CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS IMAGERY

In Donne's personal life as well as poetry a drift from secular and physical towards religious can be traced. The element of death and decay, the pain of helplessness and failure all find a solution in religion. The "eternal" bliss and "full eternity" which the lover regards to be the supreme reality of love can be achieved at the level of soul only when the mercy of God is achieved. To start with his personal life, he wrote, probably in early 1619, in his verse letter "To Mr Tilman after he had taken orders":

What function is so noble, as to bee
Embassadour to God and destinie?
To open life, to give kingdoms to more
Than Kings give dignities; to keep heavens doore?¹

So the "dignities" which Donne could not get from the king are nothing in comparison to the powers exercised by one who becomes "Embassadour to God". He himself wanted to become an ambassador and cherished the hopes till 1615, when his meeting with the king finally sealed his career in the church. These lines may be a sort of "consolation"²

¹ "To Mr Tilman after he had taken orders", Poetical Works, p. 320.
to his steep ambitions at worldly level, as Carey has suggested, but the fact can not be denied that he had religious inclinations right from an early age. He was brought up in an orthodox atmosphere and his family had the proud legacy of having suffered in the cause of their faith. His birth in a Roman Catholic family shut out all the prospects of secular advancement and naturally he became much occupied with the theological matters. As a young man, Donne seems to have a mixture of worldliness and otherworldliness, love of life and at the same time detachment from life. His "Satyre III", which was written somewhere between 1592 to 1596 when Donne was a student of law at Lincoln's Inn, is an epistle on the subject of finding true religion, a subject that affected him vitally. Most of the poem is an "extended sexual conceit".

Is not our Mistresse faire Religion,  
As worthy of all our Soules devotion,  
As vertue was to the first blinded age?

But, all the same, it marks his serious religious quest: it is "a self-lacerating record of that moment which comes in the lives of almost all thinking people". The search

3. H.J.C. Grierson in "Introduction" to Poetical Works, p. XXV.
for true church - the truth - requires "mindes indeavours". The poet does not want to make a random choice, rather he prefers to tread the "cragged" paths of the search for truth as in the following lines:

...On a huge hill,
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
Reach her, about must, and about must goe;
And what the hills suddenly resists, winne so.  

The vivid note of intellectual emancipation of these lines creates the sense of an actual historical situation in which the urgent choices present. Even more important is for his search for reality lime-lighted by this image. His conversion into Anglicanism which, probably, took place in 1597 greatly tormented him and shaped his personality. However, it did not weaken his faith in God. His religious poetry is neither dogmatic nor expository of any of the sects of Christianity, but it is a highly passionate and ardent prayer for delivery of mankind from sins and evil forces. It contemplates more on the other world and reflects a restless desire to get rid of this-worldliness; it epitomizes Christianity in general.

His shift from secular to religious can be seen in his poems. The two "Anniversaries" which were published in

1611 and 1612 respectively mark this shift. The eulogistic poems have by the end a heavenly atmosphere. The poems have received very harsh treatment from many critics. Ben Jonson found them "profane and full of Blasphemies", because of their hyperbolic praise of Elizabeth Drury which brings her at par with Virgin Mary. Donne's reply that he "described the idea of a Woman and not as she was", could not satisfy many critics. "I shouldn't have thought that it is part of the idea of a woman", Empson objects, "that her death is making the sun fall onto the earth". Actually Donne was pursuing an ideal which he aims to embody in the girl through hyperbolic imagery. The poems, on the whole, "immeasurably transcend their immediate occasion". Moreover, poetry cannot be verbatim copy of real; it has got to have something of ideal and sublime which the imaginative mind of the poet creates. The world of physical reality simply supplies means which inspire the poet's imagination.

Seen in this light, the "Anniversaries" mark a

10. Idem.
transcendence from decay, corruption, sin and ignorance to heavenly virtues, joyes and immortality. Eulogy of the girl and downfall of this world both are obliterated with the journey of soul to blissful heavenly atmosphere which works as a "Mithridate" against them. "Tapers", "Apostles Lamps" and "Holy Ghost" appear and spread "essential joy" all around:

... Only who have enjoy'd
The sight of God, in fulnesse, can thinke it:
For it is both the object, and the wit.
This essential joy, where neither hee
Can suffer diminution, nor wee;13

Thus, the hyperbolic praise is "attuned to the religious aims".14 The very understanding of the spiritual reality brings about scourging of physical pleasures.

Another important aspect of Donne's imagery is the exchange of religious and secular metaphors. On the one hand he makes the apt use of secular metaphor to define religious situations,15 and on the other hand, he makes effective use of religious metaphors to define situations in love. Love in itself is a sort of religion and only

those who undergo this sublime experience can understand the "eternal" bliss of true love, therefore, it is but natural that such an experience is expressed with something equally deep and mysterious like religion.

