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"*Acta Apothegmata*": Performative Semantics in John Donne's "A Sermon Preached at White-hall. February 29. 1627."

Yaakov A. Mascetti

Between the early sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, the Passion shifted from being material foundation of faith, which bound the Church to Christ's example, to a metaphysical principle of faith, which individual believers were required to accept and understand but could not perceive physically.[1]

[1]A compelling description of this shift in the religious paradigm of early-modern England is the chapter "Images: The Reformation of the Eyes" in Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 161–204. On the matter of transitions in the perception of the Lord's Supper and the Passion, Duffy's chapter on "The Mass" in Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 95–130, is a canonical point of reference. Canonical readings of late medieval and early-modern beliefs in and ceremonies of the Lord's Supper and Passion are Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1960). A number of literary scholars have touched on this issue of the transition from the physical to the metaphysical works: Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England*

With its re-interpretation of the Scriptures, Protestantism aimed to emphasize the importance of Christ's crucifixion as an *example* of the believer's *internal* suffering and *self*-correction, dismissing, with the theological rigor of humanism, the physicality of late-medieval Eucharistic belief.[2] While a number of Protestant poets, theologians and philosophers of the time responded with a silent acquiescence or with militant assent, John Donne, in several sermons from a relatively late phase of his religious career seems to offer a personal response to contemporary religious discourses that were re-elaborating the strategies of representation of the Passion. The present re-reading will complicate, rather than re-iterate, the rather simplistic and dichotomous readings of the changes taking place between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. It will show Donne not as a former Catholic wrestling with Calvinist theology in the Jacobean English Church, but rather as one of the leading homiletic figures endeavoring to propose a unique way to salvation. The path Donne was in fact trying to trace was supposed to lead to redemption, to the Crucifix, to a point of rest in the endless religious wanderings. In his poetic ride westward on Good Friday, 1613, Donne presents his contemplation of Christ's crucifixion as unbearable, twisting the soteriological rhetoric traditionally associated with that particular festivity, and emphasizing a cognitive incapacity or

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Ryan Netzley, *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Ryan Netzley, "Oral Devotion: Eucharistic Theology and Richard Crashaw's Religious Lyrics" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44.3 (2002), 247–72; Eleanor J. McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry: The Search for Presence in the Writings of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Geoffrey Hill* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1992); Malcolm Ross, *Poetry and Dogma: The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954); Theresa DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999). I have dedicated a significant section of my forthcoming book, *Tokens of Love: Humanist Sign-Theory and Protestant Sacramentalism in Early Modern English Religious Lyrics*, to this matter, focusing on Donne's earlier poetry, his holy sonnets and divine poems.

[2]Louis Martz referred to this phenomenon as the spiritual combat of self-knowledge.

unwillingness to contemplate a "spectacle" of unendurable "weight." (l. 16). By contrast, in his sermons he developed a text-centered conception with which he endeavored to undermine that sense of intolerable absence with the presence of what he called "*acta apothegmata*," actions performed by words. Similarly, in contrast to the uncertainty expressed by the speaker of the Holy Sonnets, several of Donne's sermons undermined the widespread sense that Protestantism fostered "Eucharistic ineffability" with his conception of the homiletic act as an imitation of Divine creativity by speech-act.[3] The spoken word of the sermon was for the later Donne a performative tool, an act that could fill the abyssal space separating the believer and his crucified God, part of an effort to undo the cage of post-lapsarian cognition, changing what Sir Philip Sidney had called the "erected will" for "the infected will."[4] It is specifically this space between the need for and the fear of presence, and the subsequent comfort and distress in absence, which the spoken word of the sermon came to fill, reiterating the Divine creational and verbal act.[5]

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[3]On the matter of ineffability of the sacrament in the early-modern English context, with emphasis on Milton's poetry, see Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 56–104.

