

Preaching the Holy Ghost: John Donne's Whitsunday Sermons

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This essay takes as its subject the ten extant Whitsunday sermons preached by John Donne in the period 1618-1630. Whilst the chronology of Donne's Whitsunday sermons remains speculative, the *occasion*, Pentecost, is not in doubt.¹ Since the early Christian church Pentecost has commemorated the descent of the Holy Spirit at Shavuot.² From the fifth century, Christian sermons at Pentecost have drawn on the rabbinical association of Shavuot with the law-giving of Sinai in order to relate the new covenant of the Spirit to the old covenant of the Law.

Each of the seven³ biblical texts selected by Donne for his Whitsunday sermons refers directly to the descent of the Holy

¹Dates for just three of Donne's Whitsunday sermons are supplied by the folios (1627-1629). For the conjectural chronology of the remaining seven see *The Sermons of John Donne*, eds., George Potter and Evelyn Simpson, 10 vols. (University of California Press, 1953-62), 5: 4-6. pp. 4-6. All quotations, as well as volume and page numbers, are from this edition.

²Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, was a Jewish pilgrimage festival held seven weeks after Passover to mark the end of the grain harvest (Lev. 23.9-22).

³Two texts are repeated: John 16.8-11 in 1625-26, and John 14.26 in 1627-28.

Spirit at Pentecost. Taken as a group, the ten sermons provide us with a substantial insight into Donne's *theological* understanding of the Holy Ghost.⁴ However, the Whitsunday sermons also exhibit Donne's *oratorical* imitation of Scriptural eloquence, the rhetorical "style" of the Holy Ghost. This imitation, in turn, derives from the persistent and explicit analogy made by Donne between the office, action, and purpose of the Holy Ghost and those of the Christian preacher. My effort in this paper is to understand the rhetorical and theological aspects of that analogy.

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In what is thought to be the earliest of John Donne's Whitsunday sermons, preached to the benchers of Lincoln's Inn in 1618, Donne observes:

And as the Trinity is the most mysterious piece of our Religion, and hardest to be comprehended, So in the Trinity, the Holy Ghost is the most mysterious person, and hardest to be expressed. (S: 46)

The nature of the third person of the Trinity and its relation to the other two persons, the Father, and the Son, lies at the heart of Donne's Whitsunday sermons. Jeffrey Johnson suggests that for Donne the mystery of the structure of the Trinity is *Regula Fidei*, the rule of Christian faith. "As his first principle, the doctrine of the Trinity informs every aspect of Donne's religious thought."⁵

In a number of Whitsunday sermons Donne takes the first mention of the Trinity to be Genesis 1.1 where the Hebrew text

⁴See the following for discussion of Donne's "moderate Calvinism": Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999); Daniel W. Doerksen, "Preaching Pastor versus Custodian of Order," *Philological Quarterly*, 73: 417-29; Paul R. Sellin, *John Donne and "Calvinist" Views of Grace* (VU Boekhandel Uitgeverij, 1983).

⁵Jeffrey Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne*, p. x.

states that "*Bara Elohim*, That *Gods*, Gods in the plurall...made heaven and earth" (9:, 92). Evident here is the importance of grammar to Donne's theology, wherein a grammatical plural of the Hebrew word for God must necessarily imply a plural *form* of the Godhead, a Trinity. But how does the Holy Ghost *proceed* from a Trinitarian God?

In attempting to illustrate the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Godhead Donne characteristically adopts three "natural," concrete images—messenger, tree, and sun—to flesh out a theological abstraction:

This is that Spirit, who though hee were to be sent by the Father, and sent by the Son, yet he comes not as a Messenger from a Superiour, for hee was alwaies equall to Father and Son: But the Father sent him, and the Son sent him, as a tree sends forth blossomes, and as those blossomes send forth a sweet smell, and as the Sun sends forth beames, by an emanation from it selfe.
(9: 240)

For this conception of the co-equal Trinity Donne draws upon an array of theological sources, including Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Basil, and John Chrysostom, scholastics such as Bernard and Aquinas, and Reform theologians such as Calvin and Beza. However, the predominant influence on Donne's Trinitarian theology is Augustine, references to whom far outnumber any other source in the sermons.

In his Whitsunday sermon of 1629 Donne makes the further connection, through Augustine, to the Neoplatonic influence on *De Trinitate*:

And to that S. *Augustine* comes so neare, as to say.. .That this Spirit of God may be that universall power, which sustaines, and inanimates the whole world, which the Platoniques have called *the Soule of the world*. (9: 96-7)

John J. O'Meara, in exploring the character of Augustine's theology, argues that the triune divinity (One, *Nous*, World Soul) and doctrine of salvation of Porphyrian Neoplatonism form the background to Christian Trinitarianism.⁶ This Porphyrian legacy is made plain by Donne in his Whitsunday sermon of 1628:

Porphyry that denies the *Trinity*, is convinced by S. Cyril, to have established a Trinity, because he acknowledged first *Deum summum*, and then *Conditorem omnium*, and after them, *Animam mundi*; One that is a supream God, One that was the Creator of all things, and One that quickens and inanimates all, and is the soul of the whole world: And this soul of the world is the Holy Ghost.
(8: 259-60)

But perhaps the clearest inheritance owed by Donne to Augustine, and he in turn to Porphyrian Neoplatonism,⁷ is the search for intelligible, earthly analogues of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.⁸ In this respect Donne follows Augustine (and Bernard) in recognizing the *Vestigia Trinitatis* in the tripartite form of the rational soul:

Let us therefore, with S. Bernard, consider *Trinitatem Creatricem* and *Trinitatem Creatam*, A Creating, and a Created Trinity; A Trinity, which the Trinity in Heaven, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, hath created in our soules, Reason, Memory, and Will.
(3: 144-45)

⁶"The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed., Dominic O'Meara (International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982), p. 36.