In his religious imagery, one of the storehouses of images is the Bible. Biblical themes and stories are often employed to define secular as well as religious experiences. In "Twicknam garden" the lover "mourns the 'cruelty' of a mistress whose 'truth' to another"16 kills him. Since the beloved is true to her first love, the new lover's love is like a serpent in the "Paradise" of the love between the beloved and her first lover. The lover admits:

And that this place may thoroughly be thought True Paradise, I have the serpent brought.17

The biblical serpent is symbol of treachery and temptation. The new lover intrigues to tempt the mistress. The image leaves the desired effect, it is logically associated with the previous image of "spider love" too. Serpent, like spider, is a lowly unpleasant and poisonous creature. The tempting lover shares these qualities. The "climbing serpent" "creeps"18 and cannot walk upright

because it tempted Eve to taste the "forbidden" fruit to satisfy its malignity. The beloved is also "a forbidden and forbidding tree" whom the lover tries to tempt by "hovering" over her "to get a part". 19 Yielding to the temptation brings hell. Hell brings the picture of helpless suffering individuals who are subjected to worst conceivable punishments. Those who are sent to hell are "damm'd", in the " furnaces throwne" "punisht" and "burnt and tyed in chains". 20 Hell also suggested him a sense of separation and darkness. Permanent separation from the beloved means the very suspension of life, it has anaesthetic effect. The absence of the beloved is thus hell:

Shadow that hell unto me, which alone
I am to suffer when my Love is gone. 21

There are certain things that are denied for a Christian in the Bible. "Sacrilege" is strictly prohibited by Christ. The flea, that has sucked the blood of both the lover and the beloved is their "marriage temple" - embodying creation. It is, therefore, "Sacrilege" to kill the flea. Another biblical image is employed in "A Valediction: of the booke" where the lover regards his true love like "all Divinity" and any book on it the

21. "Elegie XII. His parting from her", Ibid., p. 89.
Convincing his beloved not to insist on accompanying him as a page boy, while going on a journey abroad, the lover in "Elegie XVI" warns her that she may be a victim of the "lust, and hideous rage" of the Italians as the "Lots faire guests" were demanded by the lustful men of Sodoma. The story comes from Genesis XIX. Elizabeth Drury has been presented as Noah's Ark, she can save the world from the deluge of sins as Christ saved us from the deluge by wood - the Ark.

The Christian belief of the Day of Judgement, when all the dead bodies rise from the graves and God finally seals their places in heaven or hell according to their actions during life time, also brings some images in Donne. The poet is sure that the true lovers shall meet on the day of Judgement to be placed together afterwards. He conceives of the day of Judgement like a "busie day" in the market place or any public meeting place where huge crowd assembles. In "Holy Sonnet VII" he imagines a scene of the day:

At the round earths imagin’d corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
From death, you numberlesse infinities
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,

22. "Holy Sonnet VII. At the round earths imagin’d corners", Poetical Works, p. 296.
But not all have the confidence of the poet to call on the "Angells" to blow their "trumpets". The heavy weight of accumulated sinful deeds added to the Original sin makes many uncertain about their fate. They are afraid of being damned. Donne has a remarkable quality of defining the concrete with the abstract or the real with the imagined situations. He takes up the imagined scene of the day of Judgement to define the heartbreaking uncertainty of fate of the mariners in a storm entrapped ship:

And as sin-burd'ned soules from graves will creepe,  
At the last day, some forth their cabbins peep:  
And tremblingly'aske what newes, and doe heare so,  
Like jealous husbands, what they would not know.  

Another example of Donne adding the spice of his imagination to an accepted myth can be seen in the picture of Creation that he draws in "The first Anniversary". The poet tells that during the process of Creation God gave his "Rainbow" to nature because:

... God seem'd to like  
That she should sport her selfe sometimes, and play,  
To mingle, and vary colours every day:  
And then, as though shee could make inow,  
Himselfe his various Rainbow did allow.  

Manna, the nourishment from heaven, with which God fed the Israelites in the wilderness is also mentioned in

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Donne's poetry. God grows "Manna" and distils it like a "shoure of raine". The round drops of rain on a primrose flower are like "Manna", first because of their glistening round shape and secondly, because these drops impart life and beauty to the flower: 25

... if Heav'n would distill
A shoure of raine, each severall drop might goo
to his owne primrose, and grow Manna so: 26

But frustration and suffering in love can undo even this unique preparation from God. The "spider love" of the lover can convert "Manna" into "gall" as did the biblical serpent by its temptation cause Adam and Eve leave the Paradise and come to the earth.

The Metaphor of angel is one of the dominant metaphors in Donne. Angels are the agents - ambassadors - of God. They as true guides to human beings can lead them towards perfection and salvation. Angels because of their heavenly ethereal qualities fascinated the poet. Besides, it suggested a favourite pun to Donne as angel was

25. Helen Gardner, ed. John Donne: The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets, Op.Cit., p. 219, regards the image "purely visual" as the round shaped rain drops glisten like Manna. But the image is mental as well because the rain drops impart life and freshness to primrose flowers as "Manna" did to the Israelites.

26. "The Primrose, being at Mountgometry Castle, upon the hill, on which it is situate", Poetical Works, p. 54.
in Donne's time a coin in British currency. Donne often punned on it. They have many points of similarity. Angels bear the stamp of God and function as his chief agents on earth. By their heavenly qualities they can win even the sinful souls, that might be "bethroth'd" to Satan, to God by making them virtuous. Similarly coins bear the stamp of a king and can win many supporters for him. So, it is with angels that God as well as king can carry out their schemes. Both are greatly valued by men.

