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The Feminine Trinity in "Upon the Annuntiation and Passion"

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Some of John Donne's earliest poems are erotic elegies, Ovidian in inspiration; peppered with ironic commentaries on the reign of the Virgin Queen and rich in witty observations that denigrate women in general, these works have led some readers to accuse Donne of misogyny, a charge not easily refuted.[1] One cannot dismiss the elegies' sometimes nasty point of view simply by asserting that the speakers are not spokesmen for

[1]For indictments of the elegies on feminist grounds, see especially Achsah Guibbory, "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve So': The Politics of Love in Donne's *Elegies*," *ELH* 57 (1990): 811-33; Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 61-71, 78-83; and Stanley Fish, "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power," *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 223-52. See also Roma Gill on the objectification of women in several of the elegies: "There is an adolescent crudeness about such an attitude which is very different from the suave sophistication of Ovid" ("*Musa Iocosa Mea*: Thoughts on the *Elegies*," *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A. J. Smith [London: Methuen, 1972], p. 55). For a critique of the term "misogynist" as it is used in feminist criticism of Donne, see Chapter 4, "Donne Among the Feminists: Ethics and Judgment in Criticism" in Stanley Stewart, *"Renaissance" Talk: Ordinary Language and the Mystique of Critical Problems* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997), pp. 153-98.

the poet. Although Donne often invents male personae whose attitudes the reader is invited to find repellent, the poet himself clearly "has issues"—to use the slang of our own time—with female sexuality and female power. But, as Achsah Guibbory has suggested, the unpleasant things Donne has to say about Woman do not spring from misogyny in general so much as from his feelings about the reign of the ultimate Petrarchan mistress, Elizabeth I. As Guibbory puts it, "Tensions over submission to female rule are strikingly evident in Donne's representation of private love relationships in the *Elegies*."[2] As M. Thomas Hester has demonstrated, moreover, Donne's response to the cult of Elizabeth was at least as much a matter of religious allegiance as of Early Modern attitudes toward female monarchy. The personae of Donne's elegies and satires, as well as "the anti-Petrarchist, anti-Neoplatonic outlaw lover of [his] lyrics" are all caught up in what Hester calls "sectual politics."[3] With strong ties to the Old Religion and strong ideas about the poetics of sexual fulfillment, Donne tapped the subversive potential of Ovidian elegy in order to critique a Protestant Queen whose policies oppressed Catholic recusants and whose court culture glorified the Petrarchan ideal of the unobtainable beloved, establishing Elizabeth as a secular, Protestant replacement for the Blessed Virgin Mary.[4]

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[2]Guibbory, p. 813.

[3]"'this cannot be said': A Preface to the Reader of Donne's Lyrics," *Christianity and Literature* 39 (1990): 374. See also Hester, "Donne's (Re)Annunciation of the Virgin(ia Colony) in *Elegy XIX*," *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 49-64; and "'let me love': Reading the Sacred 'currant' of Donne's Profane Lyrics," *Sacred and Profane: Secular and Devotional Interplay in Early Modern British Literature*, ed. Helen Wilcox, Richard Todd, and Alasdair MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996), pp. 129-50.

[4]On the Cult of the Virgin Queen as a replacement for the Cult of the Blessed Virgin, see Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

When the old Queen died, however, the gender codes informing Elizabethan Protestantism were revised. Elizabeth's "lawes / Still new like fashions" had insisted that the English reject the Whore of Babylon and "thinke that shee"—Elizabeth, no less than the Church she headed—was "onely perfect."[5] With James's succession, that cruel fair was replaced by a self-consciously patriarchal king who asserted himself from the start (in such venues as the Hampton Court Conference and with such projects as his new Bible translation) as a wise and authoritative *paterfamilias* seeking to unite all religious factions and—he asserts in his *Triplici nodo, triplex cuneus*—initially even willing to bestow "Benefits and Gracious fauours...in generall and particular vpon Papists."[6] But the Gunpowder Plot, James laments in the same work, showed him just how misplaced were those benefits and favors. His response, he avers, was to require of his Roman Catholic subjects an Oath of Allegiance that would do no more than distinguish "betweene the Ciuilly obedient Papists, and the

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[5]John Donne, *Satyre III*, lines 56-57, 58, 59; *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Anchor / Doubleday, 1967), p. 24. All subsequent quotations from Donne's poetry are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically by line number.

