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The "*Annales* School" and the Catholicism of Donne's Family

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Long neglected, or pursued with obvious partisanship, the study of Donne's Catholicism is perhaps beginning to emerge as a subject of biographical research.[1] To some extent this emergence has been, and will continue to be, influenced by comprehensive revivals in the study of English Catholicism and of the Catholic Reform in general. This essay will first draw some relation between these revivals and Donne studies, and then try to give a tentative characterization of Donne's Catholicism in relation to its familial and historical context.

I

Since the 1930s, a strong influence on historical research has been exerted by the French journal *Annales* (originally published by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes).[2] An "*Annales* school" has in particular influenced work on the period of religious reform, rejecting a tradition of narrative history that stretches back to historians who were actually controversialists during the Reformation itself. Seeking to escape ecclesiological wrangling and preoccupation with the politics of sovereigns, *Annales*-influenced historians have placed themselves *au dessus de la mêlée* and tried to refocus on what Jean Delumeau has called the "average Christian" of the past. Such an emphasis has meant, for better or for worse, setting aside as mechanical or sterile any exclusive concern with controversial literature or other official or public expressions of conflict between great political and religious institutions. Instead, a sociological, geographical, and psychological analysis has aimed at revealing people's everyday religious lives.[3]

An example of this approach in the study of English Catholicism is John Bossy's essay on the relations between English Catholics and Rome—an essay subtitled, "A Question of Geography." He

presents the results of research into the actual routes traversed by Englishmen passing illegally to and from Rome.[4] From such work, grounded on surveys of memoirs, correspondence, local records, and other documents, we get a refreshing sense of the practical conditions and consequences of trying to be an English Catholic in or out of Elizabethan England. Moreover we are spared the burden of accumulated ideological presumptions characteristic of traditional studies that rely mainly on literary or official expressions, the illustrious "high points" of religious history.

The kind of approach exemplified by Bossy's essay can have useful applications to the study of Donne's life and work. In the field of Donne biography it has been clear at least since Jessopp that Donne's formative period coincided with the most dramatic and dangerous period for English Catholics, when their persecution was most virulent. Donne himself wrote about how deeply he and his family were involved in the persecution. Yet our sense of this important formative influence, despite what we know (and can learn) about the lasting psychological effects of such experience, remains sketchy and still dominated by questions like fixing the date of Donne's "conversion" to Anglicanism, or deciding about religious cynicism or "apostasy" in his writings. Such terms and questions obviously derive from, and are captives of, a historical tradition that defined religious history along lines of confessional controversy. Moreover, in Donne studies we generally deal with these questions as students of literature, parsing the theology, philology, and decorum of Donne's poetry or prose. To some extent we may feel that what actually happened to Donne either cannot be learned or is already known adequately enough for literary analysis—our prime interest in Donne—to carry on without further irritable searching after fact. As long as this attitude prevails, we are not able to give a coherent account of Donne's formative years and their effects on his later life and writings.

In part such a negative capability (or failure) might result from a prejudice about something literary critics think of as the "biographical fallacy," perhaps a healthy prejudice, given the way many scholars traditionally have drafted Donne into their own rather stale wars of confessional controversy. In actual practice, however, it will be seen that critical and editorial decision about Donne's writings has had to hinge on some set of biographical assumptions, even if these were never made explicit. Consider for example the sparrings of Barbara Lewalski and others concerned to oppose the theories of Louis Martz and others: were Donne's poems

"Protestant" or "Catholic"? The question remains hidebound and idle to the extent that its answer cannot grow out of some commonly accepted basis in biographical fact, or to the extent that some such basis is not even much pursued. But the work of *Annales*-influenced historians suggests how such a basis can be attained or at least approximated and might lead us in entirely new directions if we could again come to the poetry and prose armed with a new sense of the sociology, geography, and psychology of Donne's religious milieu. Perhaps then we could begin to deal with John R. Roberts' recent observation (not, I think, entirely facetious) that, after summarizing in two 300-page volumes virtually all of Donne criticism from 1912 to 1979, he was unsure whether critics of Donne had accomplished much definitive work or whether we are yet accomplishing much at our present rate.[5]