If the common men crave for coins, the religious men value angels. Another quality that they share is of being in circulation - coins have the quality of circulation from one hand to another as Angels move from place to place. Both are bright and both have unpredictable behaviour. But the greatest reason of Donne's fondness for the pun seems his personal experiences. His own poverty and the increasing, pressing necessities due to his large family specially during the exile that he had to undergo at Mitchem from 1606 to 1612 made him realise the angelic qualities of coins. The similarities between the two are best revealed in "The Bracelet", where he plays upon the pun almost throughout the poem:

Angels, which heaven commanded to provide  
All things to me, and be my faithfull guide;  
To gaine new friends, t'appease great enemies;  
To comfort my soule, when I lie or rise;\(^{27}\)

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In "Satyre V" also he plays upon the pun. Aware of the power associated with coins, he knew that they were often misused. They could also become agents of social injustice and corruption. In the poem cited above, the poet brings out the corruption of law courts. The living embodiments of justice — the Judges — are also corrupt and pass decisions under influence of money. How ironical it is that:

Judges are Gods; he who made them and said them so,
Meant not that men should be forc'd to them to go,
By means of Angels; 28

Similarly, apart from "good angels" there may be "bad angels" and "fai ne angels" as well. The desire of the mistress in "B logistic XI" that twelve coins be melted to replace her lost bracelet, evokes the picture of the angels who had to suffer for being a party with Satan. Though they had committed no mistake other than following Satan who tempted them to do so. The pun continues as the angels were thrown into burning furnaces, like the coins, to melt them. The conceit reflects, on the one hand, the poet's unwillingness to part with the angels owing to his poverty, on the other a deep sense of pity and sympathy for the suffering angels. They seem to represent the sorrow and agony of a human being. It seems as if the poet identifies his own fate with them as he is always

very much haunted by the idea of sin and resultant damnation:

Shall they be damn'd, and in the furnace throwne,
And punish't for offences not their owne?
They save not me, they doe not ease my paines,
When in that hell they'are burnt and tyed in chains. 29

Angels provide a large number of images to Donne. Different situations in love are defined through this metaphor. One of his poems is based on the metaphor of angels because they stood for purity. An analogy is built between the lover and an angel. Angels are purest of all elements—purer than the air also. Donne agrees with the belief of the scholastic metaphysicians that "air is the most pure [sic] of all elements because it is unmixed, but it necessarily falls short of pure spirits". 30 Since it is the lover who always takes initiative in love, he is purer than the beloved and thus an angel:

Just such disparitie
As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,
'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee. 31

But there is a realisation, at another place, that true love is even purer than an angel. Most often Donne presents angels as divine beings much above the status of ordinary human beings. But at times the renaissance humanistic element overpowers this belief and in such

cases the beloved - who in herself is a "Paradise" - appears to him at a higher position. The beloved who is pure, chaste and constant is purer than an angel, her purity enables her to know the heart of the lover and judge the sincerity of his thoughts:

... I saw thou sawest my heart,
And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an Angels art,
When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st
Excess of joy would wake me,... 32

Thus, "Women are all like Angels", 33 and their body a paradise. The beloved shares the softness, glory, beauty and heavenly qualities of an angel. The erotic element of "Elegie XIX" is subsided with this beautiful image:

In such white robes, heaven's Angels us'd to be Receive'd by men; Thou Angel bringst with thee
A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; 34

Whenever talking of angels, Donne is reminded of their high heavenly qualities for which they "Worship'd bee". An angel has a halo around it, which gives us clear indication of the presence of an angel. They are "lovely glorious nothing" and have "a shapelesse flame" with which they "affect us oft", 35 their influence is like the love of the beloved. They are beautiful, "bright" eternal and

32. "The Dreame", Poetical works, p. 34.
33. "Elegie II. The Aneagram", Ibid., p. 73.
heavenly beings having "face, and wings/ Of aire". They are "barren" as they have neutral sex — thus sexless. Therefore, they represent the lovers when their souls are united and they have become a neutral sex after becoming one in love:

Difference of sex no more wee knew,  
Then our Guardian Angells doe:

Thus, angels evoke their traditional heavenly qualities in Donne's mind. Being bodiless they could be seen only by the spiritually enlightened men. Since they belong to celestial hierarchy, they can know past as well as future events just by intuition, not reason: "Angell in an instant knowes". They are, therefore, guardian spirits. They watch the activities of this world on behalf of God, they guide human beings. They are "Tutelar Angels, sent to every one" by God. This quality of Angels can define a priest also as he is also a spokesman of God's will and ways on earth and teaches the congregations the ways to reach divinity:

'Tis preachers to convey him, for they doe  
As Angels out of clouds, from Pulpits speake;  
And blesse the poore beneath, the lame, the weake.

