JOHN DONNE:

CONSCIENCE: THE TOUCHSTONE WITHIN

by

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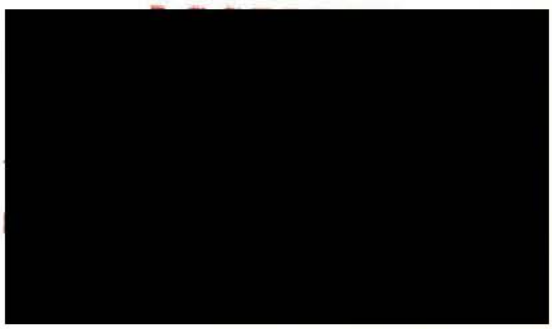

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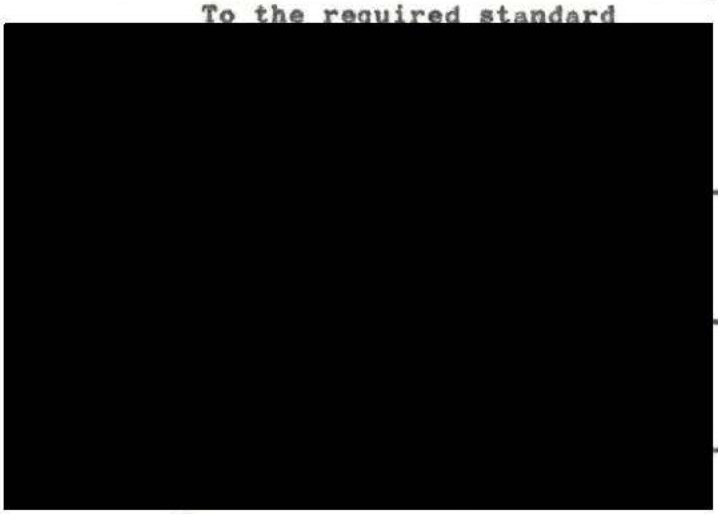

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This thesis seeks to prove that a definite change takes place in John Donne's attitude towards the role that conscience plays in man's moral and spiritual life. In order to show in what areas of thought this change of attitude can be seen, the Divine Poems are compared with and contrasted to Donne's statements in his Sermons.

The witness of conscience is the subject of chapter one, and this chapter points out Donne's struggle in the Holy Sonnets with intensely strong feelings of guilt. However, in the Sermons, Donne talks about a peace and an assurance, or as he puts it, serenitas conscientiae, that he enjoys once his conscience is rectified. This chapter also discusses how he achieves this rectification of conscience. Augustine's influence on Donne's Holy Sonnets is also mentioned, and parallels are drawn between Augustine's struggle with an accusing conscience as described in the Confessions and Donne's own struggle with feelings of guilt.

The question of authority is the subject of chapter two. A comparison of Donne's early works with his later sermons shows once again that his attitude changes. In Satire III, for example, the only authority that Donne recognizes is the authority of conscience. However, the sermons preached at a later date make it apparent that Donne's position modified. At one point, he advises his congregation

"to harken unto those men whom God has placed over them for the rectifying of conscience" (IV, 222). Aquinas' and Calvin's statements about conscience are also discussed in this chapter and the points of similarity between them and Donne are duly noted.

Donne's definition of conscience as knowledge in action is the subject of the third chapter, and once more, Aquinas' influence is noted. This chapter seeks to show that throughout his life, Donne continued to emphasize the importance of scio in conscientia. As in chapters one and two, the relationship between the Church and conscience is discussed.

This thesis undertakes to show that Donne's statements about conscience are inseparably linked to his statements about the Church. His changing attitude towards the role the Church plays in man's moral and spiritual life significantly affects his attitude towards conscience.

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Introduction

Despite the fact that volumes of criticism have been written on John Donne's poetry and prose, there is one area of Donne's thought that has not been explored, namely, Donne's theory of conscience. It is rather surprising that nothing has been written on this subject, because of the one hundred and fifty extant sermons there are only fifteen that do not contain at least one reference to conscience.[1] Since his statements about conscience have not been discussed, this thesis has two aims, first, to correct the deficiency, and second, to show that there is a definite change in Donne's attitude towards the role that conscience plays in man's spiritual life.

When one compares the earlier works of Donne with some of the sermons that he preached several years later, one detects that his attitude changes quite noticeably. This change of attitude can be seen in two main areas. First, in the Holy Sonnets written around 1609, Donne is greatly disturbed by feelings of guilt that completely destroy his assurance that God has forgiven him, and in these poems he frequently displays a conscience that is devastated and battered by sin. Later in life as an Anglican priest, Donne speaks in his sermons about a peace, an assurance, and a confidence that he enjoys once his conscience is rectified. Second, in his earlier works such as Satire III, he discusses the question of authority, and the only authority that he

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[1] The sermons that do not mention conscience are: III,11,14,15; IV,13; VI,13,18; VIII,9,11,12,16; IX,8,15,16,17. References are to Potter and Simpson's edition of Donne's Sermons.

recognises in the poem is the authority of conscience. However, there are statements in some of his later sermons that would make it apparent that he modifies his earlier position. Donne's conception of the authority of conscience tends to become coloured by his changing attitude towards the church and the role it plays in man's spiritual life. This thesis, then, is concerned with pointing out how and why these changes of attitude come about.

This thesis will focus primarily on Donne's teaching in the Sermons concerning the role that conscience plays in man's moral and spiritual life, and it will show that his statements in the Sermons about conscience shed light on the spiritual conflicts he faces as he writes the Divine Poems. Since Biathanatos, Pseudo-Martyr, and Satire III contain passages that are vital to our understanding of Donne's ideas about conscience, they too will be discussed.

The Essays in Divinity, written around 1614-1615, just prior to Donne's taking holy orders, also contain references to conscience. The Essays were written during a time when he had "...many debates betwixt God and himself, whether he were worthy and competently learned to enter into holy orders."[2] Throughout the Essays Donne often breaks out in prayers such as "O most glorious and gracious God, into whose presence our own consciences make us afraid to come, we cannot hide ourselves, hide us in the wounds of thy Son, our Saviour Christ Jesus."[3] In the Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, which Donne wrote during his illness in 1623, his preoccupation with introspection and self-analysis is again evident. At one point he prays:

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[2]Evelyn Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne (Oxford, 1948), p. 203.

[3]Ibid., p. 239.

> yet take me again, into your consultation, O blessed and glorious trinity; and though the Father know, that I have defaced his image received in my creation; Though the Son know, I have neglected mine interest in the Redemption yet O blessed spirit, as thou art to my conscience, so be to them a witness at this moment, I accept that which I have so often, so rebelliously refused.[4]

From these few quotations it is clear that in both of these works Donne is concerned with the workings of the inner voice of conscience. To have included a discussion of the Essays in Divinity and the Devotions upon Emergent Occasions would have required a work of far more considerable length than this thesis, and because they neither add to nor subtract from the argument of this paper, they have been omitted from consideration.

This thesis will also consider the forces that exerted an influence on Donne's thinking, and it will become evident that Donne's statements about conscience are to a large extent shaped by the writings of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin. Potter and Simpson in an edition of his sermons point out that Augustine is quoted from or referred to about seven hundred times (X,346). Of all the Church Fathers, it is to Augustine that Donne turns to most frequently.

There are several reasons why Donne had a particular regard for Augustine. He was attracted to Augustine intellectually, morally, and spiritually, and he displays an interest in Augustine's life and personality that he does not show for any other of the Church Fathers. Undoubtedly Donne saw a parallel between the sinfulness of his youth and the failures of Augustine as he relates them in the Confessions. The Saint's dissolute youth, his keen mind, his studies in

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[4] Ibid., p. 252.

rhetoric, his ambitions for wordly success, the difficulty and the doubts with which Augustine reached the truth -- all these struck familiar chords in Donne's mind, and when he considered the amazing change from sinner to saint in Augustine, he took courage himself.[5] Of the works of Augustine, the Confessions seem to be the writings with which Donne was most familiar. In one sermon (III,232) Donne recalls a passage from Book IX in which Augustine and his mother talked together at Ostia, shortly before her death, of the glories of the heavenly life (X,348). The editors of Donne's sermons comment on his statement in one of his early sermons: "We came too late to thy love, if we consider the past daies of our lives" (I,250). Discussing this statement, Potter and Simpson point out the resemblance which Donne himself perceived between the excesses of his own youth and those of Augustine, and the delay in both, partly because of doubt and intellectual pride, and partly because of desire for worldly success (X,350). Potter and Simpson wonder if Augustine's influence on him was altogether healthy, pointing out "that an undue number of Donne's sermons are devoted to four of the Penitential Psalms and in many other sermons there is too much emphasis on sin and its punishment" (X,357-58). They continue: "to meditate too long on human guilt and frailty as Donne is apt to do, is to distort the Christian message, and in this distortion Augustine, with his emphasis on original sin and his description of humanity as massa damnata (a phrase which Donne quotes several times), must have had a share" (X,358).

Potter and Simpson also point out Donne's indebtedness to such mediaeval writers as Aquinas and Duns Scotus. In the index to their

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[5] The Sermons of John Donne, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley, 1953-62), 10 vols. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text and indicated in parentheses.

edition of Donne's sermons, they list fifty-one references to the works of the Schoolmen. Even though Donne quotes from the writings of the Schoolmen considerably less than he quotes from those of Augustine, whenever he discusses what conscience is and what conscience does, he turns to the Summa Theologia and quotes from Aquinas' definition.[6] There is also a close parallel between Donne's treatment of a man's responsibility to obey human law and Aquinas' own handling of the same problem. In one of his sermons (V,11) Donne takes up the same question that Aquinas raises in the Summa -- how far do human laws bind man's conscience? The conclusion that Donne reaches is, as we shall see in chapter two, a restatement of Aquinas' belief as outlined in the Summa (1a2a 96.4). Because Donne displays an intimate knowledge of the philosophy of the Schoolmen and calls Aquinas "another instrument and engine of thine, whom thou hadst so enabled, that nothing was too minerall nor centrick for the search and reach of his wit,"[7] and because whenever Donne defines conscience he turns to the Summa, Aquinas' teaching on the subject of conscience has been isolated in chapter two, and it has been shown there how Aquinas' thought is reflected in Donne's own theory of conscience.

Of the Protestant commentators, Calvin is the one most frequently quoted by Donne. In Biathanatos, Donne links Calvin with Augustine "for sharp insight, and conclusive judgment in exposition of places of scripture" (X,375). In the sermons, Donne quotes Calvin and describes him as "one, to whom we all owe much, for the interpretation of the Scripture" (III,101). He pays tribute to Calvin's insight into the

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[6]For Donne's definition see IV,122; IX,248;VI,256; and Pseudo-Martyr, 237-238.

[7]Simpson, Prose Works of Donne, p. 220.

the scriptures and refers to him as "a later Divine, worthy to be compared to the Ancients, for the exposition of Scriptures, and as a theologian" (III,177).

One of Calvin's beliefs to which Donne gave wholehearted support was the doctrine of the freedom of the individual conscience. The assertion that an individual should be free to follow the dictates of his own conscience was one of the key tenets of the Reformation period. Calvin and the other Reformers, while clinging tenaciously to this doctrine, were not advancing any "new" concept; rather, they were breathing life into a forgotten and neglected teaching. St. Paul had already instructed the early Christians that no one had the right to exercise any tyranny or to coerce the conscience of a fellow man. St. Paul had taught his followers that while magistrates ought to be held in high honour, the laws framed by them did not apply to the inward governing of the soul.

For centuries St. Paul's teaching was suppressed and the Church continued to exert enormous control over man's spiritual and secular affairs. It was not until the time of the Reformation that men like John Calvin began to speak out against the control that the Church possessed over a man's conscience. In the Institutes Calvin declared that Paul made it sufficiently clear in his teaching to the Galatians that conscience, which ought to be ruled by God alone, is not to be entangled by the ordinances and the constitutions of men. Because the Institutes played a major role in drawing attention to Paul's teaching concerning man's right to follow his conscience, and because Donne quotes from the Institutes in his sermons, I have shown in chapter two that Calvin's interpretation of Paul's teaching concerning the liberty

of conscience closely parallels Donne's own thought, and that Calvin's beliefs may well have been the shaping force behind Donne's own statements about "tyranny and butchery of conscience."

There are reasons why I have in this thesis argued for Augustine's influence on Donne in chapter one and have omitted any reference to him in chapter two, and there are reasons why I have argued for Aquinas' and Calvin's influence in chapter two and have not mentioned either of them in chapter one. It is my intention in the first chapter to show that Donne's struggle in the Divine Poems with an accusing conscience is almost identical to Augustine's spiritual struggle in the Confessions with feelings of guilt. Since neither the Summa nor De Veritate discuss the concept of an antecedent conscience, that is, conscience that blames or accuses in retrospect, Aquinas is not mentioned in chapter one in which Donne's struggle with an accusing conscience is discussed. In chapter two, Donne's statements about the authority of conscience will be considered, and it will become apparent that Aquinas' and Calvin's influence in this area of Donne's thought is considerable. Because Augustine does not discuss the question of where the authority in spiritual and moral matters lies, he is not mentioned in chapter two. Augustine places greater stress upon conscience as accuser and judge than as guide and director (which is Aquinas' emphasis). For Thomas Aquinas, "conscience properly associated with the principles of συντηρήσις, directs man, above all to his good or ultimate happiness."[8]

Finally, I have, in the last chapter, sought to show that Donne's statements about knowledge are inseparably linked to his theory of

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[8]William C. Bier, ed., Conscience: It's Freedom and Limitation (New York, 1971), pp. 22-23.

conscience and that his beliefs about knowledge provide a solution to the problems he faces in chapters one and two. As a result, we shall see how for Donne conscience becomes "his touchstone within."

Chapter One: The Witness of Conscience

The life of John Donne was characterised by conflict and crisis. However, the circumstances of his life, his search for the true Church, his turbulent marriage, and his lengthy sickness only partly account for the intensity and the immediacy that pervade his poetry. The greatest conflict in Donne arose from a sense of unworthiness; he was plagued by doubt and despair, and he sought constantly for a certainty of his salvation. At the time of writing the Divine Poems, Donne was intensely aware of his sinfulness, and he was continually tormented by his conscience that accused him and produced within him strong feelings of guilt. Commenting on the Divine Poems, Helen Gardner states: "No other relgious poems ... present more vividly man's recognition of the gulf that divides him from God and the effort of faith to lay hold on the miracles by which Christianity declares that the gulf has been bridged."[1] However, later in life as an Anglican priest, Donne preaches about a peace, an assurance, and a confidence that he enjoys once his conscience is rectified. A comparison of the Divine Poems (some of which, as Helen Gardner has pointed out, were written as early as 1609), with his statements in the sermons will reveal that Donne's attitude changes. This chapter will discuss the nature of this change of attitude and the factors that determined it.

It was pointed out in the introduction that Donne was

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[1] John Donne, The Divine Poems, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford, 1952), p. xxi. All quotations from the Holy Sonnets are from this edition.

influenced by Augustine's theology, and it was stated there that Donne was particularly conversant with the Confessions and Enarrationes in Psalmos. Because Donne was very familiar with these two books and because they contain key passages on the subject of conscience, a closer look at them is necessary in order to establish the parallels that exist between Donne's and Augustine's thinking on the subject of an accusing conscience.

In Biathanatos, Donne refers to Augustine as a "man of rigorous conscience," and the Confessions can be seen as an autobiography of a man battling with a guilty and an accusing conscience. "The appearance of Augustine's Confessions, " Professor West tells us, "dates the entrance of a new kind of autobiography into Latin literature -- the autobiography of introspection, the self-registered record of the development of a human soul."[2] Such statements in the Confessions as "So I fretted, sighed, wept, tormented myself, and took neither rest nor advice, for I bore about with me a rent and polluted soul, impatient of being borne by, and where to repose it I knew not"[3] and "I will now call to mind my past foulness, and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not because I love them, but that I may love Thee, O my God" (II,i,20) bear witness to the contention that in the Confessions Augustine is greatly bothered by an accusing conscience. There are a number of statements in the Confessions that prove that Augustine was very much concerned with conscience and valued its judgments highly. He states that "of a truth, there is no science of letters more innate

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[2]Benjamin Warfield, Studies in Augustine and Tertullian (Connecticut, 1970), p. 257.

