common Prayer, Set Forth by the Authority of Parliament in the Reign of King Edward the Sixth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1841), pp. xii and 39. Theresa DiPasquale demonstrates Donne's interest in both the Book of Common Prayer and the Tridentine liturgy manifest in the La Corona sonnets and this sermon. *Literature & Sacrament*, pp. 60-66, 73. See also Robert Whalen, The Poetry of Immanence, p. 101.

[29] A. B. Chambers, *Transfigured Rites in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), pp. 1-2.

[30] Ibid.

the Nativity and the Finding in the Temple in the *La Corona* sonnets,[31] Donne fixes on Simeon at the Presentation as the means by which he, and all his listeners, may enter into the presence of the Christ Child who is sacrifice and Eucharist.

Above all with his talk about transubstantiation, and his catechesis on the way in which the bread and wine are actually transformed in the Lord's Supper, Donne makes the Christ Child the locus of a temporal collapse which is a feature of sacramental, Roman Catholic understandings of Christ's immanence, but not Reformed ones.[32] Now talking about the Epiphany, he announces his conviction that "[e]very manifestation of Christ to the world, to the Church, to a particular soul is an Epiphany, a Christmas day." Christmas, Epiphany, and the Feast of the Presentation collapse into one event:

> Now there is no where a more evident manifestation of Christ, then in that which induced this text, *Lord now lettest thou thy servant [depart in peace*]...." It had been revealed to *Simeon* (whose words these are) that he should see Christ before he dyed. And actually, and really, substantially, essentially, bodily, presentially, personally he does see him; so it is *Simeons* Epiphany, *Simeons* Christmas-day. (279-80)

Simeon sees Christ in this passage but does not touch him. With all the talk about Christ's body in this sentence, it cannot be a careless omission that Donne does not mention that Simeon does more than see Jesus. Of course, he is trying to emphasize the ways in which the congregations can be like Simeon, not ways in which they cannot imitate him, but Donne's focus on sight seems to forbid imagining Simeon's more affectionate and grandfatherly embrace of the Baby Jesus:

> So also this day, in which we commemorate and celebrate the generall Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the whole world in his birth, all we, we who besides our interest in the

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[31] Theresa Kenney, "St. Joseph in Donne's *La Corona* Sonnets," St. Louis Symposium on Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of St. Louis, June 20-22, 2016. See Kenney, "'Kisse him, and with him into Egypt goe.'"

[32] See Kenney, "The Manger as Calvary and Altar," pp. 29-65.

> universall Epiphany and manifestation implyed in the very day, have this day received the Body and Blood of Christ in his holy and blessed Sacrament, have had another Epiphany, another Christmas-day, another manifestation and applic–ation of Christ to ourselves; And as the Church prepares our devotion before Christmas-day, with foure Sundayes in Advent, which brings Christ nearer and nearer unto us, and remembers us that he is comming … to enable you by a farther examination of your selves to *depart in peace*, because your *eyes have seen his salvation*. (280)

What does this mean? Christ is not only manifested but also "applied to" the communicants. "Applicatio" is not usually considered union—it is education, as is the self-examination undertaken in the season of Advent to which Donne also refers. But to speak of Christ being applied to the believer seems odd: this usage sounds more like the application of a poultice than the presentation of a moral example. Donne's audience, however, would have recognized the theological weight of the term in a sermon like this. The Oxford English Dictionary provides a now-rare definition for the word "application" that reveals how important a term it was for Reformation sacramentology:

> b. *Theol.* The action of bringing the benefits of redemption to bear on the heart of the believer. Now *rare* (chiefly *hist.*).
> ?1548 M. Coverdale in tr. J. Calvin *Faythvl Treat. Sacrament* (new edition) sig. Avij^{v}, We must beleue y^{t} theyr receauynge of it [*sc.* the sacrament] is the application of Christes merites to vs.
>
> *a*1602 W. Perkins Godly & Learned Expos. Serm. in Mount (1608) 515 Application, is when we conceiue in our hearts a true perswasion of Gods mercie towards vs particularly in the free pardon of all our sinnes.
>
> 1647 Humble Advice Assembly of Divines conc. Shorter Catechism (new ed.)
> 13 The effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.
>
> 1656 J. Bramhall Replic. To Bishop of Chalcedon ii.99 The holy Eucharist is … an application of the all-sufficient propitiatory Sacrifice of the Crosse.