37. "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Lady Lucy, Countesse of Bedford", Ibid., p. 249.  
30. Ibid., p. 253.  
39. "To Mr Tilman after he had taken orders" Ibid., p. 321.
Donne's thwarted ambitions, his poverty which forced him to be cloistered at Mitcham for six years, his struggle in early years as a Catholic and above all his inherent religious inclinations all shaped his mind and their effect is seen in his choice of imagery. He often brings images of the cloistered men - hermits. Donne's psychological aloofness from his age is reflected in "Eclogue" where he presents himself as Idios (a private man having no part in public affairs) and is questioned by Allophanes for being absent from the marriage ceremony of Earl of Somerset. Behind the poetic device of dramatic presentation is hidden the inner mood of the poet, he felt out of tune with his times. The moods of ecstatic pleasure in love also get defined through the image of hermit. May it be the blessed mood of achievement in love or religious heights, needs contemplation and purgation of sensuality and trivial worldly achievements. It is not the "common conceit of the adored lady as saint" which comes to his mind when he calls a lady a saint but it has the sense of higher achievements and glory that he associates with a saint because the lady is a "firmament/ Of virtues".


A hermit renounces all worldly pleasures for one aim i.e. divine contemplation. This preoccupation with the goal can be seen in true lovers also because being occupied exclusively with their love only they leave all worldly pleasures to the "layetie" with the suggestion: "With wealth your state, your minde with Arts improve" but "let me love". 42 Here all worldly wealth is "alchemy" and honours "mimic". This mysterious stage makes the beloved unique in herself — now only she can be the object of the lover's (hermit's) contemplation:

I must confess, it could not chuse but bee Prophane, to thinke thee any thing but thee. 43

Such lovers are like hermits and their love for each other is "one another's hermitage". Naturally the future lovers will "invoke" them for a "pattern" of their love, which is now a mystery, almost at par with religion. Moreover, when they leave their bodies, the day will be celebrated as the day of canonization. Feast is to be observed and love hymns to be sung on such a day. Their relics are to be preserved in churches and worshipped, ordinary men will not be allowed to touch them as it would be "idolatrie". These "harmlesse lovers" had been miraculous throughout their lives as they "lov'd well and

43. "The Dreame" Ibid., p. 34.
faithfully" yet "knew not what"44 or why they loved. Therefore, like hermits and saints of love they shall guide the future lovers. When in some other mood the lover wants the "subtile wreath of hair" — a token of their love that transcends death — which is now a relic, to be buried with him lest it should be touched by ordinary men:

The mystery, the signe you must not touch,  
For 'tis my outward Soule.45

Apart from his preoccupation with his object of devotion and unworldliness, a hermit evokes the sense of serenity, wisdom, intuition and mystical vision. He knows about heaven and its glories that an ordinary man can not even think about:

So, reclus'd hermits often times do know  
More of heavens glory, then a worldling can.46

Another image related to hermits is of the "harmlesse fish" that "monastique silence keeps"47 calls for a mention of the Anchorits — the "cloisterd men" who prefer to lead an isolated life. The poet feels that in the wrinkles of an old lady love is sitting like an Anchorit — indifferent of the outward beauty:

Yet lies not Love dead here, but here doth sit
Vow'd to this trench, like an Anachorit. 48

Al already noticed, 49 a womb seems to him to be a
cloyster. Thus the lover and the beloved are, like
hermits, "cloysterd in these living walls of Jet". 50 The
flea becomes a cloyster of creation. The blessed womb of
Virgin Mary has, thus, "Immensitie Cloysterd".

Some other images related to church machinery that
the poet uses are: "Recurant", "excommunicate",
"Apostasy", "Atheism", "idolatory" etc. Lovers have been
defined as "Loves Divines" and "loves clergie", because
"all Divinity/ Is love". 51 The bridegroom in his first
visit to the bride has been defined as "priest on his
knees" and the bride as an "appointed lambe". 52 Thus,
various moods and experiences in religion as well as love
find apt metaphors from church activities.

Donne's religious as well as secular poetry
employs images of God as well. But the interesting
aspect of his images of divinity is that he tells more
about the power and supremacy of God than giving any

49. See above pp. 48 f.
52. "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne", Ibid., p. 128.
concrete picture of God. The reason is obvious. God being the supreme power can not have any concrete representation, specially for a Christian. However, Christ, who adopted human form, gets a clear picture in his images. Another interesting aspect of Donne's God is that his power and supremacy is the primary thing and his mercy secondary. However, the qualities of mercy and love cannot be altogether ruled out. Rather it is Donne's obsession with the idea of sin that makes his mercy secondary. Even then, the search for reality is completed in God only, when the fear of sin is overcome. This aspect shall be discussed in the coming pages, here concentration is on the picture of God as it comes out from Donne's imagery.