[3]Augustine, Basic Writings, ed. Whitney Oates (New York, 1948), II,211. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text and indicated in parentheses.

than the writing of conscience" (I,xviii,18). He refers to God as "the judge of his conscience before whom his heart and memory are laid bare" (V,vi,64), and in another place (IV,xix,49) he speaks about being accused by his conscience. At one point in the Confessions he deplores his wretched state, noting that now thirty-two years old he has not yet found out the truth. He states: "... now had the day arrived in which I was to be laid bare to myself, and my conscience was to chide me" (VII,vii,120). As he considers his sinfulness, he comes very close to despair, and as a result he breaks out in prayers such as "And from Thee, O Lord, unto whose eyes the depths of a man's conscience are naked, what in me could be hidden though I be unwilling to confess to Thee?" (X,ii,147).

Commenting on Augustine's mental anguish in the Confessions, Battenhouse states:

> The meeting with God strips the self to stark and naked selfhood; it is unmasked and defenseless, alone by itself. If one would enter upon the devotional journey, he must be prepared to stand the scrutiny of God in the secret places of his own heart.[4]

Realising his own guilty condition, Augustine rejects all claims to personal merit, and he throws himself wholly on the mercy of God. He states: "For what fruit had I then, O Lord my God, to whom my conscience maketh her daily confession, more confident in the hope of Thy mercy than in her own innocence" (X,iii,148). So intensely aware is he of his sin, Augustine tells us that he was bothered with frightening nightmares and "perverse images of dreams" (X,xxx,168).

As a result of his struggle with his conscience that produces in him a heightened awareness of his worthlessness, Augustine falls into

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[4]Roy Battenhouse, ed., A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine (Oxford, 1955), p. 402.

a state of dejection and despair. He asks, "Why then do we fear that which has no being? Or if we fear it [evil] needlessly, then surely is that fear evil whereby the heart is unnecessarily pricked and tormented" (VII,vii,95). Despairing that he would ever find the truth, Augustine is led into a state of anxiety about death, which he says never leaves him. He states: "Nor did anything recall me from a yet deeper abyss of carnal pleasures, but the fear of death and of Thy future judgment, which, amid all the fluctuations of opinions, never left my breast" (VI,xvi,89).

It is not only in the Confessions that we find Augustine discussing the subject of an accusing conscience, for his commentary on the Psalms also contains frequent references to the inner voice that produces feelings of guilt and remorse. He maintains: "...there is nothing in all the dungeons of this world, nay, not even in hell itself, to surpass the dreadful doom to which a villain is consigned by remorse of conscience."[5] Commenting on Psalm 72:11, Augustine declares:

> Anyone who could behold the inward parts of men, their torturing conscience, and their souls racked with such mighty perturbations of desires and fears, would see them to be miserable even when they are called happy.[6]

It is quite clear that Augustine believes that "an external sign of the inward misery and dissatisfaction of the wicked man is his restless and fruitless search for repose and satisfaction in things outside himself."[7] Augustine states:

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[5]Herbert Deane, The Political and Social Ideas of Augustine (London, 1963), p. 84.

[6]Ibid., p.280.

[7]Ibid., pp. 84-85.

> For whoever is oppressed within in his heart by a bad conscience, just as any man in consequence of the overflow of a waterspout or of smoke goeth out of his house, suffereth not himself to dwell therein; so he that hath not a quiet heart, cannot dwell happily in his heart. Such men go out of themselves in the bent of their mind, and delight themselves with things without, that affect the body; they seek repose in trifles, in spectacles, in luxuries, in all evils. Wherefore do they wish themselves well without? Because it is not well with them within, so that they may rejoice in a good conscience.[8]

Augustine shows the folly of those who trust in material objects and do not have a good conscience to fall back upon. He declares:

> The men who fall miserably are those who place their hope in the present life. The brilliant outward show is taken away, and nothing is left except the inward smouldering of an evil conscience. They can draw upon no source of comfort; they have nothing external in which to lose themselves, nothing internal to fall back upon; forsaken by wordly splendour, empty of divine grace, they are truly abject.[9]

In his discourse on Psalm 31, Augustine draws a comparison between the man who possesses a good conscience and the man without it. He states: "A good conscience generates hope; just as a bad conscience is wholly pervaded with despair, so is a good conscience pervaded with hope."[10] By the expression "good conscience" we are to understand that Augustine means a conscience that does not produce feelings of guilt or remorse. He continues:

> For that man hopes, who possesses a good conscience. But he who is stung by a guilty conscience turns his back on hope and can expect nothing for himself except damnation. To hope for the kingdom he must have a good conscience, he must have faith and

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[8] Ibid., p. 85.

[9] Enarrationes in Psalmos. ed. Johannes Quasten (London, 1961), II,59.

[10] Ibid., II,69.

good works.[11]

Using the relationship between a husband and wife as an illustration, Augustine elaborates on the point that he has just made, namely, that a good conscience leads to hope and to peace of mind. He talks about the husband who spends his time at the forum and is reluctant to return home. He declares:

> Well then, if they are miserable who when they return to their own hearth are afraid of the wrangling of their own family, how much more miserable are they who are reluctant to return to their own conscience for fear of being overwhelmed by the strife arising from their sins.[12]

In a discourse on Psalm 5, Augustine declares that conscience is the path by which man makes his approach to God. Furthermore, he states, "no man can possibly judge another man's conscience; and since on no account should we trust another's verdict, we must take refuge within in our conscience and the presence of God."[13] Commenting on Psalm 7:6, "He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord, " Augustine continues to emphasize that the testimony of a good conscience is to be desired more than the praise of men. He states:

> Rightly does the soul speak here of his glory, which he does not wish to be brought down to the dust. For he wants to have true glory in his conscience and in God's sight, where there is no room for boasting. This true glory is returned to dust, when through pride anyone scorns the promptings of conscience (where alone God proves a man's worth) and desires the empty praise of his fellows.[14]

Later in the same discourse, Augustine declares that "God directs a man in his conscience." He continues: "no man can penetrate it; it

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[12] Ibid., II 70.

[13] Ibid., II,166.

[14] Ibid., II,57.

lies open before God, who alone sees what each man thinks."[15] In an exposition of Psalm 54:4, Augustine continues to assert that the testimony of a good conscience is a great source of joy to the godly man. He maintains:

> For all holy men are helped by God, but within, where no one seeth. For in like manner as the conscience of ungodly men is a great punishment, so a great joy is the very conscience of godly men. 'For our glory this is,' saith the Apostle, 'the testimony of our conscience.' In this within, not in the flower of the Ziphites without, doth glory that man who now saith, 'For behold God helpeth me'[16]

Augustine asks the question "Whither can the servant of sin flee?" In answer to this question he declares that he cannot escape from himself or God, because he carries within himself an accusing conscience that will not let him rest:

> Whither can the servant of sin flee? Himself he carries within him wherever he flees. An evil conscience flees not from itself; it has no place to go; it follows itself. Yea, he cannot withdraw from himself, for the sin he commits is within.[17]

One final quotation from Augustine will demonstrate that for him, the testimony of a good conscience, that is, a conscience that does not condemn, is to be highly desired: "Let me revert to myself, wherein I may find what I may immolate: let me revert to myself; in myself may I find immolation of praise: be thy altar my conscience."[18]

The passages cited on the preceding pages have demonstrated Augustine's acute awareness of his sinful condition. In the Confessions in particular, Augustine struggles with an accusing conscience that

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[15] Ibid., I,86.

[16] Expositions on the Book of Psalms, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Boston, 1888), VIII,208.

[17] Ibid., VII,360.

produces strong feelings of guilt, remorse, and restlessness, a loss of peace and joy, and a fear of death. A consideration of the works of Donne will reveal that a strong similarity exists between the spiritual struggles of Augustine and those of Donne.

The main sermon in which Donne deals with the subject of conscience is the one preached before King Charles dated 3 April 1625. Taking Psalm 11:3 as his text, Donne expounds on the subject "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The sermon centres around a discussion of four houses and their respective foundations. These houses, in which Donne tells us, "Everyone of us has a dwelling" (VI,250), are the Ecclesia Domus, the house of God, Respublica Domus, the State, Domus Habitationis, the family and lastly, Domus quae Dominus, the body in which man lives. The foundation of the first house is Christ himself as revealed in the Scriptures, and this foundation is destroyed when Councils deny the use of Scripture in the vernacular of the people. The foundation of the State is the law, and Donne shows that it is the responsibility of every subject to give allegiance to the King. The foundation of the family is peace, and if the household is well-run, with the servant obedient to his master, the son respectful to his father, and the husband loving towards his wife, then nothing will destroy the tranquillity of the home. The rest of the sermon is devoted to a discussion of the fourth house, that is man himself. Donne describes man as "a poore and wretched Cottage" (VI,255) whose foundation is conscience. Donne declares that "to proceed with good Conscience in every particular action, is that,which the Apostle calles The laying up in store for our selves, a good foundation, against the time to come" (VI, 255). He then shows what it is that

destroys the conscience, the foundation of man. He states:

> Now for the destroying of this foundation, there are sinnes, which by Gods ordinary grace exhibited in the Church, prove but Alarums, but sentinels to the Conscience: The very sinne or something that does naturally accompany that sinne, Povertie, or Sicknesses, or Infamie, calls upon man, and awakens him to a remorse of the sinne. Which made Saint Augustine say, That a man got by somme sinnes; somme sinnes helpe him in the way of repentance for sinne; and these sinnes doe not destroy the foundation. But there are sinnes, which in their nature preclude repentance, and batter the Conscience, devastate, depopulate, exterminate, annihilate, the conscience, and leave no sense at all, or but a sense of Desperation, And then, the case being reduc'd to that That wickednes condemned by her own wickednes, becomes very timerous, (so as the Conscience growes afraid, that the promises of the Gospell, belong not to her) And being pressed with Conscience, alwayes forecasteth grievous things, that whatsoever God layes upon him here, all that is but his earnest of future worse torments, when it comes to such a feare, as Betrayes the succours that Reason offers him, That whereas a man might in reason argue, God hath pardoned greater sinnes, and greater sinners, yet he can find no hope for himself; this is a shrinking, a sinking, an undermining, a destroying of this Foundation of this fourth House, the Conscience (VI,256).

Since the rest of the chapter will be concerned with developing what Donne says in the above quotation about sin and its effects on the conscience and with relating this passage to the Holy Sonnets, a summary of his ideas will now be given. First, he says that some sins lead to repentance; others devastate the conscience. Second, a devastated conscience leads to despair. Third, despair leads to fear. Fourth, fear forecasts future torments. Last, fear leads to a distrust of reason.

In the passage quoted above Donne makes a distinction between sins that lead to repentance and those that devastate the conscience. Donne does not specifically tell us what these sins are that "batter and annihilate" the conscience and hinder repentance. It is possible that he may be thinking about the sins of his youth, namely, his feelings

of sexual guilt and his ambition for wordly success. The sermons would certainly bear out this conjecture, because in them we find that Donne frequently discourses about the sin of concupiscence. In his book Grace to a Witty Sinner, Le Comte states: "To his Lincoln's Inn congregation ... he spoke without sentimentality of the sins of [his] youth, leaving scarcely an aspect untouched, including self-pollution."[19] If it is true that Donne has sexual sins and ambition in mind, the reference to Augustine in this passage becomes all the more illuminating. It was pointed out in the introduction that one of the reasons Donne was attracted to Augustine's writing was that he saw distinct parallels between Augustine's youthful lusts and desires for worldly ambition and those of his own early years. However, since Donne does not indicate what these sins are that preclude repentance, it seems more reasonable to suggest that he does not have any specific sins in mind, but he is saying that any sin that leads to despair undermines the foundation of conscience.

The attitude expressed in the above quotation is extremely pessimistic. The description of a man whose conscience has become timourous, battered, and devastated by sin comes out repeatedly in the Sermons and in the Divine Poems. At times, the sermonist pictures God as a Judge, with man's conscience providing God with evidence against him: "God is able as a Judge to minister an oath unto us, and to draw evidence from our conscience against our selves" (II,319). Donne believes that the accusing voice of his conscience is to be feared more than the voice of God speaking to him in the Scriptures. He declares that whenever he is alone, he hears God speaking to him, within him in his conscience. He laments:

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[19] E. LeComte, Grace to a Witty Sinner (London, 1965), p.176.

> When the voice of God testifies against me in mine owne conscience, It is more pregnant evidence than this, When his voice testifies against me in his word, in his scripture. When I can never be alone, but that God speakes in me, but speakes against me: when I can never open his booke, but the first sentence mine eye is upon, is a witness against me, this is fearful evidence (V,133).

The predicament that the sermonist describes here in which conscience produces fearfully accusing evidence against him accurately depicts the state of mind that Donne was in when he wrote the Divine Poems. The reader of these poems is overwhelmed by Donne's heightened awareness of his sinful condition. In the Holy Sonnets, Donne uses, for example, images of a usurped town, of a worm, of a desecrated temple, and of a treasonous pilgrim to describe his utter worthlessness.

Sonnet XI provides a good example of Donne's conscience accusing him of sinfulness. In the first four lines, he visualizes the scene at Christ's crucifixion, and he demands that he be crucified instead of Christ:

> Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side,
> Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee,
> For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and onely hee,
> Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed.

As Patrick Grant points out, Donne comes to realize that it is impossible for him to replace Christ on the Cross and "he must be content to face the paradox that only the innocent can atone for the sins of the guilty."[20] In the next four lines the poet states that his sin is far greater than that of those who actually crucified Christ; they were responsible for putting Christ to death, but he is guilty of crucifying him daily:

> They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I
> Crucifie him daily, being now glorified.

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[20]Patrick Grant, "Augustinian Spirituality and the Holy Sonnets of John Donne," ELH, XXXVIII (December 1971), 543.

Sonnet V also exemplifies Donne's intense awareness of his sinfulness. In the first quatrain, Donne describes himself as a "Little world made cunningly," and because of sin his world has been enveloped by darkness and must die. In the next four lines, the poet talks about the scientific discoveries of new lands, spheres and oceans, and he asks that these new oceans be poured into his eyes "that so I might/ Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly." Even if this were possible, Donne realises that it would be an ineffectual remedy, and he has to face another paradox -- in order for him to experience spiritual healing he must be consumed by the fiery zeal of the Lord:

> ...alas the fire
> Of lust and envie have burnt it heretofore,
> And made it fouler: let their flame retire,
> And burne me O Lord, with a fiery zeale
> Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.

Sonnet IV is a further illustration of Donne's conscience suggesting to him his unworthiness and presenting accusing evidence against him. In the octave, using the simile of a pilgrim who has committed an act of treason and dares not to return to his own country and using the simile of a condemned thief who is awaiting the death sentence, Donne vividly describes his predicament. The remedy for his sinful condition is quickly forthcoming in line 7: "Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke." However, the remedy only creates another dilemma for him, and he demands to know "Who shall give thee that grace to beginne." In the final quatrain the problem is resolved, and once more Donne must face a paradox that only Christ's blood, being red, "dyes red souls to white."

The second point that Donne brings out in the quotation given on page 17 is that a battered conscience leads to despair. Despair, of

course, is a mood into which Augustine often lapses in the Confessions. At one point in the sermons, Donne declares that a continual survey of the conscience and a preoccupation with a sense of God's anger will almost certainly lead to despair (IV,185). Donne discusses the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church that makes a distinction between venial and deadly sins, and quite obviously Donne is opposed to any differentiation between them. He goes on to state what, in his opinion, is a deadly sin:

> I call that deadly sin, which is peccatum vastans conscientiam, such as if they bee not rooted out, destroy the conscience, and in their own nature oppose the workings of grace in us as long as they are in us (II,160).

In another place (V,191) Donne talks about the depression and the dejection that result from a conscience wounded by sin. Elsewhere (V,336), he refers to a spiritual burden as "a perplexity that sinks our understanding, or a guiltiness that depresses our conscience." Quite clearly, then, Donne believes that sin can destroy the security and the peace of conscience and fill it with a fear that leads to a sense of desperation apart from God's aid.

Critics frequently mention the note of despair in the Divine Poems, but none have discussed the subject more succinctly than Helen Gardner and K.W. Grandsen. In her introduction to the Divine Poems, Helen Gardner states:

> The image of the soul in meditation that the "Holy Sonnets" present is an image of a soul working out its salvation in fear and trembling. The two poles between which it oscilates are faith in the mercy of God in Christ, and a sense of personal unworthiness that is very near to despair.[21]

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[21] The Divine Poems, ed. Helen Gardner, p. xxxi.

K.W. Grandsen states the case equally as well and declares that in the Holy Sonnets Donne is like

> a terrified criminal in a dark alley between despair and death; the love of God is felt as eternally available to effect a rescue. But this love, just like the love of a profane mistress, must be sought out not with flattering speeches but with all humility and self-surrender.[22]

He goes on to say that "most religious experience is an emotional awareness of inadequacy, fear, regret, self-contempt, and a constant fresh striving towards a God who does not come uncalled."[23] These statements accurately describe the despairing note that is so detectable in Donne's holy verse. Sonnet I is an excellent example of the poet's despair. In the opening quatrain, he sees himself as a ruined vessel in need of repair. The subject of death becomes of great concern to him in this sonnet, and he visualizes himself and death running a race in which they meet head-on. He states:

> I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
> Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
> Such terrour, and my feebled flesh doth waste
> By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh.