[6]*Triplici nodo, triplex cuneus. OR AN APOLOGIE FOR THE OATH of Allegiance* (London: Robert Barker, 1607); facs. rpt. as James I, *De Triplici Nodo: The Corrected Copy for the Second Edition* (Alburgh: Archival Facsimiles Limited, 1987), p. 20. Although the title page of the anonymous first edition is dated 1607, the work actually appeared in February of 1608. T. S. Healy notes that "There seems to have been little doubt about the identity of the author" ("Introduction," *Ignatius His Conclave by John Donne* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1969], p. xxi). I quote from a facsimile edition that reproduces the king's personal copy of the anonymous first edition, complete with James's own corrections for the second edition, many of which involve shifting from third person to first person. All subsequent quotations from *Triplici nodo* and from the Roman Catholic documents to which James was responding, which were reproduced within *Triplici nodo*, are taken from this edition.

peruerse Disciples of the Powder-Treason."[7] The sincerity of the King's claim is suspect; for as M. C. Questier has demonstrated, the Oath was in fact precisely what the Papal See took it to be: a "diabolically effective polemical cocktail" designed to force English recusants into an impossible bind, "an extraordinarily forceful act of government which, for a time, seemed to threaten the existence of English Romanism in a way that no conventional 'persecution' ever could."[8]

In response to the English law establishing the Oath (3 James I c.4; 22 June 1606), Pope Paul V issued a Breve (22 September 1606) forbidding English Catholics to take the oath. When the imprisoned Archpriest George Blackwell nevertheless did subscribe, the Pope issued another Breve (23 August 1607), stressing that he meant what he said the first time; in addition, Cardinal Bellarmine wrote a letter to Blackwell (28 September 1607) urging him to recant his subscription to the Oath even if doing so meant martyrdom. It was to these three documents—the two papal Breves and Bellarmine's letter—that James was responding in *Triplici nodo, triplex cuneus*: a triple wedge to cut through a triple knot, first published anonymously in February 1608.[9]

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[7] *Triplici nodo*, pp. 46-47.

[8] M. C. Questier, "Loyalty, Religion and State Power in Early Modern England: English Romanism and the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance," *The Historical Journal* 40 (1997): 311, 328.

[9] James's Latin title is a carpentry metaphor: the king's triple wedge will cut through a triple knot in a piece of wood (see Johann P. Somerville, ed. *King James VI and I: Political Writings* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 284, n. 497). For the dates and circumstances of the two breves, Bellarmine's letter, and the king's treatise, see J. H. Pollen, "English Post-Reformation Oaths," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911 ed. New Advent, 8 November 2004 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11177a.htm>.

In this work, James insists (referring to himself in the third person to retain anonymity) that if only the Pope had deigned to indicate "what special words he quarrelled in that Oath," then "it might haue bene that his Maiestie for the fatherly care he hath, not to put any of his Subiects to a needlesse extremitie, might haue bene contented in some sort to haue reformed or interpreted those wordes."[10] Although contrasting the English monarch's alleged willingness to discuss specifics with the Pope's "flat and generall condemnation of the whole Oath," James's claim that he feels "fatherly care" for his people makes clear to English recusant readers that they must choose which father they will obey. For the King is here echoing the language used by Paul V in his first Breve forbidding Catholics to take the Oath—a document reprinted within *Triplici Nodo* itself. The Pope addresses the English Catholics as his "Welbeloued sonnes" and says that he is "*compelled*" to forbid the taking of the Oath "*by our Fatherly care which we doe continually take for the saluation of your soules.*"[11]

Not surprisingly, Donne viewed both sides of the Oath of Allegiance debate with a certain degree of scepticism, and his response to it was complex. As Dennis Flynn has demonstrated, *Biathanatos* (written c. 1608) and *Pseudo-Martyr* (published 1610) may both be read—especially in relation to one another—as ironic reflections on the controversy surrounding the Oath, rather than as a serious defense of the martyrdom *Pseudo-Martyr* called suicide or a straightforward argument in favor of avoiding such suicide by taking the Oath.[12] When the patriarchal heads of Mother Church's earthly incarnations insist that men choose between them, a sincere son of that Mother must, it would seem, take refuge in irony.

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[10] *Triplici nodo*, p. 7.

[11] *Triplici nodo*, pp. 9, 10.

[12] See Dennis Flynn, "Irony in Donne's *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr*," *Recusant History* 12 (1973): 49-69.

Or, perhaps, in a witty appeal to *her* authority. Although they are not direct responses to the Oath of Allegiance controversy, the religious poems that Donne wrote during the first decade of James's reign also reflect his unwillingness to let two warring would-be fathers define his faith or his religious practice. They respond to the paternalistic rhetoric of the Jacobean Church and its Roman rival by expressing "the Idea of a Woman"—to quote the phrase Donne used in explaining the *Anniversaries* to Ben Jonson[13]—that arises from the poet's own, idiosyncratic fusion of Roman Catholic and Reformed theology. Donne explores this "Idea" in particularly celebratory terms in "The Annuntiation and Passion."