[4]Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie* (London: Printed [by Thomas Creede] for William Ponsonby, 1595), sig. C2v; the term "performative" is used in this paper with reference to the concept of speech-act and the illocutionary force of an utterance, as in John L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[5]Joseph L. Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 252–81. On the theological and socio-political importance of preaching in Stuart England see Kenneth Fincham (ed.), *Visitation articles and injunctions of the early Stuart Church* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; New York: Boydell Press: Church of England Record Society, 1994); Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (eds.), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2006); Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Kenneth Fincham, *The Early Stuart Church: 1603–1642* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London & Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988); Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Peter Lake,

The unwillingness or incapacity to move beyond the veil of ignorance of human cognition to "behold that endlesse height which is / Zenith to us" present in the earlier stages of Donne's religious poetic work is representative of a large portion of Protestant religiosity in seventeenth-century England. The way historians and literary critics have dealt with this theological conundrum has generally been to weave "thick" descriptive accounts.[6] The acknowledgment of the devotional acceptance of a basic human intellectual incapacity is, I argue, insufficient when dealing with Donne's sermons, which struggled to construct an alternative to contemporary discourses on the elision of presence. They thereby led the audience to experience the "actus *purus*" of the Word, moving beyond that "unwilling incapacity" to "see," while still yearning to turn their faces back upon

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The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and players in post-Reformation England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'orthodoxy,' 'heterodoxy,' and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560–1660* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2000); Peter Lake and Kevin Sharpe (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Peter E. McCullough, *Sermons at court: politics and religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean preaching* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Peter E. McCullough, *The English sermon revised: religion, literature and history 1600–1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism, c. 1530–1700* (Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 2001); Nicholas Tyacke, *England's long reformation, 1500–1800* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Thomas Cogswell, Richard Cust, and Peter Lake, *Politics, Religion, and Popularity in Early Stuart Britain: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Peter Lake (ed.), *Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987).

[6]See notes 1 and 5 for secondary sources on the impact of the reformation on Renaissance English literature. See also Ellen Spolsky, *Satisfying Skepticism: Embodied Knowledge in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, NJ: Ashgate, 2001); Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 74–109.

that "spectacle of too much weight."[7] In several of his sermons, Donne reconceived the role of words and verbal representation from a *constative* tool into the *performative* Word by means of which he endeavored to recreate, within the semantic locus of the recited homiletic text, the effable incarnation of God. This sense of presence was semantic, based on a material absence and textual presence. If Donne's wit and verbosity has been considered as the symptom of a self-centered conscience, what he defined in "The Crosse" as the "concupiscence of witt" (l. 58), this paper demonstrates that it was by, through and beyond words that Donne yearned to turn the incarnate *Verbum* into a presence within the framework of the sermon.[8]

Donne, of course, was not alone in conceiving a response to this debate. A considerable number of religious tracts, written and published following the disputes on the Lord's Supper in the 1560s and well into the 1600s, treated the motif of Divine "presence" and "absence" vis-à-vis the words of the Scriptures, of the preacher and the theologian. This discussion was rooted in the religious system of the later Middle Ages, which rotated around the doctrine of

[7]Donne, John. "A Sermon Preached at White-hall. February 29. I627. [I627;8]—Acts. 7.60. 'And when he had said this, he fell a sleep'" in *Sermons. Vol. 8*. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–1962), p. 179—subsequent references from the sermons will be taken from this edition, and will indicate the volume and page number of the sermon; John Donne, "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" l. 16.

[8]This position is rooted in T.S. Eliot's "Clark Lectures" where he argued as follows: "There is a type of religious mysticism which found expression in the twelfth century, and which is taken up into the system of Aquinas. Its origin is in the Metaphysics of Aristotle 1072b and elsewhere, and the Nichomachean Ethics, and it is the opposite of Bergsonism . . . For the twelfth century the divine vision or enjoyment of God could only be attained by a process in which the analytic intellect took part; it was through and by and beyond discursive thought that man could arrive at beatitude. This was the form of mysticism consummated in Dante's time." T.S. Eliot. *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry, by T.S. Eliot*. Ronald Schuchard, ed. (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993), p. 99.

