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Hierophantic Experiences and *Homo Religiosus* in the Light of Donne's *Divine Poems*

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Abstract:

Hierophantic experience is an exalted visionary insight gained throughthe fusion and integration of six faculties. It is a close and harmonious relationship with a higherpower beyond the phenomenal world of space and time. Asharing of concord with the paroxysmal pulse of the universal spirit. Donne's religious life and the divine works- religion inspired, are the most crucial and imbued with paradoxes to emerge from the English Renaissance. He was born into one of the most visible and influential spokesman for the Anglican compromise. Fascinated by the conversion experiences of Saint Paul and Saint Augustine, he paradoxically left little conclusive evidence by which the modern reader or biographer may chart his spiritual progress with any certainty. *Homo religiosus*sees not just "a worm," "a weed," "a bird," or "a person" with s arms; in spite, he sees God in and through these things. *Homo religiosus* not only experiences prosperity or adversity in the mundane business of life but identifies God's workings in these different manifestations of divine goodness and mercy.The phrase, *homo religiosus*, refers to the idea that human existence is inherently religious.There is a long lineage of scholars that have proposed this idea, including Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), William James (1842–1910), MirceaEliade (1907–1986), Rudolf Otto (1884–1939), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), etc. In the paper that follows I will see that Donne not only perceived the world as imbued by the sacred, but also clearly believed the principal events of sacred experience, those preserved in Scripture, are repeatable and accessible to humanity.
Keywords: *Homo Religiosus,* Hierophant, Divine, Sacred.

Donne is more than a seventeenth-century Protestant writer, he is even more than a Christian writer whose values are firmly embeddedin western culture. The cumulative and widespread perspective enlightens the cross-cultural dimensions of his religious imagination gained by placing Donne within the orientation of the history of religions.An especially useful framework for examining Donne from this perspective is the work of the numerouno and forerunning historian of religions, MirceaEliade. Author of numerous scholarly treatises and editor of the multi-volume Encyclopedia of Religion, Eliade bridged the concerns of anthropologists and earlier students of comparative religion.(Kitagawa 5: 85-90)Since comparative religion accentuate the religions of the complex societies of Europe and the Far East, Eliade's study is often incorporated ofuneducated and tribal societies. Looking beyond the bases of particular manifestations of religion, Eliade worked to identify what constitutes the religious impulse cross-culturally.

Nevertheless the most casual survey of Donne's work suggests that he complies withEliade's definition of *homo religiosus*, the religious human. In synthesizing the concept of the religious human, Gregory Alles (444) sees Eliade contrasting modes of " existing in and experiencing the world"; Eliade depicts *homo religiosus* as " driven by desire for being," living "at the centre of the world, close to the gods and in the eternal present of the paradigmatic mythic events that make profane duration possible." Eliade makes a clear distinction between the individual whose fundamental orientation is sacred rather than secular and profane.

> Whatever the historical context in which he is placed, *homo religiosus* always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real. He further believes that life has a sacred origin and that human existence realizes all of its potentialities in proportion as it is religious-that is, participates in reality. . . . By reactualizing sacred history, by imitating the divine behaviour, man puts and keeps himself close to the gods- that is, in the real and significant. (Sacred and Profane 202)

The essential part of Donne's religious art is theacknowledgement that the transcendent reality of the sacred appears itself in and canonizes the world, the sacred history can and must be reappeared."In this fundamental religious paradox the mortal whose life is contracted to a brief span has open and available the vast reaches of the timeless and immutable. This abstraction assumes concrete form in those divine poems which become hierophanies, manifestations of the sacred, their very time and space transformed to the eternal and cosmic." (Eliade and Sullivan 6: 313-337)

> As perchance, Carves do not faces make,
> But that way, which hid them there, do take. ("The Cross" Donne)

