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Lutheran Imagery and Donne's "Picture of Christ crucified"

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Diarmaid MacCulloch's study of the Reformation in Europe opens with a description of the traditional juxtaposition of the Crucifixion with the Last Judgment in pre-Reformation church furniture, using for illustration the Wenhaston Doom in Suffolk.[1] This surviving early sixteenth-century tympanum showing the Last Judgment is vividly colored, and would have filled the top of the chancel arch of the church. The great rood, or crucifix, which would more often have hung below the Judgment tympanum, was in this case superimposed on it. The Wenhaston Doom was defaced in the 1540s and the rood and the figures surrounding it ripped off, but the outlines of the crucifix and the figures of Mary and John are still clearly visible as blank spaces on the doom painting which would have been behind them, "like ghosts," as the guide to St. Peter Wenhaston puts it, "of lost Catholic England."[2] The defaced Wenhaston Doom both illustrates how the superimposition of the crucifix on the Last Judgment would have worked *in situ*, before the Reformation, and provides a vivid reminder of the iconoclasm of 1540s England, which caused the rood to be destroyed and the doom itself to be whitewashed and replaced with the royal coat of arms. It stayed in this

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[1] *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 6–7.

[2] St. Peter, Wenhaston, <http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/wenhaston.html> last accessed 25 March 2007.

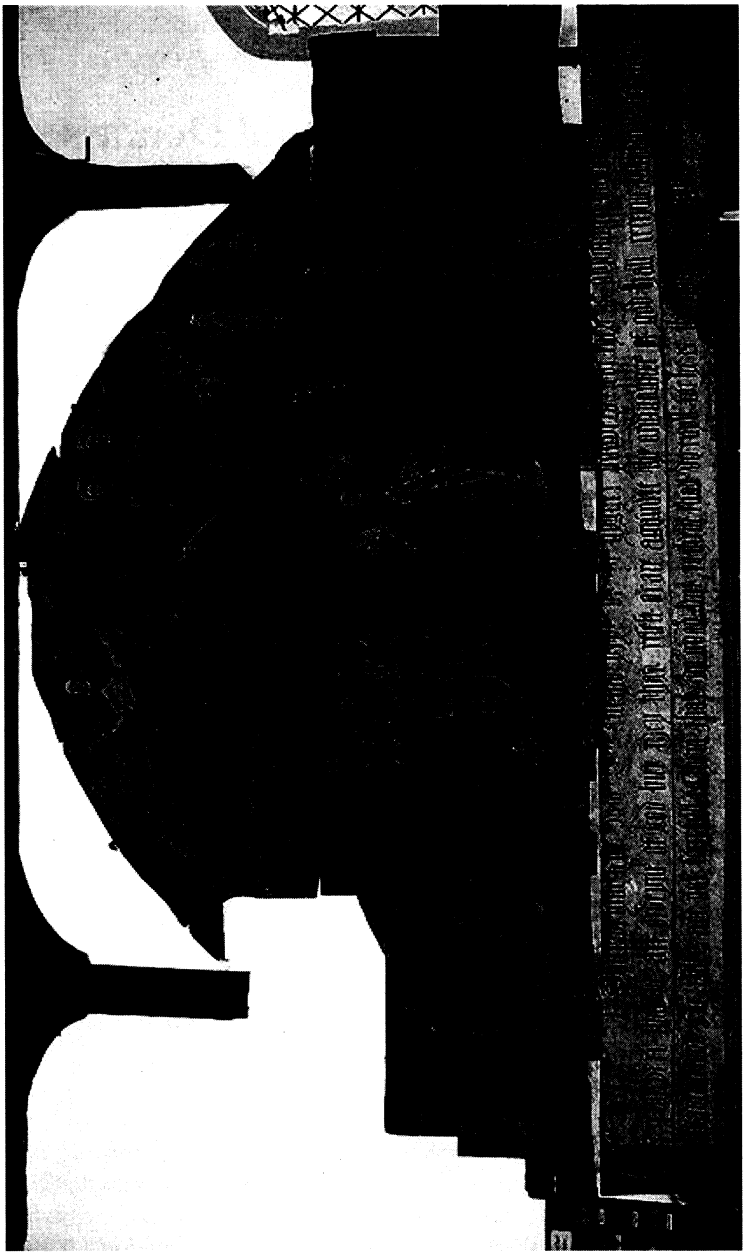

Fig. 1. Doom painting in St. Peter's Church, Wenhaston, Suffolk, England. Image © Simon Knott and reprinted by permission of the photographer.

state until the discovery of the underpainting during the renovation of the church in 1894. Poised between the memories of its Catholic creation and its Reformation destruction, the ghost of the crucifix is both present and absent in the image (fig. 1).