Eucharistic Real Presence.[9] The priest's repetitions of Christ's testament recreated within a "fragile, small, wheaten disc" the substantial presence of his flesh and blood.[10] "Ex virtute verborum," stated Peter the Chanter "fit transsubtantiatio": transubstantiation is performed by the power of words. Liturgy was empowered to create a locus and a moment in which God and man could not only meet but *merge*.[11] Protestantism chipped this creed, denying the material sacramentalism of the Catholic church, displacing Divine presence from matter to semantics, from the stuff of the wafer to the meaning of homilies, sacred poems and texts in general, and thus into the hearts of readers and listeners.[12]

This semantic conveyance of Christ's presence, accomplished in catechesis, homiletics and less frequently in poetry, was inevitably trapped within the fragmentation of human understanding. "Reason," as Raphael taught Adam in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, can be "Discursive, or intuitive; discourse / Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours" (V: 487–89).[13] Displaced in the word-centered theology of the Reformation, the immediate apprehension of truth (Raphael's "angelic intuition") inherent in the visual perception of the Eucharist lapsed into the discursiveness of inductive thought, and thus lost in the inescapable fragmentation of the human thinking. As words and things gradually came to be located at the antipodes of the Renaissance ontological spectrum with the radical changes taking place in rhetoric and in the dialectics of Ramus and his followers, a parallel process was taking place in the religious discourses of the time: this process led to

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[9]Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 91–130.

[10]Rubin, Miri, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 1.

[11]Quoted in Rubin, p. 54.

[12]I refer here to Susanne Woods' concept of the "Protestant focus on the Word" in *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 126.

[13]For an in-depth analysis of John Milton's strategies of representation, and the way in which they were informed by his theological and ontological conceptions, see William Kolbrener, *Milton's Warring Angels: A Study of Critical Engagements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 133–57.

the displacement of the objective real presence of Christ from the Eucharistic wafer to the inescapable subjectivity of the pastor's discursive interpretations of Biblical passages, bringing to the relocation of the Divine presence from *matter* to *word*, from *objects* to *semantics*. To use Joseph L. Koerner's words, Protestantism brought to the delineation of a "linguistified crucifix."[14] The use of Scriptures in sermons and poems must not be interpreted as the preacher's wit, but as a veritable re-iteration of God's word. If God was no longer present in the matter of the host, in the wheaten stuff of the Eucharist, it could still be in the Scriptural (thus semantic) message *about* God.

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The objective of Protestant theologians was not the denial of sacramental presence in matter, for the "things" attracting the "superstitious and devilish practices fostered by the Catholic Church," those "idols" broken and burned by the mob, were simply nothing in the eyes of image-breakers.[15] As Koerner has recently argued, Protestant iconoclasm was a theological war against the practice of sacramental signification that had not been mandated by Christ's word, and against those "customary practices, of rites, routines, gestures and poses" that were believed to project the sacramental presence of Christ in the objects.[16] Objects and the actions that made them into "idols" were thus stripped of their supposed sanctity, Divine presence in them was denied, and words became the sole "actions" the Christian could perform. With the radical reduction of the number and role of objects in the Protestant religious life, and with the reformation of the role of words and actions in liturgy and belief, the new actions were, as Donne would have said in a sermon preached at Whitehall on February 29th 1627, "*acta apothegmata*," verbal actions. The Protestant action was verbal, not merely, as Koerner specifies, "articulated *in* Scripture" but principally "articulations *of* Scripture: communicative actions of giving and receiving God's

[14]Koerner, p. 204.
[15]Koerner, p. 85.
[16]Ibid.

word."[17] Works were no longer a means to salvation, while sacramentalism became, to use Koerner's words, an "internal affair of understanding and belief."

Protestant iconoclasts, including those motivated by the first years of Luther's early work, considered the visual and material importance in the liturgy and theology of the Catholic Church as nothing short of "abominable."[18] No longer were material representations to be considered as part of the process of salvation; quite on the contrary, statues, paintings, and relics were seen as useless tools for the revelation of the Divine, dead icons. Having initially repudiated works as a means to salvation on the basis of Luther's call to "faith alone," throughout the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries Protestantism sought to replace "deeds," the religious actions of individuals, with "an internal affair of understanding and belief."[19] The text of the scriptures came to occupy a central role in the conversion of the soul and so did the endless process of interpretation—presence came to be displaced from the objective absoluteness of the material sphere into the intangible one of the meaning of words.[20] This emphasis on the significance of semantics in the conversion of the souls, and in the conveyance of Divine presence to believers, projected the Christian's conception of salvation into a hermeneutical dimension, where the individual searches for God in the text, whether spoken or written. Sermons and translations of the Bible gradually became the fulcrum of ecclesiastical life, both congregational and individual. For, as Donne said in one of his sermons, "there is no salvation but by faith," and there can be "no faith but by hearing" the Scriptures. The "absolution" of souls is, continued Donne, "conferred or withheld in Preaching," as were the "promises of the Gospels."