As seen earlier, Donne was very fond of the images of circle. He uses the image from poem to poem ("A Litanie"), or within the same poem repeatedly, as it aims at encircling the entire cosmos with such a large circle which he probably finds in God. The way he presents perfection through circle he seems to bring it almost at par with God. Probably, this tendency owes the Christian

53. See John Carey, Op.Cit., pp. 122-124. However, Carey's conclusions show Donne's God as a cruel "killer and pulverizer" as he has drawn this conclusion on the basis of his sermons, which are not being studied here.
influence as "The circle as shape and as motion is an emblem of the paradoxes of Christianity. God is beginning and an end; ...". 54 Seen in this light, circle is emblematic of God himself as God is the other name of perfection in every respect. God, tells Donne, is "cornerlesse and infinite". Since "God knowes where every Atome lyes", 55 he is the recorder of everything that has happened or is to happen. In other words, God is the mirror in which all our deeds are reflected. God is truth and only virtuous souls can stand face to face with God and perceive the truth:

God be our true glasse, through which we see All, since the beeing of all things is hee. 56

God is the source of all religion. He imputes wisdom in us as "From God religion springs/ Wisdome". 57 Donne believes that "all Divinity/ Is love or wonder". 58 God is the supreme power of this universe. Kings and emperors, the centres of power on this earth, are exercising the powers only because God has granted them those authorities, otherwise, these earthly kings are merely

55. "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Lady Lucy, Countesse of Bedford", Poetical Works, p. 248.
56. Idem.
"hangmen to fate". God is placed so high in Donne that he can only be afraid of God. God’s fear is often echoed in his poetry:

However, keepe the lively tast you hold
Of God, love him as now, but feare him more. 59

But God’s love for man cannot be denied. It was out of love that he sent Christ to save humanity. Donne finds himself more at ease with Christ than God. Donne can take liberty with Christ and ask him for love in return. Christ as a "strong Ramme" or "Mild Lambe" brings with him a deep sense of love and sympathy for the suffering humanity. Christ as the shepherd saves his sheep from wolf (Satan). The poet tells Christ that "I am thy sonne", "Thy sheepe, thine Image". 60 Christ himself is the "Lambe of God" but for humanity he is the "Bright Torch" and guides them towards the path of virtue and salvation. Many paradoxical realities are woven round the life and exploits of Jesus Christ. Donne is very fond of such paradoxes as they help him in his search for reality. The birth and life of Christ itself is a paradox. Despite staying in prison of womb - "cloystered" in his "welbelov’d imprisonment" 61 - and then embracing "flesh" - which is symbol of sin - for which he

60. "Holy Sonnet II. As due by many titles I resigne", Ibid., p. 293.
is ultimately being crucified, he is above sin and death.

It has been already noticed in the previous chapter that Donne treats love as a two way traffic, its success and immortality depends on the sincere and active participation of both the sides involved. So is the case with divine love also. Christ is, thus, bridegroom and human soul the bride. Now in this conjugal love if bride is to remain faithful, true and constant it is the duty of bridegroom, in turn, to protect her from "invenom'd men". The sense of belonging and possession is to operate on both the sides:

....As thou
Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now,
Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free
My soule: Who ever gives, takes libertie:
O, if thou car'st not whom I love
Also, thou lov'st not me.62

The Calvinist doctrine, that Christ imputes grace to save a selected few who are virtuous, can define a situation in love. Like Christ the beloved imputes the revelation of herself to the lover who is thus blessed by her arbitrary 63 selection.

Remarkable, not only for their large number but also for their intensity of passion, are the images related to

62. "A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany", Poetical Works, p. 322.
sin and crucifixion. In the traditional manner, crucifixion promises human salvation and freedom from the stain of sin, which otherwise contaminates and results in damnation of human soul. For illustration consider the images related to soul first. Heaven is the permanent dwelling place of soul which comes to earth to undertake a journey: "Thou art like a pilgrim". Since soul is immortal, Donne finds it a medium of forming a circle - the circle of perfection and eternity. Soul links heaven with earth. It is akin to compass that has been found as a means of the search for reality:

O Soule, O circle, why so quickly bee
Thy ends, thy birth and death, clos'd up in thee?

Whenever the poet has to show eternity or perfection, he brings images related to circle and even of coin. He finds soul a coin bearing the stamp of God. It is a representation of the divinity in man. But the moment soul enters body, it is eclipsed by the body, which is like a prison where all vices are added to soul:

As men to'our prisons new soules to us are sent,
Which learne vice there, and come in innocent.

64. "Holy Sonnet IV. Oh my blacke Soule!", Poetical Works, p. 294.
65. "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Lady Lucy, Countesse of Bedford", Ibid., p. 250.
66. "To the Countesse of Bedford. T'have written then", Ibid., p. 174.
Thus, the soul is "pack'd" in the body which is "a poore Inne", made of simply "two yards of skinne". The very union of body and soul brings the Original sin inherited by man from his first parents and this is an undenyng legacy that preyes upon humanity at all times. It is "Adams tasting the forbidden" fruit that deprived man of the heaven, made him commit sin and undergo punishment:

The poisonous tincture of Original sin, so to the punishments which God doth fling.

The first sin "brought in infirmities" and all other variety of sins generated from it. Gradually the sins multiply and the world is crumbling down under the weight of corruption and decay caused by the first sin. Man has been adding "weight to heavens heaviest curse" because once "The poison's gone through", it's very difficult to overcome it.

The effect of sin is dooming. A sinner due to the sins is "swolne" like a boil. The force of sin is so powerful that even angels may be subjected to it. The poet very sympathetically and painfully refers to the suffering of the damned angels in "Elegie XI" where he plays upon the pun on angel as a spirit and coin. The entry of corruption and sin in this world "seis'd the Angels", thus, "Angels

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sinn'd first, then Devills, and then man". His emphasis on the sinfulness of even angels shows how haunted he was by the idea of sin.