In the seventeenth century, "application" clearly means the believer's belief that Christ's merits are in some way subsumed by him or her. Christ's approach during the four weeks of Advent calls for self-examination because the worshipper will kneel at the altar on Christmas day and in receiving the Eucharist earnestly believe that the merits of Christ's salvific act will apply to him. He will be imputed righteous.

But the last definition in particular excludes the Catholic under–standing of the Mass as an offering to the Father in emphasizing the application of the all-sufficient "Sacrifice of the Crosse." The language is aimed at a reformed [mis]understanding of a Catholic "error": because of a different way of defining Christ's immanence after the Ascension, Protestants believed Catholics thought the Sacrifice of Calvary was *not* all-sufficient, and that it needed to be repeated daily and supplemented by the believers' sacrifices. This of course was not and is not the teaching of the Catholic Church, but it was one of the most important misapprehensions fueling the divisions of the Reformation period. Donne seems to want to make Christ always present and yet not touchable, not consumable: application is an act of the understanding or of the heart, but not of the body.

However, Donne also says in this sermon, "The end of all digestions and concoctions is assimilation, that the meat may become our body" (280). He seems to think that assimilating himself into the person of Holy Simeon is a way of embracing Christ, beholding him, seeing his salvation, and thus participating in communion. But the term "meat" is as controversial a word for his audience as is the word "application," if not more so. Many homilies of the sixteenth-century divines like Latimer, Cranmer, and Jewel had been devoted to refuting the doctrine of transubstantiation and Donne doubtless knew some of them.[33] All these writers focus on the term "meat" and redefine it spiritually. Donne returns the image to its original locus in the physical act of eating. However, he turns this Christmas homily into a sermon against transubstantiation, in fact, remarking,

[33] A helpful collection of extracts from the same featuring the controversial passages is to be found in Benjamin Bradney Bockett, *The Speaking Dead: or, Select Extracts from the writings of the reformers and martyrs* (London: Elliot Stock, 1882).

> I come not with this *Eulabeia*, with *Simeons* disposition, to my Epiphany, to my receiving of my Saviour, if I think that Bread, my God, and superstitiously adore it, for that is Pharisaicall, and carnall; neither doe I bring that disposition thither, if I think God no otherwise present there, then in his own other Ordinances, and so refuse such postures, and actions of reverence, as are required to testifie outwardly mine inward devotion; for these may well consist together, I am sure I receive him effectually, when I looke upon his Mercy; I am afraid I doe not receive him worthily, when I look upon mine owne unworthinesse. (289)

This articulation of what Holy Communion is is not an expression of love such as one may see in *La Corona*'s "Nativitie." Donne encourages his congregation to adopt an attitude of reverence and a feeling of unworthiness, arousing the passions of hope and fear. Being a "Simeon" in the worthy reception of Holy Communion ends up being quite a different thing than being a Joseph in "Nativitie" or "Temple." Donne only glancingly refers to the Christ Child again near the end of his exhortation, and his emphasis is on the things about the Child that the prophet did *not* know when he saw his salvation:

> He saw it, according to his word; that is, so far as God had promised, he should see it. He saw not, how, that God, which was in this Child, and which was this child, was the Son of God; The manner of that eternall Generation he saw not. He saw not how this Son of God became man in a Virgins womb, whom no man knew; The manner of this Incarnation he saw not: for this eternall Generation, and this miraculous Incarnation, fell not within that *Secundùm verbum*, according to thy Word; God had promised *Simeon* nothing concerning those mysteries; But *Christum Domini*, the Lords Salvation, and his Salvation, that is, the person who was all that (which was all, that was within the word, and the promise) *Simeon* saw, and saw with bodily eyes. (294)

Simeon has received a personal revelation, but at this point he learns nothing that will be revealed or believed about the two natures of Christ in years to come: he only knows that the Child is the fulfillment of the promise that he will see "his salvation." Donne then reminds the

congregation that they are seeing the same thing, Christ, but they are not to confuse this same thing with Christ himself:

