

John Donne (1572-1631)  
in the Company of Augustine :  
Patristic Culture and Literary Profession  
in the English Renaissance

I. – PATRISTIC CULTURE AND THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

The idea of a “renaissance” in English literature has long been recognized as problematic. While we may grant that the creative brilliance of Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare and their contemporaries marks an important new departure in the cultural life of the English nation, it is more difficult to say how this insular achievement was related to the Italian and Continental discovery of classical antiquity, or to the larger literary and educational phenomenon known since the nineteenth century as Renaissance humanism. «The more we look into the question», wrote C. S. Lewis at the start of his magisterial survey of *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, «the harder we shall find it to believe that humanism had any power of encouraging, or any wish to encourage, the literature that actually arose» in England<sup>1</sup>. As a caution against exaggerated estimates of literary classicism in the age of Shakespeare, this statement retains its value. It should not, however, be allowed more than corrective force. Lewis had a particular interest in native traditions of English literature ; continuities of that kind would more readily discerned if the concept of “renaissance” were downplayed. Relevant, too, is the fact that his brief extended only to 1600. Hard as it may be for us to take a positive view of the influence of humanism on English literature when confronted with Golding’s Ovid, the Elizabethan version of Seneca’s tragedies, and other «drab translations from the classics» (Lewis), the use made of classical models by such later writers as Ben Jonson and John Milton, both of whom actively promoted humanist educational ideals, requires more

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1. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), p. 2.

favourable assessment. Nor is it only in the realm of classical studies that English literature of the early seventeenth century affords evidence of a new sensitivity to ancient texts. «He that thinks it the part of a well-learned man to have read diligently the ancient stories of the Church, and to be no stranger in the volumes of the Fathers, shall have all judicious men consenting with him», Milton would write in 1641, with no more than pardonable exaggeration<sup>2</sup>. With the classical elements in any early modern “renaissance” of English letters must also be reckoned a *patristic* culture of a type only possible after the advent of humanism.

As is well known, the humanist summons *ad fontes* frequently implied a recourse to the earliest literary sources of Christianity. When allied with strong religious motives, the new literary and pedagogical orientation of the Renaissance favoured a mode of intellectual activity that has come to be known, for better or worse, as “Christian humanism”. For men of the Christian humanist stamp in every generation from the time of Petrarch, the writings of the Fathers constituted an integral part of the ancient literary heritage. Patristic precept and example, long credited with special dogmatic, moral and spiritual authority, now came to be seen as normative for the theory and practice of letters as well. Thus a Christian humanist who shared the fashionable desire to write and speak a Latin like Cicero’s would seek to emulate the classically trained writers and orators of the early Church, thereby (he hoped) reviving the Ciceronianism of a Lactantius, a Jerome or an Augustine.

The influence of the Fathers on the literary manners of the humanists was not, however, confined to matters of style. It also helped determine their choice of literary projects and contributed to their sense of their own role as literate members of a Christian society. The importance of patristic models for new ideas of literary vocation in the Renaissance was pointed out more than thirty years ago by E. Harris Harbison in his elegant study of *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*.<sup>3</sup> Harbison began his book with parallel sketches of the careers of Jerome and Augustine, considered as «the main archetypes of the Christian scholar» (19), in order then to demonstrate how Christian writers from Petrarch to Calvin responded to these and other patristic examples. Even if the notion of “scholarship” may not be quite adequate to the undertakings in question, the connection between late antique and Renaissance modes of literary activity is well made. The results of more recent research in Renaissance patristics would allow many of Harbison’s insights to be developed further. It will be sufficient to recall here the case of Erasmus, whose appropriation of the cultural and literary theory of Augustine – as expounded primarily in the *De doctrina christiana* – has been analyzed by Charles Béné, and whose lifelong emulation of another Latin Father inspires

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2. *The Columbia Edition of the Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen PATTERSON *et al.*, 18 vols. (New York, 1931-8), vol. 3, pt.1, p. 101.

3. (New York, 1956).

some of the finest passages in Eugene Rice's justly acclaimed monograph on the Renaissance career of St. Jerome<sup>4</sup>.

Given Erasmus' many contacts with English writers and churchmen, his several visits to their country from 1499 onwards, and the influence exerted by his writings on the English educational curriculum of the Tudor period, it is likely that his achievements as a patristic scholar played a significant part in the development of insular study of the Fathers. The subject would bear close attention. At present, the record of inquiry into English patristics in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is mainly blank, providing no secure basis for generalization. We know that major Continental editions of patristic texts were entering English libraries during the period, that certain lesser works by or attributed to the Fathers (mostly in translation) were starting to appear from English presses, that schoolboys in establishments like John Colet's school at St. Paul's (with which Erasmus was of course associated) were being drilled in the Latin of Lactantius, Prudentius and Sedulius, and that a few Englishmen – including the young Thomas More – had begun to experiment with historical approaches to the works of early Christian authors<sup>5</sup>. For this kind of intellectual activity, as for others, the middle years of the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47) seem to have been especially propitious. But that is merely an impression, which future research must qualify.

As the century progressed and religious controversy sharpened men's appetites for the written testimony of primitive Christianity, the stock of patristic texts and expertise in England steadily increased. Taken as a whole, the evidence of insular interest in the Fathers contained in sixteenth-century library catalogues, book inventories, printers' and booksellers' lists and accounts, school and university statutes and curricula, students' and teachers' notes, marginalia in books and manuscripts, and (most striking of all) thousands of patristic citations in extant works of religious instruction, devotion, and polemic, is very imposing. The business of sifting that evidence, however, has scarcely begun. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford in 1960, the late S. L. Greenslade drew

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4. Charles BÉNÉ, *Érasme et saint Augustin, ou l'influence de saint Augustin sur l'humanisme d'Érasme* (Geneva, 1969); Eugene F. RICE, Jr., *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1985). For Erasmus' Jerome see now *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 61: *Patristic Scholarship: The Edition of St Jerome*, ed. James F. BRADY and John C. OLIN (Toronto, 1992).

5. On the reception of patristic texts in England in this period, see the article by Haugaard cited below, n. 7. More's early lectures (c. 1501) on Augustine's *De civitate dei* are mentioned by Erasmus (*Ep.* 999, ed. ALLEN) and More's early biographers: Germain MARC'HADOUR, *Thomas More vu par Érasme* (Angers, 1969), p. 56; Alistair FOX, *Thomas More: History and Providence* (Oxford, 1982), p. 95-98. Colet's recommendation of «auctours Christian as lactancius prudentius and proba and sedulius and Juvencus... and such other as shalbe thoughte convenyent and moste to purpose unto the true laten spech» appears in the Statutes of St. Paul's School: text in J. H. LUPTON, *A Life of John Colet, D.D.* (London, 1909), p. 279. For the Erasmian milieu, see James Kelsey McCONICA, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford, 1965) and Peter Iver KAUFMAN, *Augustinian Piety and Catholic Reform: Augustine, Colet, and Erasmus* (Macon [Georgia, USA], 1982).

attention to the extensive use made of patristic materials by certain English Reformers. At the same time he warned against «exaggerating the erudition which is so impressive when we first turn their pages<sup>6</sup>». Like us, he observes, these writers frequently obtained their authorities and quotations at second hand. They borrowed from one another, from the Continental Reformers, from medieval collections such as those of Peter Lombard, Gratian, Thomas Aquinas, and the *Glossa Ordinaria*, from commonplace-books, and from printed collections of *testimonia*. It follows that in assessing the significance of their patristic citations we shall be concerned not only with the extent of their own primary reading (that is, their access to integral texts of the Fathers) but also with the various traditions of patristic reference and compilation which they may be supposed to have exploited.

In the thirty years since Greenslade's lecture a number of studies have appeared which help to fill out the larger picture of English patristic culture in this period. In an article on «Renaissance Patristic Scholarship and Theology in Sixteenth-Century England», William P. Haugaard has shown how analysis of bibliographical evidence for the production and circulation of texts of the Fathers can be combined with study of personal contacts and exchanges to yield a realistic context for the patristic recourse of men like More, John Jewel, and Richard Hooker. Observing that «England in the sixteenth century made no single major contribution either to [the edition of] patristic texts or to solving problems of authorship», Haugaard is nevertheless able to argue convincingly that «the era of the English Reformation laid the foundations for the flowering of English patristic scholarship through the troubled years of the next century<sup>7</sup>». Among the data he assembles are details of some 96 patristic or purportedly patristic titles, published in England or elsewhere in English and listed in the *Short-Title Catalogue* for the period down to 1600. The huge majority of these are English translations. A disconcertingly large number are spurious. Of no less than 36 texts ascribed to Augustine, only the translations of the *De praedestinatione sanctorum* published in 1550 and 1556 (?) are certainly genuine. (For Augustine, as for other patristic authors, the situation improves dramatically after 1600.)

A different and complementary sample of patristic materials from the *STC* is offered by J. W. Binns in his pioneering study of *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England : The Latin Writings of the Age*<sup>8</sup>. In the course of a survey of Anglo-Latin writings of the period between 1530 and 1640, Binns covers such topics as biblical Latin poetry and its patristic models, Latin translations of Greek patristic texts, and Latin theology. The section entitled «Theology as an Intellectual Discipline» is based mainly on the *De*

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6. *The English Reformers and the Fathers of the Church* (Oxford, 1960), p. 14. See now Henry CHADWICK, «Tradition, Fathers and Councils», in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen SYKES and John BOOTY (London, 1988), p. 91-105, with further references.

7. *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (1979), p. 37-60, at p. 40, 60.

8. (Leeds, 1990).

*recta studii theologici ratione* of Matthew Sutcliffe, a work published in London in 1602 and heavily dependent on Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*<sup>9</sup>.