The poem was inspired by a rare liturgical event. On March 25, 1608, just one month after James's *Triplici nodo* was first published, two very different religious observances coincided: Lady Day, the feast of the Annunciation, fell on Good Friday.[14] The commemoration of Christ's conception and the solemn remembrance of his death were thus combined. Donne's poem on this occasion—one crying out for witty commentary—takes as its point of departure the very traditional assumption that both the individual human soul and the Church are feminine in relation to God; the piece explores the Virgin Mary's preeminent place in salvation history and *Ecclesia*'s role as Christ's "imitating Spouse" (39). But the results of that exploration are dramatic, for the poem imagines anew the ways in which the divine Trinity manifests itself to the human soul through the holiest woman's example and through the God-revealing motions of a feminine guide.

As is evident in the 1617 sonnet Donne wrote on the death of his wife, Anne More Donne, the poet's most unquenchable thirsts and most deeply-rooted fears were tied to his notion of Woman as

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[13]"Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden" (circa 1619), *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) 1:128-78.

[14]See Shawcross's note on the date of the poem, p. 354.

both God-given sign and God-obscuring idol.[15] In "The Annuntiation and Passion," the threat of merely lustful idolatry is minimized because the feminine figures he considers—the Blessed Virgin, the Church, and the soul that embraces holiness—are not earthly wives, not women whose bodies the poet/speaker might construe as objects of desire. They are, on the contrary, active subjects, models of feminine agency who serve as guides for the poet/speaker in his efforts to become more receptive to God's presence in his life. But neither does the speaker teeter, as in the poem mourning Anne's death, on the brink of worshiping a good woman as if she were God. For the feminine figures of the poem are a decidedly creaturely threesome, perfectly reflective of the triune Deity rather than threatening to obscure Him. From the Blessed Virgin, the Church, and his own feminine soul, the poet/speaker can learn how to take as the ultimate object of his desire and as his own ultimate referent a God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and inseminating/indwelling Spirit. Donne invokes a triple manifestation of sacred femininity in an attempt to find the masculine Trinity toward whom only "she"—that divine Trinity's creaturely, feminine reflection—can direct him.

As Jeffrey Johnson has demonstrated, a conception of the Holy Trinity as "divine community" is central to John Donne's theology and "illuminates every corner of his religious imagination."[16] In the sermon he preached at Lincoln's Inn on Trinity Sunday 1620, Donne observes that "[I]t is a lovely and a religious thing, to finde out *Vestigia Trinitatis*, Impressions of the Trinity, in as many

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[15]See my "Ambivalent Mourning: Sacramentality, Idolatry, and Gender in 'Since She Whome I Lovd Hath Payd Her Last Debt,' *John Donne Journal* 10 (1991): 45-56.

[16]*The Theology of John Donne* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 3, 5.

things as we can."[17] According to St. Augustine, one of the most important of these "Impressions" is the human soul, made in the image of the triune God and engaged in acts of memory, understanding, and will. Augustine detects a trinitarian structure in other aspects of human experience as well, finding—for example—that in an act of loving, "there are three, the lover, and what is being loved, and love."[18] Augustine also detects a trinity in the sense of sight, which involves the interaction of three distinct but related things: "the thing we see," "the actual sight or vision," and that which "holds the sense of the eyes on the thing being seen..., namely the conscious intention" (*De Trinitate*, XI.2). Similarly, in an act of cogitation, the will joins a remembered thing with the internal vision or impression of that thing in the mind's eye (*De Trinitate*, XI.6).

In "The Annuntiation and Passion" (entitled in some manuscripts "Upon the Annunciacion and Passion fallinge upon one day 1608"), Donne finds a created reflection of the triune deity in three feminine figures: the cogitating Christian soul, the woman upon whom her mind's eye gazes (the Blessed Virgin), and her guide (the Church). Each member of this triad has a distinct identity, but all are—in another sense—united as one "Shee": she who "sees," she who is "seen," and she who "hath shown" how a Christian ought to respond to the triune God. The poet's construction of this three-fold figure is grounded in his use of the word "she(e)" as the prevailing nominative pronoun throughout the

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[17]John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-1962), 3:144.

[18]*The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Pt. I, Vol. 5 (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), p. 272. The passage quoted is from Book IX, section 2. All subsequent quotations from *De Trinitate* are taken from this translation and cited parenthetically by book and section number.

poem: it refers first to his soul (the *anima* being grammatically and theologically feminine), then to the Virgin (hailed by Gabriel as "blessed...among women"[19]), and finally to the Church, Christ's "imitating Spouse" (39). The poem has a tripartite form established by the speaker's movement through these three figures, each of whom is defined in visual language as seeing, being seen, or showing.