MirceaEliade argues that religious humans are motivated by the belief that "Life is lived on a twofold plane; it takes its course as human cosmos or the gods" (Sacred 167). As a result, everything takes on meaning: "It is his familiar everyday life that is transfigured. . . . Even the most habitual gesture can signify a spiritual act" (Sacred 183). All along his devotional writing, Donne views the world fromthe vistas of *homo religiosus*. Donne believed that the Creation is a book revealing the Creator; in spite, he saw the external and perceptible world as imbued with sacred meaning. In a sermon on John 14.20 he asserts that every creature calls man "to a consideration of God":

> Every Ant that sees, asks him, Where had I this providence, and industry? Every flower that he sees, asks him, Where had I this beauty, this flagrancy, this medicinal virtue in me? Every creature calls him to consider, what great things God hath done in little subjects. (Sermons 9: 237, quoted by Frances M. Malpezzi :143)

As God manifests himself in it the material world is real to Donne, which is depicted in many of his metaphysical poems Viz. "The Ecstasy", "The Canonization", "Good Morrow", etc. where he considers body as essential for the two souls to unite. What might seem trivial when seen through material eyes resounds with sacred meaning for *homo religiosus*.

In a sermon preached in 1622 on Job 36: 25, Donne expatiates at length on seeing God in his creation. The divine author reveals himself in his multi-volume work, including in "The Georgiccs." Donne exhorts his audience to consider "the Earth, a farme, a garden, nay seven foot of earth, a grave" as a manifestation of the deity:

> Goe lower; every woman in the grave, lower, every weed upon the grave, as an abridgement of all; nay lock up all doors and windows, see nothing but thy selfe; nay let thy selfe be locked up in a close prison, that thou canst not see thyselfe, and do but feel thy pulse; let thy pulse be intermitted, or stupefied, that thou feel not that, and doe but thinke, and a worme, a weed, thy selfe, thy pulse, thy thought, are all testimonies, that All, this All, and parts, therefore, are Opus, a work made, and opus ejus, his work, made by God (4:167)

It must be recorded that human suffering is the greatest affirmation of a benign deity because the excruciation of Christ is reverberated in the "red glasse" of each individual's pain. Ultimately, each visible and corporeal aspects of creation, all maneuvers, actions and human attained experiences are ways of seeing God for Donne.This belief in the manifestation of God through His works and through His working upon us underscores much of Donne's poetry, but is the particular impetus of "The Crosse." As Donne takes up the

iconoclastic controversy of his age, (Hazo1964 :34-35) the speaker concludes he cannot deny the image of the cross Christ embraced largely because there is no escaping an image which marks all life, including the indelible and invisible sign "dew'd" on his soul as Baptism. Whether he looks high or low, at a bird or a globe, Donne's speaker sees a sacralized universe reflecting divine reality:

> Lookedowne, thou spiest out Crosse in small things;
> Looke up, thou seestbirdsrais'd on crossed wings;
> All the Globes frame, and spheares, is nothing else
> But the Meridians crossing Parallels (The Crosse :II. 21-22)

Every small creature and the stupendousstructure of the world itself in equal degreeindicate the magnificence of God because they form the symbolic representation of His cross.

Furthermore, like Eliade's*homo religiosus*, Donne realizesthat he need only extend, like compass, his arms or swim to reproduce the sign of Christ's propitiation:

> Who can deny mee power, and liberty
> To stretch mine armes, and mine own crosse to be?
> Swimme, and at every stroake, thou art the reason. (The Crosse : II 17-19)

When the material world should be marked by the cross, and when simple manly maneuvers represents typical example of that cross, then even more so do the cross and the crucifixion become so tangibly solid as they adoptflesh and blood in each Christian's patient and acquiescentratification of pain and tribulation. Through agony, each individual "When Still'd, or purg'd by tribulation" makes the cross a new reality: "For when that Cross ungrudg'd, unto you stickes, / Then are you to your selfe, a Crucifixe" (The Crosse II. 30-32)

Donne uses the image of sculptor/ or carver revealing the face already in the wood which is an appropriate metaphor for fetching the theme of the "indispensability of suffering to spiritual perfection":