⁷See Mary T. Clark, "A Neoplatonic Commentary on the Christian Trinity: Marius Victorinus," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, p. 30.

⁸See Stephen McKenna, "Introduction," St. Augustine, *The Trinity* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University America Press, 1963), p. xv.

Significantly, however, Donne differs from Augustine's association of human faculties with the Trinity. Whereas Augustine's formulation associates Memory with the Father, Understanding with the Son, and Will (or Love) with the Holy Ghost, Donne holds that Understanding, Will, and Memory are linked respectively to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. For Donne, memory is the human faculty most closely allied with the action of the Holy Ghost, which "is to gather, to establish, to illumine" (9: 92). Once learned, God stays in the memory.

Turning from the *person* to the *office* of the Holy Ghost, we find in the Whitsunday sermons an array of roles assigned to the third person of the Trinity. As well as Holy Ghost and Spirit, Donne also refers variously to the *Voyce*, *Verbum Dei*, Dove, Comforter, Reprover, Witness, Teacher, Tongue, and *Legatum Christi*. No matter the guise, however, Donne's interpretation of the Holy Ghost remains consistent throughout; namely, that the third person of the Trinity is the author and communicator of Scriptural knowledge.

S. Basil...calls the Holy Ghost *Verbum Dei*, The word of God, because he undertakes the Pedagogy of the soul, to be the soules School-master. (8: 260)

On the occasion of Pentecost the Holy Ghost is sent as evangelical teacher so that the Apostles may in turn become teachers and testify to Christ: "then he came in the form of Tongues, and they that received him, were thereby presently enabled to speak to others" (8: 260). On Whitsunday, the Holy Ghost's cultivation of the eloquence of Church ministers is a simulacrum of the Pentecostal descent of the Spirit, "So the Holy Ghost leads and places the words, and sentences of the Preacher" (5: 40).⁹

⁹For the conjunction of Holy Ghost and preacher see also Andreas Hyperius, *The Practis of Preaching, otherwise called the Pathway to the Pulpit* (London 1577), p. 8.

The teaching of Scriptural knowledge is opposed in Donne's sermons to a particular kind of ignorance, the overconfidence of "*the foole...that trusteth in his own heart.*" This kind of knowledge, which is sceptical in character and "doubts wisely," is also opposed by Donne to inconsideration, "a stupid passing him (God) over" (9: 236).

The sceptical character of Donne's epistemology in the Whitsunday sermons almost certainly owes something to Montaigne, whose *Essais* were first translated into English by John Florio in 1603. Dominic Baker-Smith, in tracing the debt of the English Church to humanism, compares Donne's "doubting wisely" to that of Montaigne, "who wished to ally Christ's teachings with the scepticism of Pyrrho."¹⁰

Donne's sceptical attitude, "to stand inquiring right," can also be linked directly to the concept of *via media* outlined by such Henrician apologists as Thomas Starkey and John Bekinshaw, and fulfilled in Richard Hooker.¹¹ According to this tradition, knowledge sought through sensitive discrimination and intellectual ascesis is not contradictory to a Pauline emphasis on justifying faith:

For though in that sense of which we spoke, *Fides
justzficat sola*, Only faith do justifie, yet it is not true in
any sense, *Fides est sola*, that there is any faith, where
there is nothing but faith. (7: 228-29)

This necessity of balancing faith and reason is a significant aspect of Donne's identification of the Holy Ghost as *educator*, in

^{10a}John Donne's Critique of True Religion," in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed., A. J. Smith (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 408.

¹¹Donne's *via media* between faith and reason is also indebted to "radical Catholic" divines such as Georgius Cassander and Fra Paolo Sarpi.

distinction to the “power” and “love” embodied in the Father and Son respectively. Also, this same trinity of faculties—power, love, and knowledge—must necessarily be incarnate in human terms, in man redeemed by Christ: “By power, love, knowledge bee, / Give mee a such selfe different instinct / Of these let all mee demented bee, / Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three.”¹²

So far we have established the *person* of the Holy Ghost, as the co-eternal, co-dependent third person of the Trinity, and the *office* of the Holy Ghost, as communicator of Scriptural knowledge. Now we turn to the question of how this communication of knowledge is achieved, the *action* of the Holy Ghost. In his Whitsunday sermon of 1625 Donne establishes that the Holy Ghost’s action, which is communication of Scriptural knowledge, works in a twofold manner:

And therefore, in this capacity, as *The Comforter*, we
must consider his action, *Arguet, He shall reprove;*
Reprove, and yet Comfort; nay, therefore comfort,
because reprove. (6: 312)