This unstable crucifix makes the image an apt introduction to John Donne's Holy Sonnet 9 (Revised Sequence), "What if this present were the worlds last night?"[3] Donne's sonnet recreates the traditional juxtaposition of rood and doom, even spatially, as the sonnet's first line evoking the "worlds last night" hangs over the invocation of "the Picture of Christ crucified" in line 3. However, while MacCulloch describes the "floor-to-ceiling ensemble of the Rood and Doom" as enacting "the whole drama of the Christian faith," the defaced remains of the Wenhaston Doom—and Donne's sonnet—tell a more specific story that is shaped by the iconoclastic currents of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.[4] Like the ghost of the crucifix in the Doom painting, the crucifix in Donne's sonnet is poised between image and iconoclasm, between material object and memory. This ambivalence recalls Luther's attitude towards the crucifix in the context of another period of iconoclastic controversy in 1520s Wittenberg. Luther evoked an internal crucifix as an example to counter iconoclastic arguments, and a comparison of his crucifix with that "marked in the heart" in Donne's sonnet sheds some light on this very complex sonnet, and helps to situate it in the center of the English iconoclastic controversy.

The critical tradition which associates the Holy Sonnets with the influence of Ignatian meditative practices is based to a large extent on the sonnets' visual qualities. Louis Martz describes the "graphically imaged openings" characteristic of Donne and other metaphysical poets, "where the moment of death, or the Passion of Christ, or the Day of Doom is there, now, before the eyes of the writer."[5] For Helen Gardner, too, the Ignatian *compositio loci* is a "vivid image," or in one case "a picture of the

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[3] *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne. Volume 7, Part 1: The Holy Sonnets*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 25.

[4] MacCulloch, p. 7.

[5] *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 31.

Last Judgment."[6] The images visualized in Ignatian meditation would, of course, be internal, seen "with the eyes of the imagination."[7] Yet internal images were almost as problematic as outward aids to devotion in the iconoclastic debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the question of whether idolatry originated in the external image or in the mind was the basis of many discussions of idolatry.[8] For Calvin the mind was "a perpetual factory of idols."[9] In recent years the Catholic-influenced reading of the Holy Sonnets proposed by Martz and Gardner has been challenged by a critical movement seeing Donne as sharing the moderate Calvinism of Reformation England.[10] Any Calvinist reading of the sonnets, however, is compromised precisely by the internal images which they evoke. Although very little that was Lutheran remained in the mainstream English church by the end of the sixteenth century,[11]

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[6]John Donne, *Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. li, lii.

[7]Gardner, ed., p. l–li, quoting from *The Spiritual Exercises*, translated from the Spanish with a Commentary by W. H. Longridge, S. S. J. E. (1930).

[8]See Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts. Volume 1: Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 436.

[9]Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.8; cited by Margaret Aston in *England's Iconoclasts*, p. 437.

[10]William Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes in English Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970) and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979) were among the first to read Donne in terms of "Protestant poetics." John Stachniewski, "John Donne: The Despair of the Holy Sonnets," *ELH* 48.4 (1981): 677–705, and John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber, 1981) go furthest in attributing a "strong Calvinist influence" (Stachniewski, p. 677) to Donne; Richard Strier qualifies this, suggesting that the "Holy Sonnets" enact Donne's unsuccessful attempts to accept Calvinist doctrines fully ("John Donne Awry and Squint: The 'Holy Sonnets,' 1608–1610," *Modern Philology* 86.4 [1989]: 357–384); and R. V. Young offers an extensive counter-argument to the "Protestant poetics" of Donne's verse in *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000).