In the final six lines of the poem, he describes Satan as a subtle foe who tempts him, and he laments his inability to sustain himself without God's intervention. The ending of Sonnet I is very similar to the final six lines of Sonnet IV. In both of these sonnets, realizing his own unworthiness and helplessness he throws himself on the grace and the mercy of God.

Throughout his ministry, Donne constantly warned his congregation to be wary of Satan's subtle temptations. In 1622, Donne preached a

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[22] K.W. Grandsen, John Donne (London, 1964), p. 133.

[23] Ibid.,

series of sermons from Psalm 32. One of these sermons (IX,305) contains a graphic description of how Satan tempts a Christian; Donne declares that the Devil works upon man's conscience in one of two ways: he either hardens it to such an extent that he is insensitive to sin, or he renders it over-sensitive to the extent that he finishes in a state of despair. He declares:

> so lyes the conscience of man betweene two operations of the Devill; sometimes he rarifies it, evaporates it, that it apprehends nothing, feeles nothing to be sin, sometimes he condenses it, that every thing falls and sticks upon it....In an obdurate conscience that feeles no sin, the Devill glories most, but in the over-tender conscience he practices most; That is his triumphant, but this is his six dayes labour; In the obdurate he hath induced a security, in the scrupulous and over-tender he is working for desperation (IX,305).

The predicament that Donne complains of in the above quotation is precisely the one he faces in the Divine Poems.

Sonnet II is a good example of how Satan works on an over-sensitive conscience and induces desperation. In the first eight lines Donne declares that he is made in the image of God and that he was once a temple of God. As a result of his sin, the image of God has been erased, and the temple of the Holy Ghost has been desecrated. In the last six lines of the poem Donne declares that he is unable to escape Satan's power without active aid from Christ. The battle with Satan is a very real one to Donne:

> Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee?
> Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?

At the end of the poem, Donne moves into a state of despair because he feels that Christ loves everyone except him and that Satan hates him but refuses to let him go.

Throughout the sermons, Donne frequently mentions the joys of the

Kingdom of Heaven. Instead of becoming elated at the prospect of living in the celestial city, the thought only leads Donne into deeper despair because he lacks the assurance of salvation. Speaking about being translated into the Kingdom of Heaven, Donne remarks: "that were well, if we were sure of it; If our conscience did not accuse us, and suggest to us our unworthinesse, and thereby an impossibility of being so translated" (IV,284). The poem "A Litanie," in which Donne's keen awareness of sin leads him towards a sense of utter worthlessness, is a good illustration of Donne's conscience suggesting to him to unworthiness. In stanza three he laments that his body, which ought to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, has become muddy and profaned, and has been wasted with the youthful fires of lust and pride. "A Litanie" contains a series of invocations to God and pleads for deliverance from personal vices. He prays to be delivered from "bribing thee with Alms, to excuse/ Somme sinne more burdenous" (stanza 16), to be delivered from "neglecting to choake sin's spawne" (stanza 17), and to be delivered when "senses...arme against thee, and they fight for sinne" (stanza 21). He ends the poem in the following way:

> O Lambe of God, which took'st our sinne
> Which could not stick to thee,
> O let it not returne to us againe
> But Patient and Physition being free,
> As sinne is nothing let it no where be.

According to Donnes statement quoted on page 17, depression leads to fear, or to a "timerous conscience," as he calls it. There are two ways in which fear is manifested in Donne. He has a fear that everything he does is sinful, and he has a fear of death and judgment. However real Donne's fears may be about sinning at every action, the fear of death and the last judgment is even more crucial to him. The concept

of the last judgment is never far from Donne's thoughts in the sermons, and even though he does not demonstrate a fear of it to the same degree as he does in the Holy Sonnets, he is aware that there may be those in his congregation who are afraid of it. To those who are bothered by the thoughts of God's judgment day, Donne, quoting Augustine, advises his hearers to descend into their consciences, to accuse themselves before themselves, to sift out their sinfulness, and to know that having found themselves guilty in their own eyes, God would find them innocent (VIII,343).

In his article "Augustinian Spirituality and the Holy Sonnets of John Donne" Patrick Grant discusses Augustine's influence on Donne's holy verse. He draws attention to five particular features of Augustine's theology, the last of which, the motif of last things, is pertinent to the discussion here. He comments: "The urgency of the predicament of the unregenerate man, as with the Franciscans and Augustine himself, is frequently made present to our awareness by allusion to the terrifying proximity of death and judgment."[24] There is little doubt that in the Divine Poems Donne displays a real fear of death and the last judgment.

Holy Sonnet VI is an excellent example of Donne's fear of death, and in the poem he imagines that the last night of his life has come. In the opening quatrain, he uses four images to describe the immenence of death. In line one he compares this night of his life to the final scene of a play, and in line two, to the last mile of a pilgrimage. But in lines three and four death is even closer to him than in the opening lines. It is now only an inch away from him,

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[24]Grant, ELH, XXXVIII, 555.

and he is living the final moment of his life:

> The is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint
> My pilgrimages last mile; and my race
> Idly, yet quickly runne, hath this last pace,
> My spans last inch, my minutes last point.

Because he has been an idle competitor in the race of life, he conceives of death as an awful monster that is about to devour him. Terrified at the thought of such a fate, he exclaims:

> And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt
> My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space,
> But my'ever waking part shall see that face,
> Whose feare already shakes my every joynt.

In the sestet Donne imagines that his soul leaves his body, the sinful part of him, and ascends to heaven. In the final two lines, realizing his spiritual impoverishment, he prays that righteousness may be imputed to him. This sonnet contains some of Donne's most vivid imagery and is, without a doubt, one of the finest poems written on the subject of death.

Donne's fear of death is not only confined to Holy Sonnet VI. In Sonnet VII, Donne imagines that he hears the angels blowing their trumpets to usher in God's day of judgment. At the sound of the trumpets, the saints of preceding generations awaken from the sleep of death. But Donne immediately becomes fearful and cries out "But let them sleepe, Lord and mee mourne a space." The thought of God's judgment day only fill Donne's mind with fear because he is not ready for it. He declares that his sin is far greater than anyone else's, and he prays that God will teach him how to repent here and now:

> 'Tis late to aske abundance of the grace,
> When we are there; here on this lowly ground,
> Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
> As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

"A Hymne to God the Father" is very similar in tone to parts of

Sonnet VII. In the final stanza of the poem Donne once more reveals his fear of death, and in this particular stanza he declares that fear is sinful. Donne contemplates death and implores that God will forgive him, now, before he dies. He states:

> I have a sin of feare, that when I have spun
> My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;
> Sweare by thy selfe, that at my death thy Sunne
> Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore;
> And, having done that, Thou hast done,
> I have no more.

The fifth and final point that Donne articulates in the sermon quoted on page 17 is that "feare betrayes the succours that Reason offers him." Reason, argues Donne, ought to tell man that since God has pardoned greater sins and sinners, his case is not hopeless and God will forgive him too. The two sonnets that echo the predicament that Donne enunciates here are Sonnets XIV and IX. In the former poem he states that a violent act such as rape is necessary to break down the resistance of his will. In this sonnet Donne declares that reason, which ought to defend him has proven useless:

> Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
> But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

In Holy Sonnet IX, Donne laments that reason makes "Sinnes else equall, in mee more heinous." In these quotations, Donne quite obviously feels that man's reason is impaired by sin and no longer furnishes him with the assurance that he has been forgiven.

So far this chapter has pointed out that at the time Donne wrote the Holy Sonnets (some of them as early as 1609) his conscience continually produced accusing evidence against him, and Donne's peace of mind, like that of Augustine's, was destroyed by intensely strong feelings of remorse, anxiety, depression, and fear. However, there is

ample evidence from his sermons to prove that later in life Donne experienced a change of attitude and that his conscience ceased to accuse him. In fact, as will be pointed out, there are many places in the sermons that demonstrate that Donne achieved the peace and the confidence that he sought but failed to experience when he was writing the sonnets.

In a sermon preached at Whitehall on 26 February 1628, Donne declares that "God never sayes to the wickedest in the world, Live in fear, dye in anxiety, in suspicion, and suspension of his displeasure" (VIII,348). Furthermore, Donne asserts that we are not to conceive of a God so cruel "as that at our death, or in our way, he will afford us no assurance, that hee is ours, and we his, but let us live and die in anxiety and torture of conscience" (VIII,125). Since Donne affirms that God does not intend man to live in anxiety caused by an accusing conscience, how is man to rid himself of the torture of conscience that produces fear, depression, and guilt? Donne's answer to this question is to be found in his concept of "a rectified conscience."

It is clear from his statements about a rectified conscience that he believes that it is linked with a process of right thinking, reckoning, or judging. In a sermon preached on "Blessed is the man, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity," Donne discourses at length on the meaning of the text. He states:

> When in this place the Lord is said, not to <u>impute sinne</u>, it is meant, That the Lord shall not suffer me to impute sinne to myself. The word is <u>Cashab</u>, and <u>Cashab</u> imports such a thinking, such a surmising, as may be subject to error, and mistaking (IX,262).

In this passage Donne is stating that it is possible for man's

thinking or reckoning to be mistaken, and that through an error in his reasoning, he may impute or reckon sin to himself at a time when in fact, sin does not exist. He gives an illustration from the Old Testament in which man's imputing was in error, citing the account of Hannah who was praying silently in the temple. Eli, the priest, saw her lips moving but heard no actual words and "imputed drunkenesse unto her" (IX,262). In other words, Eli's judgment of the situation was an erroneous one; his reckoning was false. Donne goes on to say that because man's reckoning can be mistaken, it is possible for him to impute sins to himself which God does not impute to him. He continues to discuss what effect false reckoning has on man's conscience. He states:

> So then this Imputing, being an imputing which arises from our selves, and so may be accompanied with error, and mistaking, that we Impute that to our selves, which God doth not impute, And this mis-imputing of Gods anger to our selves, arising out of his punishments, and his corrections inflicted upon us, That because we have crosses in the world, we cannot beleeve, that we stand well in the sight of God, or that the forgiving of Transgressions, or covering of sinnes appertains unto us, we justly conceive that, this not imputing of iniquity, is that Serenitas Conscientiae, That brightnesse, that clearnesse, that peace and tranquility, that calme and serenity, that acquiescence, and security of the conscience, in which I am delivered from all scruples, and all timourousnesse, that my transgressions are not forgiven, or my sins are not covered (IX,262-63).

Since this passage is vital to the discussion of a rectified conscience, a summation of Donne's statements will be given. First of all, Donne declares that man's thinking can be mistaken and can lead him to believe that the adversities he experiences in life are tokens that he stands in ill-stead before God. Second, false thinking also leads man to conclude erroneously that the forgiveness of sins does not extend to him. Third, Donne declares that the

opposite of false imputing, namely, a correct reckoning results in peace of conscience that produces tranquility and serenity, and leads him into an assurance that his sins have been forgiven.

Donne goes on to declare in this sermon that the faulty reckoning or erroneous thinking that he has been describing comes about because the conscience is not rectified. He states:

> God shall suffer the Conscience thus rectified to terrifie it selfe with nothing...we shall know our way, and evermore have our Consolation in this, That as God has forgiven our transgression, in taking the sins of all mandkinde upon himselfe ... so will he never impute mine Iniquity, never suffer it to terrifie my Conscience (IX,264).

It is clear from the statments in this sermon that Donne believes a rectified conscience involves a process of right thinking and leads one to a correct assessment of one's standing before God. His remarks here about a rectified conscience tie in with the discussion earlier in which it was pointed out that sin has an effect on the reason. It was stated then that reason ought to allow a man to conclude that since God has forgiven greater sins and sinners, his sins are also forgiven. Since Donne declares that rectified conscience leads to peace, to joy, to serenity, and to an assurance of forgiveness, we can say that the opposites of these qualities, namely, depression, anxiety, fear, and guilt are symptoms of a conscience that stands in need of rectification. However, the latter symptoms reflect the attitude that Donne displays in the Divine Poems; therefore we can conclude that at the time Donne wrote these poems, his conscience needed rectifying.

The contention that when he wrote the Divine Poems Donne's conscience needed rectifying warrants further discussion. The note

of optimism that Donne sounds in the quotation on page 30 is completely missing from the Divine Poems. In the sonnets that have been discussed so far in this chapter, Donne declares that he is a treasonous pilgrim who stands damned and ready for execution (IV). His sin is even greater than the sin of those who crucified Christ (XI). He is betrothed unto God's enemy, and his will stands in need of a violent act to conquer it (XIV). In Holy Sonnet XV he states that Christ came from heaven to unbind him whom Satan has stolen. He feels Satan's temptations acutely, and states that without God's grace he cannot sustain himself for one hour (I). As a result of his unworthiness, he laments his sinful condition. His intense awareness of his sinful condition frequently leads him into despair. He declares that God loves all mankind with the exception of him (II). He is particularly despondent about the thoughts of death, thoughts which he says, create a sense of terror in him (I).

The tone of despair, futility, and depression which is found constantly in the Divine Poems is in sharp contrast to the confidence or the serenitas conscientiae that Donne declares that a rectified conscience produces. He argues that just as erroneous reckoning leads one to believe that his sins are not forgiven, right thinking or rectified conscience leads one to pax conscientiae. He states:

> This is that Pax Conscientiae, The peace of conscience, where there is not one sword drawne; This is that Serenitas Conscientiae, The meridionall brightnesse of the Conscience, where there is not one cloud in the sky (IX,263).

In the Divine Poems Donne constantly declares that he is a guilty sinner awaiting God's sentence. As a result, his sky is continually

be-clouded with anxiety, depression and fear. Since this pessimism is opposed to the peace and confidence that a rectified conscience enjoys, Donne's conscience at the time of writing the Divine Poems needs rectifying.

Throughout the sermons, Donne states that a rectified conscience produces peace of mind. He declares that when the merits of Christ's death are applied to him "I have peace of conscience and an inchoation of the kingdom of heaven here" (I,275). Because the Holy Ghost has rectified his conscience and removed all doubts from it that his sin has been forgiven, Donne is able to affirm positively:

> that which is ordinarily, and naturally the terrour of the conscience of a sinner, is the peace of mine, that which is naturally a tempest, is my calm, that which is naturally a rock to shipwrack at, is my Anchor to ride out all foul weather: and that is, the justice of God; that which would shake, and shiver my conscience, if there were no mercy nor promise, settles it now because there is a truth, that that promise shall be shall be performed to me (I,275).

In this passage, Donne is stating that the justice of God strikes a note of terror in the heart of the sinful man; however, for the man whose sins have been forgiven and whose conscience has been rectified, the justice of God is no longer a terrifying thing. In a sermon dated around 1622, Donne continues to sound out a note of positive optimism and confidence:

> So may I finde this Blessednesse, in this work of the Holy Ghost, not to impute, that is, not to suspect, that God imputes any repented sin unto me, or reserves any thing to lay to my charge at the last day, which I have prayed may be, and therefore hoped hath before been forgiven (IX,264).

The notion that a rectified conscience produces peace runs throughout the sermons. At one point, he equates sleep with peace of conscience. He states: "This [peace] is the sleep of the Saints of

God: It is not a sluggishnesse, but innocence, and a good conscience, that casts them sleep" (II,227). In another place he states that the peace of conscience leads to an undoubting trust and assurance of salvation" (II,264). Elsewhere, Donne says that peace of conscience is the seal of the Holy Ghost: "Accept the seale of the Holy Ghost, and come to that health which that physique promises, peace of conscience" (III,342). He refers to peace of conscience as "the best jewell" (IV,49), as "paradise" (V,197) and as an "olive" (VI,101). Peace of conscience, Donne declares, manifests itself in a "merry heart and cheerful countenance" (IV,140). In a sermon preached at Paul's Cross, 15 September 1622, Donne states that after Adam's sin had been forgiven, he experienced peace of conscience: "as soone as Adams sinne was forgiven him, he expressed (as he cals it in that Song) Sabbatum Suum, his Sabboth, his peace of conscience, in a Song" (IV,180). Quite clearly, Donne believes that a rectified conscience produces peace of mind.