As Binns' study shows with admirable clarity, in the elite literary culture of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age the disciplines of poetry, drama, theology, philosophy and law were all of a piece. Unless we perceive this unity we shall not be able fully to appreciate a literary oeuvre as multi-disciplinary and multigeneric as say Donne's or Milton's. The fact that these two authors wrote mainly in English does not place them outside the orbit of a common Latinity. As Anthony Grafton has remarked in a review of Binns' book, it is a mistake for us to be forever separating the products of Renaissance Latin culture in England from the new literature in English which grew up alongside it. Instead of «replac[ing] the old myth of an autonomous English Renaissance culture with a new myth of an autonomous Latin one» (as Grafton, perhaps a little unjustly, believes Binns would do), we should try to plot the different routes along which cultivated persons moved back and forth between the two literary realms, the Latin and the vernacular. By such means, Grafton suggests, we may one day solve the puzzle of the English literary Renaissance<sup>10</sup>. The study of insular patristic culture has an important part to play in this work of literary-historiographical revision. What resources can it draw on? And how should it proceed?

«The vast realm of patristics», wrote E. R. Curtius in 1948, «has not yet been explored in respect to the problems posed by European literary history and literary theory<sup>11</sup>». No longer strictly true at the time, this judgment requires further modification today. Thanks to the labours of two generations of scholars in the discipline designated by Curtius as «early Christian philology», we now know a good deal about the literary theory and practice of Christian writers of the first post-Apostolic centuries<sup>12</sup>. With such information

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9. *Op. cit.*, p. 310-313. Matthew SUTCLIFFE (?1550-1629), Dean of Exeter and court theologian to King James I, moved in the same circles as John Donne, who is known to have possessed copies of two of his other works: Geoffrey KEYNES, *A Bibliography of Dr. John Donne*, Dean of Saint Paul's, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1973), p. 276.

10. *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 March 1991, p. 3-4.

11. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. TRASK (Princeton, 1953; repr. with an epilogue by Peter GODMAN, 1990), p. 446. The statement occurs at the beginning of an excursus on «Early Christian and Medieval Literary Studies». Curtius continues: «Here, naturally enough, textbooks of patrology leave us in the lurch. For they treat the material from the point of view of theology and ecclesiastical history. In this state of the matter, what follows can offer only indications and suggestions. It will be the task of an early Christian philology to rectify and complete them». Although cognizant of the recent work of French scholars such as Marrou and Courcelle, the author shows no sign of appreciating its import for a literary-historical science of patristic texts.

12. The achievements of the past half-century's research in early Christian Latin literature will be summarized in the relevant chapters of the new *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike*, ed. Reinhart HERZOG and Peter L. SCHMIDT, 8 vols. in progress (Munich, 1989-). The introduction to the late antique part of the handbook in the first volume published (vol. 5: *Restauration und Erneuerung* 284-374 n.Chr., ed. R. HERZOG) includes a valuable review of modern scholarly approaches to early Christian writing in both Greek and Latin. Professor

at our disposal, it is possible to begin considering the influence of patristic models in subsequent phases of European literature. The literary activity of the Renaissance claims our special attention, since it was then that patristic literature first came under the scrutiny of readers who, recognizing their own distance from the world of *classical* antiquity, were also aware of the historical distinctiveness of *early Christian* writing. Needless to say, the situation of those readers with respect to patristic literature varied from place to place, and from one decade to the next. Even for the critical period c.1400-1600, the field of exploration indicated by Curtius is immense. Scholarly interest has hitherto been turned mainly towards the patrological labours of the Italian humanists and the more important early editors of the Fathers<sup>13</sup>. While a correct understanding of the English scene will necessarily depend in part on the results of such work, there is a clear need for monographic study of insular developments as well. The investigations of Greenslade, Haugaard and Binns have already revealed the general contours of English patristics in the Reformation and immediately post-Reformation periods, but much more primary research on the habits of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English readers of the Fathers will have to be done if we are ever to be in a position to draw any general conclusions about the power of humanist *patristics* (as distinct from, though not opposed to, classical studies) to «encourage the literature that arose» in England in the later Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline ages. Meanwhile, the testimonies of certain well-known literary figures may be invoked to justify and orientate the work still to be undertaken.

This article is devoted to one such piece of testimony. Its subject is the relation of *patristic culture* to *literary profession* in the writings of John Donne – poet, controversialist, honorary Doctor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, and (from 1621 until his death ten years later) Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. I shall argue that the history of Donne's interest in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* and the development of his personal sense of literary-religious profession are mutually illuminating, and that both are to be understood in the context of his early attachment to another of Augustine's works, namely the *Confessions*. Because of the complexity of the critical problems attending any study of the patristic reading of a seventeenth-century author, the conclusions offered can only be tentative. Unless I am mistaken, however, the record of Donne's encounter with these two capital Augustinian texts provides an instructive instance of the way in which ideas of the role of the Christian reader, writer, and orator promulgated in late

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Herzog's bibliographical report on the relations between classical philology and patristics (p. 43-44), is complemented by the *mise-au-point* of the editor of vol. 6 of the handbook : Jacques FONTAINE, «Postclassicisme, Antiquité tardive, Latin des chrétiens : l'évolution de la problématique d'une histoire de la littérature romaine du III<sup>e</sup> au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle depuis Schanz», *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* (1984), p. 195-212. See also *Journal of Literature and Theology* 5 (1991), p. 341-54.

13. For a survey of recent work, see Irena BACKUS, «The Early Church in the Renaissance and Reformation», *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600*, ed. Ian HAZLETT (London, 1991), p. 291-303.

antiquity could help shape literary careers and forms of literary activity in early modern England.

## II. – «AUGUSTINUS REDIVIVUS ?» THE EARLY CAREER OF JOHN DONNE

John Donne was born in London in 1572, the same year as Ben Jonson and eight years after William Shakespeare. His family was Roman Catholic and he was brought up in the old faith. Of his early education we know little. He attended both Oxford and Cambridge Universities but was barred as a Romanist from taking a degree. In 1592 he entered Lincoln's Inn where he kept several terms as a student of the law. Many of his "secular" poems – the Elegies, certain of the love lyrics and verse letters, some if not all the Satires – were written and circulated around this time, though few appeared in print until after his death. In 1597/8, after a period of military service overseas, he entered the household of the Lord Keeper, Sir Thomas Egerton, for whom he worked as a legal secretary until 1602, when an over-hasty marriage put an end to that job and to any immediate hope of preferment.

Following this discomfiture Donne retired to live near Guildford and, according to his first biographer, Izaak Walton, devoted himself to the study of civil and canon law<sup>14</sup>. A trip to the Continent with an English nobleman in 1605-6 may have been meant to qualify him for some kind of regular employment on his return, but none was forthcoming, then or at any point in the next five years. During those years Donne divided his time between Mitcham, where he lodged his wife and growing family, and London, where he cultivated a circle of literary friends and patrons. To this period of his life, it is usually assumed, belongs the composition of many of his "divine" poems, including the remarkable series of Holy Sonnets, as well as three substantial works in prose: *Biathanatos*, a casuistic defence of suicide; *Pseudo-Martyr*, an elaborate refutation of the arguments of English Catholics who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance, dedicated to King James I; and *Conclave Ignati* or *Ignatius His Conclave*, a satirical attack on the Jesuits. *Pseudo-Martyr* earned Donne an honorary M. A. from Oxford but that seems to be all the good it did him. In 1611-12 he was once again travelling on the Continent, and contemplating a legal career. On his return to England he moved his family to a house in Drury Lane, London, where they lived for the next two years.

Donne was now forty years old, a man of considerable and widely recognized intellectual abilities, with excellent connections, yet still without a settled occupation. A major factor in his difficulties, it appears, was the desire of two of his most powerful patrons, Thomas Morton, bishop of Gloucester, and James I himself, to see him ordained in the Church of England. (The date and circumstances of Donne's rejection of the Roman religion, and the quality

14. Izaak WALTON, *The Life of Dr. Donne*, p. 28. For want of a critical edition of Walton's biographies, I refer to the text published in the Nelson's Classics series (London, s.d. [1940?]), which is based on the author's third revision of 1675. For the complicated textual history of the *Lives*, see the study by Novarr cited below, n. 18.

of his commitment to the *ecclesia Anglicana*, are alike matters of controversy which need not detain us here.) For a long time he resisted the pressure to enter the ministry. Finally he changed his mind. In a letter of 1613 he writes of «having obeyed at last, after much debatement within me, the Inspirations (as I hope) of the Spirit of God, and *resolved to make my Profession Divinitie*<sup>15</sup>». The resolve, however genuine, was not immediately effective. A year later Donne was sitting as Member of Parliament for Taunton. When the parliament was dissolved after two months, he made one last attempt to obtain secular office, and failed. On January 23, 1615, he was ordained deacon and priest by the Bishop of London. Appointed royal chaplain soon afterwards, he accompanied James I on a visit to Cambridge where he received an honorary doctorate in divinity. Once back in London, he began to preach. Over the next decade and a half he would acquire a reputation for personal sanctity and sacred eloquence second to none in England.

