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Coleridge's Marginalia on the Seventeenth-Century Divines and the Perusal of Our Elder Writers

Dayton Haskin

> The fact is simply that the Civil War of the seventeenth century, in which Milton is a symbolic figure, has never been concluded. . . . No other English poet, not Wordsworth, or Shelley, lived through or took sides in such momentous events as did Milton; of no other poet is it so difficult to consider the poetry simply as poetry, without our theological and political dispositions, conscious and unconscious, inherited or acquired, making an unlawful entry. And the danger is all the greater because these emotions now take different vestures.
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> —T. S. Eliot, *Milton* (1947)[1]

In 1837, two years before the appearance of the most extensive collection of John Donne's writings ever published, a lengthy article on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Literary Remains* appeared in *The Quarterly Review*. It gestured toward the two principal stimuli of the mid-nineteenth-century Donne revival: Coleridge's Donne marginalia and Izaak Walton's *Life and Death of Doctor Donne*. The reviewer picked up a question that had been reported in Coleridge's *Table Talk* at the start of the decade and, as he sought to make it more urgent, dismissed as irrelevant what seemed its most obvious answer:

> We cannot, in passing, forbear repeating Mr. Coleridge's question . . . 'Why are not Donne's volumes of sermons reprinted at Oxford?' Surely the character of some of his juvenile *poems* cannot be the reason! Donne's Life is placed in a cheap form in

> the catalogue of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and deservedly so in every respect. Why does Oxford allow one hundred and thirty sermons of the greatest *preacher*, at least, of the seventeenth century—the admired of all hearers—to remain all but totally unknown to the students in divinity of the Church of England, and to the literary world in general?[2]

Coleridge's marginalia on Donne's sermons were published the following year (1838). The majority of his annotations seem to have been composed *after* he first called for the sermons to be reprinted, suggesting that he took seriously the implications of his own question. Their appearance in print pretty much coincided with the coming high water mark in the reception of Walton's *Lives*, more editions of which were published between the 1820s and the 1860s by far than in any other comparable period. These developments persuaded the publisher John W. Parker to accept Henry Alford's plan to print a substantial sampling of Donne's sermons. In fact, Parker encouraged the youthful editor to reprint them all, in their entirety, and to include other works by Donne as well. Parker's publishing house was located not in Oxford, but in London; and it had close ties with Cambridge University Press. The fact that it was actively involved in promoting Christian socialism already intimates that the Donne revival owes much less to the Oxford movement than is commonly supposed. That it was Parker who responded to the question posed by the Sage of Highgate, who would come to be known as the father of the Broad Church movement, shows that in practical terms Donne was valued as something of an alternative to the patristic divinity increasingly being cultivated in Oxford.[3] Before drawing any conclusions for an understanding of the course of literary history about the circumstances in which the six-volume *Works of John Donne, D.D.* was published, however, I want to illustrate that Coleridge read Donne's sermons with a remarkable independence from the High Church perspective offered by Walton. This will entail exploring Coleridge's marginalia in relation to his reading of other seventeenth-century writers, including Milton, who would eventually be made to stand for a literary tradition thought to be at permanent odds with the one in which Donne wrote.[4] Ultimately, the burden of this essay is to show

that Coleridge's mature reading of seventeenth-century religious writing stands as an alternative to the narrower thinking about Donne and Milton in polar categories that T. S. Eliot sought to bequeath to future readers. From the perspective offered by Coleridge, recent treatments of Donne as a supporter of James I's claims for royal absolutism can be seen to allow far too much credit to Eliot's tendentious insistence that readers and critics are necessarily involved in an unconcluded civil war.

I

The starting point for this inquiry into Coleridge's thinking about Donne's sermons is a curious absence in the record: the fact that, in the sixth and final volume of the ongoing Princeton edition of the *Marginalia* there is no collection of annotations on the works of Izaak Walton.[5] The more than five thousand pages in Coleridge's *Collected Works* devoted to his marginal annotations provide abundant evidence to support the claim that he is the pre-eminent marginal annotator in the history of the English language.[6] Along with the voluminous record of his reading to be found in his *Notebooks*, the surviving annotations offer an astonishing amount of detail about how he put his mind to work while he was reading. Besides the annotations from more than four hundred extant books, there were others in dozens of books that have not been found. For this reason alone, we need to begin with caution about making a great deal of the fact that no annotations on Walton survive. The fact that we do not have annotations on the works of a particular writer does not mean that Coleridge did not read him or that, having read him, he regarded his works as unimportant. In fact, in the annotations on Donne's sermons and elsewhere Coleridge occasionally deigned to mention Walton, whose *Compleat Angler* Charles Lamb had earnestly recommended to him in the 1790s. Clearly, Walton's sketch of Donne was important to Coleridge for what it tells about the conditions in which Donne carried out his preaching. But he did not much credit its nostalgia for a relatively untroubled age of piety before the outbreak of civil war; nor did he sympathize with its implication (developed in the

1658 edition) that Donne was a pillar not only of the English Church but of the High Church party.[7]

Walton's narrative about Donne, it will be recalled, was first published in the folio containing the *LXXX Sermons Preached by That Learned and Reverend Divine, Iohn Donne, D^r in Divinity* (1640). At two different times in his life Coleridge made extensive annotations in this volume: first, when he was in his late thirties, in a copy owned by William Wordsworth, and again around age sixty in his own copy. These annotations occupy more than ninety pages in the Princeton edition and help us to understand how important it was that Walton actually showed little interest in Donne as a thinker. Intellectually lightweight admirer that he was, Walton managed to leave considerable room for intelligent readers to engage with the substance of Donne's writings for themselves. The admiring narrative in the margins of which Coleridge made no annotations is nothing like the searching encounters—the quarreling here, the hectoring there, the sifting of learning and testing of beliefs at almost every point—that one finds in reading through the annotations on the sermons.[8]