[11]Alec Ryrie, "The Strange Death of Lutheran England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53.1 (2002): 82. Ryrie suggests that the iconoclastic practices of Henry VIII's regime may have been a contributing factor to the

Donne's ambivalent attitude towards religious imagery seems far removed from the hard-line Calvinist stance, and closer to the more open attitude to images taken by the Lutheran church, which stemmed directly from Luther's own equivocal position on the matter.[12]

In 1627 Donne preached a sermon on idolatry which lays out his balanced approach to the image question: "*Væ Idololatris*, woe to such advancers of Images, as would throw down Christ, rather then his Image: But *Væ Iconoclastis* too, woe to such peremptory abhorrers of Pictures . . . as had rather throw down a Church, then let a Picture stand."[13] The measured tone of this sermon, preached two years after Charles's accession to the throne, contrasts markedly with a much stronger condemnation of idolatry in a sermon of 1622 (4:132–144), and it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions about Donne's opinions on the matter without taking into account the change of regime. However, the vocabulary he uses in the 1627 sermon to describe the church's divergent views on images is revealing, as it suggests that he has the more tolerant Lutheran approach to images in mind. He cites Calvin, who argues that (in Donne's words), "where there is a frequent preaching, there is *no necessity* of pictures," but qualifies this with "but will not every man adde this, That if the true use of Pictures bee preached unto them, there is *no danger* of an abuse." He continues:

> And since, by being taught the right use of these pictures, in our preaching, no man amongst us, is any more enclined, or endangered to worship a picture in a Wall or Window of the Church, then if he saw it in a Gallery, were it onely for a reverent adorning of the place, they may bee retained here, as

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development of the English Reformation along Reformed rather than Lutheran lines.

[12]Luther's opinions on images are mainly expressed in his Lenten sermons of 1522, written as a reaction to the iconoclastic riots of January and February of that year in Wittenberg, and in his pamphlet *Wider die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament* (1525). Martin Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesammtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883–1997), 10.3:26–36; 18:62–125, 134–214. Hereafter cited in the text as WA (Weimar Ausgabe).

[13]*The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter. 10 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), 7:433.

> they are in the greatest part of the *Reformed* Church, and in all that, that is *properly Protestant.* (7:432)

Martz argues that here Donne uses the term *Protestant* "with strict etymological, legal and historical accuracy to designate the Lutherans, the original *protestantes.*" He parallels this instance of Donne's use of the word with a passage in *Satyre III*, although the poem was written some twenty years earlier: "To'adore, or scorne an image, or protest, / May all be bad" (76–77).[14] Here too, Martz claims, Donne is using the very precise definition of the term "protest":

> As the *OED* explains, "in the sixteenth century the name *Protestant* was generally taken in Germany by the Lutherans, while the Swiss and French called themselves *Reformed.*" . . . Here Donne is treating the *Reformed* Church as larger than strict Calvin and distinguishing the *Reformed* from the Lutheran—those *properly* called *Protestant*, who retained much of the old imagery and ritual.[15]

Elsewhere in the *Sermons* Donne uses both *Reformed* and *Protestant* more loosely, for example in another 1627 sermon where he speaks of practices "in the *Reformed* Churches, in both sub-divisions, Lutheran and Calvinist" (8:105). However, in the particular sermon on images, where *Reformed* and *Protestant* appear in the same sentence and are contrasted, it seems legitimate to read them as Martz suggests. It is also worth noting that on both the occasions that Donne seems to use *Protestant* to mean Lutheran, he is discussing images.[16]

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[14]*The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 25.

[15]"Donne, Herbert and the Worm of Controversy," in *Wrestling with God: Literature and Theology in the English Renaissance: Essays to Honour Paul Grant Stanwood*, ed. Mary Ellen Henley and W. Speed Hill (Vancouver: EMLS, 2001), pp. 22–23.

[16]In his sermons, Donne's references to both Luther and Calvin are for the most part fairly restrained and orthodox, citing them both as authorities on Scripture worthy to be paralleled with the Church fathers. However his passing mentions of Luther betray a more affectionate attitude, not towards the man himself or to his theological positions, so much as towards his writing style, which he describes several times as "elegant" as well as "eloquent." In the