Against the background of the changes taking place in the religious discourses between the great controversies of the 1560s and the iconoclastic diatribes of the early seventeenth century, Protestant

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[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

[20]For the idea that "the presence of God is mediated by language" see Kolbrener, p. 141.

England fostered the gradual development of two diametrically different homiletic styles: one became famous in Europe for its theological elaboration, conceptual complexity and semantic weight, and the other for its dry simplicity and analytic precision.[21] As John Selden would have stated, he that "takes pleasure to hear Sermons, enjoys himself as much as he that hears Plays, and he that loves Plays endeavour to love Sermons."[22] Within the framework of the rhetorically elaborate and conceptually acrobatic homiletic style which gradually took shape during that half-century, the word of God was thus not only to be gathered from the Scriptures and delivered by the preacher to the believers, but had to become part of a complex structure founded on the Biblical text, and embellished for the greater appreciation of the Divine *Verbum*.

With the development of Memorialism, Receptionism and the more extreme forms of iconoclastic dismissal of the materiality of sacraments both on the Continent and in England, the verbal sphere became of greater importance than central dogmas like baptism or the Eucharist. "[L]ong before [Christ] instituted the Sacraments," Donne preached in a sermon upon Candlemas Day, "Christ preached" his message, the "Christian Doctrine."[23] The "visible and sensible assistances" of the sacraments are but the "subsidiary" aspect of our religious life, coming to support "our infirmity" in the understanding of spiritual truths.[24] The sermon became the means for what John Wilkins called the "Exhortation" and "Edification" of believers, in which words could perform a work, operating or igniting an awakening of the soul through a "holy stirring of religious affections."[25] In Richard

[21]For an exhaustive description of these two poles and the changes that took place in between, see Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 617–977, and Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts, v. 1, Laws Against the Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 1–18, 133–43, 210–19, 445–66.

[22]Selden, John, *Table-Talk: Being Discourses of John Selden Esq.; or his Sence of Various Matters of Weight and High Consequence Relating Especially to Religion and State* (London: Printed for E. Smith, 1689), p. 41.

[23]Donne, *Sermons*, X: 69.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Wilkins, John, *Ecclesiastes, or a Discourse Concerning the Gift of Preaching* (London: Printed by A. Maxwell, for Sa. Gellibrand, 1669), p. 36.

Hooker's conception of the ecclesiastical polity, the "usuall *publique reading* of the word of God for the peoples instruction *is preaching*," the outward administration of the Gospels which, "(his spirit inwardly concurring therewith) converteth, edifieth, and saveth soules."[26] For Hooker, with their reiteration of Scriptural passages, the words of the sermon were not simply to "sharpen their wits" but to perform as part of a soteriological work: the preacher accomplished his salvific work through the homiletic repetition of the Biblical text, at the center of which was, to use Paul's words, "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).[27] To envelop the *linguistified* image of the crucifix within the text meant, therefore, enclosing the lost sacramentality of the material Eucharist into the semantics of the sermon, and transposing the iconicity of the visual representation into the heart and soul of the individual.

The preacher's yearning for Christ's sacrifice, though, was accompanied by a theological sense of impossibility, caused by the Protestant dismissal of sacramental presence. Yearning for the Cross was therefore paradoxically combined to a necessary elision, a substitution of presence with absence, and a transposition of the Divine from the external sphere to the inner conscience of the individual. In this way, whatever the manner or the matter of the preacher's sermon, the "hearers of the Word" were also to become "doers of the Word." As Donne preached in a sermon at Whitehall on March 4th 1624,

> . . . [just] as the end of all bodily eating, is Assimilation, that after all other concoctions, that meat may be made *Idem corpus*, the same body that I am; so the end of all spirituall eating, is Assimilation too, That after all Hearing, and all Receiving, I may be made *Idem spiritus cum Domino*, the same spirit, that my God is: for, though it be good to Heare, good to Receive, good to Meditate, yet, (if we speake effectually, and consummatively) why call we these good? there is nothing good but One, that is, Assimilation to God.[28]

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[26]Hooker, Richard, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie. The Fift Booke* (London: Printed by John Windet, 1597), p. 39.