The poem begins with a section in which the speaker focuses upon the visual banquet afforded his soul on a day when his body is deprived of its usual nourishment.[20] Commanding his flesh to

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[19]Luke 1:28. Since the Geneva translation was the most popular English Protestant rendering of the Scriptures available before (and even after) the publication of the King James Bible in 1611, I quote from *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1599 edition with undated Sternhold & Hopkins Psalms* (Ozark, MO: L. L. Brown, 1995). Of course, Donne may also have consulted the Latin Vulgate, the earlier authorized translation of the Church of England (the "Bishops' Bible"), and/or the Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims translation. Except where otherwise noted, all subsequent quotations from Scripture are taken from the 1599 Geneva Bible and cited parenthetically by book, chapter, and verse.

[20]Donne would have grown up with the Roman Catholic Church's designation of Good Friday as a day upon which fasting and abstention from meat were required. Post-Reformation Englishmen still observed these dietary restrictions, being required by civil rather than ecclesiastical law to fast and abstain throughout Lent. See W. H. Frere, *The English Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I* (New York: Macmillan, 1904; New York: AMS, [1968?]), p. 101. See also Richard Hooker's defense of fasting as a religious practice (*Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* V.lxxii, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker*, ed. John Keble, 7th ed., revised by R. W. Church and F. Paget [Oxford: Clarendon, 1888; facs. rpt. Ellicott City, MD: Via Media, 1994], 2:407-427) and the extensive overview of fasting as an important spiritual practice in the Elizabethan "Homily on Good Works: And First, Of Fasting," *Certaine Sermons and Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571). A Facsimile*

"abstaine to day (1)," he establishes himself as self-consciously devout and masculine, for the stance he takes in relation to his flesh is that of a husband addressing a wife, a "weake[r] vessel" (1 Peter 3:7) in need of firm discipline: "Tamely fraile body'abstaine to day; to day / My soule eates twice, Christ hither and away" (1-2). But while the first person speaker – the intellect addressing the body – clearly feels himself authorized to govern and command his own flesh, he can provide the body with an adequate reason for fasting only by pointing to his soul, which is itself—as one would expect, given the demands of both Latin grammar and Christian tradition—gendered feminine. And as the speaker tells his "fraile body" (1) what his soul perceives, he repeatedly underscores the latter entity's feminine identity. The two-word clause "She(e) sees" appears four times in the first twelve lines.

Reproduction of the Edition of 1623, intr. Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968).

Interestingly, the issue of dietary laws is used as an example by both sides in the Oath controversy. In his appeal to Blackwell, Cardinal Bellarmine urges the example of an Old Testament hero who resisted Hellenic laws requiring Jews to eat pork: "*worthy* Eleazar...*would neither eate Swines flesh, nor so much as faine to haue eaten it, although hee saw the great torments that did hang ouer his head, lest, as himselfe speaketh in the second booke of* the Machabees, *many young men might bee brought through that Simulation, to preuaricate with the Law*" (*Triplici nodo* 40). King James answers Bellarmine by insisting on a contrasting analogy: "If the Cardinall would remember, that when the Church maketh a law (suppose to forbid flesh on certaine daies) he that refuseth to obey it, incurreth the iust censure of the Church: If a man then ought to dye rather then to breake the least of Gods Ceremoniall Laws, and to pine and starue his body, rather then to violate the Church his positiue law: Will he not giue leaue to a man to redeeme his soule from sinne, and to keepe his body from punishment, by keeping the Kings politique lawe, and by giuing good example in his person, raise vp a good opinion in his Maiestie of like Allegiance in the inferiours of his order? This application, as I take it, would haue better fitted this example" (*Triplici nodo*, p. 82).

On this extraordinary day when two very different but profoundly interconnected liturgical events coincide, the speaker's soul observes a series of paradoxes that arise not only from the falling together of Annunciation and Passion, but more fundamentally from the miracle of the Incarnation itself, which begins at the moment of Christ's conception and comes to fruition on the day when his human flesh suffers and dies for the sins of humanity. First, "She sees" Christ as "man" (3) completing the "circle" that is "embleme" (4) of both man and God; just as in a circle "first and last concurre" (5), so on "this doubtfull day / Of feast or fast, Christ came, and went away" (5-6). The geometric figure of the circle forms a zero; and though it seems a contradiction to say that one sees when there is nothing to be seen, nothingness is the next object of the soul's perception: "Shee sees him nothing twice at once, who'is all" (7).[21] Although Divine Being is all-encompassing, Christ embraces simultaneously the near nonentity of the embryo and the corpse. The related paradox of divinity made flesh, of alpha in omega, informs the speaker's third rendering of his soul's vision: "She sees a Cedar plant it selfe, and fall / Her Maker put to making, and the head / Of life, at once, not yet alive, and dead" (8-10). The cedar, Helen Gardner notes, is a symbol of God, the everlasting One; but here it is also a mortal thing, an evergreen that is planted and dies.[22] In this context, the image of a mortal tree cannot help but evoke the tree of the Cross on which Christ "did rise and fall," as Donne puts it in the poem he would write five years later for Good Friday 1613 (13).