In the sonnet "What if this present," it is Donne's attitude to religious imagery that strongly recalls Luther's writings on the subject, in particular his evocation of an internal crucifix. The crucifix had been a highly charged religious and political image in England since the 1540s when all church crucifixes were destroyed under Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, following the Royal Injunctions of 1538. They were reinstated during Mary's reign, but many in a very temporary fashion, painted on canvas or on boards, only to be swept away again with the accession of Elizabeth to the throne in 1558.[17] By Donne's period, the crucifix was still a contested image. In such a climate, the explicit reference to the "*Picture* of Christ crucified" is strongly marked, even though the crucifix which Donne designs in this sonnet is not on a "Wall or Window of the Church" but is an internal crucifix in his persona's heart. The description of the crucifix in the octave insists on the physical characteristics of this "Picture," while the first line of the sestet introduces the notion of "Idolatrie," and the concluding line—"This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde"—privileges the form, rather than the word, as evidence. The sestet's vocabulary of beauty and idolatry offers a key to reading the sonnet as a whole. While the use of the term *idolatrie* calls images into question, and raises the spectre of iconoclasm, it is not the picture of Christ crucified that is the most immediately controversial image. The two images contained within the octave, the Last Judgment and the Crucifixion, are not juxtaposed in peaceful and universal equilibrium, but are locked in conflict. The crucifix is inscribed in the persona's heart in order to counter the image of the Last Judgment. For the speaker of this sonnet, it is the Judgment, rather than the crucifix, that is problematic. The sonnet opposes two conflicting

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Sermons, the best example of Donne's praise of Luther's style regards his use of diminutives in Latin: ". . . to fly *Ad consolatiunculas creaturlae* (as that elegant man *Luther* expresses it, according to his naturall delight in that elegancy of Diminutives, with which he abounds above all Authors) to the little and contemptible comforts of little and contemptible creatures" (5:321). See also 6:137, 8:319.

[17]Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 406–407, 454; John Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535–1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 109–110.

images of Christ, Christ as Judge, and Christ as Redeemer, which, it seems, are incompatible.

The impression of a potentially idolatrous image in the heart resonates with much of the rhetoric for and against images in the 1520s in Wittenberg, where much debate focused on whether idolatry was located in the eye or in the heart. On the one hand, Luther could say in 1529 that images were not the problem because true idolatry was in the heart, not in the eye: "vera idolatria est in corde" (WA, 27:586). The iconoclast argument can be summed up in the words of Zwingli, "ab Auge, ab Herz": once images were removed from the eye, they would be removed from the heart. However, Luther reversed this argument in his anti-iconoclastic pamphlet, *Wider die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament* (1525) ("Against the heavenly prophets in the matter of images and sacraments"), which was his considered reaction to the iconoclasm that took place in Wittenberg in January and February 1522 and Karlstadt's continuing iconoclastic preaching in the years following. In early 1522, while Luther was still in the Wartburg, the castle where he went into hiding following his excommunication, there was an outbreak of iconoclasm in Wittenberg (and in Eilenburg)—an outbreak legitimated by a council order stating that images and altars should be removed from churches. Luther returned from his exile in time to halt the worst excesses of iconoclasm.[18] In *Wider die himmlischen Propheten*, he reproached Karlstadt with removing images from the eye but not from the heart, and, in a passage which resonates with Donne's "What if this present," he argued that it might be natural to have an image of Christ in our hearts, and questioned if it would be a sin to have such an image before our eyes.

> So weys ich aus gewiss, das Gott wil haben, man solle seyne werck hören und lesen, sonderlich das leyden Christi. Soll ichs aber hören odder gedencken, so ist myrs unmüglich, das ich nicht ynn meym hertzen sollt bilde davon machen, denn ich wolle, odder wolle nicht, wenn ich Christum hore, so entwirfft sich ynn meym hertzen eyn mans bilde, das am creuze henget,

[18]Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant image question in Western and Central Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 17–31; Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion, 2004), pp. 159–164.

> gleich als sich meyn andlitz naturlich entwirfft yns wasser, wenn ich dreyn sehe. Ists nu nicht sunde sondern gut, das ich Christus bilde ym hertze habe, warumb sollts sunde seyn, wenn ichs ynn augen habe? (WA, 18:83)
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> [I know for certain that God desires that one should hear and read his work, and especially the passion of Christ. But if I am to hear and think, then it is impossible for me not to make images of this within my heart, for whether I want to or not, when I hear the word Christ, there delineates itself in my heart the picture of a man who hangs on the cross, just as my face naturally delineates itself on the water, when I look into it. If it is not a sin, but a good thing, that I have Christ's image in my heart, why then should it be sinful to have it before my eyes?][19]

There is no evidence that Donne read this passage by Luther, particularly since it does not seem to have been translated into Latin or English in the sixteenth century, but Luther's idea of the inner crucifix became "canonical" and widely disseminated in Lutheran circles.[20]