[27]Ibid., p. 43.

[28]Donne, *Sermons,* VI: 223–24.

The preached word was fed to the hearers like manna from God, and by them received, as in the case of sacramental signs, and assimilated into their being for them to be assimilated to God. The cohesion and life of the Christian congregation was maintained with the Word of the Scripture, for "the Scriptures," Donne explained, "are Gods Voyce" and the "Church is his Eccho."[29] The sermons would thus reiterate, amplify the Word of God embedded in the Scriptures, allowing one to hear and, at times, to see Christ. For, he elaborated in "A Sermon Preached to the Household at White-hall, April 30. 1626," if Christ does "appear to any man . . . in a private inspiration, yet he appears but in weakness . . . till he speak, till he bring a man to the hearing of his voice."[30] The "discontinuing, or slackning of preaching" entailed for Donne the "danger of loosing Christ."[31] Addressing and hearing a sermon meant therefore, for the preacher and the listener to experience verbally and spiritually the presence of Christ in one's heart. Words, rather than things and actions, were the means for salvation.

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Among the many debates that focus on John Donne's sermons and the multitude of theological and philosophical conceptions that characterized his homiletic style, the one I wish to focus on centers on the role of the word (both written and preached) in his conception of piety. Jeffrey Johnson has convincingly argued that the theological dispute that mostly characterized the religious language games throughout Donne's clerical career was that between "the word-centered piety associated primarily with the Puritans" and the "sacrament-centered piety attributed principally with the Laudians."[32] This distinction, based on Peter Lake's binary opposition of the "word-based style of piety" to one centered on sacraments and their ritual, was endorsed by Daniel Doerksen upon arguing that Donne was

[29]Donne, *Sermons*, VI: 223.
[30]Donne, *Sermons*, VII: 157.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Johnson, Jeffrey, *The Theology of John Donne* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), p. 131.

"content to be associated with conforming Puritanism," emphasizing in his homiletics the first type of piety as opposed to the second.[33] Yet Johnson is correct in stating that the *Sermons* "testify that the sacraments are for Donne equally essential" and that Donne conceived salvation as passing through *both* sacraments *and* sermons.[34] The "invisible grace of God" is received by his Church both through the Word and through what he calls "*Res Sacramenti*," the form, essence and substance of the God-given signs of salvation.[35] Donne's sermons were thus not only part of a broader work of conformation to Calvinism in general and to its homiletic theology in particular, or to a generic Protestant conception of the sacraments, but also at times they reveal Donne's unique effort to propose an alternative conception of his own, aspiring to become what I wish to call a *verbal sacrament*. The word spoken by the preacher is not a mere reiteration of Christ's message, but the veritable performance of a soteriological opus. The words of the sermon delineate the traits of a conceptual icon, which is not to be contemplated passively in adoration, but which redeems the on-looking individual as he hears the words from the pulpit, purifying his understanding.

In an early sermon preached at Whitehall on April 19, 1618, Donne dealt with the communal and verbal action of the Trinity in its creation of man, and thereby emphasized the creational operation entailed by the spoken word of God and the preacher:

> In the first Creation, when God made heaven and earth, that making was not *in sermone*, for that could not be prophesied before, because there was no being before; neither is it said, that at that Creation God said any thing, but only *creavit*, *God made heaven and earth*, and no more; so that that which was made *sine sermone*, without speaking, was only matter without form, heaven without light, and earth without any productive virtue or disposition, to bring forth,

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[33]Lake, Peter, *The Boxmaker's Revenge*, p. 71; Daniel Doerksen, *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne and the English Church before Laud* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997), p. 112; Doerksen endorses Lake's distinction on pp. 137ff.

[34]Johnson, p. 132.

[35]Ibid.