With Donne's ordination, writes Izaak Walton, «the English Church... gained a second St. Austin ; for I think none was so like him before his conversion, none so like St. Ambrose after it : and if his youth had the infirmities of the one, his age had the excellencies of the other ; the learning and holiness of both<sup>16</sup>». Walton's patristic learning was not profound, but he knew the *Confessions* and the fifth-century *Life of Augustine* by Possidius of Calama. And he had a strong conviction that the age of the Fathers was a more blessed time for the Christian religion than the present. Having recounted in his own fashion Donne's "debatement" with himself on taking holy orders, he adds : «Such strifes as these St. Austin had, when St. Ambrose endeavoured his conversion to Christianity ; with which he confeseth he acquainted his friend Alypius. Our learned author – *a man fit to write after no mean copy* – did the like<sup>17</sup>». The assimilation of Donne's ordination to Augustine's conversion required some sleight of hand but was necessary for Walton's purpose. As David Novarr has shown, the *Life of Donne* was designed to impart a definite and providential shape to its subject's career. Originally composed as an introduction to the first major collection of his sermons, published in 1640, it concentrates on the religious aspects of his character and achievements, emphasizing the latter part of his life at the expense of the former<sup>18</sup>. Already five years earlier, in a set of verses written to accompany a portrait of Donne in the second edition of his *Poems*, Walton had presented his later years as his best, «so much refind / From youths Drosse, Mirth & wit<sup>19</sup>». Novarr even suggests that Walton may have rearranged the poems in this edition so that the

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15. Letter to Sir Robert Ker, printed by BALD, *John Donne* (cited n. 24 below), p. 272-73. Emphasis added.

16. *Life of Donne*, p. 40.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 39. Emphasis added.

18. David NOVARR, *The Making of Walton's "Lives"* (Ithaca [New York], 1958), p. 19-126. In Novarr's words, the *Life of Donne* presents «the reverend life of a reverend man, and the general impression is one of early religious interest, continual study, holy living, and holy dying» (51).

19. Cited by NOVARR, *Walton's "Lives"*, p. 31.

passage from profane to divine subjects appeared more strictly chronological<sup>20</sup>.

Exactly when Walton conceived the idea of reinforcing his interpretation of Donne's life and work with Augustinian comparisons is not clear, but it need not have been his own. The first edition of the *Poems* (1633) contains an elegy by one Thomas Browne, entitled «Upon the *Promiscuous* printing of his Poems, the *Looser sort*, with the Religious». Browne concludes his tribute with the thought that «knowing eyes»

Will not admire  
At this *Strange Fire*,  
That here is *mingled with thy Sacrifice* :  
But dare reade even thy *Wanton Story*,  
As thy *Confession*, not thy *Glory*<sup>21</sup>.

The invitation to read the “wanton story” of Donne's looser poems as “confession” almost certainly contains an allusion to Augustine's autobiography, a new English version of which had been published in London in the year of the poet's death<sup>22</sup>. This hint may have been all Walton needed to induce him to write Donne's life on the model of Augustine's. Or he may not have needed so much as a hint, at least not from a fellow elegist. For as we shall see, if anyone was likely to have planted the idea of Donne as a latter-day Augustine in Walton's mind, it was Donne himself. Note that it is the “learned author” who, in Walton's phrase, writes his *own* life after Augustine's copy.

As we should expect, readers of Donne since Walton's time have not all viewed the poet-preacher's career in the providentialist terms proposed by his first biographer. For many of them, particularly in this century, the poems have been the primary object of interest, the prose (including sermons) at best a curiosity, the author's biography largely an irrelevance. The first attempt to write a full-scale scholarly biography was made by Edmund Gosse, whose *Life and Letters of John Donne* appeared in 1899. Herbert Grierson's critical edition of the *Poems* followed a little over a decade later, and in 1921 an article by T. S. Eliot on «The Metaphysical Poets» launched Donne's modern reputation as the darling of what would come to be known as the “New Criticism”. For the New Critics, as Deborah Larson has recently remarked,

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 32-33.

21. *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Herbert J. C. GRIERSON, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1912), vol. 1, p. 373. Italics in the original. This Thomas Browne is apparently not to be identified with the author of *Religio Medici* and *Urn Burial*.

22. *Saint Augustines confessions*, trans. Williams WATTS (London, 1631). Watts was rector of St. Alban's, Wood Street, London. His “translation” is in fact a revision of the first English version (1620) of the *Confessions* by the infamous recusant Sir Toby Mathew, a close friend of Donne's. It formed the basis both for E. B. Pusey's translation in the first volume of the *Library of the Fathers* (1838) and for the version published in 1912 in the Loeb Classical Library.

«wit, paradox, conceit, and metaphor, instead of personality and biography, became the keys to understanding Donne<sup>23</sup>». Despite widespread recognition that Gosse's work was flawed, and a steady pressure of books and articles on almost every aspect of Donne's literary art, no new biography appeared until 1970, when the Clarendon Press issued R. C. Bald's posthumous *John Donne : A Life*<sup>24</sup>.

For any biographer of Donne who would depart from the hagiographic scheme imposed by Walton, the period from 1602 to 1615, and especially the months immediately preceding his ordination, is of critical importance. Certain questions are inevitable. Why did Donne hold out so long against ordination ? Why then, having apparently settled on a clerical career, did he continue to seek alternative employment ? What motivated his final choice of the «profession of divinity», as he calls it ? Bald's statement that «when the best has been said that can be said, it must be confessed that Donne's life during his last eighteen months as a layman does not present a particularly edifying spectacle..., at no period in his life does he appear less unselfish, more self-seeking» (300), while scarcely in the spirit of Walton, is more sympathetic than the judgments of some other modern scholars, who incline to see Donne as an out-and-out opportunist for whom the Church offered a last chance of promotion when all other avenues were closed<sup>25</sup>.

There is a potential dilemma here. The record of Donne's activities before 1615 conflicts with Walton's vision of him as a man whose only reason for resisting ordination was an overwhelming sense of his own unworthiness. Humility alone cannot explain Donne's conduct. Yet to suppose that his extraordinary success as a churchman – notably as a preacher – was obtained in spite of the fact that he would personally have preferred almost any other career to that of a divine, is to ascribe more to the workings of providence than the secular historical conscience will allow. Ambition alone cannot explain Donne's achievement. If we are to escape the dilemma threatened by an idealizing hagiography on the one hand and a reductive secularism on the other, we must, I think, take seriously our subject's idea of his new career as a «profession». By the time Donne resolved to profess divinity, he was apparently convinced that his personal aspirations and the office of an Anglican churchman could be adjusted. Taking a cue from Walton, but altering his scheme, I shall argue that he made this adjustment – or at least persuaded himself of its possibility – partly through a study of Augustine.

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23. Deborah Aldrich LARSON, *John Donne and Twentieth-Century Criticism* (London, 1989), p. 90.

24. (Reissued with corrections, 1986). My own account of Donne's life to 1615 follows Bald's.

25. For a brilliant and influential portrait of Donne as an ambitious careerist, see John CAREY, *John Donne : Life, Mind and Art* (London, 1981 ; repr. with an afterword, 1990).

## III. – A LITERARY PRODIGAL

The Donne of c.1602-15 was a place-seeker of an historically recognizable kind. Like many other middle-class Englishmen of this period, he had counted on the combination of a humanistic education and a legal training to start him on a career of civil service. Along with the financial security and social status such careers provided, they offered a sense of corporate identity that Donne manifestly craved. «I would fain do something», he declares in a letter written from Mitcham and dated by Gosse to 1608, «but that I cannot tell what is no wonder. For to chuse is to do ; but to be no part of any body, is to be nothing. At most, the greatest persons are but great wens and excrescences; men of wit and delightfull conversation but as moales for ornament, except they be so incorporated into the body of the world that they contribute something to the sustentation of the whole.» The next two sentences are worth a volume of biography :

«This I made account that I begun early, when I understood the study of our laws; but was diverted by the worst voluptuousness, which is an hydroptic, immoderate desire of human learning and languages – beautiful ornaments to great fortunes ; but mine needed an occupation, and a course which I thought I entered well into when I submitted myself to such a service as I thought might [have] employed those poor advantages which I had. And there I stumbled too, yet I would try again ; for to this hour I am nothing, or so little, that I am scarce subject and argument good enough for one of mine own letters...<sup>26</sup>»

Donne does not here speak explicitly of poetry. His reference to the “voluptuousness” of human learning nevertheless recalls the terms in which Elizabethan gentleman authors were wont to describe any literary activity – including the writing of light verse or prose fiction – that could be regarded as a distraction from the career of public service for which they had been formed. As Richard Helgerson has shown in the first of his two books on the construction of authorship in the English Renaissance, the well-to-do “prodigals” of the generation before Donne had turned repentance into a poetic art. What is more, many of them had actually turned from their early literary pursuits to follow socially “useful” careers in government or the church<sup>27</sup>. With these literary “amateurs”, as he styles them, Helgerson

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26. Letter to Sir Henry Goodyer, printed by Edmund GOSSE, *The Life and Letters of John Donne Dean of St. Paul's*, 2 vols. (London, 1899), vol. 1, p. 190-92 ; also quoted by WALTON, *Life of Donne*, p. 29-31. Emphasis added. According to CAREY, *John Donne*, p. 264 and *passim*, Donne suffered a «lasting sense of isolation from some greater whole», attributable «in the first instance, to his early experience of persecution as a member of a beleaguered Catholic minority, and later to his disjunction from the Catholic Church, with its accustomed pieties, as well as to the long-drawn-out failure of his secular career, and his disastrous marriage, which put the kind of employment on which he had set his heart beyond his reach.» For another attempt to place this letter in context, see Arthur F. MAROTTI, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, 1986), p. 194-95.

27. *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley, 1976).

contrasts two other classes of author, both, in their different ways, more “professional” : writers who, like Shakespeare, made a living from the London stage, and those like Edmund Spenser who, as “self-crowned laureates”, strove to assert a poetic calling that could stand comparison in terms of civic utility with any function of church or state. Donne, in Helgerson’s view, was an old-fashioned amateur living in an increasingly professional age. Unlike his contemporary Ben Jonson, he neither attended to the printing of his verses nor sought to establish any equivalence between his role as poet and that of other public servants<sup>28</sup>.