Luther's internal crucifix resembles Donne's in many ways. Both have a highly ambivalent status. Luther's crucifix is explicitly inspired by the word, by his hearing the word "Christ." In the hierarchy of words and images, words clearly come first, and yet they are "naturally" connected. Words, once internalized, become pictures, but, as Luther makes clear, there is no question of will or agency on the part of the listener: "whether I want to or not, when I hear the word Christ, there delineates itself in my heart the picture of a man who hangs on the cross. . . ." The verb *entwerfen* ("to delineate") was generally used in Middle and Early New High German to refer to an artist's preliminary sketch. As Koerner points out, Luther's reflexive use of the verb highlights the idea that the listener does not consciously visualize the image of the crucifix; it "delineates itself" (*entwirft sich*). But Koerner goes even further, to suggest that since *entwerfen* derives from the verb *werfen* ("to throw"), *entwerfen* might be associated with the Latin *proicere* ("project," literally

[19]Translation from *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–1986), 40:99–100 (hereafter LW).

[20]Koerner, p. 56.

"to throw forward"). Thus "Christ's picture 'projects itself' in the heart in the way an object casts a shadow. Automatically, as if due to natural conditions, words generate pictures."[21] Yet Koerner's deconstruction of *entwerfen* reveals an uncertainty regarding the genesis of this internal crucifix that Luther's use of the word *naturlich* sought to dispel, for Luther's image of the man on the cross is curiously suspended between the reflected and the projected, the natural and the created.

The status of Donne's image is equally conflicted, and this ambiguity centers on the verb "Mark" which begins the second line of the sonnet. The persona instructs his "Soule" to "Mark in [his] hart / . . . the picture of Christ crucified." Earlier manuscript versions have a variant of this line: "Looke in my Hart, O Soule. . . ," and the *Variorum* edition of the Holy Sonnets attests that "Mark" is an authorial correction.[22] While the earlier "Looke in my Hart," with its echoes of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*,[23] denotes quite simply the contemplation of the crucifix (already a problematic act), the change to "Mark" opens up other connotations. For while "Mark" may indeed mean "to take notice of mentally; to consider; to give one's attention to" (*OED*) in the sense of "mark well," the word also has the sense of "making a mark on something by drawing, stamping, branding, cutting, staining, etc." (*OED*). These two potential meanings of "Mark" give two opposed interpretations of the status of the image in the persona's heart: either the picture of Christ crucified is already there and the soul is merely being instructed to meditate on it, or the soul actively inscribes the image in the heart. Yet another meaning of the word "Mark" may further complicate the sonnet: an older denotation in the *OED* has "to make the sign of the cross upon (a person, a person's heart, forehead, etc.)." The connotations of "Mark," then, range from mental contemplation to the very physical actions of stamping, branding and cutting. The change from "Looke" to "Mark" suggests that the act of looking at images contains within it the possibility of making images. As with Luther's argument that the formation of a mental picture justifies the contemplation of an actual picture, here the mental image evokes the existence of a physical crucifix.

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[21]Koerner, p. 161.

[22]*Donne Variorum: Holy Sonnets*, p. 88.

[23]As R. V. Young points out in *Doctrine and Devotion*, p. 24.

Very different critics of this sonnet have reacted to the physicality of the description of the crucifix by picturing a physical crucifix and indeed situating it in a particular school of art. Stevie Davies places Donne within the Baroque and Mannerist tradition, and reads this particular sonnet as an example of Donne's "mannerist perspective . . . contracting the conflict of the Passion into one line." For R. V. Young, Donne's "graphic image of the Crucifixion suggest[s] a Spanish baroque painting," and he finds a contemporary "visual analogue" for the sonnet in Velázquez's *Christ on the Cross* (1599–1600).[24] The association with the baroque relates directly to the sonnet's insistence on both the "beauteous forme" and the suffering body of Christ. The tears and blood of the crucified Christ function as the subjects of the verbs "quench" and "fills," respectively, and these physical details become particularly important when we consider that Donne's crucifix is raised in the second line of the sonnet as a preferable alternative to the image of the Last Judgment, which was evoked in the first line with the phrase "the worlds last night." The introduction of the crucifix challenges the authority of the image of Christ as Judge, causing the speaker to demand "Whether that countenance can thee affright." The following lines move between iconographic details of Christ's face in both crucifixion and judgment, from the "Tears in [the] eyes" of Christ crucified to the "amazeing light" in the eyes of the Judge; from the bloody brow of the suffering Christ to the frown of the Judge; from the condemnation of the Judge to the forgiveness of the Savior. Christ's "countenance" is divided into two, and the speaker of the sonnet oscillates between these two, apparently incompatible, faces of Christ.