In his 1627 Whitsunday sermon Donne elaborates on this dual action, referring to the Spirit’s “cloven tongue” (Acts 2.1) to illustrate how the Holy Ghost simultaneously reproves and consoles. In an earlier sermon (1618) Donne turns to metaphors of representation, of printing, and painting, to demonstrate how knowledge—reproof and consolation—is communicated or inspired by the Holy Ghost:

But when the holy Ghost takes a man into his schoole,
he deals not with him, as Painter, which makes an eye,
and an eare, and a lip, and passes his pencill an hundred
times over every muscle, and every haire, and so in many

¹²*The Litanie*, stanza IV, “The Trinity,” in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985), p. 458.

sittings makes up one man, but he deales as a Printer,
that in one straine delivers a whole story. (5: 38)

Later, however, in his Whitsunday sermon of 1630 Donne is careful to distinguish between the instant transmission of knowledge received by the Apostles, "as from a print, from a stampe, all at once," and the more painstaking communication his congregation can expect to receive, "as by writing, letter after letter, syllable after syllable, by catechismes, and Sermons." This connection, between the Scriptural descent of the spirit on the Apostles and the annual ecclesiastical celebration of Pentecost, Donne finds embodied in the sacraments of the Church. It is "in his Ordinance," in the reproof and consolation of the Holy Ghost, that the *religious* trinity of God, man, and Church is bound together:

For, *As when Peter spake, the holy Ghost fell upon all that heard,* So in the Ministry of his weaker instruments, he conveys, and diffuses, and seales his gifts upon all, which come well disposed to the receiving of him, in his Ordinance. (6: 131)

Donne's discussion of the "sacramental" action of the Holy Ghost necessarily implies that God works with and on human faculties. The faculties of Understanding, Will, and Memory, therefore, clearly have a role to play in *receiving* grace. Given that human effort—learning "by catechismes, and Sermons"—is required in preparing for the reception of grace, how is that learning best accomplished? For Donne it is memory, Bernard's "stomach of the soul," that enables preparation for salvation through the recollection of God's mercies and man's sins. Donne's emphasis on learning's dependence on memory is Augustinian:

To learn is nothing else, but by conception to receive,
and by marking to take heed that these those things
which the memory did before contain at random and

unnarranged, be laid up at hand as it were in that same memory, where before they lay unknown, scattered, and neglected. (*De Trinitate*, X, xi)

In Donne's Whitsunday sermons the essential value of memory in the action of the Holy Ghost is the "patterning" of experience. In the *Vestigia Trinitatis*, for example, memory enables the discernment of divine activity within remembered events. As A. M. Guite observes, "Donne shows that the pattern of the whole Bible has an interior correspondence and reflection in our own memories."¹³

Having examined the person, office, and action of the Holy Ghost as they are presented in Donne's Whitsunday sermons, we turn to the question of *purpose*. Throughout the sermons Donne's "sanctified worldliness"¹⁴ ensures a close attendance to the practical needs of his congregation. Over-ingenious inquiries into religious mysteries are repudiated. "In pursuing true knowledge," Donne remarks, "he is gone a good way, that knows where to give over" (9: 242). Bearing this in mind, Donne is succinct in his statement of the purpose of the Holy Ghost's communication of Scriptural knowledge:

This knowledge then which we speake of, is to know the end and the way, Heaven and Christ, The kingdome to which he is gone, and the meanes which he hath taught us to follow. (9: 244)

For Donne, then, the *person* of the Holy Ghost lies in the Trinity, its *office* is to communicate Scriptural knowledge and its *action* is via the memory. The *purpose* of the Holy Ghost and by analogy of

¹³A. M. Guite, "The Art of Memory and the Art of Salvation," *Seventeenth Century*, 4 (1989): 12.

¹⁴Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England, 1603-1690* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 151.

the Christian preacher is nothing less than Salvation, to “make Christians.”

Throughout the Whitsunday sermons Donne draws a persistent analogy between the office, action, and purpose of the Holy Ghost, and those of the Christian preacher. In his Whitsunday sermon of 1618 Donne uses the simile of a gardener and vine to illustrate the cultivation of the preacher’s words by the Holy Ghost:

And as a Gardiner takes every bough of a young tree, or of a Vine, and leads them, and places them against a wall, where they may have most advantage, and so produce, most, and best fruit: So the Holy Ghost leads and places the words, and sentences of the Preacher.
(5: 40)

In addition, Donne makes it clear that the *office* of the preacher, as “Reprover,” mirrors that of the Holy Ghost: “...the duties of the Preacher are expressed by the Apostle, to be these three, *To reprove*, or *convince* by argument...; And to *exhort*, to rectifie our manners; And to *rebuke*, to denounce Gods Judgements upon the refractory” (5: 41). Furthermore, the preacher’s *action*, like that of the Holy Ghost, is consummated via the ordinance of the Church, the “ministry of men”: “but to let thee see, that his way of teaching should be the ministry of men, he came in that organ of speech, the Tongue” (8: 260).

Finally, the *purpose* of the preacher, once again analogous to that of the Holy Ghost, is set out in Donne’s poem “To Mr. Tilman after he had taken orders” (1618): “How brave are those, who with their Engine, can / Bring man to heaven, and heaven againe to man?”¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, p. 471.