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[21]On the paradoxes of the poem as summed up in and resolved by the symbol of the circle, see Hugh Kirkpatrick, "Donne's 'Upon the Annunciation and Passion Falling upon One Day. 1608,'" *Explicator* 30 (1972): Item 39.

[22]Helen Gardner, ed., *The Divine Poems of John Donne*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 97.

The gender of the soul that "sees" these images of divine paradox is further reinforced by the reference to Christ as "*Her* Maker" (9; emphasis mine). And in the fourth "She sees" clause, the object of her perception is the paragon of feminine gender and female sex, the Virgin Mary: "She sees at once the virgin mother stay / Reclus'd at home, Publique at Golgotha" (11-12). Whether meditating privately in her chamber on the day of the Annunciation or mourning openly at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, the Virgin is a model for the speaker's soul. Both must prove humbly receptive to the miracle of the Incarnation; both must stand as one of many witnesses to the Crucifixion. The "shee" of the poem is, then, not only the see-er; she is also—in the person of the Virgin—an essential part of what is "seen" by the devout soul.

Lines 11 and 12, the last two lines of the poem's opening section on what the soul sees, are also the first two lines of the poem's second section, which tells of the Blessed Mother; and as the verb "sees" occurs several times in the first twelve lines, so the passive form of that verb looms large in the lines on Mary: "Sad and rejoyc'd shee's seen at once, and seen / At almost fiftie, and at scarce fifteene" (13-14). The repetition of "seen" in line 13, with the second instance of the verb serving as a rhyme word, clearly sets up a connection between the perceiving soul and the perceived Madonna. In addition, the quick segue from "She sees at once" (11) to "Sad and rejoyc'd shee's seen at once" (13) blurs the line between the two figures, making it seem for a moment that the speaker's soul is the figure who appears "Sad and rejoyc'd...at once"; nor is that impression entirely false, for the reader does perceive a mixture of sorrow and jubilation in the soul's visual banquet of paradoxes. The soul who sees and the Virgin who is seen are not entirely separate. They are Mother and Daughter; Mary becomes the Mother of the Savior when "Gabriell gives Christ to her," and the mother of all Christian souls when, on Good Friday, Christ gives "her to John" (16) with the words "Beholde thy mother" (John 19:27). But like the divine Father and

Son, this human mother and daughter are also one; Mary and the individual soul of each Christian share both the gift of the Annunciation and the bereavement of Good Friday. Line 15—"At once a Sonne is promis'd her, and gone"—applies to the soul even as it does to Mary, "For unto *us* a childe is borne, and unto *us* a Sonne is given" (Isaiah 9:6; emphasis mine), and it was to all of his apostles that Jesus said, "A little while, and ye shall not see mee" (John 16:16). Like the soul which has not yet given birth to the good works that are the fruit of grace, the Virgin of the Annunciation is "Not fully'a mother" (18). And as "Shee's in Orbitie" (18), mourning the death of her only child, so the human soul mourns the death of the Son of Man.

If one counts the lines overlapping with the poem's first section and the quotation in line 22 of the "*Ave*" Gabriel addressed to Mary, the poem's portrait of the Blessed Mother, like the section on the soul's seeing, occupies twelve lines; but before those twelve lines are completed, the poem's third and longest section is anticipated by the introduction, in line 19, of yet another visually-oriented verb. The speaker sums up what the soul "sees" and what is "seen" of Mary's experience, commenting: "All this, and all betweene, this day hath *showne*, / Th'Abridgement of Christs story, which makes one / (As in plaine Maps, the farthest West is East) / Of the'Angels *Ave*,'and *Consummatum est*" (19-22; first emphasis mine). These lines on what is "showne" by the liturgical "Abridgement" of the Gospel lead into the work's third section; beginning with line 23, the speaker focuses on the Church, the feminine figure who has arranged for the meditative possibilities "this day" affords by "some times, and seldome joyning" Good Friday and the Feast of the Annunciation. This third and final part of Donne's poem moves from what the soul "sees" and how Mary is "seen," to what the Church "showes" (27) and "hath shown" (33) to her members, and in particular to the speaker's own "Soule" (45), who observes and responds to all that *Ecclesia* demonstrates.