As a provisional placing of Donne in the “literary system” of his time, Helgerson’s analysis has much to commend it. However, the image of Donne as prodigal or literary amateur requires some modification in the light of passages such as the one just quoted. At first glance, the writer’s self-presentation in the Mitcham letter conforms closely to Helgerson’s model. Donne has tried to set himself in the way of public service but has twice stumbled, first by succumbing to an immoderate desire for humane learning and then (as his correspondent would have known) by rushing into marriage: he has been a voluptuary of the mind *and* of the senses. Prevented from following a conventional career, and unwilling to elevate (or debase) his writing to the status of a profession, the writer of the letter has no prospects in the society which Helgerson describes. So Donne himself may have felt, at least for a while. The confession that he is «scarce subject and argument enough for one of [his] own letters» ostensibly announces the joint ruin of social and literary ambition. Had Donne been more fittingly employed, he would have made a better subject for his own writing. Had he written differently (in another genre, after another “copy”) he might have made himself better employment. So we could develop his thought. But we should have to remind ourselves that Donne was in fact writing busily throughout this period of his life, and not just letters. «During the Mitcham years», Bald remarks, «[he] was nearer to being a professional author than at any other time – *except perhaps during the months in later life when he revised and rewrote a large number of his sermons*<sup>29</sup>». The qualification is revealing. Within a few years of writing the letter in which he laments that he is «no part of any body», Donne would be fully incorporated in a new role : as a preacher, and as the author of published sermons which he personally saw into print.

This change in his circumstances cannot be explained simply as a reversion to the type of the prodigal poet turned ecclesiastic. In resolving to profess

28. *Self-Crowned Laureates : Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Berkeley, 1983). Donne is described as «in some ways more conservative than his generation» (35), as one of those writers who «had no concern for the problem of how to make the voice of [their] generation into a vehicle for a major public literary career [and who] shared the short literary careers and gentlemanly disdain for literature that had characterized the Elizabethan amateurs» (108-9). Carey’s statement that «Donne is singular among English poets in that he never refers to his poetry except disparagingly» (John Donne, p. 56) needs to be qualified in the light of Helgerson’s study of the tropes of prodigality.

29. *John Donne*, p. 201. Emphasis added.

divinity Donne took a step forward, not a step back. His refashioning of the preachers's role is as deliberate and self-conscious as Spenser's or Jonson's refashioning of the role of the poet. In part it is a refashioning of the poet as preacher, and in that respect analogous to the achievement of Helgerson's self-crowned laureates in raising their poetic activity to the level of public service. But it is also, and perhaps more interestingly, a refashioning of the preacher *as poet* or literary artist. In effecting this transformation of himself and of his newly chosen profession, Donne did not work entirely by his own lights. As Spenser had looked to the example of Virgil and Jonson to that of Horace – and as Milton would look to Pindar, among others – so he could turn for precept and example to the great poet-orators of Christian antiquity, and first of all to Augustine.

#### IV. – DONNE'S EARLY READING OF AUGUSTINE

In one of his letters Donne interprets the existence of a vault beneath his library as a promise that he will die reading, «since my book and a grave are so near<sup>30</sup>». He certainly read prodigiously throughout his life, making notes as he did so. At his death, Walton records, «he left the resultance of 1,400 authors, most of them abridged and analysed with his own hand<sup>31</sup>». Those digests of Donne's reading have perished but a good number of his books have survived, and more than 200 of them have now been identified<sup>32</sup>. As Sir Geoffrey Keynes remarks, the great majority of these are works of theological controversy<sup>33</sup>. Texts of the Fathers are relatively few. Even if we allow, as we probably should, for the presence of a quantity of patristic material in the works of those «grave Divines, Gods conduits» that Donne claims as his «constant company» in the First Satire, and assume that an elegist's reference to his possession of «Divinity, great store, above the rest, / Not of the last Edition, but the best» was meant to include editions of the Fathers<sup>34</sup>, it remains the case that the progress, extent, and character of Donne's patristic reading must for the most part be inferred from his own writings. Among these it is the sermons that provide the largest and most challenging body of evidence.

According to Walton, when Donne was preparing to preach, he first chose his text, then «cast his sermon into a form, and his text into divisions ; and the next day betook himself to consult the Fathers, and so commit his meditations to his memory<sup>35</sup>». As a result of this procedure, there is hardly a sermon of

30. Letter to Sir Henry Goodyer, printed by GOSSE, *Life and Letters of John Donne*, vol. 1, p. 195-97.

31. *Life of Donne*, p. 58. For the history of these collections after Donne's death see NOVARR, *Walton's "Lives"*, p. 26.

32. See the list of «Books from Donne's Library» in KEYNES, *Bibliography*, p. 263-79.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

34. *Poems*, ed. GRIERSON, vol. 1, p. 145, 374.

35. *Life of Donne*, p. 58. Emphasis added.

his that does not offer a medley of patristic borrowings. Donne himself took care to note the provenance of the most important quotations, and his references (reproduced in the margins of the first printed texts) have guided scholars interested in reconstructing his library. In the tenth and final volume of their fine edition of the *Sermons*, George Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson provide a conspectus of Donne's patristic sources. «Augustine», they state, «is above all others the Father to whom Donne turned most constantly». In a sample tabulation of patristic references in three volumes of sermons from different periods of the preacher's career, Augustine emerges a clear favourite with a total of 226 citations, followed at a distance by Jerome (76), Chrysostom (58), Tertullian (50), Basil and Ambrose (37 each), and Gregory the Great (33). As this list suggests, Donne's reading of the Greek Fathers in general extended only so far as they had been translated into Latin or English. «Donne's quotations», we are told, «cover almost the whole field of Augustine's thought. They are drawn for the most part... from the *Confessions*, *De Civitate Dei*, the *Sermons*, *Enarrationes* on the Psalms, *De Doctrina Christiana*, and the *Epistles*, with occasional references to [certain other works]». In support of this statement, Potter and Simpson append a «List of Identified Passages from St. Augustine's Works Quoted or Referred to by Donne in the Sermons» that covers ten pages<sup>36</sup>.

The last volume of the new edition of Donne's *Sermons* appeared in 1962. Since then, several scholars have followed the lead of Potter and Simpson in studying the place of the Fathers in his preaching. Augustine has attracted a good deal of attention<sup>37</sup>, not least because of the presumed influence on Donne of Augustinian principles of biblical exegesis and Christian eloquence<sup>38</sup>. Those

36. *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. POTTER and Evelyn M. SIMPSON, 10 vols. (Berkeley, 1953-62). The discussion of patristic sources is at vol. 10, p. 345-64, the list of identified passages from Augustine following on p. 376-86. Note that only one of the passages listed, and that a doubtful one, is referred to the *De doctrina christiana*.

37. No attempt is made here to take account of the huge number of studies of, and references to, Donne's "Augustinianism", variously represented. In this area as in others it is possible that modern scholars have been too liberal in their use of the epithet "Augustinian"; for a timely caution see Tracy WARE, «Donne and Augustine: A Qualification», *Notes and Queries* 228 (1983), p. 425-27. My primary concern is to ascertain the manner and means of Donne's access to Augustine's writings.

38. See already Robert L. HICKEY, «Donne's Art of Preaching», *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 1 (1956), p. 65-74, who suggests that Donne's scattered remarks on the preacher's art could make «a fairly comprehensive handbook of logic and rhetoric comparable to *De Doctrina Christiana*» (74), and Dennis [B.] QUINN, «Donne's Christian Eloquence», *English Literary History* 27 (1960), p. 276-297, who argues convincingly, albeit without benefit of textual comparisons, that «[i]n his conception of Biblical eloquence... and in his habitual paralleling of pulpit and Biblical eloquence, Donne follows the tradition of Augustine» (286). In another article on «John Donne's Principles of Biblical Exegesis», (*Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 61 [1962], p. 313-29), Quinn evokes the preacher's «spiritual or Augustinian» approach to the Bible. Among more recent studies, special mention must be made of Janel M. MUELLER's annotated edition of Donne's *Prebend Sermons* (Cambridge [Mass.], 1971) which includes a discussion of his exegetical practice in the context of contemporary Anglican theory, much of it evidently informed by the *De doctrina christiana*; John S.

principles are of course most clearly stated in the *De doctrina christiana*. Despite the paucity of direct quotations from this treatise in the sermons themselves, there seems to be general agreement among Donne scholars that it played an important role in the formation of his pulpit manner. Thus far, however, no inquiry has been made into the nature and extent of Donne's early reading of Augustine. That the man who began to preach in 1615 was already acquainted with the major themes of the *De doctrina christiana* need not be disputed; given the pervasive influence of Augustine's treatise in the prior ecclesiastical tradition, it would be remarkable if he were not. But had he actually read the work for himself – and if so, under what conditions? In view of the claims later made for Donne's preaching by writers like Walton, it would seem important to establish the terms on which he encountered Augustine's thought, the more so since the *De doctrina christiana* provides the rationale for a socially responsible teaching of Scripture, and Donne in the period c.1602-15 was, as we have seen, actively seeking an occupation that would make him part of society again.