Throughout the sermons Donne constantly affirms that a rectified conscience produces a testimony and a witness within man. In one sermon he states that "A rectified conscience lets me know that I am his" (III,258). He declares that the testimony of a rectified conscience enables him to affirm "that he hath never forsaken me, and then that he hath never suffered me to forsake my selfe" (VII,63). He continues: "through the testimony of a rectified conscience, I can proceed to Davids confidence for the future, Because thou hast been my helpe, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoyce"(VII,64). Preaching from the text "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God," Donne declares that the blessed or the happy man is one who has the testimony of a rectified conscience. He says:

> yet so blessed are they who in the testimony of a rectified conscience, which is this purity of heart, as that they have this blessednesse in a present possession, Blessed are the pure in heart; they are now, they are already blessed (VII,340).

Donne continues:

> This Blessednesse then, is Congeires bonorum, A concurrance, a confluence, an accumalation of all that is Good; And he that is mundas corde, pure in heart, safe in a rectified conscience hath that (VII,339).

Since a rectified conscience produces a confidence and an optimism, how then is it to be achieved?

Preaching from the text "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," Donne declares that the Holy Ghost at work in the Church of Christ on earth is the agent by which the conscience is rectified: "The Spirit shall witnesse to your Spirit, and rectifie your conscience: And then, by that you shall receive power" (IV,267). He continues:

> The Holy Ghost enables your conscience to say, that your principall ende is not gaine, nor glory, but to gain Soules to the Glory of GOD, this Seales the great Seale, this justifies justice it self, this authorizes Authoritie, and gives power to strength it selfe. Let the Conscience be upright, and then Seales, and Patents, and Commissions are wings; they assist him to flye the faster; let the conscience be lame, and distorted, and he that goes upon Seales, and Patents and Commissions, goes upon weak and feeble crouches. When the Holy Ghost is come upon you, your Conscience rectified, yee shall have Power to become witnesses unto me (IV,274).

Preaching from the text "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit," Donne declares that the two spirits referred to in this verse are the Holy Spirit and the conscience. He states:

> In summe, we need seek no farther for a word to expresse this spirit but that which is familar to us, The Conscience: A rectified conscience is this spirit: My conscience beareth me witnesse, sayes the Apostle. And so we have both the persons in this judicall proceeding; The Spirit is the Holy Ghost; Our Spirit

> is our conscience: And now their office is to testify, to beare witnesse (V,66).

Preaching at St. Paul's on Whitsunday 1628, Donne discourses on the subject of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He discusses the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and for the most part, the sermon contains a series of invectives against those whom hefeels are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. Towards the end of his address, he states that it is not his intention to keep his hearers in this "ill-Aire of blasphemous contumelies against the Holy Ghost" (VIII,266). He continues:

> we promised at first, to dismisse you at last in a perfume, with the breath of the Holy Ghost upon you; and that is, to excite you to a rectified sense, and knowledge, that he offers himself unto you, and is received by you. This is alwaies the face of God to us, by which God vouchsafes to manifest himselfe to us: So his Ordinance in the Church, is his face. And, the light of God to us, is that light by which he shines upon us; his word in his Church. And then, the Evidence, the Seale, the Witnesse of all, that this face which I see by this light, is directed upon me for my comfort, is, The Testimony of the Holy Ghost, When that Spirit bears witnesse with our spirit, that he is in us (VIII,266)

In this quotation, Donne declares two important things about the work of the Holy Spirit. First of all, the Holy Spirit at work in the Church of Christ on earth provides man with a witness and furnishes him with a knowledge, an assurance of Divine forgiveness, and secondly, the Holy Spirit bears witness with man's spirit, that is his conscience, that God's spirit is within him.

In the sermon discussed earlier in this chapter where Donne talks about a false imputing and how erroneous reckoning can lead man into falsely accusing himself and into believing that Christ's sacrifice does not appertain to him, Donne also shows that each member of the Trinity is at work in the act of salvation. God the Father proposes,

decrees and accepts Christ's sacrifice; God the Son "sits upon his Church, as a Hen upon her Eggs, he covers all our sinnes, whom he hath gathered into that body, with spreading himselfe and his merits upon us all there" (IX,263). Donne then proceeds to outline what part the Holy Spirit plays in the work of salvation. He says:

> We consider God the Holy Ghost to worke ... as the Spirit of Consolation, to blow away all scruples, all diffidences, and to establish an assurance in the Conscience. The Lord imputes not, that is, the Spirit of the Lord, the Lord the Spirit, The Holy Ghost, suffers me not to impute to my selfe those sinnes, which I have truly repented. The over-tendernesse of a bruised and a faint conscience may impute sinne to it selfe, when it is discharged; And a seared and obdurate conscience may impute none, when it abounds: If the Holy Ghost work, he rectifies both (IX,263).

In this quotation Donne declares a number of important things about the work of the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Trinity. He maintains that the Holy Ghost is the agent of rectification. When a man's conscience is rectified, he ceases to impute sin to himself. No longer is he suspicious of the mercy of God, but he possesses an assurance that God has forgiven him. Donne also declares that the Holy Spirit works upon man's conscience in one of two ways. He either works on the weak conscience by instilling into it a confidence and an assurance of salvation or he works on the seared conscience by awakening it to an awareness of sinfulness. In the Holy Sonnets, as we have seen, Donne is suffering from an "overtendernesse of a bruised and faint conscience." In each of the sonnets Donne is obsessed with his sinfulness and cannot feel the assurance that God's mercy pertains to him. Once his conscience is rectified, he receives power to become Christ's witness, and he possesses an awareness, a knowledge, that Christ is in him and that he is in Christ.

Throughout the sermons, Donne constantly emphasizes the importance of the Church. He declares repeatedly that the Church of Christ on earth is the only means through which remission of sin can be attained:

> All power of remission of sinnes is in the Lord, but in the Lord in his Church: And therefore since that Church hath ordayned that sick persons shall make a special confession, yf they feele their consciences troubled with any weighty matter...let noe man think himselfe wiser than the Church (II,160).

Elsewhere, (II,324) he expresses a similar thought:

> Doe I feele the remission of those sinnes applyed to me when I hear the gracious promises of the Gospel shed upon repentent sinners by the mouth of his Minister? Have I a true and solide consolation (without shift, or disguise, or flattery of my conscience) when I receive the seal of his pardon in the Sacrament (II,324).

Donne becomes even more emphatic on this point and declares that "God hath put his conscience into his Church, and whose sins are remitted there, are remitted in heaven at all times" (II,361). Not surprisingly, Donne asserts that "the Church proposes all that is necessary to my salvation, in the Word, and seals all to me in the Sacraments" (III,210). In another sermon, Donne maintains that the Church is God's voice on earth.

> That which the Scripture sayes, God sayes, (says St. Augustine) for the scripture is his word; and that which the Church says, the Scriptures say, for she is their word, they speak in her; they authorize her, and she explicates them sayes the same Father. There is not so wholsome a thing, no soule can live in so good an aire, and in so good a diet, Then still submits a mans owne particular reason, to the authority of the Church expressed in the Scriptures (VI,282).

Donne believes that the ordinances of the Church play a part in rectifying the conscience. At one place in the sermons, Donne declares that the Kingdom of God on earth consists of three things: "Peace in

the State, peace in the Church, peace in our conscience" (III,127). He goes on to state that the man who has a sea of transgressions in his conscience is able to find a recourse to God through "the Ordinance of a well-established, and well-governed Church" (III,127). Throughout the sermons Donne constantly refers to the ordinance of baptism and aligns himself firmly with Augustine in saying that baptism washes away original sin. He states:

> ... that Baptisme is to us, Ianua Ecclesiae, as S. Augustine cals it, The Doore of the Church, at that we enter, and Investitura Christianismi, The investing of Christianity, as S. Bernard cals it, There we put on Christ Jesus; And, as Luther expresses it, The Church in Baptisme, is as a Woman delivered of a child, and her child is the Kingdom of Heaven, and that Kingdome she delivers into his armes who is truly Baptized. This Sacrament makes us Christians (VI,137).

Donne maintains that the penalty of original sin is blotted out in baptism:

> First, there is a hand-writing of Ordinances against me; a Debt, an Obligation contracted by our first Parents, in their disobedience, and falne upon me. And even that (be it but Originall sin) is shrewd evidence; ther's my first charge; that's blotted out, that's defaced, that cannot be sued against me, after Baptisme (VIII,346).

Not only does baptism cleanse a man from original sin, but Donne declares that it purifies the conscience:

> And presently followes, The remission of sins, the purifying of my conscience, in that water, which is his blood, Baptisme, and in that wine, which is his blood the other Sacrament (V,250).

Quoting from St. Chrysostom, Donne declares that we have received an infinite treasure from God in baptism. He states: "in Baptisme the mysteries of Religion are made accessible to us, and we may attain to them. And he [the Holy Ghost] comes as a dove, that is, Brings peace of conscience with him...Heaven is opened to us in Baptisme" (VI,138).

In order to understand the role that the church plays in rectifying the conscience, it is necessary to look at the imagery Donne uses to describe both the Church and its ministers. He describes it as an exchequer, in which Christ's merits are deposited: God hath provided an exchequer, where this money is issued; that is his Church, where his merits should be applied to the discharge of particular consciences" (IV,288). Further, he likens the Church to a hospital in which man can recover from the disease of original sin and from the sin of doubt. He states:

> And if we consider that this Church that Christ bought and paid so dearly for, it was rather an Hospitall, then a Church: A place where ... those that Halted between two Religions, might be rectified in the truth (V,124-25).

Throughout the sermons, Donne often refers to the Church as a mother. Using the metaphor of a nursing child, Donne declares that Christians are God's children nourished and fed with the milk of his word (IV,98). In another place, quoting from Augustine, Donne declares that the epistles are the "Ubera Ecclesiae, The Paps, the Breasts, the Udders of the Church" (VI,114). In his book The Transformation of Sin, Patrick Grant draws attention to the fact that the Church Fathers frequently referred to the Church as a mother who nourished her children. He states: "this view of the Church is present from earliest Christian times. St. Ireneaus, for instance, describes the Church as a mother who provides spiritual nourishment."[25] He points out that it was a favourite figure of Cyprian to represent the Church as a mother who joins all her children in a single family, and he shows that the figure of Mater Ecclesiae occurs in Tertullian,

[25]Patrick Grant, The Transformation of Sin (Montreal, 1974),p.10.

Clement, Origen, and Augustine.[26] When we compare such statements of Donne's as: "This Mother; is this Church: that Church to whose breasts God had applyed that Soule"(VII,83), with those of the Church Fathers, we can see how deeply versed in mediaeval thought Donne was.[27] In another place, (VII,229) Donne refers to the Church as a court, a tribunal "in which all mens consciences and actions must be regulated and ordered" (VII,229).

Donne's description of the priest is equally interesting. In one place he refers to the servants of God as "chariots of the Holy Ghost." He states:

> But when all the good gifts of men are modestly employ'd, and humbly received, as vehicula Spiritus as S. Augustine calls them. The chariots of the Holy Ghost, as meanes afforded by God, to convey the word of life into us, in Those words we heare The word (V,37).

Later in the same sermon Donne declares that the object of preaching is to rectify. Once again quoting from Augustine, he states:

> And contente thyselfe with hearing those sermons, which rectify thee; The Holy Ghost visits us, and disposes us, but yet the Holy Ghost sends us to the ministry of man; Non dedignatur docere per hominem, qui dignatus est esse homo says S. Augustine: He that came to us, As Man, is content that we go to men, for our instruction (V,40).

Elsewhere, he calls the priest a "consolation sent into the pulpit to restore and rectify my conscience, and scatter and dispel all those clouds that invested it, and infested it before" (VII,136). He declares that the preaching of the word will "rectifie thee in all ragged ways, direct thee in all crosse ways, and stop thee in all doubtfull wayes" (V,373).

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[26] Ibid., pp 10-11.

[27] Cf. My discussion, infra, p. 78.

In this chapter we have seen that a definite change of attitude occurs in Donne. The confidence and optimism that result from a rectified conscience are in sharp contrast to the tone of despair, futility, and despair that pervades the mind of the writer of the Holy Sonnets. At the time of writing the Divine Poems, Donne struggles with a guilty conscience that produces depression, fear and anxiety. We have also seen the role the Church plays in bringing about a rectified conscience. Once Donne's conscience is rectified it no longer accuses him; instead, it becomes a touchstone within him, a criterion, a standard of judgment against which he is able to measure himself spiritually. He is able to appeal to his conscience and to call upon it to provide him with evidence that his sin has been forgiven and that he no longer stands condemned before God. Once conscience is rectified, it becomes for Donne a solid foundation upon which he is able to build his hope for forgiveness and for eternal life.

Chapter Two: The Authority of Conscience

St. Paul enjoined the Church at Rome "to let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: The powers that be are ordained of God."[1] Since the time of St. Paul's words the question of where authority in moral and spiritual matters lies has been a contentious issue. Throughout history, man has been trying to decide the nature of his obligation to obey human laws. Thomas Aquinas, for example, devotes a section of the Summa Thelogiae to this problem. He asks such questions as "Are human laws always binding and authoratative?" Are all men subject to human law?" "Does human law bind a man in conscience?" and "Does the Bible teach complete obedience to human law?" A few centuries later, Calvin sought to unravel St. Paul's teaching concerning the problem of Christian freedom. In many places in the Institutes Calvin discusses a Christian's obligation to civil and ecclesiastical law and questions whether such laws bind man's conscience.

It is clear from the works of John Donne that he was also concerned with the problem of whether a man's conscience was the ultimate authority in ethical and spiritual matters, or whether man was obligated to obey all civil and ecclesiastical laws. In his earlier works, Donne emphatically asserts that man should be free to follow his own conscience and bitterly resents any intrusions upon this God-given liberty. However, there are some statements in his sermons

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[1] Romans 13:1.

preached at a later date which would make it apparent that Donne modified his earlier position. Donne's concept of the authority of conscience tends to become coloured by his changing attitude towards the Church and the role it plays in man's spiritual life.

About 1594 Donne composed a satire on religion described by Professor Grierson as "one of the most thoughtful appeals for toleration, for the candid scrutiny of religious differences, which was written perhaps in any country."[2] As Battenhouse points out, "the facts of the Donne family history hardly prepare us for the tolerant spirit that breathes in John's poem."[3] John Donne was raised in a strongly Catholic family. He had spent three years at Oxford but left without receiving a degree because he had doubts about taking the Oath of Allegiance. In the preface to Pseudo-Martyr, Donne declares how strong a hold the Roman religion had on him. He writes:

> I was first to blot out certaine impressions of the Romane religion and to wrastle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken; and some anticipations earlye layde upon my conscience, both by persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life seem'd to me justly to claime an interest for the guiding and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters.[4]

From the biographies of Donne we know that his family tradition was one of unbroken loyalty to the Roman Church.[5] His mother was related to Thomas More, and her brothers, Ellis and Jasper Heywood, were renowned Jesuits. In 1593, Donne's brother Henry was imprisoned on

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[2] The Poems of John Donne, ed. H.J.C. Grierson (Oxford, 1912) II, xvi.

[3] Roy Battenhouse, "The Grounds of Religious Toleration in the thought of John Donne," Church History, XI (1942), 217.

[4] Divine Poems, ed. Helen Gardner, p. xviii.

[5] Ibid., p. xvii.

suspicion of having given shelter to a Jesuit. While in prison, Henry contracted fever and died. The date of Henry's death is significant, for it proceeds by approximately one year the writing of Satire III.

From the tone of Satire III, it would seem most likely that it was written during the period of Donne's life when, according to Walton, he "...betrothed himself to no Religion that might give him any other denomination than a Christian."[6] In Pseudo-Martyr Donne had written that he had used no "...inordinate haste, nor precipitation in binding his conscience to any locall Religion, even though his delay endangered his career and reputation."[7] One fact becomes clear from Satire III -- at this point in his life Donne had certainly abandoned the Church of his upbringing.

As Helen Gardner accurately observes, the subject of Satire III is the problem of authority: "Where is true Religion to be found?" She continues:

> The only authority recognized in the poem is the authority of conscience; and the appeal made to antiquity, "aske thy father which is shee, Let him aske this" is the Protestant appeal to primitive tradition against the Roman assertion of the authority of the continuing Church.[8]

The last lines of the poem contain a directive to "keep the truth which thou hast found," and in this section of the poem Donne clearly deals with the problem of which is the true and authoritative church. At this point in Donne's life he refuses to side with Rome,

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[6] Ibid., p. xviii.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

Geneva, or Canterbury, but he admits the possibility that all three may be right. He remonstrates thus:

> Fool and wretch, wilt thou let thy soul be tied
> To man's laws, by which she shall not be tried
> At the last day? Oh will it then boot thee
> To say a Philip or a Gregory
> A Harry or a Martin, taught thee this?
> Is not this excuse for mere contraries
> Equally strong? Cannot both sides say so?

Donne's protest "Cannot both sides be right" stands out as an appeal for toleration and moderation in religion and defies the temper of the time that seemed to demand a dogmatic and opinionated approach to religious belief.