As about himself, he felt sin increase in him. He repents that he "wallowed" in it for "a score" of years and further aggravated it by winning "Others to sinne? and, made my sinne their doore?" The most of his religious poetry is shadowed by the fear of sin and death. His fear of death, basically, is not the fear of the end of life as such, rather it is the fear of damnation that repeatedly haunts his mind and generates the fear of death as well. Donne fears sin so much as he is aware of the irresistible charm of sin. He relates his repentence over sin to his earlier life which, no doubt, had the "hydroptique thirst" for learning but, he confesses, in "Holy Sonnet III", was a life of an "itchy Lecher", full of "idolatry". But there is "no satisfactory evidence to prove that Donne had a dissipated or immoral youth". Probably this is the fear of a Christian in general, specially that of Donne's time. Deep contemplation over the theological issues might have created a sense of repulsion for the pleasures of youthful life that everyone

wants to enjoy. In "Goodfriday. 1613. Riding Westward", the poet expresses his sorrow that the "sphere" of his soul having come under the influence of "foraigne motions" of "pleasures or businesse" has been distracted from its journey towards "East" (i.e., devotion towards God) and has moved towards "West" (i.e. death). To some extent, it had the effect of his apostasy which he had to accept under compulsions of his ambitions as well as religious atmosphere of Elizabethan England. One of the reasons of his insistence on sin, as Evans points out, was the influence of St. Augustine also. Donne finds it very difficult to overcome the temptation of Satan and here lies one of the root causes of his fear of sin. The fear of previous sins is not so great as is the fear generated by his failure to crush the temptation of Satan. He confesses that "our old subtile foe so tempteth me". The fear of Satan is so great that he feels his presence near him. In the last lines of "Holy Sonnet II" the threat of Satan seems almost invulnerable. In the seventeenth century many people spoke of devils' visits to them and their presence was commonly accepted. Donne's exasperation over the presence of Satan seems to have resulted from this belief. Carey rightly suggests that "we can not share the terror of the 'Holy Sonnets' unless we feel the devil Donne speaks of

75. "Holy Sonnet I. Thou hast made me", Poetical Works, p. 293.
as a living creature, a family acquaintance, close at
hand." 76 Even "Reason", which is the "viceroy" of God in
man, fails to guide the struggling soul against sin and
Satan. It results in feverish restlessness and a cry for
help mixed with protest:

If poysous mineralls, and if that tree,
Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us,
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
Can not be damn'd; Alas; why should I bee? 77

He often exaggerates his sinfulness and finds
himself a greater sinner than the Jews that crucified
Christ:

They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I
Crucifie him daily, being now glorified. 78

This clearly reflects the restless, burning desire to get
rid of sin. But the suffering soul finds it difficult to
repent as it has influence of sin. The helplessness that
"to confess we know not what we should" 79 do, makes him
appeal earnestly before God that his disqualification be
pardoned and repentence taught:

Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood. 80

77. "Holy Sonnet IX. If poysous mineralls", Poetical
   Works, p. 297.
78. "Holy Sonnet XI. Spit in my face you Jewes", Ibid.,
   p. 298.
79. "To the Countesse of Bedford. T'have written them",
   Ibid., p. 173.
80. "Holy Sonnet VII. At the round earths imagin'd
corners", Ibid., p. 296.
The image of burning from alchemy suggests purification and extraction of quintessence. Hence, the poet feels that his soul "must be burnt", God should "Burne off" his "rusts" and "deformity" so that all his sins are washed off. Only then God will "Restore" his "image" in his heart. The process of conversion of baser metals into gold is like purgation because they are freed from all dross that they have and thus purgation of soul is somewhat akin to this process. The sins "vicious tinctures" - are to be removed and the divine qualities to be extracted:

O Father, purge away
All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned
I may rise up from death, before I am dead. 82

The desire of being purged through the alchemical process reflects the baseness of material. The process of purgation is not going to be easily possible because the soul is covered with "dross" like iron. No earthly alchemist can have such elixir, only God can purify and draw the "iron heart" of the poet, as we hear him pray in "Holy Sonnet I": "Thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart". The "iron heart" is to be drawn towards heaven. The poet often expresses his desire to unite with God. He conceives of his soul taking a flight to heaven and dwell in the

in the blissful atmosphere with the blessed saints and 
"Prophets" in heaven:

Upto those Prophets, which now gladly see
Their Prophecies growne to be Historie.
Up to th'Apostles, who did bravely runne
All the Suns course, with more light then the Sunne.  

Even those portions of "The second Anniversarie", where the poet describes Elizabeth Drury's flight to heaven, it is not the light of her soul but it "is Donne's own soul which here is made a symbol of release" and this release is "not only from physical bondage, but also from the mental bondage which is the deepest agony of the greatest souls", 84 as Martz observes.