Contrast to this bleak aspect the exciting ferment now at work in the history of English Catholicism. John Bossy's most controversial theory, propounded forcefully in *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*, is that the developing Catholicism after the first decade of Elizabeth's reign was in practice and doctrine discontinuous with the medieval English Church. The old Church "died" under Elizabeth, and the "sect" that subsequently replaced it under the name of Catholicism was an exotic or hybrid growth of a distinct character.[6] Bossy maintains that the lives of Catholics in Elizabethan England need always to be understood in a wider, European context. In particular he stresses that, from the Continent, Jesuit missionaries and seminary priests imported into England a kind of Tridentine Catholicism that was foreign to the traditional English Church.[7]

Countering this theory of discontinuity in Elizabethan Catholicism, Christopher Haigh has pointed out that Bossy's evidence derives exclusively from the Catholic gentry, whereas the story told by records of the Catholic commons is one of continuity and of the survival of Catholicism after 1559 as a roughly organized, separate institution apart from the Anglican Establishment. Central in Haigh's treatment of this subject is the word "resistance," and he stresses that it stemmed from the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. By the time missionary priests began to arrive, the essentially traditional character of Elizabethan Catholicism had already been formed "and was properly called 'the old religion' by its adherents." The activities of reforming missionaries were limited and partially redirected by a stubborn cleaving to pre-Tridentine ways on the part of a significant portion of the Catholic populace.[8]

Thus, a fertile dialectic of continuity and discontinuity has been introduced into our understanding of the complex sociological developments attending the Anglican Establishment, the missions of Jesuits and seminaries, and the Elizabethan persecution. These concepts and their concrete components in the kinds of sources and evidence used by Bossy and Haigh, as well as other historians, may usefully be considered by students of Donne's biography and writings.

II

One way of introducing these issues into Donne studies is to consider Donne's Catholicism in its familial and historical context. To begin with, much of Bossy's and Haigh's characterization of the "old religion" aptly delineates the Catholicism that descended to Donne through his mother's family, the Heywoods, directly from the Catholicism of Thomas More. Donne was self-consciously a descendant of More. This awareness had been a part of his family's religious history, reaching back through his mother and her brothers —Jasper and Ellis Heywood—and through their father John Heywood, Donne's grandfather and More's protege at the Court of Henry VIII. Continuity and discontinuity can be seen in a peculiar way also to characterize the religious attitudes of each of these generations, as the following brief notes are intended to show.

But, first, mention should also be made of Donne's father, John Donne the ironmonger, some of whose activities between the accession of Elizabeth and his death in 1576 (when Donne was four) testify to his part in the resistance Haigh has ascribed to common Catholics. For one thing Donne the elder cooperated with his exiled father-in-law John Heywood to thwart effects of the "Acte agaynst Fugytyves over the Sea" of 1571. For the sake of religion, Heywood had gone without license to the Netherlands in 1564, handing over management of his properties to his then new son-in-law. But arrangements such as this were rendered void by the legislation of 1571, and Donne would be subject to prosecution should it be found that he was involved in secret dealings with a Catholic fugitive. Moreover, should Heywood himself not return to England within six months, all his property would be forfeit to the Crown. The complicated story of Donne the ironmonger and the affairs of John Heywood can be pieced together from various sources: the reports of special commissions looking into the disposition of Heywood's lands, Heywood's own letters, and a letter from the Netherlands by the English agent Dr. Thomas Wilson.[9] But the gist of the matter is that Donne and Heywood

contrived to keep hold of the most valuable of Heywood's properties while concealing Donne's culpability in direct dealings with a fugitive. Moreover, Donne was actually able to continue for a time, with obvious illegality, forwarding to Heywood some of his rents. Heywood himself, of course, never relinquished his practice of Catholicism in the Netherlands. The child John Donne was too young to be aware of these dealings, but they probably are evidence of what must have become family lore by the time Donne many years later reminded his mother of "my most dear and provident father."[10]

The ironmonger belonged to the same class of Catholic London tradesmen as did Henry Machyn, the diarist, whose chronicles of the years around Elizabeth's accession are a mine of particulars for the student of Donne's early milieu.[11] Machyn actually knew Donne the ironmonger and John Heywood, and he mentions them in his diary, which clearly conveys the wonder and dismay of Catholic Londoners over the establishment of Anglicanism. In Machyn's diary entries we can trace the beginnings of the oppressed, furtive, and recalcitrant Elizabethan Catholic mentality that surrounded the poet in his family and connections during the early years of his life.