The final section is the longest; indeed, since the first two twelve-line sections overlap, and thus occupy only lines 1-22, the

twenty-four line section extending from line 23 through line 46 represents just over half the poem. The Church, after all, includes both the Blessed Mother who is a type of *Ecclesia*, and the individual soul, who—like the Church as a corporate entity—is called to be the Spouse of Christ. The portion of the poem dealing with the Church is long enough to subsume the lines on the two more individuated feminine figures because the Church is the most important of the three in mapping out the Christian way of life; though not infallible, she is a reliable guide. Like the pole-star, which is not itself the Pole but nevertheless proves a clear indicator of which direction is north, the Church is the best indicator we have of God's will:

> As by the selfe-fix'd Pole wee never doe
> Direct our course, but the next starre thereto,
> Which showes where the'other is, and which we say
> (Because it strayes not farre) doth never stray;
> So God by his Church, neerest to him, wee know.
> (25-29)

These lines do not deal with the question, so important in *Satyre III* and in Donne's sonnet "Show me deare Christ," of which earthly incarnation of the church is the best or truest; rather, they acknowledge the Church with a capital "C," the Bride of Christ who is "neerest to him" even when the human institutions that represent her *do* stray "farre" from his wounded side.

"[T]he virgin mother" (11) and the soul who is both her daughter and her reflection or likeness are, so to speak, the first and second persons of an earthly feminine triad, corresponding to the Father and the Son of the heavenly Trinity. Not surprisingly, then, Donne's speaker emphasizes the connection between the Church and the Holy Spirit. Alluding to Exodus 13:21, he follows up the image of the pole-star that "strayes not farre" with an image of the Church as the guide of an errant people: "wee"—the faithful—"stand firme, if wee by her motion goe; / His Spirit, as

his fiery Pillar doth / Leade, and his Church, as cloud; to one end both" (29, 30-32). In a note, Gardner recounts the traditional Christian interpretation of Exodus 13:21, in which "the Lord went before" the Israelites "by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light": the pillar of cloud represents the Old Testament, in which God manifests himself only through what Milton calls "shadowy types," while the pillar of fire is a type of the New Testament, which moves "From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit."[23] "Donne's interpretation," however, which makes the pillar of cloud a type of the Church and the pillar of fire a type of the Holy Ghost, Gardner believes to be "original"; she notes further that, "In many places 'cloud' is glossed generally as 'flesh' and particularly as 'the humanity of Christ'. Donne may be extending this to the Church, which is Christ's body."[24] But the Church is the mystical Body of Christ, not his fleshly humanity; and as just noted, Donne is here concerned less with the Church incarnate in any earthly institution than with the mystical Spouse herself. He is, moreover, defining her relationship with the Third Person of the Trinity rather than the Second. Perhaps, then, Donne represents the Church as the pillar of cloud because she is not herself the Holy Spirit who descended on the apostles in tongues of fire (Acts 2:3), brought the Church to life, and illuminated Christ's disciples in their time of darkness; but she is "neerest to him," as the pillar of cloud in Exodus is the daytime partner to the pillar of flame. Fire is a masculine element, water a feminine one. So "His Spirit," the Father's Spirit, burns in phallic splendor "as his fiery Pillar" (31), while the Church is figured forth in the colder, damper medium of cloud.

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[23]John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London and New York: Longman, 1971), 624; the passage is quoted from Book 12, line 303.

[24]*Divine Poems*, p. 97.

Of course, the pillar of fire leads by night, and the pillar of flame by day; it is thus significant that Donne's speaker repeatedly links the Church to the word "day" in the poem. In line 19, he speaks of what his soul sees and what is seen of Mary as the things "this day hath showne"; in line 33, he continues his interpretation of the combined feast and fast by introducing a catalogue of what "This Church, by letting these daies joyne, hath shown." The Church is clearly the quotidian, daylight guide of the human soul. Though the confluence of Annunciation and Good Friday is a rare and remarkable occasion, the massive aggregate of lessons taught by their combined occurrence forms a lump sum of sacred capital that can finance a lifetime's expenses in ordinary time: "This treasure then, in grosse, my Soule uplay, / And in my life retaile it every day," the poem concludes (45-46). The soul that acts on this advice is a prudent steward of spiritual resources, investing for the future rather than putting off until tomorrow what she can do today. She has heeded the advice of *Satyre III* to "strive" toward Truth during the daylight hours, "before age, deaths twilight," since "none can worke in that night" (*Satyre III*, 83, 84).

The wording of the warning in *Satyre III*, we might also note, is based on a passage from John's Gospel that may explain Donne's association of the Holy Spirit with the pillar of fire that was the Israelites' nighttime guide. In John 9:4-5, Jesus says, "I must worke the workes of him that sent me, while it is day: the night commeth when no man can worke. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." As he takes leave of his disciples later in the same Gospel, Jesus tells them that he is about to depart this world, but consoles them with the promise that the Father "shall give [them] another Comforter" (14:16); this "Comforter, which is the holy Ghost, ...shall teach [them] all things" (14:26), thus functioning as their light and guide in the nighttime of Jesus's absence from the earth. The brief allusion to the pillars in Donne's 1608 poem provokes such meditations; it does not spell them out. Still, the poem stresses that Christ is on this day both "hither and away" (2); it commemorates how the Savior both "came, and went

away" (6), that "He shall come, he is gone" (40). The pillar imagery thus makes a great deal of sense insofar as it contributes to the poem's overarching commentary on the soul's journey; it takes place both in the nighttime of Christ's absence and in the daylight of his ongoing presence through the Church's ministry.