> and to nourish creatures. But when God came to those specifique formes, and to those creatures wherein he would be sensibly glorified after, they were made *in sermone*, by his word; *Dixit & facta sunt*, God spake, and so all things were made; . . . But when God came to the best of his creatures, to Man, Man was not only made *in verbo*, as the rest were, by speaking a word, but by Consultation, by a Conference, by a Councell, *faciamus hominem*, *let us make Man*; there is a more expresse manifestation of divers persons speaking together, of a concurrence of the Trinity; and not of saying only, but a mutuall saying; not of a Proposition only, but of a Dialogue in the making of Man. . . . The making of man was *in sermone*, in a consultation.[36]

The biblical account of God's creation of man reveals, in this specific passage, the communal, plural and dialectic nature of the divine Verbum—and because the creation narrated in Genesis is but "a shadow, a representation of our second Creation, our Regeneration in Christ, and of the saving knowledge of God," it appears quite clear that Donne conceives the verbal interaction between preacher and congregation as a completion of the creative council of the Trinity. The word is spoken, heard and as such it creates—the dialectics of performative semantics. This creational performance of the sermon, furthermore, passes through the ear—for, as Donne said in another homily preached in 1618 at Lincoln's Inn, "the Organ that God hath given the naturall man, is the *eye*" for "he sees God in the creature"; but the "Organ that God hath given the Christian, is the *ear*" for he "hears God in his Word."[37] When the Christian comes to God "*in sermone,*" Donne preached in a sermon at Whitehall on April 19th 1618, he is brought by the preacher to encounter divinity "in his word," to approach God's creative act "in his Scriptures": this homiletic catechism allows Donne's imperfect congregational "creatures" to become "better and nobler Creatures" with "clearer notions of God" and "more evident manifestations of his power, and of his goodness towards us."[38]

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[36]Donne, *Sermons*, I: 289.
[37]Donne, *Sermons*, II: 114.
[38]Donne, *Sermons*, I: 290.

Preaching thus was not merely catechesis, or a pedagogical tool in the hands of the pastor to spread the Word, but a veritable creative act, a completion of the Divine genesis, by means of which Donne becomes an active part in God's creative opus. In a sermon he gave to the household at Whitehall in 1626, Donne expanded the concept of Christ's calling to the individual believer to strengthen his faith and live a life in the example of the savior. This, he states, implies a "calling," in which both a "voice" and a "Word" come to perfect the soul of the individual.

> . . . *by the Word preached*, according to his Ordinance, and under the Great Seal, of his blessing upon his Ordinance. So that *preaching* is this *calling*; and therefore, as if Christ do appear to any man, in the power of miracle, or in a private inspiration, yet he appears but in weakness, as in an infancy, till he speak, till he bring a man to the hearing of his voice, in a setled Church, and in the Ordinance of preaching.[39]

Preaching is a completion of Christ's own message—it is the means through which Christ's Word reaches the believer, the sole way for the salvation to be accomplished. The "discontinuing" or the "slackning" can cause the loss of Christ. Donne sees creation as a perpetual creative operation, a work in progress by means of which the state of things is gradually changed. In this conception, Adam was not "made in Paradise, but brought thither, call'd thither"; the "sons of *Adam* are not born in the Church, but call'd thither by Baptism."[40] Creation as it is is not perfect—"*Non nascimur sed re-nascimur Christiani*; No man is born a Christian, but call'd into that state by regeneration." Donne's conception of "calling" is that of a verbal opus, a work by virtue of which man is perfected, called into another state, on the way up to the perfection of what he calls the "*Masters joy.*"[41] Men are "called" by the preacher's reiteration of the salvific Word and *made* "partakers of his Word and Sacraments, and the other Ordinances by the way."[42] The voice of the preacher, as Donne had argued earlier in a 1624 sermon, is

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[39]Donne, *Sermons*, VII: 157.
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid.
[42]Donne, *Sermons,* VII: 157–58.

"*vox dicens*, *a voyce saying*, speaking": it is "Gods voyce, but presented to us in the ministery of man," it is "our way . . . to depart from our own blindnesse, and to behold a way, that is shewed us."[43] Quoting Paul from Romans 10:14, Donne inquires "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" The mysteries of religion are imprinted upon the human understanding of the individual neither by the "weakest kinde of proofe," namely the "book of creatures" nor by the "powerfullest proofe of all, which is the power of miracles," but by means of "a voyce."[44] The voice of the preacher shapes the cognition of the congregants and turns their intellectual blindness into the clear understanding of Christianity's principles—"for this knowing is beleeiving."[45] Homiletics show the listeners the "word of God, preached by man."[46] The act of listening is, for Donne the preacher, an act of confirmation, an act of faith.