In her article "John Donne and the Mindes Indeavours," Sister Geraldine states that in Satire III Donne aims his satirical barbs at three kinds of intellectual bankruptcy: a lack of awarness leading to imprudent and improvident behaviour; culpable ignorance, that impedes the attainment of truth; and the deliberate manipulation of another's mind by confusing and misguiding his ability to think for himself.[9] Her last point is pertinent to the discussion here. Because the argument in Satire III is an argument for toleration and because Donne maintains that man ought to be free to follow the convictions of his conscience, he strongly resents any attempts by either Protestants or Catholics to impose their views on another man. Consequently, as Sister Geraldine observes, Donne "inveighs against the deliberate shaping of one mind by another and his shafts reach out to both the shaper and the shaped."[10] Donne asserts that the coercing of a man's conscience is a sin and that God has not issued any kind of a "blank

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[9]Sister Geraldine, "John Donne and the Mindes Indeavours" Studies in English Literature, V (1965), 116.

[10]Ibid., pp. 118-19.

charter" for tyranny. He states:

> men do not stand
> In so ill case here, that God hath with his hand
> Signed kings blank charters to kill who they hate.

The concern which Donne shows for the freedom of an individual to decide for himself where the true Church is to be found and his criticism of those who deliberately seek to manipulate a man's thinking is by no means confined only to Satire III. Donne takes up the same theme again in Ignatius His Conclave in which he attacks among others Copernicus, Paracelsus, Machiavelli, Columbus, and Ignatius because "they have done violence to, or at least disturbed the thinking of their fellows."[11] In Ignatius His Conclave the poet visits the corridors of the Inferno and comes upon a secret place to which only those who had affronted antiquity and induced doubts, anxieties, and scruples had a title. As in Satire III, Donne aims most of his invective at those who deliberately twist the minds of men for evil purposes.

It has already been pointed out that at the time when Donne wrote Satire, III he had rejected the notion that any one Church was the authoritative one; instead, he argues that since the opinion of Protestant, Catholic, or Reformer was equally probable, a man should be free to follow his own conscience and to decide for himself where religious truth was to be found. In many of his sermons preached between 1615 and 1630, Donne discusses the question of authority frequently. He raises such questions as "To what extent is a Christian obligated to obey human law?" He wonders what a man should do if his conscience tells him that to obey man's law is to transgress Divine

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[11] Ibid., p. 120.

law. In such a case, ponders Donne, is conscience an authoritative guide?

Donne's indebtedness to mediaeval scholasticism has already been pointed out in the introduction to this thesis. A closer look at parts of the Summa in which Aquinas discusses the subject of law is helpful at this point in order to establish the parallels that exist between Donne and Aquinas in the area of man's obligation to the law. In his analysis of law Aquinas is concerned with showing that because men live under law, a moral obligation is imposed upon each individual to observe that law. In the section of the Summa in which Aquinas systematically discusses man's obligation to human law, his concern, as one critic aptly puts it, is

> ...to focus almost exclusively on one problem, that of the roots of obligation. The problem is basic because it asks, in effect, by what warrant does the human legislator bind the consciences of men. Is not this a power that belongs to God alone? If men possess it, what are the limits within which they may excercise it?[12]

One of the key questions that Aquinas raises in his treatment of law is "Do human laws bind a man in conscience?" He asserts emphatically:

> It seems that human law does not set up an obligation in the court of conscience. An inferior power has no jurisdiction in a superior court. The human authority that makes human laws is lower than divine authority, and so cannot impose its law on divine judgment which is the judgment of conscience (ST 1a2ae 96.4).

He continues:

> Furthermore, human laws often invade men, destroy their good name, and doing them other injury; Isaiah cries, Woe to them that make wicked laws and, when they write, write injustice, to oppress the poor in judgment, and do violence to the cause of the humble of my people. Yet anybody may lawfully escape from oppression and outrage. Therefore,

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[12] Thomas Aquinas, Treatise on Law, ed. Stanley Parry (Chicago, 1970), p.v.

human laws impose no necessity on conscience (ST 1a2ae 96.4).

Aquinas comments on the following verse from St. Peter's epistle concerning obedience to superior powers. Peter writes: "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully."[13] Aquinas maintains that human laws are either just or unjust. "If they are just," he says "they have binding force in the court of conscience from the Eternal law from which they derive" (1a2ae 96.4). Aquinas proceeds to define what constitutes both a just and an unjust law. According to Aquinas, laws are said to be just on three counts:

> ...from their end, when they are ordered to the common good, from their authority, when what is enacted does not exceed the lawgiver's power, and from their form, when from the good of the whole they place burdens in equitable proportion on subjects (ST 1a2ae 96.4).

In Aquinas' opinion, just laws, that is those laws that meet the conditions as outlined in the above quotation, oblige at the bar of conscience. On the other hand laws can be unjust in two ways. First of all, they are unjust when they are contrary to what is fair in human terms, and secondly, they are unjust when they are contrary to God's rights. Aquinas shows that laws may be against human good when the ruler taxes his subjects for his own greed or vanity rather than for the common benefit, when he enacts a law beyond the power committed to him, or when laws are made unequally. He elaborates thus:

> such are the laws of tyrants which promote idolatry or whatsoever is against divine law. To observe them is in no wise permissable, for as it is said in the Acts, We must obey God rather than man (ST 1a2ae 96.4)

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[13] 1 Peter 2:19; cf. the Beatitude: "Blessed are they that which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

To what extent then, in terms of Aquinas' teaching, is man bound to human law? Basing his argument on St. Paul's instruction, Aquinas states:

> There is no authority, that is human authority, except from God, and therefore he who resists the authorities, that is in what lies within the order of their power, resists what God has appointed and consequently is made guilty in conscience (ST 1a2ae 96.4).

The key phrase in Aquinas' argument is contained in the above quotation in the words "in what lies within the order of their power." In this section of the Summa Aquinas asserts that man is bound to human laws if those laws do not contravene God's commandments. If human law orders a man to do anything contrary to the commands of God as set out in the Scriptures, then, states Aquinas, such laws go beyond the order of power and are not to be obeyed. The extent to which a man is bound to human law is the extent to which that law corresponds to God's commandments as outlined in the Scriptures.

It is evident from Donne's sermons that he is in complete agreement with Aquinas, and he also discusses the Christian's obligation to the law. In Donne's most extensive treatment of the subject, he uses the Biblical story of Esther. King Haman, Esther's husband, had made a decree that no one could come into the royal presence unless the king had specifically sent for him. Having learned of Mordecai's plot to destroy the Jews (Esther's own people) she finds herself in a predicament. In order to save the Jews, she must disregard Haman's edict and go to the king and ask for his intervention. She consecrates the whole action to God, and "finding it acceptable to him, she neglects both that particular law, That none might have access to the King uncalled, and that general Law, That every man is bound to

preserve himself" (V,217). Donne declares that in deciding to disregard the King's edict, she was to transgress both the law of the state and the law of nature itself, by exposing herself to the danger of death.

Donne takes up the same question that Aquinas raises in the Summa -- "How far Humane Laws binde the conscience, how far they lay such an obligation upon us, as that, if we transgress them, we do not only incur the penalty, but sin towards God" (V,224-225). He admits that it is a perplexing question and one that has been debated in all places and at all times. He maintains that no matter how widely divergent opinion may be on this point, there is a general consesus of agreement that human law has a divine part to it as well. With the opinion that human law contains part of the law of God Donne is in complete agreement. He states:

> that man cannot binde the conscience, because he cannot judge the conscience, nor can he absolve the conscience, may be a good argument, but in laws made by that power which is ordained by God, man bindes not, but God himself: And then you must be subject, not because of wrath, but because of conscience (V,225).

Donne anticipates the question "how then was Esther's act exempt from sin?" He comes to her defence by declaring that whenever one is faced with a choice between two laws and it is obvious that one cannot obey both, one must obey the law that comes immediately from the greatest power and imposes the greatest duty (V,226). Esther was faced with two laws, God's and the King's; the one promoted God's glory (to save His people from Mordecai's plot) and the other promoted the greatness and the majesty of the King. Hence, it was right for Esther, after having debated in her conscience the merits of both laws, to have chosen to break the one and to obey the other. The conclusion reached here by

Donne is simply a restatement of Aquinas' belief, namely, that those laws which are contrary to God's rights do not impose a necessity or have a binding force on conscience.

A consideration of Donne's and Aquinas' treatment of the subject of obedience to human law involves a discussion of a doctrine that was mentioned in the introduction of this thesis as being one of the key tenets of the Reformation, namely, the assertion of the freedom of the individual conscience. Since Calvin was one of the most outspoken writers of Christian freedom, and because Donne was familiar with and quoted from the Institutes in his sermons, a closer look at the Institutes will reveal that Calvin's thought is reflected in Donne's sermons in the area of Christian freedom.

"Christian Freedom" is the title of Book III, chapter ix of the Institutes. Calvin believes that Christian freedom "... is a thing of prime necessity, and apart from a knowledge of it consciences dare undertake almost nothing without doubting; they hesitate and recoil from many things; they constantly waver and are afraid."[14] Calvin is aware that although the subject causes passions to boil and wild tumults arise, care must be taken that such an important doctrine be not supressed. Calvin believes that Christian liberty consists of three things, the first of which is freedom from the Law. He states that "the conscience of believers, in seeking assurance of their justification before God, should rise above and advance beyond the law, forgetting all law righteousness" (III,ix,2). Calvin advises Christians, whose consciences are concerned with how they will reply and with

[14]John Calvin: Institutes of Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, 1960), II,833. Future references from this work will be cited in the text and indicated in parentheses giving volume, chapter, and page numbers.

what assurance they will have when they are summoned to God's judgment, "not to reckon what the law requires, but Christ alone, who surpasses all perfection of the law, [that is, the Law of Moses] must be set forth as righteousness" (III,ix,2). The second component of religious liberty is the freedom of conscience that willingly obeys without compulsion of the law. The third part lies in this: "regarding outward things that are of themselves indifferent, we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and at other times not using them, indifferently" (III,ix,7). Calvin warns that a knowledge of this freedom is very important, "...for," he says, "if it is lacking, our consciences will have no repose and there will be no end to superstitions" (III,ix,7). The fact is, argues Calvin, these matters are more important than is commonly believed:

> For when consciences once ensnare themselves, they enter a long and inextricable maze, not easy to get out of. If a man begins to doubt whether he may use linen for sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and napkins, he will be afterward be uncertain also about hemp (III,ix,7)

Calvin also realizes that it is possible for Christian liberty to be abused,and he warns against gluttony and luxury. However, there is another area that concerns Calvin even more, and that is the effect Christian liberty might have upon a weaker brother. For his teaching on this point Calvin turns naturally to St. Paul. The latter warns the church at Corinth: "But take care lest your freedom in any way cause offense to those who are weak" (1 Cor. 8:9).

It is clear from the sermons that Donne also holds and propounds an opinion of Christian liberty that closely parallels the view of Calvin. Donne preached two sermons at Lincoln's Inn on the text "Woe unto the world, because of offences," and in both sermons example is

is the key-note. One of the offences that Donne preaches against is the effect that one's example has on a weaker Christian. He says:

> How well soever we may seeme to be in our selves, we are not well, if we forbear not that company, and abstaine not from that conversation, which by ill example may make us worse, or if we forebear not such things, as, though they bee indifferent in themselves, and can do us no harme, yet our example may make weaker persons then we are, worse, because they may come to doe as we do; They may sin in doing those things by our example, in which we did not sinne, because we knew them to be indifferent things, and therefore did them (III,171-72).

In this sermon Donne shows that there are two kinds of "Active Scandall," as he calls them. The first occurs when a person is encouraged to sin by following the example of another. Donne outlines the second kind of scandal as follows:

> To do anything that in it selfe is <u>indifferent</u>, And no sin in mee, that do it in the sight of another that thinks it not indifferent, but unlawfull, and yet because he hath a reall, or reverentiall dependence upon me... does it against his conscience by my example, though the sinne be formally his, radically it is mine, because I gave the occasion (III,172).

As was noted in Calvin's teaching on Christian liberty, Donne is also acutely aware of his influence on the "weaker brother." Using the same passage from St. Paul as did Calvin, Donne comes to the same conclusion:

> As he [Paul] requires that we should eat and drinke to the glory of God, so he would have us study to avoid scandalizing of others, even in our eating and drinking; <u>If meat make my brother to offende</u>, in eating against his conscience... <u>I will eat no flesh while the world standeth</u> (III, 174).

Like Calvin, Donne concludes as follows: "So for our actions; it may become us, it may concern us to abstain from some indifferent things" (IV, 112).

As a logical outcome of his beliefs on Christian liberty,

Calvin asserts the freedom of conscience in the area of obedience to traditions and to civil government. He states his views on this subject in no uncertain terms:

> Since believers' consciences, having received the privilege of their freedom which we previously described, have, by Christ's gift, attained to this, that they should not be entangled with any snares of observances in those matters in which the Lord has willed them to be free, we conclude that they should be released from the power of all men (III,ix,14).

On the teaching contained mainly in the epistle to the Galatians, Calvin bases his contention that Christian believers should not be brought under men's subjection. Calvin believes that in this epistle Paul is "...solely trying to show how Christ is obscured, or rather extinguished, unless our consciences stand firm in their freedom" (III,ix,14). Calvin is aware that as soon as anything is said about the abrogation of human constitutions, many objections will be raised on such a contentious issue by some who would claim that he is expounding a doctrine that would lead to anarchy and to total disobedience to civil law.

In order to clear the objections that Calvin anticipates will be raised, he declares that there are two types of government in man, one of which is spiritual and the other, secular. In the first, man's conscience is instructed towards obedience and reverence towards God, while in the second form of government, man is trained to discharge his duties that are befitting a good citizen. Consequently, Calvin refers to these as "two kingdoms," the one spiritual, the other secular. Calvin sees these two kingdoms as being entirely separate from one another: "there are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority" (III,ix,15).

Difficulties arise, so Calvin declares, when Christians misapply the teaching of the Gospel of Christian freedom to the political realm, "as if Christians were less subject, as concerns outward government, to human laws, because their conscience have been set free in God's sight" (III,ix,15). He maintains, however, that the resolution is not really as difficult as that if one keeps the distinction in mind between "the outer forum, as it is called, and the forum of conscience " (III,ix,15). At this point in Calvin's argument, we are back to the language of Aquinas in the Summa.

Calvin proceeds to discuss conscience in relation to human and papal laws. Calvin maintains that if "any kind of law were passed to lay scruples upon us, as if the observance of these laws were necessary of itself, we say something unlawful is laid upon conscience" (IV,x,5). It is Calvin's opinion that conscience has to do with God and not with man. Although he concurs with Paul's teaching that magistrates, since they are ordained by God, ought to be held in honour, he maintains that Paul does not teach that the laws framed by them apply to the inward governing of the soul. Instead, argues Calvin, Paul asserts that the worship of God and the spiritual rule of right living are to be placed before and above the decrees of man.

As a consequence of his teaching on the freedom of conscience, it is little wonder that Calvin declares that the Church has no right to set up independent constitutions to bind consciences, and he condemns the Papacy, which, he says, has exercised the most savage tyranny over and butchery upon its members. He describes ecclesiastical constitutions thrust upon men as a necessary part of the worship of God as "traps to catch and ensnare souls"(IV,x,6). He denounces those bishops as false who, pretending that they have been appointed by God

as spiritual law givers, have burdened the conscience with new laws. He denies that they have the power over believers "as to be able by themselves to prescribe a rule of life, or to force their ordinance upon the people committed to them" (IV,x,6). Since God alone is the sole lawgiver, men are not permitted to usurp this honour because all arbitrary lordship is an encroachment upon God's kingdom. He declares that Paul's teaching to the Galatians is sufficiently clear evidence that conscience, which ought to be ruled by God alone, is not to be entangled with snares" (IV,x,8). Basing his argument on Paul's doctrine, Calvin rejects the Church of Rome's ecclesiastical constitutions that authorize ceremonies in worship, because he brands them as "tyrannous, frivolous and contrary to scripture, because with extreme vigor they bind conscience to observe whatever they command" (IV,x,9). He declares that Papal constitutions nullify God's commandments by establishing the traditions of men and exalting them over clear commands in scripture, and he asserts that such constitutions of the Roman Catholic Church are meaningless and useless. He cites auricular confession as such an example. He wonders how they "...could excuse themselves since among them it is far more wicked to have skipped it [Mass] at the turn of the year than to have led an utterly wicked life the whole year through" (IV,x,10).