His steep ambitions, though not fulfilled at secular level, find their echoes in religion. In religious matters also he is not satisfied with an ordinary Christian's fate. He wants to inherit the qualities of the Trinity - power from God, love from Christ and knowledge from the Holy Ghost:

... let all mee elemented bee,
Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three. 85

This is one of the most dominant images that clearly

unfolds the depths of Donne's personality. We have already marked his steep ambitions, his pursuit for knowledge and his restless desire for salvation. Donne believed that God, the supreme power of this universe, has sent King, as His representative on earth. How desirous was Donne to become ambassador! Well, he got divine ambassadorship in form of priesthood. His thirst for knowledge is clearly reflected through his erudite imagery, moreover, his account of his library bears a clear testimony to it. Then how are these two aspirations - i.e., nearness to God and satisfaction of thirst for knowledge - to be fulfilled? The answer comes from the love of Christ, the last and the only ray of hope. He, by his love, can teach him to repent, can impute grace on him and ultimately ensure his salvation and in heaven he can satisfy his aspirations. This discussion may seem exaggerated but the seeds were definitely present in Donne which often seem to sprout in form of his restlessness over failure to fulfil them here on earth and it is this restlessness which is one of the shaping forces of his unflinching faith in God, which demands no questions about God's authority.

But such a higher state of bliss is not easily possible. It requires exceptional virtues which an ordinary man can not easily attain. Without them one can not understand the ways of God who works "miracles exceeding
power of man". The duty of man is to make "Our soule, whose country' is heaven, and God her father", grow rich in virtues and divine pursuits "that she returns home, wiser than she went". The question that one faces is how to grow these virtues and wherefrom to learn them. Soul is basically virtuous but it is contaminated by body. Therefore, the process is to begin from soul itself. He makes the point clear with an efficacious image of magnifying glass. Soul, he says, is like sun and its rays of virtue are to be centralised as a magnifying glass does centralise and multiply the heat of sun rays. Thus the search is to begin from within oneself:

Seeke wee then our selves in our selves; for as
Men force the Sunne with much more force to passe,
By gathering his beames with a christall glasse;87

Thus, Donne believes that virtue is self existent and innate with soul, he tells Lady Carey in one of his verse letters that "Vertue is our Soules complexion". We simply have to educe what is latent in us. The emphasis on virtues can be seen at many places in Donne. He treats the four "Cardinall" virtues as a distinctive quality of saints. One who follows these virtues viz. justice, prudence, temperence and fortitude, is a "Saint" and his soul is a

87. "To Mr Rowland Woodward. Like one who", Ibid., p. 164.
"Paradise".

Donne's religious and theological images reflect his bent of mind. He was born and brought up in an orthodox Christian atmosphere and his family had connections with the fanatic Jesuits. He feels that all knowledge should ultimately lead towards the spiritual attainments. The knowledge acquired through the senses is not going to bring spiritual attainment:

When wilt thou shake off this Pedentery
Of being taught by sense, and Fantasie?

He has such a deep faith in God that he finds all "Arguing" about him a "heretiques game" and all such arguments like "glassie bubbles".

But this realisation did not come all of a sudden. It came after a long contemplation. The poet was an explorer in the religious matters as well. We can not forget that he believed in reasoning also:

... doubt wisely: in strange way
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
To sleepe, or runne wrong, is.

In order to reach truth we "about must, and about must goe". "Satyre III" was written at least five to six years

89. "Satyre III", Ibid., p. 139.
before "The Progresse of the Soule". The process of reaching truth was endlessly going on in the mind of the poet. In "The second Anniversarie", first published in 1612, the poet makes the bold assertion that "In heaven thou straight know'st all".

This, however, does not undermine the knowledge acquired in this world. In the same poem he stresses the importance of such knowledge when he tells that Elizabeth Drury has acquired the superior position through her learning:

... as learned, and as full, as shee
Shee who all libraries had throughly read
At home in her owne thoughts, and practised
So much good as would make as many more:

Similarly, the poet finds faith and reason to be identical. They are not antagonistic but are complementary to each other. He tells the Countess of Bedford that "Discretion" and "Religion" "are one". In another letter to her he writes:

Reason in our Soules left hand, Faith her right,
By these wee reach divinity. 91

91. "To the Countesse of Bedford. Reason is our Soules left hand", Ibid., p. 167.
In the elegy on the death of Prince Henry, the poet stresses the parity through the conceit of orbit. He tells that the orbit of man's mind is oval shaped and has to centres one each for faith and reason. But in case of virtuous men there is no disparity between them, faith and reason supplement each other:

For all that faith might credit mankinde coulde,
Reason still seconded, that this price would.

In religious matters, ultimately, what the poet approves of is reason to second faith. Religion is the last hope for a soul suffering from all doubts and sins and can lead him towards the right path. Donne felt that the religious authorities and the pious theologians should raise no disputes over petty matters because such disputes leave religious feverishness as legacy for a common Christian and disturb the principle of harmony, they result in "interrupted eveness, with fits". Religious matters, therefore, should have harmony and uniformity. Religion is the "supernatural food" that the poet wants to feed on.

For salvation, then, one should submit before God with "white sincerity". The poet, in "La Corona", tells God that he has a "strong sober thirst" for salvation and

delivery from sins. The liturgical prayer appeals for general salvation: "Salvation to all that will is nigh".