In some ways the key figure in the background of the poet's early years was his grandfather, John Heywood, who had from the time of Henry VIII been a famous success as playwright, poet, and musician at the Courts of Tudor princes. Heywood's Catholicism thus spanned the entire period of religious reform in England. For his grandson he stood, though in exile and even after his death, as a close embodiment of continuity in English Catholicism. But in the course of Heywood's Catholicism there were also elements of discontinuity. Significantly, Heywood's connection as a protege of Thomas More extended back before Luther's schism, to the time of *Utopia* and of early friendship between More and Erasmus. Heywood became a member of the More circle and shared its ideas about literature, law, education, and religion even before he married into More's family in the 1520s. Although More's own attitudes toward religious reform underwent change in the 1520s and 1530s, Heywood, like the rest of More's family and friends, continued to take an approving attitude (even up to the time of More's execution) in regard to governmental reform of the Church. However, these attitudes changed when, by 1543, it became clearer to members of More's family what he had died for. Accusing Archbishop Cranmer of heresy, Heywood was subsequently imprisoned and

faced execution until he read out a recantation robed in a white gown at Paul's Cross. If John Foxe's account of this incident is accurate, Heywood hereby solemnly repudiated the papal supremacy and excluded the jurisdiction and authority of the Roman Church.[12] Yet, as we have seen, he survived ultimately to return to Catholicism.

In relation to Donne, these earlier shifts in attitude are more significant than has been thought. In More's and Heywood's early Erasmian Catholicism, and in their subsequent conservative opposition to Protestantism in England, some of the continuity, discontinuity, and pathos of pre-Tridentine English Catholicism is exemplified. Inclined to deepen the spirituality of Catholicism through humor and controversy, the More circle were unprepared effectively to resist forces mobilized by the nascent modern nation-state, which had its own very different program of reform. A related pattern of disappointed eirenic hopes changing to unavailing militancy is seen in the career of Reginald Pole, to whom John Heywood's first son Ellis dedicated in 1556 his dialogue *Il Moro*, celebrating Thomas More's rededication to humanist spirituality and persuasion in the last days before his arrest for treason.[13] Ellis Heywood had been serving as Cardinal Pole's secretary in Italy and returned to England with the Cardinal to help administer Marian Catholicism. While in Italy with Pole, Heywood probably had shared the distress of the Cardinal over the course taken by the Trent Council, that hardening of confessional lines through the adoption of dogmatic formulations. Pole had been most at odds with the champion of orthodoxy at Trent, Cardinal Carafa. When Carafa became Pope in 1555 he put considerable pressure on Pole personally with a near fanatical obsession over heresy and obedience. Among other things, the Pope charged that Pole's household in Italy had been for many years a refuge for Lutheranizing heretics.[14] This psychological stress on Pole and on his friends was an experience indirectly and variously felt by other Erasmian English Catholics, and its significance is great in relation to the continuity and discontinuity of Donne's Catholicism.