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The second part of this paper focuses on the nature of the analogy between Holy Ghost and Christian preacher. Here I suggest that in the Whitsunday sermons, via an *imitative* application of Scriptural eloquence, Donne achieves a mimetic incarnation of the office, action, and purpose of the Holy Ghost. This application of Scriptural eloquence draws on the typology and *animarum aedificatio* of Augustinian exegesis. It intends,

Exhortation principally, & *Edification*, & a holy stirring
of religious affections. (8: 95)

Given Donne's emphasis on preaching, on "Exhortation" and "Edification," *how* then do his sermons "imitatively" apply Scriptural eloquence? In terms of sermon structure Donne operates within the contemporary *artes concionandi*, following theorists such as Keckermann¹⁶ and logician Peter Ramus in beginning the sermons with a proem or *praecognitio textus*.¹⁷ Having introduced the sermon's text, the *divisio* then divides the text into two or three parts. The *divisio* is then followed by the amplification of each of its parts and a sum or application of its doctrines.¹⁸

This conventional sermon structure was used by Donne as the foundation for a number of structural variations, classed into six main types by Joan Webber.¹⁹ In the Whitsunday sermons Donne

¹⁶See Bartholomew Keckermann, *Rhetoricae ecclesiasticae* (Hanover, 1606).

¹⁷See Winfried Schleiner, *The Imagery of John Donne's Sermons* (Brown University Press, 1970). See also William Mueller, *John Donne: Preacher* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1962), pp. 89-99.

¹⁸See W. Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of its Literary Aspects* (1932; rpt., New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 93-101.

¹⁹Joan Webber, *Contrary Music. The Prose Style of John Donne* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), p. 165.

predominantly adopts four structural variations: word-by-word interpretation, exegesis, imagistic structure, and merging of the text with the sermon occasion by developing symbols that apply equally to both. Walter R. Davis suggests that the exegetical and word-by-word interpretative structures in Donne's sermons often approach *typological* forms "in their unfolding of the senses of the text." By contrast, the imagistic and merging of text and occasion structures "are *meditative...since* they begin with an image and proceed to transcend it."²⁰

Donne's Whitsunday sermon of 1629 on Genesis 1.2 is an example of a sermon that combines exegetical and word-by-word interpretative structures. The sermon develops its text into a two-part typology. In the first part the Spirit of God moves on the waters at Creation; and in the second the Spirit is moved "*In figura Baptismi*" (9: 453) to prefigure the second Creation of the New Testament.

Notably, the *figurae* Donne chooses for the typology of his sermons typically avoid ideal types such as Christ preferring instead people "of a "middle nature," above nature and below grace."²¹ Such biblical types include "imperfect and struggling examples" such as Esther, Paul, Job, and David.

If I wash my self in Snow-water, and purge my hands
never so cleane, yet mine own clothes shall make me
filthy. (6: 117)

²⁰Walter R. Davis, "Meditation, Typology, and the Structure of John Donne's Sermons" in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, eds., Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 166.

²¹Nancy Wright, "The *Figura* of the Martyr in John Donne's Sermons," in *John Donne, New Casebooks*, ed., Andrew Mousley (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p. 66.

This preference for a “middle nature” between the extremes of zeal and discretion is characteristic not only of the structure and *dispositio* of Donne’s Whitsunday sermons but also of their *elocutio* or style. Donne’s rhetorical *via media*, therefore, founded on prolepsis, correction, and “doubting wisely” is a simulacrum of his theological equilibrium between reason and faith.

Rhetorical style, Donne suggests, should be adaptable to the preacher’s subject and occasion. On certain occasions preachers must adopt the style of “*speculatores*,” watchmen who discern and denounce sin. On other occasions preachers must be “*tubae*,” trumpets to bring people to the sense of their sins. Further, the preacher must be mindful of the Augustinian injunction “to Teach, to Delight, to Turne,” for

The style of the Scriptures is a diligent, and an artificial style; and a great part thereof in a musical, in a metrical, in a measured composition, in verse. (5: 385)

In the Whitsunday sermons the signature of Donne’s rhetorical “music” is the “loose period”—“that pattern of associations...the flexible dislocation of the syntactic order, through elements such as parenthesis, inversion, and elliptical phrasing.”²² In his sermon on Whitsunday, 1628, Donne “dislocates the syntactic order” via his adoption of the liquid metaphor of the “dew of Hermon,” illustrating the descent of the Holy Ghost:

The dew of Hermon descends upon the mountaines of Sion; But the waters that fall upon the mountaines, fall into the valleyes too from thence; The Holy Ghost fals, through us, upon you also, so, as that you may, so, as that you must finde it in your selves. (8: 267)

²²A. C. Partridge, *John Donne: Language and Style* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978), p. 223.

Here, the “liquidity” of Donne’s “loose period” aspires to a rhetorical mimesis of the Holy Ghost’s descent. The mimesis proceeds via a “commatic” chain of propositions known by Greek rhetors as *kôla* and *kommata* (clauses and phrases) and in Latin as *membra et incisa* (limbs and pieces). Donne then characteristically elaborates the liquid metaphor, using the rhetorical scheme of *anacoluthon* to create a sense of urgency, shifting in mid-sentence from a less emphatic verbal form, “so that you may,” to a more emphatic, “so, as that you *must*.”