> Donne pictures the face hewn by the sculptor as having been hidden within the unsculpted wood or stone. The whittling away of the concealing matter by the sculptor, according to Donne, permits the indwelling face to be seen. Tribulation is said to possess this same sculpting power to the extent that it ends to reveal the Christian or indwelling countenance or "true" face after purging man of superficialities. (Hazo 1964: 40)

The used metaphor is substantially enoughfor the divine being permanently present in the physical universe. In a world impregnated with the sacred, Donne as *homo religiosus*discerns the divine. He performs, in the capacity of a poet, like the carver conscious of the face within the wood; his words carve through the world to reveal its consecration.

Whereas Donne's "The Crosse" clearly exhibits that all life, all cosmos is habituated to the direct involvement of Christ's crufixion, other divine poems also illustrate the way *homo religiosus* sees God in his works and in his working upon mankind. The world of Donne's divine poems is one in which the invisible things of God are manifest in creation, a world in which every gesture, every act- whether it be the cruciform motion of swimming, journeying westward on a Goodfriday, travelling to Germany, or loving a woman- reverberates with sacred meaning. (Frances M. Malpezzi: 146)

> This treasure then, in grosse, my Soule uplay,
> And in my life retaile it every day. ("Upon the Annunciation and Passion" John Donne)

Subsequently, as *homo religiosus*, Donne venerated the events of sacred events of sacred history where not deported to the past but are a part of the sacred present and accessible to every believer. Donne held thatby the means of the faculty of memory, sacred time became attainable. There can be two ways in which the poems of Donne should make sacred time approachable to us. First, in portraying and seizing the perpetual present of Christian myth,

they make the speaker and participatory readers contemporary with these events, bringing them in the incessant present of extemporal and sacred reality. And, second, they depict how the life of the speaker reproduces these happenings. Thepoem, in the first way,brings forward the metaphysical power of memory, returning the participatory readers to the sacred time; the second shows the sacralization of the profane as the sacred is "made flesh" in the day-to-day life of each individual.

In "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward" Donne perceives his spiritual problem to be a geographical firstly: "if he could just turn around and ride in the opposite direction he would eventually reach the place where he could see the Son of God whose ride and fall saved humankind from eternal darkness."(Frances M. Malpezzi: 155) In this poem he has seized and adapted an esoteric and metaphysical experience, as he portrays a worldly speaker who ventures into the presence of the crucified Christ. In his return to sacred time beyond temporality and spatiality far removed from geographical reality, he experiences an esoteric mystery(hierophany) which brings a transformation in his life as he discerns the need of conforming his will to God and complying with himself to the suffering Christ. He experiences and identifies the way profane life can be classified by the divine and thus imbued with the sacred quality, furthermore, he recognizes the accessibility of sacred time and space.

Religious poetry for Donne is a vehicle for keeping souls in tune with God(Frances M. Malpezzi: 156). While we scrutinize the outputs of Donne's divine poetry and his hierophantic imagination, we procure that John Donne was a great minister of the Word in the poetic revelation of that imagination than when he was in the lectern. Donne's divine poems, because of this aesthetics, are often hierophantic experiences, and perspicuous manifestation of the sacred. Donne reverts the readers to the holy time and space, and affirms the sanctification of life by bringing the participants in the poem contemporary with the empyreal happenings and putting them in the immediacy of the deity by exhibiting the way these happenings structure, imbue with meaning, and sanctify the profane experience.

When we observe Donne functioningunder the circumstances of*homo religiosus*we see it means to acknowledge his relationship not only to those seventeenth-century British writers who shared his ideology, ittoorefers to realizingthe common features he has with the poets, who through the centuries, have been influenced by the hierophanticurge. To observe Donne's hierophantic experiences in relation to theexperiences from earlier or later cultures by those who do not share his Christian belief system is eventually to elevate and respect the metaphysical power of his poetry and perennial value.

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