As students of the classical tradition know only too well, any reconstruction of an author's reading on the basis of his writing is beset with obstacles. In the case of the patristic readings of Renaissance authors, we confront a number of special problems, some of which have been touched upon already<sup>39</sup>. I shall make no attempt in the present study either to identify the editions in which Donne may have read Augustine, or (beyond a certain point) to specify the medieval and Renaissance compilers and commentators whose work may have conditioned his response. Such precision must await the time when we have a clear notion of the resources of patristic, biblical and other theological scholarship available to English readers in the early seventeenth century. For the moment, my aim is simply to assess the evidence for Donne's familiarity with Augustinian principles in their Augustinian formulation. Even so I have had to be highly selective in the choice of material to be surveyed. The scholar interested in Donne's literary formation up to the time of his first public sermon has to contend with a huge and heterogeneous body of texts: poems,

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CHAMBERLIN, *Increase and Multiply: Arts-of-Discourse Procedure in the Preaching of John Donne* (Chapel Hill, 1976), the most careful exploration to date of the sources and affiliations of Donne's homiletic theory; and P. G. STANWOOD and Heather R. ASALS, eds., *John Donne and the Theology of Language* (Columbia [Missouri], 1986). In the introduction to their anthology of texts from Donne's sermons, Stanwood and Asals observe that the leading ideas of the *De doctrina christiana* «are implicit in Donne's own theory and practice, and sometimes acknowledged, as in the passage from a late sermon that closes this book [= *Sermons*, ed. POTTER and SIMPSON, vol. 10, p. 148, referring to *De doctrina christiana* 2. 37. 55]» (4).

39. Above, p.176. For an exemplary treatment of these problems as they appear in the work of an earlier Continental preacher, see Richard WETZEL, «'Staupitz Augustinianus': An Account of the Reception of Augustine in his Tübingen Sermons», in *Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*. Essays in Honor of Damasus Trapp, O. S. A., ed. Heiko A. OBERMAN and Frank A. JAMES, III, in cooperation with Erick L. SAAK (Leiden, 1991), p. 72-115. Wetzel observes that Staupitz' «direct recourse to Augustine merges with the Augustinus receptus (via Lombard, Giles [of Rome] or others) and thus a quasi-humanist new experience emerges in which this ancient authority becomes quite contemporaneous» (78). As we shall see, Donne's case is not dissimilar.

letters, and other assorted prose. Much of this material is difficult to date exactly. For the sake of convenience, and because they offer the most obviously relevant evidence, I have confined the present inquiry to three prose works of the period c.1607-14 : *Biathanatos*, *Pseudo-Martyr*, and the *Essays in Divinity*. Of these, only the first and last contain clear indications of Donne's acquaintance with the *De doctrina christiana*. *Pseudo-Martyr* is included for the light that it sheds on the writer's developing ideas of the possible relation between his own literary activity and the profession of divinity. Although the results of such a limited survey must remain open to contradiction, they may help us begin to clarify the *textual* basis of Donne's alleged "Augustinianism".

«*A man of the most tender and delicate Conscience*»

The reader who comes to any of these early prose works from Donne's *Poems* is immediately struck by the apparatus of erudition that crowds their margins. In *Biathanatos*, as elsewhere, Donne is meticulous in recording his literary authorities. A list of "Authors cited in this Booke" inserted before the table of contents contains 173 items, of which at least 30 may be counted patristic. At the end of the list Donne adds a revealing (and, we may suspect, somewhat disingenuous) disclaimer :

«In citing these Authors, for those which I produce onely for Ornament, and Illustration, I have trusted mine owne old notes. Which though I have no reason to suspect, yet I confesse here my laziness; and that I did not refresh them with going to the Originall. Of those few, which I have not seene in the bookes themselves (for there are some such, even of places cited for greatest strength) besides the integrity of my purpose, I have this safe defence against any quarreller, that what place soever I cite from any Catholique *Autor*, if I have not consider'd the booke it selfe, I cite him from another Catholique Writer. And the like course I hold in the Reformers. So that I shall hardly be condemn'd of any false citation, except to make me Accessory, they pronounce one of theyr owne freinds principall.<sup>40</sup>»

Whatever interpretation we set on these words, we shall do well to consider all patristic references as potentially second-hand, unless or until we have reason to suppose that Donne had at some time consulted an integral text of the original work.

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40. *Biathanatos*. *A declaration of that paradox, or thesis, that selfe-homicide is not so naturally sinne, that it may never be otherwise*, ed. Ernest W. SULLIVAN, II (Newark [New Jersey], 1984), p. 5. All references are to this edition. Composed in 1607/8, *Biathanatos* was first printed in 1647. Sullivan bases his text on a Bodleian manuscript derived from the author's holograph ; the marginal annotations in this manuscript are in Donne's hand. According to the editor, the disclaimer concerning the accuracy of the citations was meant to apply to «the condition of the annotations and quotations in the copyist's manuscript» (p. xxxvii) - i. e. not to the text as finally annotated by Donne himself. The point is debatable.

The references to Augustine in *Biathanatos* serve to endorse this general principle. As we should expect, Donne has much to say about the treatment of suicide in Book One of the *De civitate dei*. I have not analyzed his citations of that work, but in view of the importance of certain passages for his argument it would be surprising if he had not at least checked them against “the Originall”. Another class of references, in this case allusions rather than citations, implies a general familiarity with the *Confessions*. At one point Donne refers to the «unurged confessions» of Augustine, Anselm, and Jerome (41). Elsewhere he speaks of Augustine’s «most zealous, and startling tendernes of Conscience» (107), and describes one of his own forebears, Sir Thomas More, as «a man of the most tender and delicate Conscience, that the world saw since *Aug[ustine]*» (62-63). Especially interesting is a passage in which Donne determines to «speake alittle of *S[aint] Aug[ustine]* in generall, because from him are derived allmost all the reasons of the others [sc. for rejecting suicide], he writing purposely thereof, from the 17 to the 27 Chap[ter] of his first Booke *De Civitate Dei*». He then asserts that while Augustine is almost without rival «in exposition of places of Scripture, which he allwayes makes so liquid, and pervious... yet in practique Learning, and morall divinity he was of so nice, and refine, and rigorous a conscience (perchance to redeeme his former Licenciousnes, as it falls out often in such Convertites, to be extreemly zealous) that for our direction in actions of this life, *S[aint] Hierome*, and some others may be thought sometymes fitter to adhere unto» (77). Although we may doubt whether any of these sentiments is original to Donne, the confidence of his judgment on Augustine’s character argues a full acquaintance with the story of his life. Citations of, or possible allusions to, other works by Augustine in this treatise are too scattered to allow any conclusions to be drawn regarding the nature of the author’s source, except in the case of the *De doctrina christiana*.

«We shall no where find a better portrait of Charity», Donne announces towards the end of his discussion, «then that which *S[aint] Aug[ustine]* hath drawne: She loves not that, which should not be loved ; She neglects not that which should be Loved ; She bestowes not more Love upon that which deserves lesse ; Nor doth she æqually Love more and lesse Worthynesse ; nor upon æquall Worthynesse, bestowe more and Lesse love» (125). Here we recognize Augustine’s description of the *dilectio ordinata*, or “orderly love”, taken from *De doctrina christiana* 1. 27. 28<sup>41</sup>. We should not suppose, however, that the author of *Biathanatos* had read it in that context. In

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41. «Ille autem iuste et sancte vivit, qui rerum integer aestimator est; ipse est autem, qui ordinatam habet dilectionem, ne aut diligat, quod non est diligendum, aut non diligat, quod diligendum est, aut amplius diligat, quod minus diligendum est, aut aequè diligat, quod vel minus vel amplius diligendum est, aut minus vel amplius, quod aequè diligendum est». Citations of the *De doctrina christiana* follow the edition of J. MARTIN, *CCSL* 32. Donne continues : «a.To this Charity the same blessed and happy father proportions this growth *Inchoated, Increasd, Grown great, and Perfited ; and this last is saith he, when in respect of it, we contemne this Life* [.] And yet he acknowledgeth a higher Charity then this[.] For b.*P[eter] Lombard* allowing Charity this growth *Beginning, Proficient, Perfect, More, and most Perfect* he cites c.*S[aint] Aug[ustine]* who calls *That perfect Charity to be redy to dy for another...*»

accordance with Donne's usual practice, the next three quotations are all keyed to marginal notes stating their provenance. The first quotation, concerning the growth of charity, is from Augustine's *De natura et gratia*. The second is from Peter Lombard : the reference, printed as *Lomb. l. 3. Dist. 3* (i.e. Book Three, *Distinctio 3* of the *Sentences*), ought to read *l. 3. Dist. 29*. At the end of that section of the *Sentences*, immediately before the heading *Distinctio 30* [XXX], which presumably lies behind the incorrect figure 3 in Donne's note, we find the phrase attributed by Donne to the Lombard and the latter's citation of Augustine's fifth tractate on the First Epistle of John, which is Donne's third reference<sup>42</sup>. Since *Distinctio 29* is entitled *De ordine diligendi*, it comes as no surprise to find that it opens with a long quotation from the *De doctrina christiana*, beginning with the very definition of the *dilectio ordinata* that Donne has just quoted without a reference<sup>43</sup>. His immediate source for the quotation is thus almost certainly the *Sentences*, not the *De doctrina christiana* itself.

Another quotation in a similar style occurs in the closing pages of *Biathanatos*. There Donne writes : «But it is well noted by *Alcuinus*, (and I think from S[aint] *Aug[ustine]*). *That though there bee foure things which wee must Love, Yet there is no precept given upon any more then two, God, and our Neighbour*». (144). A note refers the reader to a letter of Alcuin, but the ultimate source of the idea is again Book One of the *De doctrina christiana* (1. 23. 22). I do not know where Donne found the passage from Alcuin, but it is easier to suppose that his Alcuinian source referred him to Augustine without specifying book or chapter than that Alcuin's letter reminded him of something he had previously read for himself in an integral text of the *De doctrina christiana*. In fact, Donne would have found Augustine's exact words in Book Three, *Distinctio 28* of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, a column or so before the passages quoted earlier, so he may simply have remembered reading them there in the context of other excerpts from Augustine.