Like the internal crucifix, the persona's simultaneous attraction to and rejection of Judgment in this sonnet has parallels in Luther's writings. Luther repeatedly objects strongly both to the iconography and the doctrinal implications of the Last Judgment. He evokes the rainbow, the lily and the sword of judgment paintings, only to argue that this is a false view of Christ.[25] He rejects the fear that the Last Judgment was intended

[24]Davies, *John Donne* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p. 25; Young, pp. 24–25.

[25]WA, 8:677–678; WA, 33:538–539; WA, 45:482, and in many other places. For an anthology of Luther's remarks about the iconography of the Last

to instil in the faithful, and argues that if we have faith we have no need to fear Christ (WA, 47:102). According to Luther's theology, salvation can only be achieved through faith in Christ, and therefore Judgment, which implies the weighing of men's acts and works during their lives, is part of the older system of belief which must be rejected. Luther approves of the Gospel of John, particularly the verse "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17), and comments that, indeed, man should not regard Christ as a Judge or a terrible Lord, but rather as a Savior and a friend (WA, 48:135). In another commentary on John's Gospel, he states, "therefore you must have a picture of Christ that is different from the one you were taught; you must not look upon him as a judge. . . . No, if you have sinned, He is the Light of the World and judges no-one" (LW, 23:337).[26] We must, Luther says, find another mental picture of Christ to replace the image of Christ in Judgment that we have inherited from the Papacy. And in a sermon preached in 1519 on "preparing to die" he states that Christ on the cross prepared himself as "*ein dreyfeltig bild*" (a three-fold picture) for us, with which we could drive out the "*gegen bild*" (counterpictures) of death, sin and hell, all of which he associated with the Last Judgment (WA, 2:691, 695; LW, 42:106, 111).

Luther's language here suggests the idea of images in competition with each other: the good image of the crucifixion can counter its opposite, the image of death, sin, and hell united in the Last Judgment. A very similar process takes place in Donne's sonnet, as the image of Christ in Judgment is replaced by the "Picture of Christ crucified." The face of Christ is doubled. In the first three lines of the sonnet there is a clear distinction between two different images: "the worlds last night" and "Christ crucified"; but from line 4 onwards the two images begin to merge into one, for it is difficult to distinguish which "countenance" is being described, as iconographic details from the picture of Christ crucified merge with those of Christ in Judgment in the space of single

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Judgment, see Hans Preuss, *Luther der Kunstler* (Güttersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann, 1931), pp. 36–37.

[26]"Darumb bilde dir Christum anders fur, denn sie gelereret haben, nicht als einen Richter . . . sondern hast du gesundiget, so ist er das Liecht der Welt, er richtet niemand" (WA, 33:542).

lines. Thus the "Teares" of Christ crucified become confused with the "amazeing light" of Christ Judge (5); the "Bloud . . . from his pierc'd head" merges with the stern "frownes" of the Judge (6). The last two lines of the octave articulate the doctrinal problem behind the iconographic confusion: whether Christ both condemns and forgives and whether Christ as Savior and as Judge can be the same person.

However, the octave of the sonnet shows more than a merging of these two images of Christ. The verbs governed by the "Teares" and "Bloud" of Christ describe a dynamic and indeed destructive relationship between the two images. The "Picture of Christ crucified" is superimposed on the image of Christ the Judge. The tears of the former "quench" the light from the eyes of the latter; the blood from the wounds of the crucified Christ "fills" the frowns of the Judge. The image of Christ the Judge is extinguished and smoothed out by the physical effluence from the body of Christ crucified. In a sonnet which explicitly evokes "Idolatrie" (9) and the iconoclastic controversy, the image of Christ Judge is erased by the image of Christ Savior. The picture of Christ crucified, itself the victim of so many iconoclastic attacks, here performs an act of iconoclasm, effacing—or even defacing—the image of the "worlds last night," and thus the image of Christ's divinity is replaced by Christ's humanity. The ambiguity surrounding the word "Mark," however, means that it remains unclear whether this internal iconoclasm is an action willed by the speaker of the poem, or whether he is merely the witness of it.