> Beloved, in the blessed, and glorious, and mysterious Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, thou seest *Christum Domini*, the Lords Salvation, and thy Salvation; and that, thus far with bodily eyes; That bread which thou seest after the Consecration, is not the same bread, which was presented before; not that it is Transubstantiated to another substance, for it is bread still, (which is the hereticall Riddle of the Roman church, and Satans sophistry, to dishonour miracles, by the assiduity and frequency, and multiplicity of them) but that it is severed, and appropriated by God, in that Ordinance to another use. . . . (294)

In fact, Donne now asserts that the congregation has not even seen Christ. He is not there substantially or presentially if he cannot be adored. "The Lord's Salvation" is "Christum Domini," "the Christ of the Lord," and it oddly seems to be an operation and no longer a person: the effect of the salvific acts of Christ upon the believer, and not him himself. The bread is not transubstantiated, but severed and set aside, like the priest Simeon and the priestly congregation, but it remains bread. That is what they see.

Donne in the end does not continue his meditation upon the Christ Child's sufferings; he is more interested in re-inventing Simeon as an exemplar of reformed belief in the Eucharist: Simeon does not know Christ is God; he does not ask how he can be Incarnate or both God and Man, or how he can be born of a virgin; he only sees what he asked for and no more. He is not Lutheran; he is not Roman Catholic; he is not Calvinist. In fact, one would be hard put to say he is Christian in any Nicene, credal sense:

> Almost 600. years agoe years ago, the Romane church made *Berengarius* sweare, *sensualiter tangitur*, *frangitur*, *teritur corpus Christi*, That the body of Christ was sensibly handled, and broken, and chewed. They are ashamed of that now, and have mollified it with many modifications; and God knowes whether 100. yeares hence they will not bee as much ashamed of their Transubstantiation, and see as much

> unnaturall absurdity in their Trent canon, or Lateran canon, as they doe in *Berengarius* oath. (296)

Donne is inventing a shame the Roman Catholic Church in fact did not feel, to predict a future that never came, and has so lost interest in the Christ Child himself that he descends into rancorous mockery of those who wish to understand in what way Christ is present. And in a moment, he has returned to asserting that the body of Christ is in fact in the Sacrament:

> As they that deny the body of Christ to be in the Sacrament, lose their footing in departing from their ground, the expresse Scriptures; so they that will assign a particular manner, how that body is there, have no footing, no ground at all, no Scripture to Anchor upon: And so, diving in a bottomlesse sea, they poppe sometimes above water to take breath, to appeare to say something, and then snatch at a loose preposition, that swims upon the face of the waters; and so the Roman church hath catched a *Trans,* and others a *Con,* and a *Sub,* and an *In,* and varied their poetry into a Transubstantiation, and a Consubstantiation, and the rest, and rymed themselves beyond reason, into absurdities and heresies, and by a young figure of *similiter cadens,* they are fallen alike into error, though the errors that they are fallen into, be not of a like nature, nor danger. (296)[34]

This passage is perhaps the most important extant exfoliation of Donne's teaching on the Eucharist, and it is perplexing:

> We offer to goe no farther, then according to his Word; In the Sacrament our eyes see his salvation, according to that, so far, as that hath manifested unto us, and in that light wee depart in peace, without scruple in our owne, without offence to other mens consciences.

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[34] It is unclear whether Donne is only thinking of theologians grasping for the correct "stantiation," when he speaks of *similiter cadens*, or also referring to the rhyming Latin of Aquinas's eucharistic hymns for Corpus Christi such as "Pange lingua gloriosi," or Southwell's translation of Aquinas's "Lauda Sion Salvatorem." But the former is clearly implied, the latter only my speculation.

