Sacred Space and Biblical Maps in Donne's "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward"

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Abstract

In this study of John Donne's "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," I illustrate how maps printed in Protestant Bibles in the 16th and 17th centuries gave salvation a spatial, chorographic orientation. Despite Reformers' iconophobia towards depictions of Christ, Mary, and God, maps of the Holy Land, Eden, etc. offered safer, more exegetical mediums through which to visualize God's work and, by extension, God's grace. While traditional readings of this poem locate salvation through meditation and memory, I argue that this new practice of printing maps alongside Scripture prompted Donne to look to the external world for religious guidance.

Introduction & Objectives

John Donne presents a cartographic gaze in much of his poetry and prose; fascinated by navigational tools, atlases, and cosmographical charts, Donne's poetry reflects changing notions of space in a rapidly widening globe. This project, however, situates Donne within the intellectual culture of the Protestant Reformation. In keeping with the objectives of the Early Modern Conversions project, my main objective is to illustrate how Donne's poem, with the help of these Biblical maps, aids religious conversion by converting and resacrilizing space.

Key Findings

1. Understanding the scope and scale of professional literary research
2. How to synthesize information from a plethora of primary and secondary sources to form my own unique argument
3. How to work both independently and alongside incredible mentorship
4. Improvement of writing and communication skills