Donne then elaborates the liquid metaphor further, making a comparison between the entry of the Holy Ghost into the human soul and the infusion of liquid into a vessel:

There is an infusion of the holy Ghost; liquor is infused into a vessell, if that vessell hold it, though it doe but cover the bottom and no more: The holy Ghost is infused into you, if he have made any entry, if he cover any part, if he have taken hold of any corrupt affection.
(8: 269)

Donne’s use of an elemental, “natural” image to illustrate a theological concept, the descent of the Holy Ghost, deliberately imitates Scriptural eloquence. “To (Donne) concrete images were not realities of perception, but instruments for making ethical truths aesthetically luminous.”²³ Phrasal balance is used to gather associative meaning: “There is an infusion of the holy Ghost; liquor is infused into a vessell.” Repetition of clause structure builds rhythmic intensity: “if he have made any entry, if he cover..., if he have taken hold.”

Donne takes the liquid metaphor yet further:

There is also a diffusion of the holy Ghost; Liquor is diffused into a vessell, when it fils all the parts of the vessell, and leaves no emptinesse, no driness: The holy

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Ghost is diffused into you, if he overspread you, and
possesse you all, and rectifie all your perversenesses.

(8: 269)

From an infusion, filling some part of the vessel only, we move to a diffusion, filling *all* of the vessel. Repetition of a suffix, in this case “-fusion,” is an oft-repeated Donnean device in the Whitsunday sermons that produces an incantatory effect, justifying Mr. Chidley’s opinion that “He kept his love but not his object. Wit / He did not banish, but transplanted it.”²⁴

As Donne draws to the climax of his sermon he brings the liquid analogy to its natural conclusion:

But then, in the Schoole, we have also an effusion of the
holy Ghost; And liquor is effused then, when it so fills
the vessell, as that that overflowes, to the benefit of
them, who will participate thereof. Receive therefore the
holy Ghost, so, as that the holy Ghost may overflow,
flow from your example, to the edification of others.

(8: 269)

The *anadiplosis* of “overflow, flow” epitomises *in parvo* the overall sense of motion achieved by Donne’s liquid metaphor. The metaphor is incremental in nature, building up meanings and associations via a “substitutive technique”²⁵ and the rhetorical scheme of *homoeoteleuton*, the repetition of the same word-ending. From barely covering the bottom of the vessel Donne proceeds to the “effusive” image of the overflowing vessel, analogous to the superabundance of the Holy Ghost.

The evangelical aim of Donne’s *elocutio* is clear—to make the congregation themselves: “*Salvatores mundi*, men that assist the

²⁴*Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (London, William Pickering, 1840), p. xlv.

²⁵Winfried Schleiner, *The Imagery of John Donne’s Sermons*, p. 203.

salvation of the world, by the best way of preaching, an exemplar life, and holy conversation" (8: 269).

The associative relations that proliferate in Donne's long, loose sentences offer an insight into "those *operations* or *perceptual processes* which are reflected in inter-propositional relationships."²⁶ Associative relations in Donne's sermons, frequently arranged in overlapping layered series, are indicative of Donne's "evangelical" elision of the border between concrete examples such as falling water, and spiritual concepts such as the descent of the Holy Ghost.

In his Whitsunday sermon of 1618 Donne focuses his exegesis on that part of the text, Acts 10.44, that most vividly dramatizes the occasion of Pentecost, "The Holy Ghost fell on all them, which heard the Word."

[...] here the Holy Ghost is said to have fallen, which denotes a more earnest communicating of himselfe, a throwing, a pouring out of himselfe, upon those, upon whom he falls: He falls as a fall of waters, that covers that it falls upon; as a Hawk upon a prey, it desires and it will possesse that it falls upon; as an Army into a Countrey, it Conquers, and it Governes where it fals.

(5: 49)

Here the familiar rhetorical schemes of *anadiplosis* and phrasal balance are present once more. But on this occasion, rather than develop a consistent metaphorical *image* such as liquor in a vessel, Donne develops the *action* of falling, building an accumulation of meaning via a succession of images—plunging water, a bird of prey, a conquering army.

That Donne's exegesis should focus on action is consistent with his imitation of Scriptural eloquence. "God," says Donne, "is *Logos*,

²⁶Winifred Croomie, *Free Verse and Prose Style* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 146.

Sermo, Verbum, Oratio; The Word, Saying, Speaking; But God considered primarily in himself so, is *Actus purus*, all Action, all doing" (8: 179).²⁷ Scriptural language, therefore, expresses itself primarily as verb or action because God's words imply action.²⁸

However, the roles of the preacher and the congregation, in their subjection to God, also contain a strongly passive sense. This is exemplified by the fact that man cannot be saved without *being* baptised and *receiving* the Spirit:

It is true, that S. *Cyprian* says there, That a man is not truly sanctified, *Nisi utroque Sacramento nascatur*, Except he be regenerate by both Sacraments: And he tels us what those two Sacraments are, *Aqua & Spiritus*, Water and the Spirit, That except a man have both these seales, inward and outward, he is not safe. (5: 51-2)

The grammatical solution to this active-passive paradox of Christ crucified, of man predestined-yet-free, is in Donne's choice of verbs. Verbs such as "to suffer," "to receive," and "to hear," which have active voice forms but passive or middle voice meanings, are used in both Scripture and Donne's sermons to convey the spiritual sense of "active passivity," of man's submission to God.