> Christ is *verbum*, The word; not A word, but The word: the Minister is *Vox*, voyce; not A voyce, but The voyce, the voyce of that word, and no other; and so he is a pleasing voyce, because he pleases him that sent him, in a faithfull executing of his Commission, and speaking according to his dictate; and pleasing to them to whom he is sent, by bringing the Gospel of Peace and Reparation to all the wounded, and scattered, and contrite Spirits.[47]

The understanding of this idea of Christ's presence in the spoken word of the preacher entailed, in Donne's theological thought, a complex process of mimesis, a moment of representation which would entail the concealment of divine presence within a locus of absence, and was thus meant to initiate a search for the Divine within the text in the form of hermeneutics and inquiry. For God's presence to be understood by the reader and the listener, it had to be perceived properly: the preacher's duty was to re-iterate, endorse and use

[43]Donne, *Sermons,* VI: 134.
[44]Donne, *Sermons,* VI: 133–34.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Donne, *Sermons,* II: 172.

Christ's Word to teach his congregation how to see God "here and now," even within the apparent absence of the textual revelation. In one of his most interesting sermons, preached at St. Paul's cathedral on Easter day 1628, Donne tackles the difference between the "sight and knowledge of God in this life, and another manner of sight, and another manner of knowledge in the life to come."[48] Knowledge in this life is, Donne quotes from 1 Cor. 13:12, "*in aenigmate*," and man is thus called to search for him in "obscure representations" and to acquire what is, by definition, "*a Knowledge but in part*."

> For our sight of God here, our Theatre, the place where we sit and see him, is the whole world, the whole house and frame of nature, and our *medium*, our *glasse*, is the Booke of Creatures, and our light, by which we see him, is the light of Naturall Reason. And then, for our knowledge of God here, our Place, our Academy, our University is the Church, our *medium*, is the Ordinance of God in his Church, Preaching, and the Sacraments.[49]

Shaping the understanding of his congregants, the preacher shows them a glimpse of God's presence, "*in speculo, in a glasse*," reflected in the words he pronounces on the pulpit. The words of a sermon are images in which the listeners perceive traces of Divine inspiration, channels to a more perfect and enlightened apprehension of truth. Donne's homiletic mimesis is, therefore, a necessary means for the accomplishment of the congregation's re-education. The preacher leads his listeners to identify with what Calvin called the "living image of Christ in the Word," and ultimately to identify with Christ. In that moment, the believer acquires the status of a representation, an icon of Christ, and the preacher is its author—this is the performative use of the word.

> He that will dy for Christ upon Good-Friday, must hear his own bell toll all Lent; he that will be a partaker of his

[48]Donne, *Sermons*, VIII: 222.
[49]Donne, *Sermons*, VIII: 220.

> passion, must conform himself to his discipline of prayer and fasting before.[50]

In a sermon preached on February 29, 1627, Donne prepares his listeners at Whitehall to commend their spirits into God's hands, leading them through the stages of a process of identification with the life of Christ. This process, known in theological terms as "*imitatio Christi*," was from the Pauline epistles to the Augustinian tracts, one of the prime means for the individual's salvation. If Jesus had incarnated the union between the divine and the human, between matter and spirit, his self-sacrifice and death had become the events for the Christian individual to imitate in order to undermine the difference between his human state and that of his Savior. Before coming to "his [Christ's] resurrection," before, that is, experiencing the moment in which Christ cleansed humanity of its sins, one was required, for Donne, to first come to "his grave" and before that to "be in his death-bed."[51] The congregants thus were called by the preacher to "do as he did," to "fast and pray" in order to attain a union with him. The text of the sermon, recited not only as a rhetorical exercise but also as a moment of communion between pastor and congregants, was one of the main "preparatives" preceding the entrance of the sick into a "Medicinal Bath," a believer's preparation before he immerses himself into "that Bath, the blood of Christ Jesus, in the Sacrament."[52] This process of cognitive preparation preceding his encounter with Christ begins with "two general considerations":

> First, that every man is bound to do something before he dye; and then to that man who hath done those things which the duties of his calling bind him to, death is but sleep . . . every man is bound to do something, to take some calling upon him. Secondly there is *hoc age*; every man is bound to do seriously and scedulously, and sincerely the duties of that calling; and thirdly . . . the better to perform those duties, every man shall do well to propose to himself

[50]Donne, *Sermons*, VIII: 174.
[51]Ibid.
[52]Ibid.