Finally, the humanist member of the family exerting the most direct influence on Donne was John Heywood's second son, Jasper Heywood, who returned to England after nearly twenty years in exile when Donne was nine years old. Heywood had left England shortly after Elizabeth's accession and been admitted into the Society of Jesus at Rome in 1562. This date seems significant in

two respects: it had been just six years since the death of Ignatius Loyola, during a period when the Society's character was still fluid, relatively open to Erasmian currents, and not yet irrevocably identified with conservative enforcing of the Trent Council; and it had been just three years since the death of Carafa, Pope Paul IV, at whose election in 1555 Loyola is said to have shaken in every bone of his body.[15] Joining the Jesuits in 1562, under the less rigorist pontificate of Pius IV, Heywood seems likely to have thought the Society a more congenial company than it turned out later to be, especially after Pius IV was succeeded by Pius V in 1566. Under the latter and succeeding Popes, Heywood and the Jesuits were increasingly cast in the role of Tridentine reformers. During these years Heywood demonstrated and acquired some reputation for a maverick tendency in the Erasmian vein. In 1567 he made a farce of his own doctoral disputation at Dillingen; and later he took to jesting broadly (particularly in the presence of his provincial) about the Society's resemblance to that black crow Noah let out of the ark: as it never returned, Heywood joked, so the Jesuits would perish on the wastes of scholasticism. Heywood was ultimately sent on the English mission to the great relief of his German superiors, after he created problems of international scope by his ironically rigid stand against absolving Bavarian merchants who confessed to having charged 5% interest on certain loans.[16]

His appearance in London in the summer of 1581 came just at the time Edmund Campion was captured—probably the most dramatic and turbulent year of all for London Catholics. Heywood burst into the life of his young nephew, a legend suddenly become reality, and Donne was at an age when Heywood's activities could and would impress him deeply. When after three and a half years, first of furtive missionary work, then of torture and solitary imprisonment, Heywood had again to face the prospect of exile, Donne visited him in the Tower of London, dangerously assisting Heywood's disguised successor William Weston to penetrate the Tower and actually hold conference there with Heywood in Donne's presence for most of a day. Moreover, in connection with his banishment Heywood may have arranged somehow for Donne's education on the Continent between 1585 and 1590, an unparalleled six-year lacuna in the record of Donne's whereabouts.

Of particular interest for our understanding of the continuity and discontinuity of Donne's Catholicism is the gulf that opened between Heywood and his superior on the English mission, Robert

Persons. Persons was of the new breed of post-Tridentine Jesuits, determined to resist English heresy by facing the nation-state with more effective weapons. Heywood came to believe, however, that Persons had conspired to assassinate Queen Elizabeth. There is no evidence of this improbability, but Heywood believed it in the late 1580s. At the same time, Heywood had developed various close relations with exiled Catholics opposed to Persons' conduct of the mission, among them the Welshman Owen Lewis, Bishop of Cassano, who is known also to have been out of sympathy with the implementation of Trent. One senses here a pattern of evidence suggesting the character of Donne's Catholicism as well as the Catholicism of his family.

Donne's Catholicism, like that of the Heywoods and More, was of a sort that could survive the Council of Trent only through fierce resistance on its own terms. Deprived of normal conditions for spiritual and institutional development, such Catholics clung to old ways increasingly irrelevant as the sixteenth century wore on. Their isolation became increasingly painful and confounding, and became also the source of their increasingly ineffectual ironies about religion: the ironies of *Utopia*, of John Heywood's plays and poems, of Jasper Heywood's antic disposition, and ultimately of John Donne's love poems, satires, and other writings.

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NOTES

1 Building on the work of Augustus Jessopp, Edmund Gosse, and Baird D. Whitlock, R. C. Bald's *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970) incorporated much and added more of the results of research focused on Donne's Catholicism. See also David Chanoff, "Donne's Anglicanism," *Recusant History*, 15 (1980), 154-67; Alan Davidson, "An Oxford Family: A Footnote to the Life of John Donne," *Recusant History*, 13 (1976), 299-300; and my own studies: "Donne's Catholicism," *Recusant History*, 13 (1975-76), 1-17, 178-95; "Donne's First Portrait: Some Biographical Clues," *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, 82 (1979), 7-17; and "'Sir Thomas Heywood the Parson' and Donne's Catholic Background," *Recusant History*, 15 (1981), 325-27. Recent studies applying the results of such research to interpretation of Donne's writings include Howard Erskine-Hill, "Courtiers Out of Horace," in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A. J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 273-307; John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981); and M. Thomas Hester, *Kinde Pitty and Brave Scorn: John Donne's Satyres* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1982).