Coleridge makes reference to Walton in one of his *Lay Sermons* (1817) in a way that makes it plain that he regarded Donne as a worthy antagonist and Donne's first biographer as a mere enthusiast, someone who had valued the preacher's intellectual vigor without in any way matching it:

> It is my full conviction, that in any half dozen Sermons of Dr. Donne, or Jeremy Taylor, there are more thoughts, more facts and images, more excitements to inquiry and intellectual effort, than are presented to the congregations of the present day in as many churches or meetings during twice as many months. Yet both these were the most popular preachers of their times, were heard with enthusiasm by crowded and promiscuous Audiences, and the effect produced by their eloquence was held in reverential and affectionate remembrance by many attendants on their ministry, who, like the pious Isaac Walton, were not themselves men of learning or education.[9]

While accounts of large seventeenth-century congregations listening to sermons that lasted an hour or two left most of his contemporaries to feel relieved that times had changed, Coleridge, when he contemplated this historic difference, tried to imagine the material and intellectual conditions that had made preaching like Donne's and Taylor's possible. He discerned that heterogeneous seventeenth-century congregations—audiences "promiscuous" in the sense of being from mixed backgrounds and occupying a whole range of social positions—possessed a degree of theological learning on which contemporary preachers could no longer rely. The informed interests of those congregations—above all their urgent desire to understand the Scriptures—had meant that gifted preachers could pitch their discourses above the level of their audiences, in accord with a principle well known to successful teachers and enunciated simply and frankly by Richard Baxter: "I did usually put in something in my Sermon which was above their own discovery, and which they had not known before; and this I did, that they might be kept humble, and still perceive their ignorance, and be willing to keep in a learning state. . . . And I did this also to increase their Knowledge; and also to make religion pleasant to them, by a daily addition to their former Light, and to draw them on with desire and Delight."[10]

It took Coleridge many years of reading seventeenth-century writers to develop the informed historical imagination that led to his fascination with the actual audiences to whom sermons in both their spoken and written forms had been addressed. When he was first annotating Donne's sermons, about 1809, the sorts of differences that most interested him were more philosophical and ethical than historical, and he read with a kind of detachment that had become increasingly characteristic in Enlightenment culture. "It is amusing to see the use, w̄ch the Xtian Divines make of the very facts in favor of their own religion, with which they triumpha[ntly] batter that of the Heathen" (2: 254-55). The later annotations, probably written in 1831-32, show that in the last years of his life Coleridge had much greater knowledge of seventeenth-century divinity than he had had when he annotated Wordsworth's volume. This was not well understood in the nineteenth

century: when the two sets of annotations were printed in the 1830s and again the 1850s, both times they were run together as a single sequence, obscuring evidence that the annotator had been reading in two quite different sets of circumstances. Moreover, the mature interests that Coleridge developed as he became more knowledgeable were badly served by the dissemination of accounts by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle of their meetings with him at Highgate.

Emerson visited both Coleridge and Carlyle during his first European tour in 1833, and the visit with Coleridge proved a disappointment to him. While Coleridge's adaptation of Kantian philosophy became central to Emerson's thought, and although Coleridge's ideas were foundational for *Nature*, Emerson's personal investment in Unitarian doctrine led him to dismiss Coleridge's theological views as so much dogmatic encrustation that had set in during old age. Moreover, when Derwent Coleridge, having reorganized materials that had appeared in *Literary Remains* in 1838, brought out his father's *Notes on the English Divines* in 1853, Carlyle's interpretation of the sorrow and pain experienced by Coleridge in his fifties dissuaded many readers from looking into them. Famously, in the *Life of Sterling* (1851) Carlyle attributed the wreck of a great man to "mis-spent" labors; and he framed a "tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will." In his view, Coleridge's assiduous reading and writing in philosophy and theology were thoroughly misguided activities, and Coleridge had suffered from the "fatal delusion" that the moribund church of England could be resurrected by enlisting the distinction between *Vernunft* (Reason) and *Verstand* (Understanding). While acknowledging that Coleridge was "pious, ever-labouring, [and] subtle," Carlyle proposed that he lacked the courage of his own youthful vision and was punished for having "sought refuge in vague daydreams, hollow compromises, in opium, in theosophic metaphysics." His sketch concluded by asking rhetorically whether Coleridge had not sought to "procreate strange Centaurs, spectral Puseyisms, monstrous illusory Hybrids, and ecclesiastical Chimeras,—which now roam the earth in a very lamentable manner!" Even in America, where the first volume of William Shedd's edition of Coleridge's *Works* (1853) commenced with an appreciative

account of his theological views, Carlyle's bitter account had a wide and lasting impact. In the Coleridge volume for F. J. Child's series of the British Poets, first published in the 1855 and often reprinted, the introductory "Memoir of the Author" quoted it virtually in full on the grounds that Carlyle had provided the "best description of Coleridge during the later years of his life."[11]

Appealing as Carlyle's wholesale dismissal of Coleridge's theological thought may have been to those intent on seeing Christian faith as a discredited vestige of the past, Coleridge meant his adaptations of Kant to make that faith precisely current and lively; and he tended to see seventeenth-century thinking as outmoded insofar as it blurred the distinct operations of Reason and Understanding. One marginal comment specifically criticizing Donne's failure to employ the distinction shows that Coleridge was inclined to think it a key to criticizing late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers generally: "even our best & most vigorous theologians & philosophers of the age from Edward VI. to James II... generally confound the *terms*, and so *too* often confound the subjects themselves—Reason and Understanding. Yet the diversity, the difference *in kind*, was known <to,> and clearly admitted, by, many of them: by Hooker, for instance, and <it is> *implied* in the whole of Bacon's Novum Organum" (2: 276-77). In this specific case, Coleridge was criticizing Donne's use of the phrase "the law of Reason" in a sermon on the coming of the messiah in the fulness of time (Gal. 4: 4-5), where Donne, instead of ascribing to "the *Understanding*" the idea that Christ might better have been born in Rome than Bethlehem and might better have had Cicero and Seneca than Peter and Matthew as disciples, ascribed it to Reason itself. What was at stake here for Coleridge was that the Understanding generalizes "particular experiences" and "judges of the future by analogy of the past." It thus draws conclusions that are merely contingent, whereas Reason would never have led anyone to think in these terms.