Virtues, religious thirst and sincerity alone are not sufficient for salvation. What Donne stresses most is the mercy of Christ whom he finds the symbol of love. Naturally there occur many images on Christ that have already been discussed, images on crucifixion need a discussion here. Donne was fond of handling paradoxes and this habit is seen in his images of crucifixion also. The early Christian doctrines were influenced by the classical philosophy of God. But this resulted in rival systems of thought and Donne exploits such contradictions. Christianity adopted the Neo-Platonic view that God is eternal, boundless and always wholly present everywhere. But it is at odds with the Christian teaching that God became man and was crucified. They very idea of all powerful God being nailed and crucified creates the problem. Cross is the symbol of salvation as well as Christ's ghastly crucifixion. The paradox occurs in "The Progresse of the Soule": "That Crosse, our joy, and griefe, where nails did tye". Again, in "La Corona":

That All, which always is All every where,
Which cannot sinne, and yet all sinnes must beare,
Which cannot die, yet cannot chuse but die,

The paradoxical reality that is presented through
the conceit, attracts Donne greatly. He wrote a poem on the cross emphasizing its omnipresence in the cosmos. The spiritual manifestations of the cross are related to church ceremonies but what the poet stresses most are its curative and preservative properties:

These for extracted chimique medicine serve,
And cure much better, and as well preserve: 94

It is the awareness of these healing properties of the cross that makes the suffering soul cry in "The Litanie": "O be thou nail'd unto my heart". The "wrath" of Christ over human sins can be quenched only with his "owne blood". The poet expresses his desire to die like Christ. There is a fervent appeal to Jews to spit on his face and to kill him in the same fashion as Christ was. The death of Christ thus symbolises human delivery from sins from death:

Deliver us from death, by dying so,
To this world, ere this world doe bid us goe. 95

Thus, only Christ's "safe sealing Bowle", a drop of his blood, can free the soul from the fear of sins, Satan and damnation that horrified the soul of the poet. When Christ agrees to "Moyst" with one drop "of his blood" the "dry soule" of the poet, all his fears are immediately

eliminated. Now the poet has reached the stage of contemplation and identification with Christ that he can see the "picture of Christ crucified" in his heart. This happens in the "Holy Sonnet III", which has been called "a direct fruit of meditation on the crucified". Christ is presented here as having love with human soul.

When in the intenser meditative moods as in "Holy Sonnet XV", the poet finds not only the picture of crucifixion in his heart but Christ himself deigns to be there. In such moods of perfect identification with God, the fears of sin and death that so often tormented the poet, are completely obliterated. There is a blessed atmosphere of heavenly benedictions all around and now comes a voice of full confidence in God's mercy.

"Holy Sonnet XVI" is again a poem of such intense mood where the poet is free from the fear of sinfulness and celebrates God's love and grace. Now he has inherited Christ's "joynture" of "deaths conquest". The problem that he was earlier facing - "Teach me how to repent" - is solved. The poet is sure that Christ's last command of love will seal his salvation, so he earnestly appeals God

in "Holy Sonnet XVI": "Oh let this last will stand!" The same mood of unflinching faith in God's mercy can be seen in "Resurrection, imperfect" and "The Annunciation and Passion" also. The Resurrection of Christ is the "tincture" that can bless even the most sinful creatures. The illumination dawns:

Th' Abridgement of Christ's story, which makes one
(As in plaine Maps, the furthest West is East)\textsuperscript{97}

The union of "West" with "East" brings about the mental state when death and life are seen alike. Physical death is now immaterial because eternal life is waiting in turn.

The fear of death being totally effaced, the poet brings about the images of whole-hearted confession, to be followed by journey to heaven. The last two divine poems viz. "A Hymne to God the Father" and "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse", which were written when Donne was seriously ill and "when he thought himself at the point of death",\textsuperscript{98} show this final stage. The first poem is a whole hearted and sincere confession. The mild doubts that

\textsuperscript{97} "The Annunciation and Passion", Poetical Works, p. 305.

appear in the first few lines are soon obliterated, the poet confesses all his sins with the happy ending: "I feare no more". The second poem which is not only the final voice of Donne but also his "most splendid achievement in divine poetry",99 is the next stage after confession. It begins with death scene leading to purgation, purification and salvation. After the confession is made, all fears and doubts are obliterated, a new illumination dawns upon the soul and he is now welcomed in heaven - the "Holy roome" - and has become a part of the holy "Musique" of the "Saints". Filled with the inconceivable elation of this new experience he tunes the divine "Instrument" at the door of heaven, he now becomes a part of the divine music.

The geographical concept of his body as a "Mapp" suggests the juxtaposition of macrocosm and microcosm. Moreover, now "West" - death - of his life has become his "East" - resurrection - as he lies "flatt" - prostrate - to offer his prayers to God:

As West and East
In all flatt Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the Resurrection.100

Now "both Adams" meet in the poet, i.e., now he is successor of both Adam and Christ. What he succeeded from Adam - Original sin - has been purged by Christ with his blood. This is the journey from confession, purgation, purification, illumination to salvation. Here is the search for reality completed. The life long search is happily accomplished in God. All the doubts, fears and failures that kept him haunting are ultimately wiped out. All the mysteries are now open to him and he "straight know'at all".¹⁰¹ The map of life is completed, the circle of soul is perfected with its return to heaven.