> some person, some pattern, some example whom he will follow and imitate in that calling.[53]

As part of what comes across as Donne's clear call to act and to perform good deeds in one's life, this invocation for the individual's conformance with his calling leads to a moment of completion, communion with one's duty, and eventually to the undermining of death conceived as the undermining of individuality and self-consciousness. These actions are fashioned and conceived with the aid of an example, a model provided by Donne for the listeners' imitation in the accomplishment of their calling. Yet the speaker is not merely eager to encourage his listeners to turn their praxis into the exact reflection of a pre-existing model, but eventually states that his objective is to elicit a moment of complete identification with the represented type. Rather than mimesis, what Donne is calling for is a moment of communion with the model, turning themselves into the signified of a signifier. When this process is not carried out by the individual, the latter, says Donne, passes "through this world as a flash," as a senseless sign, an "*ignis fatuus* in the air, which does not only not give light for any use, but does not so much as portend or signifie any thing."[54] The lack of voluntary acceptance of a model excludes him from the world, in that "he whom we can call nothing, is nothing."[55] This merging of the imitating signifier with the imitated signified, this complete intersection with one's calling, defines the true existence of a man, and a conformation with God's essence of being—"Gods own name is *I am*." Adopting the word as a point of reference and hearing the voice of the preacher, Donne's man ultimately becomes a living icon of Divine presence; but when he "stands in a place and does not [the] duty of that place, [he] is but the statue of that place," an inert representation of human potential.[56] The idolatrous materiality of the individual's inertness is the exact opposite of Donne's living image of God, the spoken text of the Gospels in the sermon which brings to life its listeners, fashioning the minds and hearts of those willing to be saved.

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[53]Ibid., p. 175.
[54]Ibid., p. 177.
[55]Ibid.
[56]Ibid., p. 178.

> The duty in this Text is expressed and limited in speaking. *Cum dixisset* . . . and truly so, literally, in speaking, and no more, it stretches far: Many duties, in many great places consist in speaking; Ours doe so.[57]

The duty of the preacher is to speak, to pronounce words, and the duty of the listeners, of the congregants, is to hear those words and conform to their Divine message. When this happens, Donne concludes, the preacher's speech acts as the performative words of the "great Persons," whose "Apothegms are their actions, and wee heare their words in their deeds."[58] Speech is but speech unless it accomplishes what it was meant to do: fashion, convince, redeem. When the preacher's words become "*Acta Apothegmata*," they conform to the operative nature of God's word, and *they do things*.

> If wee consider God; as a second Person in the Godhead, the Sonne of God, God of God, so God is *Logos*, *Sermo*, *Verbum*, *Oratio*; the Word, Saying, Speaking.[59]

In this sense, Donne's conception of preaching goes beyond the mere construction of a word-based piety and merges the sacramentality of signs with the semiosis of human locution, not merely as a nostalgic post-Catholic verbal transubstantiation, but as the semantic means through which the individual turns himself or herself into a sign of Christ's true presence. When accomplishing his duty, the preacher becomes a type of the Godly *sermo*, a signifier of Divine meaning, and thus proceeds to create a new man out of the inert statue of the listener. Upon doing his duty in his own place, in his own time, the individual's actions influence their context—the "perfume" of his verbal actions, "intended only for that room," expands "upward and downward, and round about it," while the words uttered by the preacher are no longer a mere reiteration of the Scriptures, but a veritable signification of Godly presence, sacramental signs of divine truth. These "*Acta Apothegmata*," these verbal actions of a preacher, in other words, are Donne's "doing of the duties of the place," in the

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[57]Ibid., p. 179.
[58]Ibid.
[59]Ibid.

"middle Sphears," when his words, *acta apothegmata*, "breath upward and downward," performing a perfecting action upon reality and an "improvement of the present."[60]

Bar-Ilan University, Israel

[60]Ibid., p. 178.