The evidence of *Biathanatos* indicates that by 1607/8 Donne was familiar with the story of Augustine's life, may have read the *Confessions*, and was used to collecting quotations from Augustine's works from the writings of later theologians. It also strongly suggests that he had hitherto lacked either reason or opportunity to turn the pages of the *De doctrina christiana*.

«*Writing in Divinity, though no professed Divine*»

Donne's next major prose work, and the first to appear in print, was *Pseudo-Martyr*, «wherein out of certaine propositions and gradations, this conclusion is evicted. That those which are of the Romane Religion in this

42. *PL* 192, col. 818.

43. *PL* 192, col. 816 : «Ordinem autem diligendi Augustinus insinuat, dicens, in libro de doctrina christiana I, cap. 27 : Ipse est, etc».

Kingdome, may and ought to take the Oath of Allegiance<sup>44</sup>». *Pseudo-Martyr* contains few references to Augustine and none, so far as I can ascertain, to either the *Confessions* or the *De doctrina christiana*. It does, however, provide evidence of Donne's sense of literary and religious profession that can help us to understand his recourse to Augustine in the roughly contemporary *Essays in Divinity*. In this connection, the two most significant passages in *Pseudo-Martyr* appear in the author's preface addressed to «the [Roman Catholic] Priestes, and Jesuits, and to their Disciples in this Kingdome». There Donne describes the long process of study and prayer by which he had rid himself of those «impressions of the Romane religion» received in his early years, continuing :

«And this course held in rectifying and reducing mine understanding and judgment, might justifie & excuse my forwardnes ; if I shold seeme to any to have intruded and usurped the office of others, in writing of Divinity and spirituall points, having no ordinary calling to that function. For, to have alwaies abstained from this declaration of my selfe, had bene to betray, and to abandon, and prostitute my good name to their misconceivings and imputations ; who thinke presently, that hee hath no Religion, which dare not call his Religion by some newer name then *Christian*. And then, for my writing in Divinity, though no professed Divine ; all Ages, all Nations, all Religions, even yours, which is the most covetous and lothest to divide, or communicate with the Layety, any of the honours reserved to the Clergie, afford me abundantly examples, and authorities for such an undertaking. (sig. B3<sup>r</sup>)»

Even if we discount the possibility that *Pseudo-Martyr* was commissioned by King James I (as has sometimes been suggested), we shall not miss the author's awareness of the privilege of "writing in Divinity". Although Donne rejects the notion that such activity is reserved exclusively to "professed Divines" or "Clergie", the manner in which he harps on "office", "calling", "function" and "honours" indicates that he was acutely conscious of venturing on new and potentially dangerous ground, not just as a convert from Roman Catholicism but as an intruder from another field of literary endeavour. That he had good reason for his misgivings may be confirmed by the comment of a hostile critic on *Pseudo-Martyr*, «that it had byn much more for [the author's] reputation to have kept himselfe within his compasse, and not to have passed *ultra crepidam*, that is to say, beyond his old occupation of making Satyres (wherein he hath some talent, and may play the foole without controle) then to presume to write bookes of matters in controversy<sup>45</sup>».

44. (London, 1612). References are to the original edition, available in a facsimile reprint with introduction by Francis Jacques SYPHER (Delaware [New York], 1974). The new critical edition by Anthony RASPA (1993) unfortunately appeared too late for me to take advantage of it : Raspa's annotations (continuing the work done by Ernest Sullivan for *Biathanatos*) are a valuable addition to our knowledge of Donne's literary sources.

45. *A Supplement to the discussion of M. D. Barlowes answere...* (London, 1613), p. 107, cited by KEYNES, *Bibliography*, p. 5.

For all his talent in it, Donne's «old occupation of making Satyres» was not an occupation in the sense that the profession and writing of divinity might be, and Donne (as we know from his Mitcham letter) was currently looking for something to “do”. The theme of fit employment recurs most poignantly at the close of the preface to this new work. «Wee are not sent into this world, to *Suffer*», Donne writes, «but to *Doe*, and to perform the Offices of societie, required by our severall callings» (sig. E1<sup>v</sup>)<sup>46</sup>. Had he remained constant in the faith of his youth, he would now have had the chance to suffer death for it; instead he claimed an “office” or “calling” in the world. By writing against martyrdom, Donne makes a “declaration of himself”, both as a Christian and as a writer. Here he refrains from listing the abundant “examples and authorities” that encouraged him in this undertaking. In another work of the same period, the *Essays in Divinity*, he makes it plain that one of them was that earlier convert of «most zealous and startling tendernes of Conscience», likewise a writer in divinity before he was a professed divine, Augustine.

«*Unvocal preaching*»

Donne's *Essays in Divinity* take the form of extended meditations on the opening verses of Genesis and Exodus. They were first published twenty years after his death, by his son<sup>47</sup>. In a preface to the reader, the younger Donne announces that the essays were «printed from an exact Copy, under the Authors own hand.» He further informs us that they represent «the voluntary sacrifices of severall hours, when he had many debates betwixt God and himself, whether he were worthy, and competently learned to enter into Holy Orders» (4). This statement accords well with the character of the pieces themselves, which are aptly described as “essays” – that is, as trials or experiments in what was for their author a novel kind of literary expression: “divinity” or scriptural exegesis<sup>48</sup>. Donne himself presents these compositions as written “sermons” or “unvocal preachin” (41), and is insistently aware of his newly assumed role as biblical interpreter. As Evelyn Simpson observes, he was «beginning to think of himself as a preacher... prepar[ing] himself for a new career in which preaching was to be one of his principal tasks<sup>49</sup>». The

46. Donne's words evoke the famous boast of C. Mucius Scaevola: «et facere et pati fortia Romanum est» (Livy 2. 12). Cf. MILTON, *Paradise Lost* 1. 158, 2. 199.

47. *Essays in Divinity; by the late Dr Donne, Dean of S Paul's. Being several disquisitions, interwoven with meditations and prayers: before he entred into holy orders* (London, 1651). References are to the critical edition by Evelyn M. SIMPSON (Oxford, 1952).

48. The use of the term “essay” for a short, meditative or discursive composition in prose was of fairly recent introduction in England, appearing first in the title of Francis Bacon's *Essays* (1597). Of course there is no certainty that the elder Donne would have chosen the title *Essays in Divinity*, had he himself published the work.

49. *Essays*, p. x, xxiv. Of Donne's sources in this work, the editor remarks: «It is difficult to decide how much material he drew from the Fathers, and how much from the great commentaries [on Genesis] of Pererius, Paraeus, Calvin, and others, who summarized the

*Essays* apparently belong to the period immediately preceding Donne's ordination in 1615. At that critical juncture of his life, he turned to Augustine for warrant and example.

*In the Beginning God created Heaven and Earth.* With this *in principio* Donne marks his own beginning as a biblical commentator. «I do not therefore sit at the door, and meditate upon the threshold», he continues, «because I may not enter further...» The Scriptures are accessible even to laymen. And yet they have this property, «that to strangers they open but a little wicket, and he that will enter, must stoop and humble himself<sup>50</sup>. To reverend Divines, who by an ordinary calling are Officers and Commissioners from God, the great Doors are open» (5). «Let me», says Donne, «with *Lazarus* lie at the threshold, and beg their crumbs». There follows a crumb from Augustine's table : «*Discite a me*, says our blessed Saviour, *Learn of me*, as Saint *Augustine* enlarges it well, not to do Miracles, nor works exceeding humanity; but *quia mitis sum*, learn to be humble» (5). The passage quoted, as Jessopp notes, is from one of Augustine's sermons on St. Matthew's Gospel (*Sermo* 69. 1. 2), though Donne need not have read it in that context.

The same self-deprecating tone is maintained throughout the *Essays*. Later Donne speaks of those «such as I, who are but Interlopers, not staple Merchants, nor of the company, nor within the commission of Expositors of the Scriptures» (32, emphasis added). When he does finally cross the "threshold" of Scripture and begin expounding Genesis, the transition is made by means of a passage in quotation marks – part quotation, part improvisation – derived from Books One and Eleven of the *Confessions*. Donne condenses the narrative of Augustine's long and tortuous approach to Scripture into a single paragraph linking the invocation of the opening of Book One to the moment in Book Eleven when the author confronts the first chapter of

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opinions of the Fathers on doubtful points. He certainly knew Augustine [i.e. the *Confessions*] at first hand, and quoted him at considerable length. After Donne's ordination he studied the Latin Fathers assiduously, but at this early stage he may well have relied chiefly on the commentaries» (101). We may note also the opinion of Arnold WILLIAMS, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 37 : «Donne demonstrably used the commentaries. He cites several of them in the *Essays in Divinity*. On the other hand, he also knew the fathers. There is absolutely no means of finding out whether in a specific instance Donne has gone directly to Augustine, Chrysostom, or Basil, or whether he has contented himself with Pererius' summary.» Simpson's notes on the sources of the *Essays*, on which I have drawn freely, reproduce in part the work of an earlier editor, Augustus Jessopp. According to Walton, Donne devoted the three years preceding his ordination «to an incessant study of textual divinity, and to the attainment of a greater perfection in the learned languages, Greek and Hebrew» (*Life of Donne*, p. 38). For his limited acquaintance with the Hebrew and Greek texts of the bible, see D. C. ALLEN, «Dean Donne Sets His Text», *English Literary History* 10 (1943), p. 208-229.

50. Cf. *Confessions*, 3. 5. 9. This passage would have been familiar to Donne from its use in the Elizabethan *Book of Homilies* : see *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and a Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570)*, ed. Ronald B. BOND (Toronto, 1987), p. 65.