> Having thus seene *Simeon* in these his Dimensions, with these holy impressions, these blessed characters upon him; first, (1) A man in a reverend age, and then, (2) In a holy function and calling, and with that, (3) Righteous in the eyes of men, and withall, (4) Devout in the eyes of God, (5) And made a Prophet upon himselfe by the holy Ghost, (6) Still wayting Gods time, and his leasure, (7) And in that, desiring that his joy might be spread upon the whole Israel of God, (8) Frequenting holy places, the Temple, (9) And that upon holy motions, and there, (10) Seeing the salvation of the Lord, that is, Discerning the application of salvation in the Ordinances of the Church, (11) And lastly, contenting himselfe with so much therein, as was according to his word, and not inquiring farther then God had beene pleased to reveale; and having reflected all these severall beames upon every worthy Receiver of the Sacrament, the whole Quire of such worthy receivers may joyne with *Simeon* in this Antiphon, *Nunc Dimittis, Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, . . .* (296-97)

Donne desperately wants to avoid saying anything that smacks of Roman Catholicism, but in reflecting his beams upon the com–municants at St. Paul's on Christmas day, his Simeon acts as mediator as well as moral example, and transports all the congregation to unify their voices in the *Nunc dimittis*.

"As they that deny the body of Christ to be in the Sacrament, lose their footing in departing from their ground, the expresse Scriptures": Donne himself loses this footing, and invokes sacred tradition to define Simeon as a priest—in fact, his whole conceit of the priesthood of the communicants derives from this image.[35] But the members of his congregation are all priests of an absent Child, whom they are forbidden to touch or hold. In collapsing the Presentation with the Lord's Supper, Donne avoids citing even once anything Christ himself says about it in the Gospels or St. Paul's narrative of the institution. The elided justifications for collapsing the two events are twofold: the ancient

[35] Not that Anglicans in general dismissed Sacred Tradition, but Donne has just done so personally in this sermon. Hooker defended tradition in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*: see Gerald Bray, "Scripture and Tradition in Reformation Thought," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 19.2 (April 1995): 165.

celebration of the feasts on the same day, the day of the Epiphany, not Christmas, and the unmentioned patristic and medieval tradition of reading the Circumcision as a prefiguration of and *part* of the Last Supper and the sacrifice on the cross. Does Donne know of this tradition? He started the sermon with a rehearsal of it.

Lacking the emotional qualities for which Donne's sonnets are so well-known, the sermon seems not to intend to conjure up devotion in the listener. Although a century later Jonathon Swift would protest that it was not the job of a preacher to rouse the emotions of his listeners because those passions could all too easily be made to follow false reasons, Steinberg points out that instructions in Catholic homiletics in the century preceding Donne admonished the priest to take care to rouse the affections of his listeners, since they already knew the doctrines of Christianity; the sermon was no place for argumentation.[36] As St. Ambrose said in his discourse *De Incarnatione dominicae sacramento*, "Ubi igitur est crimen? Ubi culpo? Non in oblatione muneris, sed in oblationis affecta"—"Where then is the crime [of Cain]? Where is his fault? Not in the sacrifice of the gift, but in the love in the sacrifice."[37] A Christmas homily that neglects the presence of the Child himself seems a poor offering. Donne perhaps wishes to follow the mode of Pseudo-Dionysius and in talking about ways in which Christ is *not* there, teach a sense of the ineffability of the divine. However, that is not his text. Moreover, he confuses the listener in order to land on a deduction that collapses the present with the time of Simeon in a unique, not to say perverse, way: these Christians of AD 1626 are to become like a man who sees but does not understand Christ, a man who saw him before his mission, his Last Supper, his crucifixion and resurrection, in order to be good Christians.

Is the body of Christ there or not there? Is it to be adored or not? Is the Christ Child always present? Is he always suffering? We must "content . . . [ourselves] with so much therein as was according to his word, and not inquiring farther then God had beene pleased to reveale."

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[36] Jonathan Swift, *The Works of Jonathon Swift, DD, Tracts in Defence of Christianity* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1824), p. 22. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 11-12.

[37] St. Ambrose, *De Incarnatione domenicae sacramento liber unus,* PL 16.819.

To know what Simeon knew and to inquire no further, never to see Christ again on this earth in the flesh: that is the sum of our knowledge of what the Lord's Supper is. Donne in this sermon resembles Milton's St. Michael, who, like the poet's Raphael, advises Adam to seek no further, to "descend from this top / of Speculation" (*Paradise Lost* 12.588-89),[38] to be content with what he has seen. But Donne's congregation could be forgiven if they did not know any longer what they had seen after listening for an hour to the Dean of St. Paul's.

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[38] Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003), p. 467.