Koerner points out the irony inherent in the iconoclastic defacement of the crucifix. He argues that the crucifix is itself already an image of defacement, and the emphasis laid on the scourging and piercing of the body of Christ in meditations on the Passion foreshadows the defacement of the crucifix by the iconoclasts. Passion plays rigorously re-enacted Christ's flagellation and torture, and in some pre-Reformation crucifixion images it is difficult to distinguish the body of Christ behind the blood that covers it. The blood of Christ already serves to hide his body from view, rather as, in our sonnet, the blood of the crucified Christ serves to fill in and smooth out the frowns of Christ the Judge. The final effect of the practice of affective piety, "this exercise of achieving a mental picture of the ruination of a body" was, in Koerner's words, "the recognition that what we end up seeing, in our head, in the painting, is

also everything Christ is *not*."[27] In other words, Christ's divinity is concealed by the extreme humanity of his crucifixion, the humility and the ugliness of it, just as prophesized: "he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is . . . a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:2–3).

The distinction between the representation of Christ's divinity and his humanity is crucial to the debate over images. An argument dating back to the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century upholds the interdiction on representing the divine, but claims that the incarnation of Christ made him circumscribable and therefore able to be represented.[28] Christ in all his broken humanity may be painted, whereas the beauty of Christ in his divinity is unimaginable and therefore unrepresentable. What Donne describes as the "amazeing light" of Christ revealed in his divinity is not fit to be seen by men's eyes, but, as St. Paul put it, the human Christ is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

Critics concur on the strength of the octave, its "smooth and decorous power," and its "resplendent serenity,"[29] but the sestet is always found to be problematic, partly because of the intrusion of Donne's "Prophane Mistresses" into the sacred territory of the sonnet, and partly because of an uneasiness regarding the logic of the context in which they appear. The argument that emerges from Donne's tortured syntax uses an analogy from the profane world to assuage his spiritual doubts. Donne's persona used to flatter and seduce his mistresses with the argument that a beautiful woman would take pity on her lover and succumb to his advances, while a less beautiful woman would maintain an unfeeling "Rigor." The spurious logic of this then appears to be transferred to the contemplation of the image of Christ: "soe I say to thee," the persona addresses (presumably) his soul, "To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd, / This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde." It is the unhelpful juxtaposition of the profane and the sacred in the sestet, as well as its faulty logic, that has caused such a strong critical reaction. Martz finds the sonnet's sestet "unworthy of [the] opening: the reference to 'all

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[27]Koerner, pp. 109–11, quotation from p. 126.

[28]Christoph Schönborn, *L'Icône du Christ: Fondements théologiques* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986), pp. 203–234.

[29] Carey, p. 47.

my profane mistresses' is in the worst of taste: there is almost a tone of bragging here"; and Richard Gill comments on the possibly "boastful" recollections of his profane mistresses.[30] John Carey goes further, describing the sestet as "blasphemous":

> He contemplates the Saviour's bloody face, and searches for some argument that will assure him of salvation. But all he can find among the dazed, licentious thoughts that have become habitual to him is the hideous piffle about pity and pretty faces which the last six lines throw up.[31]

The bragging and blasphemy of the sestet, however, do not invalidate the power of the octave, even if they complicate and question its powerful imagery. The mention of the mistresses, and particularly their qualification as "Prophane," is in fact congruent with the reading of the octave as iconoclastic. The association of idolatry with female sexuality was well-established in Donne's time, as can be seen, for example, in the Elizabethan *Homilie against Perill of Idolatrie* (1563):

> Doeth not the word of GOD call Idolatrie spirituall fornication: Doeth it not call a gylte or painted Idol or Image, a strumpet with a painted face: Bee not the spirituall wickednesses of an Idols inticing, like the flatteries of a wanton harlot: Bee not men and women as prone to spirituall fornication (I meane Idolatrie) as to carnall fornication.[32]

The fact that the heart, in Donne's sonnet inscribed with the picture of Christ, was in secular love poetry traditionally the place where the lover would keep the image of his beloved, brings together the picture of Christ and the idolatry associated with the mistresses even before the speaker of the sonnet makes his strained analogy: "soe I say to thee. . . ."[33]

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[30]Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, p. 84; Gill, *John Donne: Selected Poems* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 10.

[31]Carey, p. 47.