While denouncing the Papal constitutions as false, because they impose an additional burden upon conscience, Calvin does not hold with those who would remove all forms of Church government. Calvin maintains that it is the duty of Christians to keep the ordinances that have been established with a free conscience, that is devoid of superstition, yet with a pious and ready inclination to obey and not to despise them or to pass them over in careless negligence (IV,x,31). Calvin further

declares that where there is excessive attentiveness and caution to Church governmental issues there can be no freedom of conscience. He believes that the issues that comprise Church government are not fixed and permanent sanctions by which men are bound, but merely outward rudiments ordained because of human weakness. Calvin's belief in the liberty of all Christians, whether in obedience to human or to church law or in the right use of things, is summarised in the following quotation from the Institutes:

> Freedom is not to be restrained by any limitation but to be left to every man's conscience to use good things of this life as far as seems lawful to him. Certainly, I admit that conscience neither ought to nor can be bound here to definite and precise legal formula; but inasmuch as Scripture gives general rules for lawful use, we ought to limit our use in accordance with them (III,ix,1).

Commenting on the stance that Calvin takes in the Institutes, Ronald Wallace states that "to guard our consciences against coming into bondage to men or to our own selves by developing scruples about such outward things is, for Calvin, a most important aspect of our struggle for Christian liberty."[15] Consequently, "a Christian will refuse to allow his conscience to be brought into bondage to anything other than the word of God."[16] As we shall now see, this is precisely the same attitude Donne takes in the sermons.

The sermon that contains the most lengthy discussion on conscience, has, at first glance, some rather puzzling if not contradictory statements. Having just stated that a Christian is a commonwealth to himself, with the scripture as his law, and that for

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[15] Ronald Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life (London, 1959), p. 309.

[16] Ibid., p. 308.

all his actions his conscience is to be his judge, he then proceeds to qualify his remarks with the following quotation that is based largely on a quote from Jerome:

> Thou must not rest in that vulgar saying, sufficit mihi, As long as mine owne Conscience stands right, I care not what the world say. Thou must care what the world says, and study to have the approbation and testimony of good men. Thine own conscience is not enough, but thou must satisfy the world and have Testimonium ab homine, good men must think thee good. A conscience that admits no search from others is, cauterizata, burnt with a hot Iron; not cured, but seared; not at peace but stupified (IV, 221-222).

At first glance, this quotation seems to negate much that has been said in this chapter, that is, that the only authority that Donne recognises in moral and spiritual matters is the authority of conscience. Throughout this chapter, it has been pointed out that Donne emphatically asserts that man should be free to follow his own conscience and that he bitterly resents any intrusions upon this God-given liberty. The passage quoted above is from a sermon preached at St. Paul's dated 13 October 1622, and it contains some statements that are crucial to his theory of conscience. In the above quotation Donne once more repeats his belief that the Church plays an important role in man's spiritual life. In this sermon, Donne goes on to say that men are to harken to those "whom he hath set over... them for the rectifying [italics mine] of... their conscience" (IV,222). Although some of the statements in this sermon seem to contain an argument for auricular confession, nothing is farther from his mind. Donne's insistence on this point is quite evident:

> Neither is this to erect a parochiall papacy, to make every minister a Pope in his own parish or to enthrall you to a necessity of communicating all your sinnes or all your doubtful actions to him; God forbid. God of all his goodnesse hath delivered us,

> from that bondage, and butchery of conscience, which our fathers suffered from Rome (IV,222-223).

The parallels between Donne and Calvin here are overwhelmingly close; both men describe Papal authority with the same term, namely, "butchery of conscience."

Donne firmly believes that just as one consults a physician when he is sick or a lawyer when legal advice is needed, so, he argues, should one consult with God's priest and obey him whom God has appointed as a spiritual guide. To conclude his argument on this point he states:

> so, for our Judge, which is the conscience, let that be directed before hand, by their advice whom God hath set over us, and settled and quieted in us, by their testimony, who are witnesses of our conversation (IV,323).

However, although he believes in and sees the value of the advice of good men, he has a warning against following every opinion. On this point he is explicit:

> The good opinion of good men, by good ways be worth our study, yet popular applause, and the voice of inconsiderable men is far too cheape a price to set our selves at, so if a man surrender himselfe wholly to the opinion of other men, and have not this Criterium, his touchstone within him, he will need North and South, all the points of the Compasse, the breath of all men (IV,227-228).

Later in the same sermon he declares that the role of the priest is first and foremost to preach. God has not set up priests to "spie, to lie or to delf furtively into his congregations' affairs"; but rather, a priest is ordained to publish and to preach, and according to Donne, this precludes "... forcible and violent pressing the Conscience by secular or Ecclesiastical authority, so it forbids clandestin and whispering Conventicles" (IV,229).

Later on his ministry, Donne lashes out at the Roman Church with a more severe stroke of the whip. To some tastes, his protest against the Church of his upbringing is a little suspect, as if it is a case of "he doth protest too much." Be this as it may; for the purposes of discussion here, his remarks will be taken at face value. Seeing the need for confession of sin, yet at the same time denouncing the Church of Rome's practices in no uncertain terms, he states:

> Nor are they to be brought in chains, as they doe in the Romane Church, by a necessitie of an exact enumeration of all their sins: But to be led with that sweetnesse, which our Church proceeds, in appointing sicke persons, if they feel their consciences troubled with any weighty matter, to make a spirituall confession and to receive absolution at the hands of the Priest (IX,310).

The satirist's tone of savage indignation is used by Donne in the next breath. Although God has ordained that men whose consciences are burdened with sins confess them to a priest, he denounces the Church of Rome's abuse of this God-given right, and while God has placed the power of confession in the Anglican Church's hands too, he protests that the priests of that Church are "...far from inducing amongst us, that torture of conscience, that usurpation of Gods power, that spying into the counsails of Princes, and supplanting of their purposes, with which the Church of Rome hath been deeply charged" (IX,310).

In one of his later sermons (IX,13) he begins to approach the subject of confession again, and he declares that confession must always be made to God, regardless of whether it is made directly or through a priest. Donne discusses the position of the Anglican Church which enjoys a general public confession from the whole congregation, and he recommends private confession to the priest for those sick persons troubled with their consciences, and for those about to come to the

Holy Communion who are also troubled (Introduction to v.IX) he states

> And then to be remembred, that every coming to the Communion is as serious a thing as a transmigration out of this world, and we should doe as much here, for the settling of our conscience, as upon our deathbed; And to be remembered also, that none of all the Reformed Churches have forbidden Confession, though some practice it lesse than others (IX,310).

Although Donne declares that the practice of confession in the Church of Rome has led to butchery and slavery of conscience, he nevertheless affirms that it is necessary. He states:

> And then for Confession, we deny not a necessity to confesse to man; There may be many cases of scruple, or perplexity, where it were an exposing our selves to farther occasions of sin, not to confesse to man; And in Confession, we require a particular detestation of sin which we confesse, which they require not (IX,266).

In another sermon, IX,304, he continues along the same line of thought, that confession is an important aid in easing man's conscience:

> It is but a homely Metaphor, but it is a wholsesome, and a usefull one, Confessio vomitus, Confession works as a vomit; It shakes the frame, and it breakes the bed of sin; and it is an ease to the spiritual stomach, to the conscience, to be thereby disburdened (IX,304).

In nearly all of his sermons, Donne reminds his congregation of the importance of the Church and he claims that God has endowed her with enormous power. He is convinced that the Church is the voice of God on earth and that she explicates the truths of God's word. In chapter one, as we have seen, Donne maintains that the Holy Ghost at work in the Church rectifies the conscience and instills within it a confident assurance. Here in this chapter, Donne's attitude towards the authority of conscience is seen to be modified by his growing awareness of the authority that God has given to his Church. As Donne comes to realize that the Church "proposes to man everything necessary for his salvation," a shift in emphasis takes place in his thinking.

This does not mean that later in life Donne values the judgment of conscience any less than in 1594, the year of Satire III. In "Death's Duell," Donne's final message to his congregation before his death in 1630, he emphasizes among other things the importance of sifting and examining one's conscience:

> Hast thou been content to come to this Inquisition, this examination, this agitation, this cribration, this pursuit of thy conscience, to sift it, to follow it from the sinnes of thy youth, to thy present sinnes? That's time spent like thy Saviours (X,247).

Donne's dying statement proves that throughout his life he continued to stress the importance of conscience even though, as has been pointed out, his attitude towards it is modified.

Chapter III

Conscience: *Conscientia* and *Scio*

Despite the fact that widely varying opinions have been and most likely will continue to be held about the conditioning forces that trigger conscience into action, both theologian and psychologist alike agree that the word "conscience" is derived from the Latin word *conscientia*, meaning "joint knowledge," and both maintain that knowledge is basic to the operation of conscience. The aim of this chapter is to show that for Donne knowledge is a vital part of conscience -- in other words, the *scio* of *conscientia* is extremely important. It will also become evident that his statements about knowledge are connected with the changes of attitude that have been discussed in the preceding chapters.

It is clear from the *Summa Theologia* that Aquinas certainly thought that knowledge was an important part of conscience. In the *Summa* Aquinas discusses the subject of conscience, asking "What is it?" "Does it bind?" and "Is conscience ever mistaken?" He defines conscience in the following manner:

> Conscience is an act, not a power. Taking the original meaning of the word, it denotes knowledge ordered towards something, since it means knowledge-along-with-another (*ST* 1a 79.13).

He points out that its role is to witness, to bind, to incite, and also to accuse, to torment, and to rebuke, but he maintains that all these functions depend on applying some of our knowledge to action (*ST* 1a 79.3). This application of knowledge operates in three particular areas. Conscience is said to witness when we acknowledge that something has or has not been done. Aquinas continued:

> knowledge is also applied when through our

> conscience we judge that something ought to be done or ought not to be done. In this case conscience is said to incite or bind. A third application is when by conscience we judge something to have been done well or ill. In this case we speak of conscience excusing or accusing or tormenting. It is obvious that all these things follow actual application of knowledge to what we do (ST 1a 79.13).

The Thomistic view of conscience is undoubtedly, as one critic states, "the classic statement if not the origin of conscience as a built in human device for spot-checking right from wrong."[1] In a parallel passage in De Veritate, Aquinas declares:

> Conscience means the application of knowledge to something. Hence, to be conscious (conscire) means to know together (simul scire). But any knowledge can be applied to a thing. Hence conscience cannot denote a special habit or power, but designates the act itself which is the application of any knowledge to some particular act.[2]

The main sermon in which Donne deals with the subject of conscience is the one preached before King Charles on 3 April 1625. Taking Psalm 11:3 as his text, Donne expounds on the subject, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Having stated that conscience is the foundation upon which man builds his life, Donne proceeds to ask "What is conscience?" This is his answer:

> Conscience hath but these two Elements, Knowledge, and practise; for Conscientia presumit Scientiam; Hee that does anything with a good Conscience, knowes that hee should doe it, and why hee does it; Hee that does good ignorantly, stupidly, inconsiderately, implicitely, does good but hee does that good ill. Conscience is, Syllogismus praticus; upon certaine premises, well debated, I conclude that I should doe it, then I doe it (VI,255-56).

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[1] James Knight, Conscience and Guilt (New York, 1969), p. 5.

[2] Thomas Aquinas, De Veritate, trans. J. Glynn (Chicago, 1953), III,318. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text and indicated in parentheses.

This one quotation contains a very neat summary of Aquinas' teaching on conscience. Donne reaffirms all the main features of Thomas' systematic treatment of conscience. Like Aquinas, Donne believes that conscience is an application of knowledge to action. He also concurs with Aquinas' syllogistic method of argument, that is, to arrive at a conclusion from a series of premises as to what course of action should be pursued.

In another sermon, Donne continued a similar line of thought and once more shows his awareness of and familiarity with the writings and the methods of the Schoolmen. Defining conscience, he states:

> Conscience includes science; it is knowledge, and more; but it is that at first, It is as we express in the School, Syllogismus practicus. I have a good conscience in having done well: but I did that upon a former knowledge that that ought to be done (IV,122).

When this quotation is compared with the following excerpt from Aquinas' De Veritate, Donne's familiarity with mediaeval literature and with the methods of scholastic argument becomes very obvious:

> We use the name conscience for both of these modes of application. For, in so far as knowledge is applied to an act, as directive of that act, conscience is said to prod or urge or bind, But, in so far as knowledge is applied to an act, by way of examining things which have already taken place, conscience is said to accuse or cause remorse, when that which has been done is found to be out of harmony with the knowledge according to which it is examined (De Veritate, II,319).

The above quotations show that Donne, using the ideas and the methods of the Schoolman, defines conscience as knowledge in action. However, he also maintains that in order for man to be capable of right action his knowledge must be accurate; in other words, right knowledge is indispensably linked with right action.

Throughout the sermons, Donne is convinced that "knowledge is the first ingredient in godliness, the ingredient which man himself provides."[3] Taking John 14:20 as his text,Donne expounds on the verse "At that day shall ye know." The entire sermon is concerned with showing that knowledge is essential for right action. He divides the sermon into three parts and considers what knowledge is, when one receives it, and how much of it man receives. Quoting from Trimegistus, Donne declares of what the iniquity of the soul consists:

> The iniquity, the wickednesse of the soule consists in this, that we are ignorant of those wayes, and those ends, upon which we should direct and by which we should govern our purposes: And if ignorance be the corruption, and dissolution, certainly knowledge is the redintergration, and consolidation of the soule (IX,233).

In this sermon, Donne declares that knowledge is opposed to three things, namely, ignorance, inconsideration, and concealment. Defining ignorance, Donne proceeds first to show what ignorance is not: it is not a lack of understanding or of political insight, nor is it a lack of discretion. Donne declares that the ignorant man, the fool, is simply the man who trusts in his own ability. In other words, ignorance consists in man's self-reliance and self-sufficiency and his attribution of the blessings of God to man's own endeavours.

Continuing his discussion of knowledge, Donne begins to assert the role of the Church and declares that a visible church affords assistance to the individual and prevents him from falling into the sin of inconsideration. He tells his congregation:

> This knowledge ... is this, that God by breeding us in the visible church, multiplies unto us so many helps and assistance in the word preached, in the Sacrament ... as that it is almost impossible to fall into inconsideration (IX,236).

Having stated that knowledge is opposed to both ignorance and

and inconsideration, Donne contends that it is likewise opposed to concealment, and at this point he shows that right knowledge is inseparably linked with right action. He declares emphatically that "virtue that is never produced into action, is scarce worthy of that name" (IX,238). As Donne draws this sermon to a close, he begins to discuss what the nature of this knowledge is that he has been talking about, and he shows that it consists of three things. He states that "this great Legacy, this knowledge, which is all Christian Religion is, That Christ is in the Father, and you in him, and he in you." Once a man has arrived at this state of knowledge, Donne declares that a man must "enlarge science into conscience" (IX,248). He admonishes:

> Conscience is a syllogism that comes to a conclusion; Then only hath a man true knowledge, when he can conclude in his own conscience, that his practise, and conversation hath expressed it. Who will believe that there is a ditch, and know the danger of falling into it and drowning in it, if he sees us run headlong towards it, and fall into it, and continue in it? Who can beleeve, that he separates himself from Christ, by continuing in his sin, hath any knowledge, or sense, or evidence, or testimony of Christs being in him? As Christ proceeds by enlarging thy knowledge, and making thee wiser and wiser, so enlarge thy testimony of it, by growing better and better, and let him that is holy, bee more holy (IX,248-49).

The mark of a truly wise man is then, according to Donne, to know that Christ is in him and to express that knowledge in a sanctified life, and for him to have the witness of conscience that his actions are an expression of his knowledge (IX,249).

Donne is by no means an innovator in linking right knowledge with right action; rather, he is perpetrating a belief, propounded first by Socrates, that still flourished in Renaissance England. Robert Hoopes has written a book on the subject of right reason in the Renaissance. Hoopes is concerned with showing that from the time of

Socrates and continuing on into the seventeenth century, philosopher and theologian alike have held that right thinking is indispensable to right action. According to Hoopes, the idea of right reason may be said to have been born when Socrates advanced the proposition that virtue and knowledge are identical.[3] He continues: "the only kind of knowledge that will bring virtue into being is a knowledge of what things are really good or evil."[4] Hoopes points out that according to Socrates, virtue is the expression of knowledge, and evil is the expression of ignorance.[5]

Hoopes finds the same ideas occur in Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics where the ideal of the prudent man, in whom right thinking and right action are indivisibly joined, is upheld. He finds that this same concept recurs in Augustine and in Aquinas and continues on to the seventeenth century. Unfortunately, Hoopes gives only passing reference to Donne and does not do justice to the fact that he also, as has been pointed out, is equally concerned with the concept that right knowledge is indispensable to right action. Donne's insistence that "... if ignorance be the corruption and dissolution, certainly knowledge is the redintergration and consolidation of the soule" (IX,233) underscores his awareness of the Socratic equation that evil is the expression of ignorance.