Genesis<sup>51</sup>. Then, as Augustine had prayed, «Audiam et intellegam, quomodo in principio fecisti caelum et terram», and continued, «scripsit hoc Moyses...», (11. 3. 5), Donne confides :

«Let me in thy beloved Servant *Augustine's* own words, when with an humble boldnesse he begg'd the understanding of this passage, say, *Moses writ this* [...] Thus did he whom thou hadst filled with faith, desire reason and understanding ; as men blest with great fortunes desire numbers of servants, and other Complements of honour.» (15)

Augustine's imaginary interview with Moses, itself a dramatic illustration both of the importance of human *praedicatio* and of its dependence on divine illumination, here becomes the occasion for a secondary encounter between Donne and Augustine which, fleeting as it is (Donne's next quotation is from Thomas Aquinas), serves in similar fashion to accredit a new *praedicator*. But there is more to the meeting than that. Donne does not just join Augustine on the common ground of Genesis. In borrowing his words he also momentarily takes his place, and in doing so shows himself to be sensitive to one of the most original features of the *Confessions*. In that work Augustine recreates the process of his own approach to Scripture so affectingly that, by the time Book Eleven is reached, the susceptible reader is implicated in a narrative that virtually requires him or her to stand in for the author, or at least accompany him, as he enters the biblical text<sup>52</sup>. Only such a reader – one, that is to say, who had read the entire work with a measure of sympathy – could make as

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51. The full text reads : «'In the Beginning whereof, O onely Eternall God, of whose being, beginning, or lasting, this beginning is no period, nor measure ; which art no Circle, for thou hast no ends to close up ; which art not within this *All*, for it cannot comprehend thee ; nor without it, for thou fillest it ; nor art it thyself, for thou madest it [cf. *Confessions* 1.2.3] ; which having decreed from all eternity, to do thy great work of Mercy, our Redemption in the fulnesse of time, didst now create *time* it selfe to conduce to it ; and madest thy glory and thy mercy equal thus, that though thy glorious work of Creation were first, thy mercifull work of Redemption was greatest. Let me in thy beloved Servant *Augustine's* own words, when with an humble boldnesse he begg'd the understanding of this passage, say, *Moses writ this, but is gon from me to thee ; if he were here, I would hold him, and beseech him for thy sake, to tell me what he meant. If he spake Hebrew, he would frustrate my hope ; but if Latine, I should comprehend him. But from whence should I know that he said true ? Or when I knew it, came that knowledge from him ? No, for within me there is a truth, not Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarous ; which without organs, without noyse of Syllables, tels me true, and would enable me to say confidently to Moses, thou say'st true.*' Thus did he whom thou hadst filled with faith, desire reason and understanding ; as men blest with great fortunes desire numbers of servants, and other Complements of honour.» The probable echo of Book One of the *Confessions* in the earlier part of the passage is noted by Simpson both in her commentary on the *Essays* and in her earlier *Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford, 1924), p. 197. Other quotations from Books Eleven and Twelve occur at *Essays*, p. 19, line 35 and p. 34, line 17.

52. For fuller discussion of this feature of the *Confessions*, see my «Conference and Confession : Literary Pragmatics in Augustine's 'Apologia contra Hieronymum'», forthcoming in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*.

much as Donne does of the opportunity for writerly association offered by the opening chapters of Book Eleven.

Thus by submitting to the logic of the Augustinian narrative of conversion and biblical initiation Donne is finally able to thrust himself into «the company» of professed divines. It is true that in abridging the *Confessions* in the *Essays* he leaves out the story of Augustine's conversion, on which he had earlier laid such emphasis in *Biathanatos*. He does not, however, discard the prodigal and penitential burden of the saint's autobiography, for this is largely recuperated in two prayers annexed to the *Essays*, the second of which expresses the profoundly Augustinian hope that the author may «in despite of Me, be of so much use to thy glory, that by thy mercy to my sin, other sinners may see how much sin thou canst pardon» (97).

It will be clear by now that Donne entered on his career as a public interpreter of Scripture clinging to Augustine's coat-tails. That he not only knew but had carefully meditated the *Confessions* by the time he wrote the *Essays in Divinity* is beyond reasonable doubt. Had he also found time to study the *De doctrina christiana*? My own impression is that while he had probably still not read the work through, he was in possession of several of its guiding principles. More adventurously, I would suggest that he was now acquainted with the prologue to Augustine's treatise, if not necessarily at first hand. A brief study of five passages from the *Essays* will help justify these assertions.

#### *Biblical literacy*

The first relevant passage occurs while Donne is still lingering on the "threshold" of Scripture, considering the Bible in its dual relation to the other "Book of life" (the eternal register of God's elect referred to in the Apocalypse) and the Book of Creatures :

«And as our orderly love to the understanding this Book of life [i.e. the Bible], testifies to us that our names are in the other [i.e. the Book of the Elect] ; so is there another book subordinate to this, which is *liber creaturarum*. Of the first book [i.e. the Book of the Elect], we may use the words of *Esay*, *It is a book that is sealed up, and if it be delivered to one (Scienti literas) that can read, he shall say, I cannot, for it is sealed.* So far removed from the search of learning are those eternall Decrees and Rolls of God... Of the Second book, which is the *Bible*, we may use the next verse ; *The book shall be given (As interpreters agree, open ) Nescienti Literas, to one which cannot read: and he shall be bid read, and shall say, I cannot read.* By which we learn, that as all mankind is naturally one flock feeding upon one Common, and yet for society and peace, Propriety, Magistracy, and distinct Functions are reasonably induc'd ; so, though all our soules have interest in this their common pasture, the book of life, (for even the ignorant are bid to read) yet the Church has wisely hedged us in so farr, that all men may know, and cultivate, and manure their own part, and not adventure upon great reserv'd mysteries, nor trespass upon this book, without inward humility, and outward interpretations. For it is not enough to have *objects*,

and *eyes* to see, but you must have *light* too. The first book is then impossible ; the second difficult; But of the third book, the book of *Creatures*, we will say the 18<sup>th</sup> verse, *The deaf shall hear the word of this book, and the eyes of the blinde shall see out of obscurity.*» (7)

The mention of “orderly love” reminds us again of *De doctrina christiana* 1. 27. 28, which we have already seen quoted by Donne in another context. More telling, however, is the application of Isaiah 29 :12 («The book shall be given to one who cannot read», etc.) to the interpretation of the Bible. The verse had been a *locus classicus* for the obscurity of Scripture since Origen. What is notable in this instance is Donne’s use of it to specify a “distinct Function” of biblical interpretation within the “society” of the Church. Inward humility, we are told, will not ensure access to the mysteries of Scripture, unless it be joined with the “outward interpretations” of those who are, as it were, biblically literate. Donne here echoes the themes of the prologue to the *De doctrina christiana*. Following Augustine, he presents biblical understanding as a kind of literacy<sup>53</sup>. Like him, he insists that certain members of the Christian community (in Donne’s case, the Anglican clergy) have a special responsibility in this regard. It is possible that his conclusion – that «it is not enough to have *objects*, and *eyes* to see, but you must have *light* too» – contains a reminiscence of the optical analogy employed by Augustine to justify his treatise<sup>54</sup>.

#### *The example of St. Antony*

The second, and most obvious, reference to the *De doctrina christiana* in Donne’s *Essays* occurs in a discussion of charitable giving :

«For, God would not, saith Saint *Ambrose*, that we should pour out, but distribute our wealth. So that for precise Moderation herein precept will not serve; but that prayer of that most devout Abbot *Antony* (of whom Saint *Augustine* says, that without knowledge of letters, he rehearsed, and expounded all the Scriptures) *Deus det nobis gratiam Discretionis.*» (67)

53. Compare especially *De doctrina christiana, prooem.* 9 : «Qui legit audientibus litteris, utique quas agnoscit enuntiat ; qui autem ipsas litteras tradit, hoc agit, ut alii quoque legere noverint, uterque tamen id insinuat, quod accepit. Sic etiam qui ea, quae in scripturis intelligit, exponit audientibus tamquam litteras, quas agnoscit, pronuntiat lectoris officio ; qui autem praecepit, quomodo intellegendum sit, similis est tradenti litteras, hoc est praecipienti quomodo legendum sit.» See further P. BRUNNER, «Charismatische und methodische Schriftauslegung nach Augustins Prolog zu ‘De doctrina christiana’», *Kerygma und Dogma* 1 (1955), p. 59-69, 85-103.

54. Compare *De doctrina christiana, prooem.* 3 : «Et illi ergo et isti me reprehendere desinant et LUMEN OCULORUM divinitus sibi praeberi deprecentur. Non enim si possum membrum meum ad ALIQUID DEMONSTRANDUM movere, possum etiam OCULOS accendere, quibus vel ipsa demonstratio mea vel etiam illud, quod volo demonstrare, cernatur.»

Replying to the arguments of a *tertium genus reprehensorum* who claimed to be able to interpret Scripture by divine gift without benefit of rules of the kind he was proposing, Augustine had reminded these people that even they needed human instruction in “letters” before they could read the Bible, whereas some, like the hermit Antony, allegedly obtained a perfect understanding of the Scripture *sine ulla scientia litterarum*<sup>55</sup>. Donne evidently knew this passage and, as a marginal reference (*De doctrina christiana*) shows, where it came from. The knowledge may have been second-hand. If it was, his secondary source must have supplied at least some of the context. Donne says that Antony “expounded” the Scriptures, which is more than Augustine says, but perfectly in accord with the intention of the prologue to the *De doctrina christiana*.