To understand how Coleridge's historical imagination was at work when he went back to reading Donne's sermons in the early 1830s, our best guide is certain remarks that he had written inside the front cover of the *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ* around 1820, when he was contemplating

as the last of four projected works "Letters on the Old and New Testament, and on the doctrines and principles held in common by the Fathers and Founders of the Reformation," a work he imagined writing for candidates for Holy Orders.[12] The remarks in the Baxter volume define several "grounds for recommending the perusal of our elder writers"; and Coleridge lists "Hooker, Taylor, and Baxter" in particular and emphasizes the affective aspects of reading along with the intellectual ones (1: 280). The first three of these grounds were excerpted in full in the *Quarterly Review* article and are worth examining. Coleridge's first point applies as conspicuously to his reading of Donne's sermons and satires as it does to the works of the writers he mentions by name:

> The overcoming the habit of deriving your whole pleasure passively from the Book itself, which can only be effected by excitement of Curiosity or of some Passion. Force yourself to reflect on what you read §ph by §ph, and in a short time you will derive your pleasure, an ample portion at least, from the activity of your own mind. All else is Picture Sunshine. [1: 280]

That this point applies equally to Donne's satires is illustrated in Coleridge's annotation on Satyre III, which shows how intimately linked Donne and Milton were in his reading experience: "If you would teach a Scholar in the highest form, how to *read*, take Donne, and of Donne this Satire. When he has learnt to read Donne, with all the force & meaning which are involved in the Words—then send him to Milton—& he will stalk on, like a Master, *enjoying* his Walk" (2: 225-26).

The stimulus to reflection that Coleridge found in Donne's sermons can be illustrated from a sermon that he particularly admired, the one preached at St. Paul's on Christmas Day, 1628. Whereas the "Picture Sunshine" of Walton's narrative is delivered by that writer's recurrent "forbearing" (as he is at pains to tell us) from including anything like gossip, Donne announces as his text the passage "Lord, who hath beleeved our report?" The discourse begins by giving a reason for the preacher's departure from the usual practice of supplying a citation, and

Donne's explanation serves the dramatic purpose of stimulating more questions:

> I Have named to you no booke, no chapter, no verse, where these words are written: But I forbore not out of forgetfulnesse, nor out of singularity, but out of perplexity rather, because these words are written, in more then one, in more then two places of the Bible.

The passage goes on immediately to describe the sorts of fillers in conversation that people characteristically use, "which fall often upon their tongue, and which they repeat almost in every sentence; and, for the most part, impertinently." This description of a familiar feature of ordinary discourse leads into a reflection upon ways in which both individual biblical authors—Moses and Isaiah and Paul—and the Holy Spirit as the ultimate author of Scripture repeatedly use "particular phrases," sometimes "whole sentences," and to contrast skillful uses of repetition with impertinent compulsions.[13] Pitched somewhat over the heads of many in the congregation, the opening paragraphs of the sermon provide perspectives and information with which they can make progress in comparing and contrasting the diverse ways in which the text of the sermon is used, all of them unusual, in its various biblical contexts.

The second grounds on which Coleridge recommends reading seventeenth-century religious writers helps to underscore something that, against almost all expectation, he found in Donne, that is, evidence of a "mere catholicism" (to use Baxter's term for it) with which Oxford in the 1830s was having less and less to do. Some twenty-five years after Donne's death and in still more trying political circumstances than those in which Donne had preached, Baxter praised as "meer" (that is, quintessential) catholics "Men of no Faction," whom he observed not "siding with any Party, but owning that which was good in all, as far as they could discern it."[14] Coleridge's articulation of this second grounds also illustrates his habitual imaginative practice of taking his hard-won understanding of how a writer thought in his own time and then

projecting that thinking to address present circumstances. Another potential benefit of reading the "elder writers" is

> The conquest of party and sectarian Prejudices, when you have on the same table the works of a Hammond and a Baxter; and reflect how many & how momentous their points of agreement; how few and almost childish the differences, which estranged and irritated these good men.
>
> Let us but reflect, what their blessed Spirits now feel at the retrospect of their earthly frailties: and can we <do> other than strive to feel as they <now> *feel*, not as they once felt?—So will it be with the Disputes between good men of the present Day: and if you have no other reason to doubt your Opponent's Goodness than the point in Dispute, think of Baxter and Hammond, of Milton and Jer. Taylor, and let it be no reason at all!—[15] [1: 280]

To Coleridge's mind, what most separated a Milton from a Jeremy Taylor was, for all the acrimony of seventeenth-century polemical discourse, less significant than what separated both of them from the majority of nineteenth-century Christians. If reading the elder writers was to deliver readers from the tyranny that reigns over those ignorant of the relevant past, two conditions, Coleridge thought, were requisite: submitting to the demands that their prose makes upon active minds and observing the example of the preachers' own reading practices, which were largely discontinuous with those of contemporary clergymen. Whereas "our old Divines shewed the depth of their love & appreciation of the Scriptures—& thus led their congregations to feel and see the same," contemporary preachers are said in the Donne marginalia to suffer from "the feeble dotage of the Paleyean School." A natural theology that "knows nothing of the Maker but what can be proved out of the Watch" offers a false basis for shared religious faith; it impoverishes religious experience as much as a syntax that allows only the impersonal "It" of "*it* rains, *it* snows, *it* is cold" to occupy the nominative position in sentences (2: 323-24). Elsewhere, Coleridge remarked that

since 1688 "our Church has been chilled and starved too generally by Preachers & Reasoners" who substitute "Prudence" and "Paleyianism" for morality, and he insisted that "A Christian Preacher ought to preach *Christ* alone" (2: 291). He located the most profound contrast between seventeenth-century preachers on the one hand and nineteenth-century ones on the other in their different agendas:

> If our old Divines in their homiletic expositions of Scripture *wire-drew* their Texts, in the anxiety to evolve out of the words the fulness of their meaning, expressed, involved or suggested, our modern Preachers have erred more dangerously in the opposite extreme, making their Text a mere *theme*, or *motto*, for their discourse. . . . It was ever God's holy Word, that our Donnes, Andrewses, Hookers preached, it was *Scripture* Bread, that they divided according to the needs & seasons—the Preacher of our Days expounds or appears to expound his own sentiments and conclusions—& thinks himself evangelic enough, if he can make the Scripture seem in conformity with them.