2 Here and throughout I have largely relied on a very useful bibliographical study by John O'Malley, "The Jesuits, St. Ignatius, and the Counter Reformation, Some Recent Studies and Their Implications for Today," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 14, No. 1 (1982).

3 "We are invited to study the most basic levels of Christianity, the religion of particular groups: from now on every religious history is necessarily sociological and as

far as possible serial and quantitative" (*Catholicism Between Luther and Voltaire* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977], p. 129). For some animadversions by an *Annales*-influenced historian see Dermot Fenlon, "Encore Une Question: Lucien Febvre, the Reformation, and the *School of Annales*," *Historical Studies*, 9 (1974), 65-81.

4 "Rome and the Elizabethan Catholics: A Question of Geography," *Historical Journal*, 7 (1964), 135-49.

5 "John Donne's Poetry: An Assessment of Modern Criticism," *John Donne Journal*, 1 (1982), 66.

6 See especially "Part One: Death of a Church, 1570-1688," in *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), pp. 11-76. Bossy had laid some groundwork for this his major study in an earlier essay, "The Character of Elizabethan Catholicism," *Past and Present*, 21 (1962), 39-58.

7 Bossy applies the anthropological term "kinship" in his discussion of this issue: even on the continent Tridentine discipline and sacramental ministry were corrosive to late medieval, family-centered, local religious cultures. In England, where Tridentine missionaries labored under persecution, departures from late medieval ways were accentuated in a generally innovative effort to "redress the dominance . . . of a seigneurial social structure and seigneurial ways of thought" in religion (ibid., p. 48). See also by Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and Present*, No. 47 (May 1970), pp. 51-70; "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Ireland, 1596-1641," *Historical Studies*, 8 (1971), 155-69; "Blood and Baptism: Kinship, Community, and Christianity in Western Europe from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," in *Sanctity and Secularity*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), pp. 129-43; and "The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 25 (1975), 21-38.

8 "The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation," *Past and Present*, No. 93 (November 1981), pp. 37-69. Haigh's major work is *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975); see also "The Fall of a Church or the Rise of a Sect? Post-Reformation Catholicism in England, " *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), 181-86, and "From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in Early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 31 (1981), 129-47.

9 The reports of commissions are in P.R.O. E178/1019 and E178/1095; Heywood's letters are printed in A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama* (London: Methuen, 1926), pp. 35-37, 237-38; and Wilson's letter about Heywood in the Netherlands is calendared in *For. Cal. Eliz.*, 10 (1572-74), 582.

10 *A Collection of Letters Made By Sir Tobie Matthew, KNT* (London: Henry Herringman, 1660), pp. 324-25.

11 *The Diary of Henry Machyn*, ed. J. G. Nichols (London: Camden Society, 1848).

12 *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. George Townsend (London: Sealey and Burnside, 1838), V, 528-29. On the slow realizations of Heywood and of More's circle in general, see James K. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), pp. 264-65.

13 *Il Moro: Ellis Heywood's Dialogue in Memory of Thomas More*, ed. Roger Lee Deakins (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972).

14 Dermot Fenlon, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 269-79.

15 Peter A. Quinn, "Ignatius Loyola and Gian Pietro Carafa: Catholic Reformers at Odds," *Catholic Historical Review*, 67 (1981), 391.

16 As an English missioner Heywood was unique in certain respects. Already before becoming a Jesuit he had had an established literary reputation that appears for a long time to have grown, even during his years of exile. His translations of Seneca's plays from 1559 to 1561 were influential in the subsequent development of Elizabethan tragedy; and his shorter poems were repeatedly reprinted in ten editions of *The Paradyse of Daynty Devyses* from 1576 to 1606. Another important fact about Heywood is that he had been Queen Elizabeth's schoolmate, probably under Roger Ascham. Among his fellow missioners only Campion even approached Heywood in these sorts of background and credentials. For other details of Heywood's career, see my forthcoming "The English Mission of Jasper Heywood, S.J.," in *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*.