In the climactic development of his metaphor of falling Donne uses such verbs in exhorting his congregation to heare and receive the Holy Ghost, which is mimetically incarnated in the words of the preacher. According to the analogy between Holy Ghost and preacher Donne contrives to rhetorically plummet, gathering impetus through repeated negation and increasingly dynamic verbs of downward motion—"He did not onely hover...He did not onely descend...He fell." Rapidly switching from images of the Holy

²⁷Heather Asals, "John Donne and the Grammar of Redemption," *English Studies in Canada*, 5 (Summer, 1979): 128.

²⁸For a seventeenth century view of God as "verb" rather than "noun," see Andreas Guarana, *The Grammar Warre* (London, 1635).

Ghost as breath, as voice, as hawk or dove or angel, Donne concludes in the short sentence of the *style coupé* with the abstract yet personalized image of the Holy Spirit itself.

This was then the effectuall working of the Holy Ghost, *Non spiravit*, He did not only breathe upon them, and try whether they would receive the savour of life unto life, or no: *Non sibilavit*, He did not onely whisper unto them, and try whether they had a disposition to heare, and answer; *Non incubabat*, He did not onely hover over them, and sit upon them, to try what he could hatch, and produce out of them; *Non descendit*, He did not onely descend towards them, and try whether they would reach out their hand to receive him; But *Cecidit*, He fell, so, as that he possessed them, enwrapped them, invested them with a penetrating, with a powerfull force; And so, he fell upon them All. (5: 53)

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The first part of this paper aimed to establish the analogy in the Whitsunday sermons between preacher and Holy Ghost. In the second part this analogy was characterized as a form of mimetic incarnation, the preacher's imitation of Scriptural eloquence in the exegetical manner of Augustine's *animarum aedificatio*. In this final part I wish to show a further aspect of Donne's rhetorical imitation of Scriptural eloquence. This aspect is present in the dual function of the Holy Ghost as Comforter, that is to assure and *reprove*:

[...] to convince, to prove, to make a thing evident, by undeniable inferences, and necessary consequences.

(6: 316)

Here, as a necessary complement to Donne's *affective* mode of edification we find Donne's *sylogistic* appeal to reason. The use of reason in understanding the revelation of God's will in the

Scriptures is justified for Donne by the dual connotation of *Logos* as word *and* reason. "The language of the *Logos* is logic, Donne believes, and redemption lies the way of that logic."²⁹

God is *Logos*, *speech* and *reason*: He declares his will by his *Word*, and he proves it, he confirms it; he is *Logos*, and he proceeds *Logically* *Religion* is *reason* and *Logique*; The devill hides, and deludes, Almighty God demonstrates and proves: That fashion of his goes through all his precepts, through all his promises, which is in *Esay*, *Come now, and let us reason together*.

(5: 103-4)

In his appeal to *both* faith and reason³⁰ in his sermons, Donne's most frequent model was St. Paul, whose method was:³¹

[...] to proceed by the understanding, to the affections, and so to the conscience of those that hear him, by such means of perswasion, as are most appliable to them, to whom he then speaks.

(8: 160)

What then are the *syllogistic* "means of perswasion" used by Donne in the sermons? In his Whitsunday sermon of 1626 on John 16.8-11 Donne aims to show that "all the world is under sin, and knowes it not."

²⁹Heather Asals, "John Donne and the Grammar of Redemption," p. 133.

³⁰For the influence on Donne's theology of Aquinas, Ockham, and Gerson see Louis I. Bredvold, "The Religious Thought of Donne in Relation to Medieval and Later Traditions," in *Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne*, Vol. 197 (London: Macmillan & Co, 1925), p. 205.

³¹Paul W. Harland, "Imagination and the Affections in John Donne's Preaching," *John Donne Journal* 6, 1 (1987): 42.

As every man hath a devill in himselfe [...] some particular sin that transports him, so every man hath a kinde of God in himselfe, such a conscience, as sometimes reproves him. (7: 217)

In suggesting that the existence of sin must *ipso facto* imply the existence of conscience, Donne argues *axiomatically*. The axiom in this case is the natural “law of symmetry” wherein the existence of a thing, such as the devil, necessitates the existence of its “symmetrical” opposite, God. Donne then develops this argument-by-antithesis to suggest a causal moral principle, that sin itself *inevitably* leads to repentance:

That very sin which hath possessed him, by the excesse of that sin, or, by some losse, or paine, or shame following that sin, occasions that reproofe and remorse, that withdraws him from that sin. (7: 217)

Within Donne’s reasoned argument that sin begets its own reproof we can detect the *lex talionis* of Judaic rationality. With its rewards for virtue and punishments for vice, justice in the Old Testament is necessarily rational in its predictive nature.³² Donne’s confidence in rationality, in divine justice, is also evident in his propositional style, a series of short, uninflected phrases that proceed by logical deduction to command assent:

The Holy Ghost is sent to Teach; he teaches by speaking; he speaks by his Ordinance, and Institution in his Church. (8: 261)

This series of propositions appears to contain a self-evident logic. Concrete actions and entities—teaching, speaking, Ordinance, and Church—stand in for the abstract concept of the Holy Ghost.