The annotation was rounded out with praise for the extraordinary focusing of so much intellectual and moral energy—and sheer learning—upon the Bible: "Above all, there is something to my mind <at once> elevating & soothing in the idea of an order of learned Men reading the many works of the Wise & great in many languages for the purpose of making one book contain the life and virtue of all for their Brethren who have but that one to read." Coleridge's mature view of Scripture allows that it is like other good books in offering a text to which we can return, collectively as well as individually, and to which we may bring an increase of learning the better to tease out more of what is implicitly present in the text: "What then, if that one book be such, that the increase of Learning is shewn by more & more enabling the mind to *find* them all in it" (2: 338). Coleridge took for granted that interpreting Scripture requires all the resources of historical scholarship and of literary criticism; and he advocated, as Stephen Prickett has shown on the basis of close study of the later notebooks, "unfettered enquiry" and "disinterested scholarship," precisely within a context of

communal faith.[16] His interest in Donne's "promiscuous audiences" was in large part that persons from diverse backgrounds and social positions contribute, by their shared interest in getting the Scriptures right, to a cumulative understanding of the sacred text that is richer than any lone individual could produce.

The third of Coleridge's grounds for recommending older writers is shot through with the moral perspective that inspired his work as a mediator of their writings to others:

> It will secure you from the narrow Idolatry of the Present Times and Fashions: and create the noblest kind of Imaginative Power in your Soul, that of living in past ages, <wholly devoid of which power a man can neither anticipate the Future, nor even live a truly human life, a life of reason, in the Present.> [1: 280]

This is a perspective that Coleridge shared with Lamb and his circle. It informed, moreover, the earliest periodical article on Donne's poetry, which appeared in 1823 and in which the author was at pains to show "what was thought of Donne in his own day" and emphasized that even "the objectionable parts" of Donne's writing offer not only amusement but "great exercise" for a reader's "*thinking* faculties"—precisely by way of "thought, sentiment, and imagery" that show it could "*not* have been written in the present day."[17] This expansive and sometimes exhilarating approach to reading animated the Donne revival among those who, shaking free of Samuel Johnson's strictures against the metaphysical poets' display of learning, recognized that Donne himself had mediated old and arcane knowledge to his contemporaries in ways that challenged then current fashions.

If reading seventeenth-century sermons prompted Coleridge to marvel that it had once been usual for preachers to provide "excitements to inquiry and intellectual effort," it also enabled him to discern historical differences of other sorts as well, some equally profound, others more obvious or superficial. One of his rare references to Walton shows that he read the *Lives* less as hagiography than as a source of information to help him imagine the conditions of learning and morality

that were operative in Donne's era. Aware of a sermon literature that differed radically from that of his own time, accustomed to attending to the "tone, the matter, the anticipated sympathies, in the sermons" of any period as offering "the best moral criterion of the character of the Age," Coleridge acknowledged, against a "narrow Idolatry" that was fashioning a self-serving doctrine of Progress, that certain achievements of the past can stand in judgment on the present: "When, after reading the biographies of Isaac Walton, and his Contemporaries I reflect on the crowded Congregations, on the thousands, who with intense interest came to these hour and two-hour long Sermons, I cannot but doubt the fact of any true progression, moral or intellectual, in the mind of the Many" (2: 328).[18]

At the same time Coleridge was quite capable of acknowledging and affirming that genuine social progress had occurred since the time of James I. When in Sermon XVII Donne rejoices that he has instructions from his "superiours" and pronounces "The eloquence of inferiours is in words, the eloquence of superiours is in action," Coleridge can praise the "beautiful sentence" and describe the obvious "contrast with the present times" almost dispassionately: "A just representation, I doubt not, of the general feeling & principle at the time Donne wrote. Men regarded the gradations of Society as God's Ordinances, & had the elevation of a self-approving Conscience in every feeling and exhibition of respect to those of rank superior to themselves" (2: 319). Even as this implied a certain disapproval for the characteristic respect Donne and other functionaries accorded their social betters, Coleridge saw clearly that this was not the whole story. Elsewhere he singled out a "very beautiful" passage (2: 312) in a sermon that he otherwise judged "one of Donne's least estimable Discourses" (2: 314). Donne, kindling a fascination with the ultimate work of social leveling wrought by the natural course of things, seems in one way to anticipate the ironies of George Herbert's poem "Church Monuments," and seems in another to articulate a grounding of that great respect for the nameless anonymity of the dead later to be found in Wordsworth:

> The ashes of an Oak in the Chimney, are no Epitaph of that Oak, to tell me how high or how large that was; It tels me not what flocks it sheltered while it stood, nor what men it hurt when it fell. The dust of great persons graves is speechlesse too, it sayes nothing, it distinguishes nothing: As soon the dust of a wretch whom thou wouldest not, as of a Prince whom thou couldest not look upon, will trouble thine eyes, if the winde blow it thither; and when a whirle-winde hath blowne the dust of the Church-yard into the Church, and the man sweeps out the dust of the Church into the Church-yard, who will undertake to sift those dusts again, and to pronounce, This is the Patrician, this is the noble flowre, and this the yeomanly, this the Plebeain bran. [2: 312]