### *Biblical obscurity as a source of delight*

The evidence of these first two passages suggests that by the time he came to compose the *Essays*, Donne had caught the spirit of the prologue to the *De doctrina christiana*, perhaps even that he had read part of the treatise. On the most optimistic view, a later excursus on the pleasure experienced by “great wits” in the solution of difficulties in the Bible could be taken to prove that he had got as far as Book Two. Having emphasized the importance of numbers in the Bible, Donne is obliged to account for the chronological inconsistencies of the historical books of the Old Testament :

«The generall reasons why God admits some such diversities in his book, prevail also for this place which is now under consideration ; which are, first, To make men sharpe and industrious in the inquisition of truth, he withdrawes it from present apprehension, and obviousness. For naturally great wits affect the reading of obscure books, wrastle and sweat in the explication of prophetes, digg and thresh out the words of unlegible hands, resuscitate and bring to life again the mangled, and lame fragmentary images and characters in Marbles and Medals, because they have a joy and complacency in the victory and achievement thereof.» (56)

As the restatement of an Augustinian principle in terms of Renaissance ideals of antiquarian scholarship, this account of the pleasures of the biblical text may conceivably testify to the influence of the *De doctrina christiana*. It

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55. *Ibid.*, 4 : «recordentur se tamen per homines didicisse vel litteras nec propterea sibi ab Antonio sancto et perfecto viro insultari debere, qui sine ulla scientia litterarum scripturas divinas et memoriter audiendo tenuisse et prudenter cogitando intellexisse predicatur.» Donne also refers to this passage in a letter to Sir H. Goodyer written around the same time as the *Essays* : «For divers minds out of the same thing often draw contrary conclusions, as Augustine thought devout Anthony to be therefore full of the Holy Ghost, because not being able to read, he could say the whole Bible, and interpret it ; and Thy[r]a]eus the Jesuit, for the same reason, doth think all the Anabaptists to be possessed» (GOSSE, *Life and Letters of Donne*, vol. 1, p. 184).

cannot, however, be urged as evidence that Donne had consulted Augustine's work for himself. Such ideas had long been part of the common stock of Christian literary theory and Donne would have encountered them repeatedly in his study of medieval and later commentators. Indeed, even to suppose that he associated the notion of Scripture's "delightful obscurity" with Augustine seems hazardous in the light of the two quotations which follow.

«*Res*» and «*verba*» in the Bible

«And as *Lyra* notes, being perchance too Allegoricall and Typick in this, it [*sc.* the Bible] hath this common with all other books, that the *words* signifie *things* ; but hath this in particular, that all the *things* signifie *other things*.» (8)

«*Frui/uti*»

«In one word, if I do not *frui* (which is, set my delight, and affection only due to God) but *Uti* the Creatures of this world, this world is mine...» (36)

In both cases, Augustinian terminology helps to make a point in passing. However, there is no reference to Augustine, let alone to the *De doctrina christiana*. For the theory of biblical signification, Donne is content to invoke the authority of Nicholas of Lyra<sup>56</sup>. For the distinction between use and enjoyment, a marginal note refers us once again to the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Such usage makes it unlikely that the author of the *Essays* had a first-hand acquaintance with the main body of Augustine's treatise.

V. – EPILOGUE

In Book One of the *Essays in Divinity* Donne advances no further than the first verse of Genesis. Many years later, at the opposite end of his career as a divine, he would choose as his text for a Whitsunday sermon at St. Paul's the latter part of the second verse of the same book : *And the Spirit of God moved*

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56. A copy of Lyra's commentary on the Vulgate, in six volumes with the *Glossa Ordinaria*, was presented by Donne to the library of Lincoln's Inn in 1622 : KEYNES, *Bibliography*, p. 279 ; BALD, *Life of Donne*, p. 382. Chamberlin comments : «It is peculiar that Donne does not recognize this doctrine about sacred language to be Augustine's since he refers elsewhere in the *Essays* to the *De doctrina christiana* » (*Increase and Multiply*, p. 104). As we have seen, such references need not imply any more general acquaintance with the text in question. Augustine does not, in fact, say that all things in the Bible signify other things (cf. *De doctrina christiana* 3. 10. 14 ). Nor does Lyra. See also QUINN, «John Donne's Principles of Biblical Exegesis», p. 315, and Winfried SCHLEINER, *The Imagery of John Donne's Sermons* (Providence : Brown University Press, 1970), p. 186.

upon the face of the waters. After declaring his intention of considering these words «first, literally in the first, and then spiritually in the second Creation», he would continue :

«First then, undertaking the consideration of the literall sense, and after, of the spirituall, we joyne with S. Augustine, *Sint castae deliciae meae Scripturae tuae* ; Lord I love to be conversant in thy Scriptures, let my conversation with thy Scriptures be a chast conversation ; that I discover no nakednesse therein ; offer not to touch any thing in thy Scriptures, but that, that thou hast vouchsafed to unmask, and manifest unto me : *Nec fallar in eis, nec fallam ex eis* ; Lord, let not me mistake the meaning of thy Scriptures, nor mis-lead others, by imputing a false sense to them. *Non frustra scribuntur*, sayes he...<sup>57</sup>»

“Joining”, or rejoining, Augustine at *Confessions* 11. 2. 3, he would then offer a *retractatio* of the ensuing chapters concerning «the exposition of dark places» in Scripture, to leave him on a phrase from Book Twelve (12. 30. 41), developed in a manner consistent with the hermeneutic principles of the *Confessions* and *De doctrina christiana* : «So far I will goe, saies he, so far will we, in his modesty and humility accompany him, as still to propose, *Quod luce veritatis, quod fruge utilitatis excellit*, such a sense as agrees with other Truths, that are evident in other places of Scripture, and such a sense as may conduce most to edification» (95). Returning once more to the *Confessions* in order to consider the meaning of the phrase «The Spirit of God», he would himself confess : «I am loath to be parted from this father, and he is loath to be parted from, for he sayes this in more then one place ; Lord thou hast enamoured mee, made me in love; let me enjoy that that I love ; That is, the holy Ghost» (101). Most significantly, it is Augustine’s often-repeated prayer *Da quod amo* that inspires the preacher’s highly personal treatment of the operation of the Holy Spirit (though the comparison with the human “artificer” was almost certainly suggested by the *homo artifex* of *Confessions* 11. 5. 7) :

«The moving of the holy Ghost upon me, is, as the moving of the minde of an Artificer, upon that piece of work that is then under his hand. A Jeweller, if he would make a jewell to answer the form of any flower, or any other figure, his minde goes along with his hand, and he thinks in himself, a Ruby will conduce best to the expressing of this, and an Emeraud of this. *The holy Ghost undertakes every man amongst us, and would make every man fit for Gods service, in some way, in some profession* ; and the holy Ghost sees, that one man profits most by one way, another by another, and moves their zeal to pursue those wayes, and those meanes, by which, in a rectified conscience, they find most profit. And except a man have this sense, what doth him most good, and a desire to pursue that, the holy Ghost doth not move, nor stir up a zeale in him.» (101, emphasis added)

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57. *Sermons*, vol. 9, p. 94. The sermon in this form was preached in 1629.

However they may have struck Donne's audience in 1629, the autobiographical import of these reflections is plain enough to the modern reader. Like Augustine before him, and with his help, this English poet and orator had come to regard the ministry of the Word as a "profession" profitable both to himself and to his fellow men. No wonder he was loath to part from his illustrious predecessor.

An extension of the present inquiry into the sermons which Donne preached from 1615 onwards would perhaps enable us to trace the stages of a more complete assimilation of the *De doctrina christiana* than is discernible in his writings of the preceding period. It would show, I suspect, that Donne persisted until the end of his life in associating the theoretical precepts stated most clearly by Augustine in the *De doctrina christiana* with the practical example of the latter's own approach to Scripture as represented in the *Confessions*. For this English "convertite", it seems, Augustine's autobiography provided a compelling model of the movement from a personal religious *confession* to a public, literary, and artistic *profession* of divinity, a model which (in accordance with Augustine's own intentions) encompassed and completed the *De doctrina christiana*.

The convergence of these two literary and spiritual careers is not without significance for the history of the English Renaissance. In determining to write (in Walton's phrase) "after the copy" of Augustine, Donne not only found a fit profession for himself, he also helped restore the art of sacred eloquence in England to a status approaching that to which the bishop of Hippo and his Greek and Latin contemporaries had first raised it, twelve hundred years earlier, in another age of religious renewal and literary experimentation<sup>58</sup>.

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SUMMARY : Donne's first biographer, Izaak Walton, represents him as a second St. Augustine and there is general agreement among modern scholars that the African Father exercised a powerful influence over the early seventeenth-century English poet-preacher. By what means and in what manner did Donne become acquainted with Augustine's writings and thought? How much of his knowledge of his literary oeuvre was obtained at first hand? A sample analysis of Donne's prose works from the years immediately preceding his ordination in 1615 reveals a general familiarity with the *Confessions* and some awareness of the main tenets of the *De doctrina christiana*. It appears that Donne drew heavily on Augustinian precept and example in order to reconcile his own literary and social aspirations with the office of an

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58. While Donne's career put Walton in mind of Augustine, this was not the only patristic comparison to occur to his contemporaries. We may note also these lines from a poem «In Memory of Doctor Donne» by R. B.: «Mee thinkes I see him in the pulpit standing, / Not eares, or eyes, but all mens hearts commanding, / Where we that heard him, to our selves did faine / Golden Chrysostome was alive againe...» (*Poems*, ed. GRIERSON, vol. 1, p. 386).

Anglican churchman. The record of his early encounter with Augustinian principles and formulas provides an instructive instance of the way in which ideas of the role of the Christian reader, writer, and orator promulgated in late antiquity shaped literary careers and forms of literary activity during the English Renaissance.