That ministry, as the speaker of the poem sees it, is well summed up in the liturgical event that is his subject. The Church joins a feast and a fast; the fact that she is the force binding them together is underscored again and again, with the word "joyning" in line 24 and "joyne" in lines 33 and 39. This copulative function further reinforces the parallel between the Church as the third person of Donne's feminine trinity and the Holy Spirit as the third person of the divine Trinity. In Augustine's *De Trinitate* (XV.27, 37), the Spirit is the love that unites the Father and the Son; so, it is the Church's orchestration of the liturgical overlap of Good Friday and Lady Day that brings together the Virgin and the soul, the mother and the daughter, the object seen and what Augustine calls its "quasi-offspring," the image in the beholding eye (XI.9, 11).

The speaker completes the description of what his soul perceives through a catalogue of different expressions summing up the lesson that the liturgical occasion teaches; the "Church, by letting these daies joyne, hath shown" (33) that

> Death and conception in mankinde is one.
> Or 'twas in him the same humility,
> That he would be a man, and leave to be:
> Or as creation he had made, as God,
> With the last judgement, but one period,
> His imitating Spouse would joyne in one
> Manhoods extremes: He shall come, he is gone. (34-40)

The Church as "imitating Spouse" is here a feminine mirror to the masculine God; but her imitation is more than mimicry. She shows that humanity reflects the divine, since the paradoxes of the Incarnation are reflected in the paradoxes of human existence

itself. "Death and conception...is one" (34) in humankind because the embryo is subject to death from the start; the mortal sin of Adam and Eve, with its deadly consequences, infects the soul of each newly-begotten baby from the moment it is conceived. And at the same time, death is the gate of life: "whosoever shall lose his life for [Christ's] sake, shall finde it" (Matthew 16:25). But the Church also reproduces divine truths on a human scale, thus—like Mary—giving birth to Emmanuel, God-with-us. As God made "creation... / With the last judgement, but one period" (37-38), so the Church wisely plays out in liturgical time the eternal simultaneity of the Alpha and Omega, making intimate and immanent that which would otherwise remain distant and transcendent.[25]

Like the Christ she imitates, moreover, the Church is extravagant, providing an embarrassment of spiritual riches. By overlapping Good Friday and Lady Day, she provides an overabundance of spiritual resources to "busie" the industrious soul and to bankroll her business:

> Or as though one blood drop, which thence did fall,
> Accepted, would have serv'd, he yet shed all;
> So though the least of his paines, deeds, or words,
> Would busie'a life, she all this day affords;
> This treasure then, in grosse, my Soule uplay,
> And in my life retaile it every day. (41-46)

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[25]On Donne's sense of liturgical time in this poem, see A. B. Chambers, "*La Corona*: Philosophic, Sacred, and Poetic Uses of Time," *New Essays on Donne*, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literature, 1977), pp. 150-52, and Frances M. Malpezzi, "Donne's Transcendent Imagination: The Divine Poems as Hierophantic Experience," *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross* (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995), pp. 149-50.

The financial metaphor that is quite explicit in the final couplet is introduced subtly in the first half of the larger analogy, Christ's act of atonement being defined in quantitative terms as a literal redemption or buying back that he could have transacted with but one drop of his infinitely precious blood. The offer, if "Accepted" by the one to whom the debt was owed would have "serv'd." But as the Suffering Servant is not content to do only what is required to complete his task, so the Church is not content to supply souls with only one of his "paines, deeds, or words" as a subject for contemplation or an inspiration to action. Any of them alone would "busie'a life": keep a contemplative meditating, keep ordinary souls laboring in the vineyards, and overdetermine every line of every work a witty devotional poet writes. But the Church "all this day affords," with "affords" carrying overtones of both its generic meaning—"To manage to give, to spare" (*OED* v. def. 4)—and its more specifically financial meaning—"To have the means, be able or rich enough; to bear the expense" (*OED* v. def. 3). And with that observation, the poem comes full circle, returning to the first feminine figure, the speaker's soul. If the Church is generous enough to provide such "treasure," the speaker reasons, his soul in turn must "uplay" it, save it and invest it soundly, so as to have available an inexhaustible source of sacred currency, coin applicable to the spiritual demands of daily life.[26]

With this conclusion in mind, one can more fully appreciate the first two lines of the poem: "Tamely fraile body'abstaine to day; to day / My soule eates twice, Christ hither and away." The sense of super-abundance in the poem's concluding lines is first evoked here, the image of the soul's double banquet providing a rich counterpoint to the body's fasting and abstention on Good Friday.