To less capacious minds it may have appeared odd that Coleridge should highly esteem this passage even as he condemns the sermon as a whole. Most readers then as now did not read Donne's sermons as organic wholes and were content to find in them remarkable passages and brilliant "flashes." Coleridge himself is reported to have said that the old preachers "rarely present us with a perfect whole. Their compositions are marked by the liveliest *expression*, but are often destitute of *symmetry*. Their power comes out in vivid bursts of sublimity, in flashes of indignant satire, in exhortations of overpowering enthusiasm."[19] Although he praised the "whole" of Donne's Christmas sermon for 1628 as "noble . . . in thought and in diction" (2: 288), there is little evidence that Coleridge ever came to read Donne's sermons as his note of 1811 on "The Canonization" says he learned to read the poems: "As late as 10 years ago, I used to seek and find out grand lines and fine stanzas; but my delight has been far greater, since it has consisted more in tracing the leading Thought thro' out the whole. The former is too much like coveting your neighbour's Goods: in the latter you merge yourself in the Author—you *become He*" (2: 220). Still, Coleridge admired Donne for his being able to concentrate attention on individual words without losing sight of the larger biblical picture, and for resisting the widespread superstition among his contemporaries by which a single biblical place was often isolated from the

unity of the Bible and made to bear the weight of a doctrinal edifice or to deliver an answer to a complex personal or social problem.

Moreover, Coleridge was quite capable of recognizing the sure hand with which Donne could organize a long sermon, and he praised in particular a passage from Sermon XVII (on Matthew 19:17), where Donne announced the division of his subject in this way:

> In the words, and by occasion of them, we consider the Text, the Context, and the Pretext: Not as three equall parts of the Building; but the Context, as the situation and Prospect of the house, The Pretext, as the Accesse and entrance to the house, And then the Text it selfe, as the House it selfe, as the body of the building: In a word, In the Text, the Words; In the Context, the Occasion of the words; In the Pretext, the Pretence, the purpose, the disposition of him who gave the occasions. [2: 318]

This passage occasioned Coleridge's expression of a general approval for the use to which "Our great Divines" put their learning. The way in which he framed it marks his passage from one sort of interpretative community into another. When he was first annotating Donne's sermons (c. 1809), he criticized some uses that "Xtian divines" made of materials from non-Christian cultures. The later annotations evince his sense of belonging to a community of Christian thinkers from various centuries, including divines like Donne, who "were not ashamed of the learned Discipline, to which they had submitted their minds under Aristotle and Tully." While he elsewhere "reprobated" with Milton the "great fault of the early Divines," their "too great Reverence of the first 4 Centuries" (2: 684), in the comment on Sermon XVII he judged that the likes of Donne often managed to "BAPTISE . . . the logic &. . . manly Rhetoric of ancient Greece" and to bring "the purified products, as sacrificial Gifts to Christ" (2: 317-18).

Still, Coleridge's marginalia show that, admiring as he was of Donne's sermons, he was a pretty steadily resistant reader of them, not least because they show a tendency to over-value antiquity, as if it were a basis of authority rather than an accident of history.[20] The very first

note on the sermons printed in *Literary Remains* proposed that "[e]ven in Donne, still more in Bishops Andrews and Hackett, there is a strong *patristic* leaven" (2: 260; cf. 301). A marginal note from the later annotations on Donne singled out a passage as stinking of popery ("*papam redolet*," 2: 312-13). Another criticized a "rhetorical extravaganza, after the manner of too many of the Fathers, from Tertullian to S[t] Bernard" (2: 292). A third accused Donne of "play[ing] the Jesuit, disguising the true fact, viz. that even as early as the third Century the Church had begun to *paganize* Christianity under the pretext & no doubt in the hope, of christianizing Paganism" (2: 304). Yet Coleridge did not wholly consign Donne to the group of theologians whom he denigrated for their being "Patristic." In accord with the second point that he wrote into the front of the *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, he was generally willing to regard instances of reliance upon the church fathers in Donne's preaching as temporary lapses of little import in a writer who had so manifestly thought through everything for himself. In fact, reading biographically, with information garnered from Walton but independently of Walton's hagiographical perspective, Coleridge was attracted to Donne for his having been a promiscuous annotator like himself. Walton reported that at age twenty Donne had showed "the Deane of Gloucester" the complete works of Cardinal Bellarmine "marked with many waighty observations under his own hand"; that when King James urged him to enter holy orders, he spent almost three years in "an incessant study of Textuall Divinity" and sought to perfect his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew; and that at his death Donne "left the resultance of 1400. Authors, most of them analyzed with his owne hand."[21] Coleridge's regard for Donne's learning and for his habits of annotation gave him a certain sympathy with the residue of popery that shows up in the frequent references to Catholic doctrine and discipline in Donne's writings. He seems actually to have appreciated the fact that Donne often brought forward for consideration the learned opinions of Catholic interpreters of the Bible.

For this openness to explore some implications of Donne's early Catholicism there was precedent in the marginalia on the *Poems*. In the note on "The Indifferent" where Coleridge voiced wonder at Donne's

willful "squandering" of his "*vigor*," he acknowledged what few other Englishmen of the nineteenth century were willing to acknowledge, that there had been substantial constraints on what Elizabethan and Jacobean Catholics had been allowed to say for themselves: "He was an orthodox Christian, only because he could have been an Infidel *more* easily, & therefore *willed* to be a Christian: & he was a Protestant, because it enabled him to lash about to the Right & the Left—& *without a motive* to say better things for the Papists than they could say for themselves" (2: 219-20). Donne himself had become so thoroughly committed to Protestantism that he could confidently remark, while delivering a conventional Gunpowder Plot sermon in November of 1622, "I should not easily feare his being a *Papist* that is a good *Text man*."[22]