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[3]Robert Hoopes, Right Reason in the English Renaissance (Cambridge, 1962), p. 1.

[4]Ibid., p. 7.

[5]The ignorant man as defined by Hoopes is the one who lacks the knowledge necessary for him to act with rectitude. He states: "Men act wrongly, but they do so because of their ignorance in which state they can only think that what they are doing is good." (p.10).

Since conscience is defined by Donne as an application of knowledge to action and because he maintains that knowledge is inseparably linked with right action, Donne's concern(as outlined in the preceding chapter) with the question of knowledge and the authority of conscience should now become clearer. Donne's criticism in Satire III of Mirreus, Crantz, Graius, Phrygius, and Gracchus is now more easily understood. He satirises these five men because, as Sister Geraldine points out, "all five of them have failed to seek sincerely the knowledge necessary to choice."[6] In other words, Donne is once more stating his belief in the Socratic equation that evil is the result of ignorance. While Donne declares in Satire III that truth is elusive he nonetheless affirms that it exists and can be known. As Sister Geraldine accurately observes the search for knowledge is an important element of the devout life, the overcoming of ignorantia.[7] Donne's statements here about knowledge and ignorance are identical to those in the Whitsuntide sermon of 1630 discussed earlier in this chapter. A comparison of this sermon with Satire III will reveal that some thirty-six years after the Satire was written Donne is still occupied with the same theme: evil is the expression of ignorantia while virtue is the expression of knowledge.

We can also understand why it is in Satire III that even though Donne declares that the wilful coercing of a man's conscience and convictions is sinful he is even more critical of the ignorant man, whose lack of knowledge renders him susceptible to coercion. Sister Geraldine succinctly observes:

> It is not to those who sin against their better knowledge that the satirist has ... given his

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[6] Sister Geraldine, SEL, V (1965), 118.

[7] Ibid.,

> soberest attention. It is to those whose awareness needs to be sharpened, whose knowledge is insufficient, whose thinking may be coerced.[8]

She goes on to point out that the significant verb of lines 100-102 is "know": "That thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds know." Although Donne aims his criticism in Satire III in many different directions, his emphasis is always upon the same thing --- knowledge.

Donne's contention that *scio* is an important element in *conscientia* is by no means limited to the works that have been discussed so far in this chapter, but it will now become evident that in *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Biathanatos* he is also concerned with the same theme. That Donne displays an interest in casuistry in both *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Biathanatos* is beyond doubt, as recent criticism has shown.[9] But since both of these works contain some key statements about the importance of knowledge in conscience some attention must be given to the subject of casuistry. Izaak Walton informs us of Donne's interest in casuistry and that among the materials found in the study of Donne after his death were "copies of divers Letters and Cases of Conscience that had concerned his friends, with his observations and solutions of them."[10] Even though many of Donne's letters have survived there is no trace of the "cases of conscience" that Walton mentions. As one critic points out, casuistry enjoyed great popularity during Donne's lifetime, and he estimates that between 1564 and 1660, more than six hundred practical treatises, each dealing with cases of conscience, were published.[11] It is obvious

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[9] Donne's interest in casuistry is discussed by A. E. Malloch in SEL, II (1962), 57-76. See also Dwight Cathcart's unpublished doctoral dissertation: John Donne: Doubting Conscience: The Tradition of Casuistry, (Vanderbilt University). 1969.

[10] A.E. Malloch, SEL, II (1962), 57.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

that Donne was acquainted with some of these works as he quotes from them both extensively in both Pseudo-Martyr and Biathanatos.

Despite his keen interest in the literature of the casuits, Donne appears to have his doubts about the validity of their approach. In a letter written during the years of misfortune at Mitcham he writes:

> ... the Casuists are so indulgent, as that they allow a conscience to adhere to any probable opinion against a more probable, and do never hinde him to seek out which is the more probable, but give him leave to dissemble that is to pretend not to see it and to depart from it, if by mischance he come to know it.[12]

The criticism that he makes here of the methods of casuistry is continued in Pseudo-Martyr. In this book, Donne discusses the question of taking the Oath of Allegiance, and maintains that the precept that "kings must be obeyed" is binding except under special circumstances:

> And though these circumstances give it the necessity of refusing to take the Oath all the life it hath, so that to make it obligatory, or not so depends upon them, yet it is impossible to discerne those circumstances, or unentangle our consciences by any of those Rules, which their Casuists use to give, who to strengthen the possession of the Romane Church, have bestowed more paines, to teach how strongly a conscience is bound to doe according to a Scruple, or a Doubt, or an Opinion, or an Errour which it hath conceived than how it might depose that Scruple, or cleare that Doubt, or better that Opinion, or rectify that Errour.[13]

Donne proceeds to outline one of the difficulties "these Rules" of the Casuists present:

> ... it is an accepted rule that in doubtful matters one should follow the common opinion, but the usefulness of this rule is severely limited by the fact that the substance of the 'common opinion' changes according to place and time.[14]

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[12] Quoted by Malloch in SEL, II (1962), 59.

[13] Quoted from Pseudo-Martyr, by Malloch in SEL, II (1962), 60.

[14] Ibid.

Donne declares that in order to determine whether the taking of the Oath is a "mortal sinne" the matter ought "to be tried by the principles of Divinity, not by the circumstanciall ragges of casuists."[15] A few pages later in his argument he declares that the rules of the Casuists "give no infallible direction to the conscience."[16]

Despite Donne's criticism of the methods of casuistry in Pseudo-Martyr, this book contains some passages that are vital to the discussion of this chapter, namely, to show the importance of scio to conscientia. It is clear from Chapter VIII of Pseudo-Martyr that Donne is acutely aware of the workings of conscience within man:

> ... to turne a little back to this point of knowledge, Ordo scientiae ad aliquid, and an Act by which we apply our knowledge to some particular thing, the Conscience ever presumes Knowledge: and we may not, doe any thing upon Conscience, if we doe it not upon Knowledge.[17]

He concludes his argument:

> ...our Conscience, whose office is to apply our Knowledge to something, and to present to us some law that bindes us in that case, cannot binde us in these heavy incommodities, for any matter, but that which we believe that wee know, because there are certainely some meanes naturally and ordinarily provided for the knowledge thereof; and that we have used those means.[18]

In these quotations we can see exactly where, as Malloch points out, Donne parts company with the Casuists; they have taken the scio out of conscience. He continues:

> Donne, using Thomas Aquinas' definition, insists that knowledge is a necessary part of conscience, that conscience is no less than the act which applies knowledge to some particular situation.[19]

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[16] Quoted by Malloch, p. 62.

[17] Quoted by Malloch, pp, 71-72.

[18] Quoted by Malloch, p. 72.

[19] Quoted by Malloch, p. 72.

Donne's quarrel with the casuists is this: in allowing a man to follow any probable opinion they do not encourage him to arrive at a carefully debated and determined knowledge of what he ought to do in any given situation. For Donne, "knowledge is very clearly something to which the agent attains in propria persona, and not merely through the borrowing of opinion: it is 'our knowledge,' 'our understanding,' that which 'wee...believe that wee know.'"[20] While Donne will admit that sometimes man's conscience may be in doubt as to what course of action he should pursue he feels that the casuists ought to be concerned with forming the conscience rather than with the elaboration of rules to govern those who are diverted by doubt, error, or scruple.[21] Consequently he criticises the casuists who spend more time teaching what to do in a case in which the conscience is in doubt than they spend clearing up the doubt. In a sermon preached 13 October 1622 (about thirteen years after Pseudo-Martyr was published) he takes up the same theme:

> 'Tis true, (but many men flatter themselves too far, with this truth) that it is a sin, to do any thing in Conscientia dubia, when a man doubts whether he may doe it, or no, and in Conscientia scrupulosa, when the conscience hath rec'd any single scruple, or suspicion to the contrary, and so too in conscientia opinante, in a conscience that hath conceived, but an opinion, (which is far from a debated, and deliberate determination) yea in conscientia errante, though the conscience be in an error, yet it is sin to do aright against the conscience; but then, as it is a sin, to do against the conscience labouring under any of these infirmities, so it is a greater sin, not to labour to recover the conscience, and devest it of those scruples, by their advise, whom God hath indued with knowledge, and power for that purpose (IV,222).

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[20] Ibid., p. 72.

[21] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

The statements in the above passage are important to the discussion here, because they contain Donne's criticism of the methods of the casuists. Furthermore, he argues that in being content to follow any probable opinion the casuists are failing to seek a true knowledge that Donne feels is necessary for any responsible action. As Malloch points out: "Donne's firm distinction between an opinion and a 'debated, deliberate determination' shows exactly where he parts company with the casuists."[22] Donne rejects probability based on opinion in favour of a carefully debated certainty based on a reasoned knowledge.

Throughout the sermons Donne, like Augustine, indicates that there are two kinds of knowledge, and he divides the faculty of reason into two functions: Ratio, leading to a knowledge of temporal things and intellectus, leading to wisdom of the divine.[23] So far this chapter has discussed the first kind of knowledge, but it will now become evident that Donne is even more concerned with the second kind of knowledge, namely, spiritual knowledge or self-knowledge, a knowledge of one's spiritual condition.

Donne preaches a series of undated[24] sermons from one of the penitential psalms, Psalm 32. At one point in the series (IX,382) he states that the purpose of the whole psalm is to rectify man's understanding. Because this series of sermons contains some important state-

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[22] Ibid., p. 73

[23] Terry Sherwood, "Reason in Donne's Sermons," ELH, XXXIX (Sept, 1972), 357.

[24] Although these sermons are undated, basing their argument on internal evidence, Potter and Simpson conclude that they belong to the middle years of Donne's ministry. See their introduction to Vol. IX.

ments about arriving at a true knowledge of one's spiritual condition, a close look at parts of these sermons is necessary. Donne begins the first sermon of the series by discussing the first word of the Psalm -- "blessed" -- and from there quickly moves to a consideration of the nature of man. He declares that man is not a man until he uses the faculties that make him man, that is, until he understands something and wills something:

> man is not man, till he hath produced some acts of the faculties of that soule, that makes him man; till he understand something, and will something, Till he know, and till he would have something, he is no man; Now, The first Act of the will is love; and no man can love any thing, but in the likenesse, and in the notion of Happinesse, of Blessednesse, or of some degree thereof; and therefore David proposes that for the foundation of his Catechisme, Blessednesse (IX,251).

Using Augustine's aphorism, amare nisi nota non possumus, Donne declares: "We cannot truly love any thing, but that we know ... and that we know it in this life" (IX,251). A few lines later he declares that philosophers have never been able to bring man to a knowledge of what the Summum bonum, the Happinesse, this Blessednesse is (IX,254). He criticizes the philosophers in the following manner:

> it is much easier, how high soever a tree be, to come to a taste of some of the fruits, then to digge to the roote of that tree: They satisfied themselves with a little taste of Health, and Pleasure, and Riches, and honour (IX, 254-55).

But Donne maintains that the psalmist David does understand the nature of happiness. He states: "He [David] comprehends all that belongs to man's knowledge, and that belongs to man's practice ... first in understanding true Blessednesse, and then, in praising God for it" (IX,255). According to Donne, happiness or blessedness comes about as a result of knowing. He states: "No study is so necessary as to know

ourselves... And the end of knowing our selves, is to know how we are disposed for that which is our end, that is this Blessednesse" (IX,257). Using David's Psalm as the basis for his own argument, Donne declares that the happy man is the one who has a knowledge of three things: that his transgressions have been forgiven, that his sins have been covered, and that his iniquities will not be imputed to him (IX,257). It is obvious from Donne's statements that he maintains that the happy or the blessed man is one who has a true knowledge of his spiritual condition. How then, is this knowledge to be achieved?

It is clear from the sermons that Donne believes that one of the ways a man arrives at this self-knowledge is through the examination of conscience. Preaching from the verse in Psalm 32 "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid," Donne declares:

> When I have displayed to my selfe, anatomized mine own conscience, left no corner unsearched, I am come to perfect understanding of mine own case, This is Davids act upon himselfe, the recalling, and recollecting of his sins in his own memory (IX, 297).

Donne maintains that there are two steps involved in the process that leads a man to self-knowledge. First, he must think about his sinful state and acknowledge his sin, and then, second, he must proceed to a particular inquisition of his conscience. He asserts:

> Thou hast brought me to...mine owne miserable condition...so may I proceed to a perfit sifting of my conscience in all corners, which is Davids second motion in his act of preparation, I acknowledged my sin. This implies a sifting of the conscience...Hee doth not seeke his sinnes in his Belly, nor in his Bones, nor in his Purse, but in his Conscience, and he unfolds that, rips up that, and enters into the privatest, and most remote corners thereof (IX,300-01).

In these passages Donne declares that the recalling of sin to one's

memory and the searching of one's conscience will lead an individual to a perfect knowledge of his spiritual condition. Consequently, he admonishes his congregation to search their consciences continually:

> Our salvation is as much endangered, if we call not our consciences to an examination, as if we repent not of those sins, which offer themselves to our knowledge, and memory.... We require an overtaking of the enemy, That we be not weary, in the search of our consciences (IX,267).

In one of his early sermons he gives a similar admonition: "never to shut your eyes at night, till you have swept your consciences" (I,205). Donne maintains that a frequent examination of conscience is necessary because man is often unaware of his spiritual condition: "when thou examinest thy conscience but once,but slightly, it may appear, white as snow, innocent; but examine it again, and it will confess many fleshly infirmities" (II,223). Donne goes on in this sermon to state that unless a man has passed a severe examination of conscience he will lack the assurance of his salvation. He contends: "and this treasure of the soule, the body and blood of your Saviour, is not due to you if you have not yet passed a mature, and a severe examination of your conscience" (II,224). Since Donne believes that a continual examination of conscience will lead a man into a true knowledge of his spiritual condition and because it will provide him with the assurance of salvation, Donne exhorts his congregation: "Search thy conscience, empty that, and then search the Scriptures, and thou shalt finde abundantly enough to fill it the conscience with peace and consolation" (V, 264).

His insistence that a repeated and a thorough examination of conscience will lead to self-knowledge is by no means held by Donne alone. In his book <u>The Poetry of Meditation</u> Louis Martz draws attention to the fact that from the Middle Ages onward and continuing

into the seventeenth century both Roman Catholic and Puritan alike were concerned with self-examination, and that while both groups bitterly accused each other of neglecting the inner life they practised methods of self-examination by methods equally sincere.[25] Martz discusses the question of self-examination in the Middle Ages in a chapter of his book entitled "Self-knowledge: the Spiritual Combat," and in this chapter he maintains that self-examination was an indispensable preparation for all the exercises directed towards the love of God. Martz quotes Pourrat who has pointed out that "all great popular treatises of the late Middle Ages insist on a pitiless examination of conscience."[26] Martz cites the Treatise of Thomas à Kempis in which he instructs his followers to practice four particular things: to examine their lives by daily inquisition; to see if they have advanced or retreated; to place their transgression before their eyes and bewail themselves; to sum up at night."[27] The injunctions that à Kempis gives his followers here are almost identical to those that John Donne gives his congregation. When one compares à Kempis' instruction "to examine your life by daily inquisition" with a statement in one of Donne's undated sermons "I tooke knowledge of my sinful condition, and then I proceeded to a particular inquisition of my Conscience" (IX, 302), Donne's indebtedness to mediaeval thought can be readily seen. As Martz points out, "if we remember such exhortations (to self-examination) resound throughout popular treatises of our period... we may avoid a tendency to attribute the acute self-consciousness of English mediaeval poetry in this era

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[25] Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1962), p. 121.

[26] Ibid., p. 119.

[27] Ibid.

self-consciousness of English mediaeval poetry in this era chiefly to Donne's example."[28] In addition to the treatise of Thomas à Kempis, Martz also mentions the fact that Ignatius Loyola in the Spiritual Exercises is also concerned with methods of self-examination. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius sets forth rules for a daily examination of conscience. An examination takes place at three different times of the day. In the morning, on arising, a resolve is made to guard against the particular sin or defect with regard to which one seeks to correct or to improve one's self. At midday an examination is made and one demands an account of one's thoughts, words, and actions to see if an improvement has been made. After supper another examination is made and the individual goes over each single hour of the day. A chart is kept to record progress. The first examination of conscience is entered on the chart along with the subsequent daily examinations. In this way, an individual is able to determine day by day and week by week if any progress has been made.