³²See George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd. 1961), pp. 4-6.

Donne's imitation of Scriptural eloquence draws here on the isotopic relation of grammar to logic. Moving from the passive voice of "is sent" to the active assertion of "he speaks," Donne grammatically compels logical assent. In this sense, Scriptural language is seen to be inherently *rational* because inherently *grammatical*. In the context of human morality Donne sees this inherent logic as inborn:

There is no Atheist; They that oppose the true, do yet
worship a false god; and hee that sayes there is no God,
doth for all that, set up some God to himselfe. Every
man hath this reproofe borne in him, that he doth ill,
that he offends a God, that he breaks a law when he
sins. (6: 325)

Knowledge of God, then, and knowledge of sin is borne in man; it resides in his memory. Here once more is Donne's imitation of the Scriptural use of the deponent verb,³³ placing man's relation to God midway between activity and passivity. This midpoint is represented in rhetorical terms by Donne's use of what Winifred Crombie calls "hypothetical arguments in the form of *condition-consequence* relations."³⁴ In Donne's 1625 Whitsunday sermon, for example, a cumulative series of five "If" statements and their consequences, "this is a reproof" (6: 329), enumerate the ways in which a person might be in sin. Having established the hypothetical conditions and consequences of how a person's sins might merit the reproof of the Holy Ghost, Donne proceeds to exhort his congregation:

Reprove they selfe; but doe it by convincing, not by a
downe-right stupefaction of the conscience; but by a
consideration of the nature of thy sin, and a

³³"Deponent" in the sense that to "be born" takes a passive voice form but has an active voice meaning.

³⁴Winifred Crombie, *Free Verse and Prose Style*, p. 138.

contemplation of the infinite proportion between God
and thee. (6: 329)

The accent on "convincing" by reason is conspicuous. In contrast to irrational "stupefaction of the conscience," Donne invites his auditors to consider the ratio, the spatial, geometrical proportion between God and man. This implies that a rational, mathematical contemplation can lead to a rectified spiritual knowledge.

Other forms of syllogistic argumentation employed by Donne include the resolution of paradox via axiomatic priority, *reductio ad absurdum*, and the proof of apparent *non sequiturs*. All are used by Donne to advocate the use of reason in receiving the Holy Ghost.

The division of Donne's imitation of Scriptural eloquence into an affective style and a syllogistic style is not meant to suggest a rhetorical antinomy. Rather the opposite in fact, since both styles draw on the rhetorical analysis of Book IV of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. The "commatic style" that Augustine found in St. Paul, for instance, is present in both the phrasal balance of Donne's meditative *elocutio* and also in the antitheses of his logical style.

Flexibility of rhetorical style is also evident in Donne's tempered mode of sermon presentation. The Holy Ghost's "reproofe," Donne remarks, is "but *Syllogismus*, it is but argument, it is but convincing, it is not destroying; it is not an Inquisition, a prison, a sword, an axe, a halter, a fire" (6: 319). Steering a *via media* between overly-discreet proofs that rely on Authority and over-zealous argumentation, Donne urges preachers to moderation, to take care not to "tread out smoaking flaxe," nor to "breake a bruised reed" (6: 319).

Significantly, Donne defines this mode of Scriptural eloquence, this golden mean between discretion and zeal, in Aristotelian terms. "*Elenchus est Syllogismus contra contraria opinantem*; A reproofe, is a proofe, a proofe by way of argument, against another man, who holds a contrary opinion" (6: 317). In Donne's imitation

of the eloquence of the Holy Ghost, this “prooffe,” this “*elenchus*”³⁵ proceeds by applying reason to the awakened memory. The abstract application of reason to memory, analogised in the Whitsunday sermon of 1625 to the application of grace to the soul, characteristically for Donne becomes a question of ductility:

Grace doth not ordinarily work upon the stifnesse of the soule, [...] but when the soule is soupled and mellowed, and feels this reproofe, [...] that remorse becomes as the matter, and grace enters as the form, that becomes the body, and grace becomes the soule. (6: 325)

In this third part of the paper we have seen that Donne appeals to reason via *elenchus*, or logical argument. This “syllogistic” style, I have suggested, is in keeping with the preacher’s rhetorical imitation of the office of the Holy Ghost, which is to communicate Scriptural knowledge. Types of rhetorical *controversia* used in Donne’s syllogistic style include axiomatic, antithetical, and hypothetical argument, argument via proposition, in which logic is equated with grammar, resolution of paradox, and *reductio ad absurdum*.