[32]Quoted by Ernest Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 132.

[33]As Margaret Aston points out, "the ease with which poets found lovers 'doting' in 'mad idolatry' shows how effectively the reformers, whose

If, as Luther says, true idolatry is in the heart, the very presence of the "Prophane Mistresses" strengthens the context of idolatry in which the picture of Christ crucified appears, and contributes to the dynamic of idolatry and iconoclasm which animates the octave.

More troubling is the conclusion (if such it can be called) of Donne's analogy in the sestet. The assertion that "This beauteous forme assures a piteous minde" seems to claim that the beauty of Christ will guarantee his mercy. However, the predominant image of Christ in the octave, that of Christ crucified, is anything but beautiful, and indeed should not be beautiful but entirely abject in his sacrifice. Some critics have dealt with this by claiming that the beauty of the last line refers to the "ethical beauty" of Christ's act of redemption, in which the "event becomes beautiful."[34] However, the last line explicitly asserts that it is the "forme" which is beautiful, and in the context of the crucifixion, Donne's words strongly recall the "man of sorrows" verse from Isaiah: "he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). No form, no beauty. Thus it does not seem that the "beauteous forme" can refer to the "Picture of Christ crucified."[35] The "beauteous" Christ must be the divine Christ, revealed in glory. It was the "beauteous forme" of Christ as Judge that the picture of Christ crucified was erasing, or concealing, in the octave. At the end of the sestet, however, Christ's divine beauty seems to reassert itself. It is as if the act of iconoclasm attempted in the octave, the erasure of Christ as Judge by Christ crucified, has not entirely succeeded. If the erasure of the octave works by superimposing the picture of Christ crucified on top of the picture of Christ as Judge, concealing but not destroying it,

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terminology was thus drafted into amorous service, had done their work" (*England's Iconoclasts*, pp. 466–467).

[34]Doniphan Louthan, *The Poetry of John Donne: A Study in Exposition* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), p. 122; Paul W. Harland, "'A True Transubstantiation': Donne, Self-love, and the Passion" in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995), p. 167.

[35]Peter Milward, however, suggests that with "beauteous" Donne may be referring to Christ's "native appearance" as described in Psalm 45, in the Douai translation: "Thou art beautiful above the sons of men" (*A Commentary on the Holy Sonnets of John Donne* [Tokyo: The Renaissance Institute, Sophia University, 1988], p. 76).

perhaps the two overlaid pictures can be seen as a kind of palimpsest. The scene of Judgment and Christ's divine beauty are temporarily concealed, but in time begin to show through again, the "amazeing light" once more penetrating the mess of blood and tears which obscured it.[36]

The human and the divine natures of Christ are both represented in the sonnet. While the verbs "quench" and "fill" in the octave tell the story of one image effacing the other, Christ's human form only *conceals* his divine form, and cannot, of course, destroy it. The "beauteous forme" in the last line of the sestet undoes the logic of the octave and reinstates the image of the divine Christ. More than that, however, the erasure and replacement of the image of Judgment records a clash of two doctrines. Luther's objection to the iconography of the Last Judgment was that anyone who truly had faith had nothing to fear from Judgment, because salvation could only be achieved through faith in Christ. By establishing the Lutheran image of the internal crucifix in his heart, the speaker of this sonnet attempts to place all his faith in the salvatory power of the crucifixion, and in doing so, to blot out his fear of Judgment. However, the Crucifixion cannot totally erase the fear of the "worlds last night," and the "beauteous forme" shining through reveals not only the "amazeing light" of Christ's divine nature but also the speaker's incapability of placing his faith solely in the image of the Crucifixion. The Lutheran image marked in the heart is not strong enough, after all, to function for the speaker as a guarantee of Christ's mercy, and the assurance which the last line of the sonnet asserts is, paradoxically, weakened by the reassertion of Christ's divine image. Finally, even the potentially idolatrous "Picture of Christ crucified" fails to assuage the speaker's anxiety regarding Judgment.

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[36]Martin also sees a "palimpsest" in this sonnet, although for her it is "a two-sided scroll or palimpsest reflecting the two opposing images of God: on the one side beauty and pity, on the other duplicity and death" ("Unmeete Contraryes: The Reformed Subject and the Triangulation of Religious Desire in Donne's *Anniversaries* and *Holy Sonnets*" in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation*, ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian [Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003], p. 209).