It was the "good *Text man*" that Coleridge especially valued when he read Donne's sermons, so many of which self-consciously reflect upon hermeneutical procedures. The first paragraph of the first sermon in the 1640 volume opens by exploring the ways in which biblical interpretation is like a journey. It sets out reflections on "with what modesty we are to proceed, and in what bounds we are to limit" the inquiry. Coleridge admired Donne's close attention to the actual text of the Bible, his willingness to acknowledge the limits of his own understanding, and his readiness to explore alternate interpretative possibilities. In an annotation on a sermon on John 10: 10 ("I am come that they might have life . . ."), where the preacher lingers over the various senses of the word *life*, Coleridge praised Donne's exposition and contrasted seventeenth-century hermeneutics with more recent interpretative practice: "A noble instance of giving importance to the single words of a text—each word by itself a pregnant text. Here, too, lies the excellence, the imitable but alas! unimitated excellence, of the Divines from Elizabeth to William III[rd]" (2: 294). Next to a passage in Sermon XIX in which Donne had proposed that "The literall sense is alwayes to be preserved; but the literall sense is not alwayes to be discerned" and had then gone on to explore a series of possible interpretations of a difficult passage in Revelation, Coleridge wrote in praise of the "excellent good sense a wise man, like Donne, can bring

forth on a passage, he does not understand/ For to say, it may either mean X. or Y. or Z., is to confess I do not know what it means.—*But* if it be X, *then*—& if it be Y, then—and lastly if it be it be [sic] Z, then.—i.e. he understands X, Y, Z, but not the text" (2: 335-36). Familiar as Coleridge was with Dutch and German biblical criticism of the eighteenth century, he was in a much better position than most Englishmen of his time, indeed than most English biblical scholars of the whole nineteenth century, to appreciate the degree to which Donne and other seventeenth-century English divines, having broken free from the requirement to interpret Scripture in ways congruent with the teachings of the papal church, had exercised that freedom to explore a wealth of possibilities in constructing the meaning of biblical texts. Recognizing that Protestant preachers in every period operate under dogmatic constraints of their own and that ordinary readers were prone to all sorts of superstitious interpretative practices under the illusion that their religion was based "on the Bible only," he especially valued the example that Donne's procedure here set for his congregation. By showing how to interpret, rather then by serving up authoritative interpretations, Donne had nurtured a critical approach to the Bible and had been, more profoundly than Walton understood, the English church's "second St. Austin." Coleridge saw that Donne's interpretative practices led him to anticipate a number of his own hard-won convictions: "Donne felt, *was possessed by*, the truths, I have here labored to enforce—viz. that Faith is the *Apotheosis* of the Reason in Man;—the Complement of Reason, the Will in the form of the Reason. As the Basin-water to the fountain-shaft, such is Will to Reason in *Faith*—The whole Will shapes itself in the image of God, in which it had been created, and shoots toward Heaven" (2: 333). Donne credited his "promiscuous" auditory with the intelligence and willingness to discern the implications of their belief, and he preached to people whose responsibility for their own faith he respected.

II

In the long years between the first publication of Donne's sermons and the writing of Coleridge's annotations on them "Reason" had often been invoked in the service of another sort of biblical criticism; and in his young manhood Coleridge himself had been largely under the spell of rationalist views. His reading of seventeenth-century divines was in some respects a means of working through them to a more affectively satisfying religious perspective. Both early and late he took an active interest in what Donne had to say about the doctrine of the Trinity. The notes that he wrote around age forty show him attending to "single words" (such as "proceeding" and "nets") on which Donne had lavished attention, attempting to understand affectively as well as intellectually the doctrines of the Trinity and Redemption. The notes written closer to age sixty, more numerous and variegated, include many specifically on Donne's Christmas sermons and evince a still more informed interest in the interrelatedness of these doctrines (see 2: 64-65). By this time Coleridge had annotated a number of works from the Restoration period, including ones by Daniel Waterland and William Sherlock, that illustrated the debates through which there had occurred a "descent & metempsychosis" of seventeenth-century Arianism "into Socianism, and thence into modern Unitarianism" (2: 265). It would be interesting to know what Coleridge thought, or would have thought, about Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*, discovered in 1823 and published in 1825, with its prominently inscribed anti-Trinitarian views and its author's insistence that they were based "on the Bible only."

The Donne marginalia give us more than a hint in this matter. Having bought into a quest for origins, Coleridge in some measure accepted the back-to-the-Bible Protestantism that denigrated, as Milton characteristically did, patristic and scholastic "extravagances." Beyond this, his criticism of the "*post-apostolic* Christopædia, concorporated with the first, & prefixed to Luke's Gospel" (2: 266), shows his participation in a German evangelical hermeneutics that idealized the period of Jesus's earthly life and increasingly denigrated traces of "early

Catholicism" in the Scriptures themselves. From his knowledge of the late seventeenth-century English debates about the Trinity and of the critical approaches to the Bible developed by German scholars, Coleridge made bold to criticize the widespread and deleterious practice of citing biblical passages wholly out of context, as if their meaning were transparent and their application to current circumstances immediate. In this, too, he displayed a profound kinship with Milton, so much of whose poetic recasting of biblical materials worked against facile applications of biblical places.[23] Although there is no evidence that Coleridge ever annotated Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*, from the evidence of his marginalia on other seventeenth-century religious writings we can infer that he would have seen the sheer existence of this document, which illustrated Milton's sustained engagement with the text of the Scriptures, as itself far more significant than the eccentricities of doctrine which resulted at least in large part from Milton's distrust of ecclesiastical authorities and which the Yale Prose edition is so massively invested in highlighting.[24]

Coleridge valued Donne in particular for having fearlessly proposed that "we have a clearer, that is, a nearer light then the written Gospell, that is, the Church," and he observed that anyone "who should now venture to assert this truth, or even . . . contend . . . for a co-ordinateness of the Church and the Written Word, must bear to be thought a Semi-papist, an Ultra-HighChurchman [sic]" (2: 289). "Donne and his great Contemporaries," Coleridge observed in an oblique comment on a dramatic reaction to Laudian abuses, "had not yet learnt to be *afraid* in announcing and enforcing the claims of the Church, distinct from, and co-ordinate with, the Scriptures" (2: 295). By a similar token, Coleridge criticized the contemporary British and Foreign Bible Society for the fundamental (and to his mind fundamentally naïve) rule according to which its Bibles were to be printed altogether without notes and comments, as if the Scriptures always speak clearly without any need for interpretation (2: 261).