Lastly I would like to touch on Donne’s theory of *res et verba*. For in part at least, it is Donne’s view of the relation between words and things that underwrites the analogy in the Whitsunday sermons between preacher and Holy Ghost. Under ordinary circumstances, Donne maintains, words must always be secondary to things. *Res*, in this sense, is related to *verba* as soul is to body. In a sermon on the text of Philippians 3.2 (“Beware of the concision”), Donne remarks:

Language must waite upon the matter, and *words* upon *things* [....] The matter, that is, the doctrine we preach,

³⁵The etymology of “*elenchus*”—a logical refutation, via Latin from Greek *elenchein*, to shame, reveals the single root of the dual aspects, moral (shame) and legal (logic), of “the Reprover,” the Holy Ghost.

is the forme, that is, the Soule, the *Essence*; the language
and words wee preach in, is but the Body, but the
existence.
(10: 112)

However, to say that matter is more “essential” than language is not to say that the connection between *res et verba* is accidental. In the third of Donne’s Prebend sermons, preached at St. Paul’s in 1626, Donne observes that “Adam gave every Creature the Name, according as he saw the Nature thereof to be” (7: 241). Donne observes that Adam could name the creatures because he knew their essences. The name of a thing, therefore, springs from its essence. This concept of the unity of *res et verba* lies at the heart of the notion of God’s grammar. Furthermore, Donne’s analogy between Holy Ghost and preacher, between God and man, implies that having understood God’s grammar, we are bound to imitate it.

The underlying logic of God’s grammar, of the *Logos*, is structured as a trinity. The three grammatical persons, I, Thou, and It, map the Trinitarian structure of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the Whitsunday sermons, “I” can be taken to refer to Donne’s individual rhetorical style; “Thou” to the rhetorical schemes called for by the occasion of each sermon; and “It” to the matter that is preached, the Scriptural text. The result is a form of speech in concurrence with Scriptural eloquence, the word of God. The Trinity, Donne states, “is the first letter in his Alphabet, that ever thinks to read his name in the book of life” (9: 51).

Donne’s linguistic “theory” of *res et verba* also lies at the heart of another Trinitarian structure in the Whitsunday sermons, the triple “knot” of Scripture, sermon, and Church Ordinance. In his earliest extant Whitsunday sermon, preached at Lincoln’s Inn in 1618, the “dilated, diffused” interrelations of Word, sermon, and Ordinance are defined by Donne in a series of *qualifying* propositions:

The Word of God is made a Sermon, that is, a Text is
dilated, diffused into a Sermon; but that whole Sermon

is not the word of God. But yet all the Sermon is the
Ordinance of God. (5: 56)

In a sermon preached nine years later in St. Paul's, on John 14.26, Donne focuses on refining the structure of the three persons of the Trinity, a refinement that has implications, as we have seen, for Donne's view of the structure of language. Donne refers initially to Basil's account of the inherent relations of the Trinity, a description Donne uses in a number of sermons:

S. *Basil* gives us one interpretation; that is, that one principall name of Christ belongs to the Holy Ghost. For Christ is *Verbum*, The Word, and so is the Holy Ghost, sayes that Father, *Quia interpres filii, sicut filius patris*, Because as the Son manifested the Father, so the Holy Ghost manifests the Son. (7: 448)

However, Donne is not quite satisfied with Basil's interpretation. The semantic problem that Donne senses, I suggest, lies with the word "manifested." As a description of the relation between the persons in the Trinity, "manifestation" is at one remove from the idea of "incarnation." From the Latin *manifestus*, literally "that is grasped by the hand," "manifested" conveys the sense of a distance between two connected entities, something "out there."

In refining his definition of Trinitarian relations Donne turns inevitably to his strongest patristic influence:

S. *Augustine* gives another sense; *Societas Patris & Filii, est Spiritus Sanctus*, The Holy Ghost is the union of the Father and the Son. As the body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of the soul and body[...]; so the union of the Father and Son to one another, and of both to us, by the Holy Ghost, makes up the body of the Christian Religion. And so, this interpretation of S. *Augustine*, comes neare to the

fulnesse, in what sense the Holy Ghost came in Christs
name. (7: 448)

In Augustine's interpretation "manifested" has been replaced with "union." Union, in contrast to "manifests," denotes unity, incarnation, the three-in-one of the Trinity. This emphasis on "union" rather than on "manifestation" is informed by Donne's view of the Scriptural name of a thing springing from its essence. In the relation between God and man this Trinitarian union is typologically dilated into concrete, human structures, "The holy Ghost shall fall upon you...and make your domestique peace there, a type of your union with God in heaven" (5: 56-7).

Similarly, this Augustinian "union" characterizes Donne's *kerygma*, his incarnation of the Holy Ghost in the Whitsunday sermons. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are thus present "in the preaching thereof," the preaching that "conveys, diffuses, and seals" in its effort to emulate the function of Scriptural eloquence, which is to "actuate, fecundate, and generate" the congregation's disposition to receive the Holy Spirit (6: 5).

So Donne's theology and rhetoric (and by extension his ecclesiology and politics), hang on a word. Instead of an analogy between Holy Ghost and preacher, between *res et verba*, Donne gives us "an union:" "...for this (Pentecost) is an union, in which, Christ in his purpose hath married himself to our souls" (9: 248). Given Donne's legal training, his knowledge of casuistry, and his philological inclination, perhaps we should not be surprised by the grammatical nature of his exegesis:

I know it is a good rule, that Damascen gives...*Parva,*
parva non sunt, ex quibus magna proveniunt: Nothing is to
be neglected as little, from which great things may arise.
(9: 70)

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