Martz mentions two other works that were landmarks in the developement of spiritual exercises during the sixteenth century: Lorenzo Scupoli's Spiritual Combat and François de Sales' The Introduction to Devout Life. Scupoli's book was popular in France especially and was the shaping force behind de Sales' own work. The Introduction to Devout Life was well-known in England and self-analysis, the prime weapon of spiritual combat, is central to the book's teaching. Consequently, when Donne advises his listeners to descend within themselves, to sift and to ransack their

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[28] Ibid., p. 124.

conscience, he is expressing a familiarity with the tradition of meditation which placed strong emphasis on self-analysis; and further, when at one point in his ministry he declares to his congregation "that I may know, whether I doe deceive my selfe, in presuming my self to be of that number, I come down, and examine my self whether I can truly tell my conscience, that Christ Jesus dyed for mee" (II,323), he maintains that examination of conscience is a vital weapon in his own spiritual combat for self-knowledge.

Not only does Donne declare that self-analysis leads to self-knowledge, but he also indicates that the church plays an important role in bringing man to a knowledge of his spiritual condition. The series of undated sermons that Donne preached from Psalm 32 has already been discussed in this chapter, but since they contain some statements that show the important role the church plays in man's spiritual life, a closer look at them is necessary at this point. It has already been pointed out that Donne believes that happiness is composed of a knowledge of the following things: that a man's transgressions have been forgiven, that his sins have been covered, and that his iniquities will not be imputed to him (IX,257). These three components of happiness form the structural divisions of Donne's sermon. However, it is in his discussion of the second point, namely, the covering of sin, that he stresses the importance of the church. He declares: "So, our mercifull God, when he sees us under this mantle, this covering, Christ spread upon his Church, conceales his knowledge of our sins, and suffers them not to reflect upon our consciences in a consternation thereof"(IX,260-61). He continues:

> ...the embracing of this mantle, this garment, this covering, the righteousnesse of Christ in the

> Christian Church; In which Church, and by his visible Ordinances therein, the Word, and Sacraments, God covers, hides, conceales (IX,260).

In these passages Donne declares a number of important things about the church. He maintains that man's sins are concealed in the ordinances of the church and that God has spread a mantle, a covering, over his church. As a result, Donne claims that when God sees a man under this mantle he conceals his knowledge of his sins and will not allow feelings of guilt to disturb his conscience. He goes on to say that although he may know that Christ died for the sins of the world, "except there passe some act betweene God and me, some seale, some investiture, some acquittance of my debts, my sins" (IX,261), he will lack the knowledge that he personally has been forgiven. Donne adamantly maintains that the ordinances of the church provide irrefutable evidence that sin has been covered: "God hath not only received a full satisfaction for all sinne in Christ, but Christ, in his Ordinances in his Church, offers me an application of all that for my selfe, and covers my sin, from the eye of his Father" (IX,261). As he draws the second part of his sermon to a close, Donne declares what the covering of sin is: "the covering of sin, is the benefit of discharging and easing the conscience, by those blessed helps which God hath afforded to those, whom he hath gathered in the bosome, and quickened in the wombe of the Christian Church" (IX,262). In these quotations Donne maintains that the ordinances of the church (the preaching and the sacraments) provide a man with a knowledge that his sins are covered. Once a man has this knowledge he is no longer bothered by feelings of guilt nor is he troubled by an accusing conscience.

The Whitsuntide sermon of 1630 has already been refered to in this chapter, but since it contains some statements that are pertinent

to the discussion here, namely, to show the role that the church plays in bringing a man to a true knowledge of his spiritual condition, another look at parts of this sermon is necessary. Donne takes John 14:20 as his text: "At that day shall ye know." The sermon does not leave any doubts as to the kind of knowledge he is discussing. About half way through the sermon Donne states: "This great Legacy, this knowledge which is all the Christian Relgion, That Christ is in the Father, and he in you"(IX,242). In this sermon, Donne is concerned with showing that a man can have the assurance of his salvation and that he can know that his sin has been forgiven. How then does he come to possess this knowledge? He emphatically asserts:

> It is, by our obedience to his inspiration, and by our reverent use of those visible meanes, which he hath ordained in his Church, his Word and Sacraments: And as our flesh is in him, by his participation thereof, so his flesh is in us, by our communication thereof (IX,248).

In this quotation Donne once more declares that the ordinance of preaching and the ordinance of the sacraments that God has ordained in the church, produce within man the assurance and the knowledge of his salvation.

From the discussion of this chapter it is obvious that Donne maintains that knowledge is a vital part of conscience. It can be contended that from 1594 -- the date when Donne wrote Satire III -- until he preached his final sermon in 1630, Donne continued to stress the importance of knowledge. For this reason, he criticises the ignorant man in Satire III because his lack of knowledge renders him susceptible to coercion. For the same reason, Donne rejects the methods of casuistry, because it has removed the scio from conscientia. There is

little doubt that in his early works Donne displays an interest in the literature of the casuists. However, he abandons their probable opinion approach in favor of a carefully debated determination that is based on a reasoned knowledge. In the sermons, using Aquinas' definition, Donne maintains that conscience is composed of two things: knowledge and will. In one of his last sermons, Donne exhorts his congregation "to enlarge science into conscience," and he challenges them to let their actions be an expression of their knowledge. When he states "then only hath a man true knowledge, when he can conclude in his own conscience, that his practise, and conversation hath expressed" (IX,248), he is once more reaffirming his belief in the Socratic equation that he expressed in Satire III: virtue is the expression of knowledge.

Conclusion.

A number of conclusions can be reached from our study of Donne's statements about conscience. The most obvious has to do with Donne's change of attitude. That change must have been apparent to Izaak Walton who describes Donne's frame of mind at the time of his death in the following way: "His aspect was cheerfull, and such as gave a silent testimony of a clear knowing soul, and of a Conscience at peace with itself."[1] There is ample evidence from the sermons that would attest to the accuracy of Walton's statement, and in Chapter One, attention was drawn to some of Donne's sermons that would make it apparent that his conscience ceased to produce accusing evidence against him.

But there is an even more significant conclusion. Throughout his life Donne continually asserted that scio was a vital part of conscientia, and it should now be apparent that Donne's statements about knowledge, outlined in Chapter Three, provide us with the key to an understanding of how his change of attitude comes about (described in Chapters One and Two). At the time of writing the Divine Poems, Donne does not have the knowledge that his sins are forgiven; he does not have the assurance of his salvation. Consequently his conscience constantly accuses him of his sinfulness and of his own unworthiness. In one of his undated sermons, he makes the following statement:

> For as an over-tender conscience may call things sins, that are not, and so be afraid of things that never were, so may it also of things that were, but are not now; of such sins as were truly sins, and fearfull sins, but are now dead, dead by a true repentance, and buried in the Sea of blood of Christ Jesus, and sealed up in that Monument, under the seale of Reconciliation, the blessed Sacrament, and yet rise sometimes in this tender conscience, in a suspition and jealousie, that God hath not truly, not fully

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[1] Evelyn Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne (Oxford, 1962), p. 70.

forgiven them (IX, 306).

Undoubtedly Donne has his own experience in mind here, and he is able to sympathise with those in his congregation who are suffering from an overtender conscience. Most certainly he knows what it is like to live with a constant fear that God has not forgiven him. In many of the Holy Sonnets he confesses his sinfulness to God and prays for Divine forgiveness, yet in his mind there still lurks a suspicion that God has not really forgiven him. Consequently, he lacks a knowledge of forgiveness, and he does not have a confident assurance that salvation belongs to him.

It was pointed out in Chapter Three that Donne declares that one of the ways that a man arrives at self-knowledge is through examination of conscience, and, as Louis Martz points out, the Holy Sonnets can be seen as exercises in self-analysis.[2] It is not until a few years later that Donne is able to talk about possessing serenitas conscientia. Yet there is always an ambivalence in Donne, and one is often left wondering if he ever did achieve an absolute certainty of his forgiveness. However, we do know from the sermons preached between 1615 and 1630 that he was much closer to reaching this certainty during these years than he was at the time of composing the Divine Poems.

Throughout his works, Donne declares that there are two kinds of knowledge. In addition to spiritual knowledge (which includes self-knowledge) he frequently mentions a knowledge of temporal things. Because knowledge is tremendously important to Donne, we can readily understand why it is in both Satire III and in Ignatius His Conclave

[2]See Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, pp. 118-149.

that while he condemns any attempts at manipulating another man's conscience, he is even more critical of the ignorant man whose lack of knowledge renders him susceptible to coercion. From the instruction of Satire III of 1594 -- "That thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds know" -- until the command of 1630 -- "enlarge science into conscience" -- Donne's focus never shifts: the scio of conscientia is always extremely important to Donne.

Another conclusion that emerges from our study is that at the time of writing the Divine Poems, Donne's conscience needs rectifying. In one place in the Sermons (IX,305) Donne declares that Satan works upon man's conscience in one of two ways: he either hardens it so that he becomes insensitive to sin, or he renders it over-sensitive so that he falls into a state of despair. He declares:

> so lyes the Conscience of man betweene two operations of the Devill; sometimes he rarifies it, evaporates it, that it apprehends nothing, feeles nothing to be sin, sometimes he condenses it, that every thing falls and sticks upon it, in the nature, and takes the weight of sin, and he misinterprets the indifferent actions of others, and of his owne, and destroyes all use of Christian liberty, all conversation, all recreation, and out of a false feare, of being undutifull to God, is unjust to all the world, and to his own soule, and consequently to God himselfe, who of all notions, would not be received in the notion of a Cruell, or Tyranicall God. In the obdurate conscience that feeles no sin, the Devill glories most, but in the over-tender conscience he practices most; That is his triumphant, but this his Militant Church; That is his Sabbath, but this is his six dayes labour; In the obdurate he hath induced a security, in the scrupulous and over-tender he is working for desperation (IX,305).

The predicament that Donne complains of in the above quotation is precisely the one he faces in the Divine Poems. In the Holy Sonnets, he laments that the devil is his subtle foe who tempts him, that he

is bound by him, and that Satan is loth to let him go. In the passage quoted above, he states that Satan aims at fear and desperation. As has been pointed out in this thesis, these are exactly the sentiments Donne articulates in the Holy Sonnets. But despair, suspicion, dejection, and fear are all opposed to the confidence, trust, optimism, and peace that a rectified conscience enjoys. Thus it is possible to say that in the Divine Poems Donne's conscience clearly needs rectifying, and this rectification accounts for Donne's portrayal in the Divine Poems of his struggle with feelings of guilt, despair, and anxiety.

From Donne's sermons it can be concluded that a rectified conscience becomes a touchstone, a standard of judgment for him. He declares that a conscience rectified by the Holy Ghost leads a man to a correct knowledge of his spiritual condition. It will not allow man to come to an incorrect assessment of his standing before God, nor will it permit him to come to an erroneous reckoning or to a false imputing of sin to himself that God has already forgiven. A rectified conscience will not let a man torture himself with agonizing fears that salvation does not appertain to him. Neither will it engender a suspicion on the part of man that God is angry with him; nor will a rectified conscience allow man to live in fear of death or to be terrified lest God's judgment day will come before he is ready for it or is worthy to stand before God. Quite the contrary, Donne affirms that a rectified conscience creates an optimistic assurance in him that no sword of anger, of condemnation, or of judgment is drawn against him and that no cloud of either original sin or of actual sin obscures the brightness, the peace, and the serenity of conscience. A rectified conscience is a firm foundation upon which Donne can

build his hopes for peace in this life and eternal bliss in the life to come. It is a touchstone within him, something that is positive and reliable, by which means Donne is able to repel Satan's temptations that Christ will not receive him.

Another significant conclusion that emerges from our study is that the Church plays an important role in man's moral and spiritual life and that Donne's conception of the Church as the voice of God on earth has an effect on his theory of conscience. From his statements in the sermons it is obvious that Donne's beliefs about conscience are connected to his beliefs about the Church. He maintains that the object of preaching is to awaken his hearers' conscience: "We spend our studies, our lucibrations, our meditations, to bring Christ Jesus home to their case, and their consciences" (VIII,248). Donne asserts that in his method of preaching he follows the example of St. Paul, and states that the apostle's method of instruction is "to proceed by the understanding, to the affections, and so to the Conscience of those that hear him" (VIII, 159-60).

In each chapter of this thesis, Donne's conception of the Church in one way or another is shown to have a bearing on his statements about conscience. In chapter one Donne declares that the Holy Spirit at work in the Church of Christ rectifies man's conscience. As Donne comes to realise that God has endowed the Church with enormous spiritual powers, and as he also comes to a realization of the role that the Church plays in enabling man to come to a true knowledge of his spiritual condition, a shift in emphasis takes place in Donne's thinking, and this shift in emphasis accounts for Donne's change of attitude shown in chapter two.

In his early works such as Satire III, Donne asserts that truth exists and can be found, but he will not go so far as to declare that any one Church is the true and authoritative one. The opinion that he expresses in Satire III -- that the voice of one's conscience is the only authoritative voice -- changes drastically as he comes to the realisation that the Anglican Church is God's mouthpiece on earth. In many of his sermons Donne condemns the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and clearly rejects the religion of his upbringing. He defends the Church of which he is now a member, and declares that the Anglican Church is the true voice of God: "God planteth thee in a Church, where all things necessary for salvation are administered to thee, and where no erroneous doctrine is affirmed and held" (V,251). Early in his ministry Donne claims that the Anglican Church is the true and authoritative one. He states: "And this Church is that which proposes all that is necessary to my salvation, in the Word, and seals all to me in the Sacraments" (III,210). Convinced of this fact, Donne exhorts his congregation to heed the advice of those whom God has placed over them for the rectifying of their consciences and to avail themselves of those means (the sacraments) that God has insituted in His Church for their spiritual enlightenment.

While Donne affirms his belief in the Church's role in leading man towards a knowledge of his spiritual condition, he emphatically asserts that no ecclesiastical council has the right to impose any kind of law that would impose a necessity upon conscience. Even though it is the messenger of God's task to ransack and to awaken the conscience, he must never use his office and calling as an opportunity to become a tyrant over men's consciences (II,282).

He clings tenaciously to the Pauline doctrine of the liberty of the conscience, of which Calvin became a competent and outspoken expositor. Donne jealously guards this inner voice that God has placed within man, and in an age of controversy and in a climate of religious dogmatism, Donne warns against surrendering oneself to the opinions of other men. He declares that the man who does not possess a Criterium, a "... touchstone within him, will need North and South, all the points of the Compasse, the breath of all men" (IV,227-228). Without this Criterium, this touchstone, man will find himself driven in all directions certain of nothing, and will ultimately wreck his life on the rocks of despair and futility.

Since Donne also affirms that a rectified conscience is the word of God, the decisions of conscience become tremendously important and impose an obligation on him to carry them out. In declaring that a rectified conscience is the word of God within him, Donne is saying that the decisions of this touchstone, this Criterium, provide a man with a directional force for all his life. All of his actions can be submitted to the debates of conscience, and he has the guarantee that no matter what he does, he acts with rectification. By asserting that conscience is the word of God, Donne is conferring on conscience enormous authority. A rectified conscience becomes the voice of God within him, and it is a test, a criterion within him, by which he governs his life.

Of all the statements that Donne makes in the Sermons about conscience, the following most graphically describes the tremendous role that conscience plays in man's life. He states:

> Yea, here God opens another book to him, his manuall, his bosome, his pocket book, his Vade Mecum, the Abridgment of all Nature, and all Law, his owne

> heart and conscience: And this booke, though he shut it up, and clasp it never so hard, yea it will sometimes burst open of it selfe; though he interline it with other studies, and knowledges, yet the Text it selfe, in the book it selfe, the testimonies of the conscience, will shine and but appear. Though he load it, and choak it with Circumstances, and Disputations, yea, the matter it selfe, which is imprinted there, will present it selfe, yea, though he tear some leaves out of the Book, that is, wilfully, yea studiously forget some sins that he hath done, and discontinue the reading of this book, for some time, yet he cannot lose, he cannot cast away this book, that is so in him, as that it is himself, and evermore cals upon him, to deliver him from this inconsideration, by this open and plentifull Library, which he carries about him (IX,237).

In this passage Donne asserts that man cannot destroy this book within him, and even though he tears out some pages and clasps it tightly in order that it be not opened, the testimony and the evidence of this book, the conscience, cannot be concealed.

According to Donne (IX,272) conscience is either one of two things; it is either a glory to man or a confusion within him. If sin has been deposited in his conscience, it will create an inseparable confusion within him. However, if the Holy Ghost has rectified the conscience, if the grace of God has applied the merits of Christ's death to him through the Sacraments of the Church, then his conscience becomes an inseparable glory to him. It will alleviate his mind of the fear and doubt; it will provide him with a touchstone within him, by which standard he will be able to try all his actions and upon which he will be able to build his confidence for salvation in this life and his hope for eternal joy in the life to come.

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