In the Donne marginalia what Coleridge meant by "the Church" was not primarily an institution to be found in the contemporary world; nor was it an abstract, unchanging ideal. The annotations show that the

interpretative community he had in mind was made up of thoughtful interpreters living and dead. Conspicuously, it included the fallible likes of Donne and other learned divines, whose wide knowledge of the Bible and of other literature conferred upon them an authority unavailable through "the Bible only" and quite different from the sort of chain-of-command authority valued by the proponents of apostolic succession. Such a church needed to be Christocentric and its preachers needed to recognize, as Donne generally had, "Christ in all, all things in Christ" (2: 291). The later Donne marginalia, in their references to the etiolated Christianity of the Unitarians, display how far Coleridge had distanced himself from religious views that, claiming to do so on rational grounds, rejected the Redemption and even "the Gospel in toto" (2: 263). As elsewhere, he used the term "Socinianism" as a shorthand designation for an interpretative community in which everything was to be made "plain and easy for the meanest Understandings" (2: 296). He was seeking further to exorcise his own "Sociniansim of the spirit," which, as Ronald Wendling has said (quoting from a letter of November, 1819), he thought of as a "'Dry Rot in the timbers' of the Church" and regarded as "more appalling than honest nonbelief." The interpretative community with which the mature annotator of the *LXXX Sermons* affiliated himself, by contrast with the Unitarians, prominently included German biblical critics, the older English Divines, Luther and the magisterial reformers, the early Christians who wrote out their interpretations of the apostolic teaching, and the biblical writers, many of whom had been vehicles of the mythmaking powers of the Hebrew people.[25] By observing the interpretative practices of Donne and other seventeenth-century divines, Coleridge came to regard the history inscribed in the Bible as the early history of Christianity itself and to think of the church as "an IDEA," as he urged in his annotations on Taylor's *Polemicall Discourses*, "but not therefore a Chimera, or a Fancy, but a real Being & most powerful Reality" (5: 638; see also 661-62). Discerning many ways in which the later biblical writers engaged and transformed the work of earlier ones, he was nonetheless willing, as a provisional heuristic device, to explore the possibilities of reading the diverse Scriptures as a kind of unity:

> *one* Work, intended by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Church in all ages, & having, *as such*, all its parts synoptically interpreted, the eldest by the latest &c./ Moses or David, or Jeremiah, (we might in this view affirm) meant so and so, according to the context, and the light under which and the immediate or proximate purposes, for which he wrote—but we, who command the whole scheme of the great dispensation, may see a higher & deeper sense, of which the literal meaning was a symbol or type.—& this we may justifiably call the Sense of the Spirit. [2: 286]

It was this perspective that led him to write, when he encountered Donne's proposal that "there are not in all the world so eloquent Books as the Scriptures," the marginal annotation "See Paradise Regained" (2: 337).

This note suggests a relevant parallel in Milton's poem, where an integral part of the Son's rejection of the kingdoms of the world is his rejection, not of classical learning per se but of such learning as a "work" that would compromise the purity of faith. Whalley's gloss emphasizes the priority of biblical to classical literature (*Paradise Regained*, IV, 336-38). Even more pertinent, however, is the challenge precisely to the likes of Donne and Coleridge and Milton himself in the Son's observation:

> However many books
> Wise men have said are wearisom; who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> (And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek)
> Uncertain and unsettl'd still remains,
> Deep verst in books and shallow in himself,
> Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys,
> And trifles for choice matters, worth a spunge;
> As Children gathering pibles on the shore.[26]

Above all, Coleridge's reference to this passage near the end of his second set of annotations on Donne represents a moment of recogni-

tion. He saw that Donne and Milton were, in fundamental ways, allied in thought and approach: the sophisticated understanding of biblical revelation that characterizes Milton's major poetry was of a piece with Donne's learned reflections on the complex relations between classical and biblical texts. The informed theological interests of persons who crowded into Saint Paul's Cathedral to hear Donne's preaching in the years when Milton was growing up in its shadow had helped to define the climate, cold and belated as it had become forty years later, in which Milton had been able to compose *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained.*

The first wave of the Donne revival, to which Coleridge's deep and long-standing interest in Donne contributed more substantially than Walton's popular narrative, was not stimulated as is commonly thought by the Oxford movement. It was rather part of a larger religious movement that looked to a less patristic and more catholic church that would continue to define itself over against Roman Catholicism conceived as an intolerant sect. It was against this sort of "Catholicism," so acrimoniously dismissed by Milton through the whole course of his mature writing career, that Donne had rebelled and against which he often spoke up, with the authority of the convert, from the pulpit. Already in the 1830s this fact was a sufficient ground for an Oxford seeking a rapprochement with Rome to decline to reprint Donne's sermons; and the momentous developments of the 1840s only reinforced Donne's de facto exclusion from the tradition with which he has often been assumed in the twentieth century to have been affiliated. In short, what needs emphasizing is that both the appropriation of Donne for "Anglo-Catholicism" and the idea that the metaphysical poets represent an alternative literary and political tradition, a main current from which Milton diverged, are primarily the work of the modernist movement. Even after the eclipse of the authority of that literary giant who proclaimed himself a royalist, an Anglo-Catholic and a classicist, Eliot's framing of Donne endures, however, in the works of critics who, confusing the current culture wars with the civil war of the seventeenth century and discounting the range and depth of Donne's interests, persist in representing him as a supporter of monarchical absolutism, as

if only two political positions were possible in the period before the civil war.