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[26]Malpezzi notes that the "play on words in the last line is significant. The story is the speaker's (and humanity's) spiritual currency and is, through the constant telling, always to be made spiritually current. The spiritual treasure of salvation history is never depleted and always accessible" (p. 150).

Even more importantly, the eating metaphor ushers in the four "She sees" clauses that follow and thus defines the soul's visual perception as a kind of feeding, its eating as a way of seeing. The sequence "eates...Christ" / "sees...Christ" demonstrates that the speaker has answered the invitation of Psalm 34:8: "Taste ye and see, how gracious the Lord is."[27] This imperative would come to define Donne's pastoral objective as a clergyman. As Johnson demonstrates, "While the center of Donne's theology is the essential community of God revealed in the doctrine of the Trinity, the theological goal divulged in his preaching, as well as in his administration of the sacraments, is to bring the individual, through the visible Church, into loving conformity with God. To that end, the tasting and seeing by which one receives the grace offered to all in Christ's passion serves as the antitype to the eating of the forbidden fruit."[28] Although Donne was in 1608 still seven years away from ordination, and although he was faced that year with new challenges to finding in any "visible Church" the feminine ideal his poem envisions, "The Annuntiation and Passion" nevertheless reflects the theological goal he would go on to pursue as a priest in the Church of England. The speaker's reflections allow his soul to "taste and see" the abundant divine goodness poured out in the Incarnation and the Atonement. Thus fed, she becomes one person of the triune "shee" who shows men how to mirror the triune God.

Nor is that God hard to digest. As Donne explains in "A Litanie," another poem that he wrote around 1608, the "Blessed glorious Trinity" is "Bones to Philosophy, but milke to faith" (28, 29).[29] "A Litanie" begins with three stanzas addressed to the three

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[27]The gustatory metaphor is further underscored in the King James Version's "O taste and see that the Lord is good" and the Douay-Rheims' "O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet."

[28]Johnson, p. 139.

[29]See Gardner, pp. 154-155 on the date of "A Litanie." Like "The Annuntiation and Passion," "A Litanie" reflects Donne's preoccupations

persons of the Trinity and continues with a fourth that calls upon the Trinity in its entirety. In this fourth stanza, the speaker muses that, while the Trinity as an intellectual concept is as indigestible as "Bones," it is nevertheless the spiritual "milke" that nourishes the faithful soul. This evocative image of Godhead as the mildest of foods, the milk a mother produces for her infant, feminizes divinity itself. But if God is milk, it is a human female who expresses that milk. The speaker proceeds immediately, in stanza V, to a prayer thanking God for the Virgin Mary, "that faire blessed Mother-maid, / Whose flesh redeem'd us; That she-Cherubin, / Which unlock'd Paradise" (37-39). The woman in "Whose wombe... / God cloath'd himselfe, and grew" (41-42) is thus portrayed—like the Church in line 29 of "The Annuntiation and Passion"—as "neerest to" God. In "A Litanie," the nearness is physical and prosodic as well as spiritual, for it is the flesh of a woman (worn by her son) that redeems humanity, and the stanza giving thanks for the redemptive power of Mary's flesh follows directly after the one on the Holy Trinity.

No earthly father is afforded such dignity; even when, in stanza VII, the speaker of "A Litanie" turns to praise "The Patriarches," he calls them "Those great *Grand*fathers of thy Church, which saw / More in the cloud, then wee in fire" (56-57; emphasis mine). Here the pillar of cloud represents Nature, which preceded both Mosaic Law and the new covenant of Grace as God's means of manifesting himself in the world; the Patriarchs are the distant male ancestors "Whom Nature clear'd more, then us grace and law" (58). In these lines, then, fully legitimate spiritual patriarchy is a thing of the past; the Christians of 1608, whichever ecclesiastical father they acknowledge, see less clearly than the ancient grandfathers. But as "The Annuntiation and Passion" confirms,

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in the wake of the Oath of Allegiance controversy, for the speaker prays for guidance about when equivocation may be acceptable: "Good Lord deliver us, and teach us when / Wee may not, and we may blinde unjust men" (170-71).

one may escape such blindness by turning to a feminine model of grace. Joining herself with Mother Mary and with a feminine rather than patriarchal version of Christ's "imitating Spouse," a soul can evade the triple knots and triple wedges of earthly masculine authority and open herself to the infinite goodness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Whitman College

In loving memory of Dr. Pasquale DiPasquale, Jr.
6 October 1928 – 14 July 2004
Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon him.