In the earlier twentieth century it was a narrow idolatry of the present times that believed that T. S. Eliot had "discovered" Donne and that credited Eliot's appropriation of his writings for an allegedly authentic literary tradition that would displace the one in which Milton had an integral part. From a kindred narrowness characteristic of the later twentieth century, which continues to group Donne with Eliot and therefore to read him as a spokesman for Walton's High Church party, a perusing of Coleridge's marginalia might help to deliver us. What Coleridge holds out is encouragement on three interrelated grounds: reading Donne actively, exploring his agreements (as well as his manifest disagreements) with the likes of Milton, and anticipating a future in which there is room for that exhilarating long view in which "a truly human life . . . in the Present" sometimes includes the pleasures of living imaginatively in the past.

Boston College

Notes

1. "Milton II," in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), p. 168.

2. "Coleridge's *Literary Remains*," *Quarterly Review* 19.18 (July-Oct., 1837): 6 (1-32). Cf. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 14: *Table Talk II*, ed. Carl Woodring (London: Routledge; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 105.

3. I have discussed the circumstances in which Parker published Alford's edition at greater length in "John Donne and the Cultural Contradictions of Christmas," *John Donne Journal* 11 (1992): 133-57. In two places that article, written when I knew less about the subject, contributes to the mistaken impression that the Donne revival was allied to the Oxford movement.

4. For a fine study of what seems anomalous about Coleridge's interest in Donne, see Anthony John Harding, "'Against the stream upwards': Coleridge's recovery of John Donne," in *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, ed. Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 204-20. For an influential attempt to keep Milton squarely at odds with the likes of Donne, see the use made by Christopher Hill of the passage from Eliot I have placed at the head of this essay; Hill used it as the epigraph for the Introductory chapter in his book, *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977; New York: Viking, 1978), p. 1. I have quoted one more sentence from Eliot than Hill does, in order to illustrate the essentialist thinking that blurs significant historical differences between seventeenth-century political experience and twentieth-century cultural experience.

5. So Heather Jackson, who succeeded the late George Whalley as editor of the *Marginalia*, graciously informed me in private correspondence prior to the actual publication of the volume. References to the *Marginalia* are to the six parts of Volume 12 of *The Collected Works*, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969-).

6. See H. J. Jackson, "Writing in Books and Other Marginal Activities," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 62.2 (Winter, 1992-93): 222 (217-31).

7. See David Novarr, *The Making of Walton's Lives* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 92-96.

8. For perceptive commentary on Coleridge's stance toward the authors whom he annotated, see Jerome C. Christensen, "Coleridge's Marginal Method in the *Biographia Literaria*," *PMLA* 92.5 (1977): 928-40.

9. *The Collected Works*, 6: *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 197-98.

10. *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ, or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the most*

Memorable Passages of His Life and Times, ed. Matthew Sylvester (London, 1696), p. 93.

11. For Emerson's account of his visit to Coleridge, see *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. IV: *1832-1834*, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 407-12. For Carlyle's account, see *The Life of John Sterling*, Vol. XI of the Centenary Edition of *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes*, ed. H. D. Traill (1896-1899, reprinted, 2d ed., New York: AMS Press, 1980), pp. 58-62. Cf. *The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge with a Memoir*, 3 vols. (1855; reprinted, Boston: Little Brown, 1866), pp. xcii-c.

12. For the dating of the marginalia, I consistently rely on the accounts of the Princeton editors. In March 1820, Coleridge set out his scheme for the four projected works in a letter to Thomas Allsop, which is helpfully discussed by Stephen Prickett in *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 38-39.

13. *LXXX Sermons* (London, 1640), pp. 52-53.

14. Geoffrey Nuttall cites this passage from the *Reliquiæ* as the epitome of Baxter's idea of "the meer Catholick"; see *Richard Baxter* (London: Nelson, 1965), p. 68.

15. Material placed within <angle brackets> reproduces the practice of the editors of the *Collected Works*, representing insertions that Coleridge himself made in his notes.

16. See Prickett, pp. 40-41, 49, 65.

17. "Donne's Poems," *The Retrospective Review* 8 (1823): 33, 36 (31-55).

18. *Collected Works*, 6: *Lay Sermons*, pp. 197-98.

19. R. A. Willmott, "S. T. Coleridge at Trinity," in *Conversations at Cambridge* (London: John W. Parker, 1836), p. 9.

20. In his annotations on Jeremy Taylor's *Polemicall Discourses*, Coleridge deplored "the fashion of the Arminian Court Divines . . . , i.e., of the High-Church Party, headed by Archbp Laud to extol and (in my humble judgement) egregiously to over-rate the example and authority of the first four, nay, of the six first Centuries" (*Marginalia* V: 578).

21. *LXXX Sermons*, pp. A6r, B1v, B4v.

22. *Fifty Sermons* (London, 1649), Sermon XLIII, p. 407.

23. This argument is developed in detail in my book, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

24. See the sections labeled "Dogma" and "Observations" in Maurice Kelley's Introduction to *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. VI: *ca. 1658-1660* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 43-116. Cf. also *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John B. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

25. Ronald C. Wendling, *Coleridge's Progress to Christianity: Experience and*

Authority in Religious Faith (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1995), pp. 28-29. Cf. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 4: *1815-1819*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), # 966. See also Coleridge's annotation on a passage in Taylor's *Polemicall Discourses*, in *Marginalia* V (2000): 516. On Coleridge's "idea" of the church, see J. Robert Barth, S.J., "Coleridge and the Church of England," in *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, ed. Richard Gravil and Moly Lefebure (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 291-307.

26. Quoted from *The Complete English Poetry of John Milton*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: New York University Press, 1963), Book IV, lines 321-30.