MILTON'S ORTHODOXY AND ITS RELATION TO THE FORM
OF PARADISE LOST

by

BERNICE M. GERARD

B.A. University of British Columbia, 1962

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

M.A.

in the Department

of

ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 1967
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date September 1967
ABSTRACT

There exists a wide divergence of opinion as to whether Milton is an orthodox Christian. This thesis argues that upon examination Milton's alleged heresies come out quite clearly as transpositions of orthodox belief rather than as departures from it, and that Milton as the author of *Paradise Lost* emerges as an outstanding Christian apologist because he soared in his singing robes to present the orthodox Christian story of redemption with unsurpassed beauty and eloquence. This re-examination of the problem of Milton's relationship to orthodoxy centers upon *Paradise Lost* and *The Christian Doctrine*, in which there is doctrinal consistency.

According to the poet's own terms of reference the appeal to Scripture as described in the Westminster Confession is the true criterion for orthodoxy. In the face of mainstream Christianity's claim that Milton's beliefs must be measured against the creedal statements, Milton holds that not only his beliefs but the creeds themselves must be weighed in the balance of Scripture.

Milton's deviation from the established norm of the early creedal statements is seen to be negligible, but when he unequivocally disagrees with the Nicaean Creed which states definitively the Trinitarian position, he has been thought to put himself outside orthodoxy's circle. However, this thesis argues that Milton can only be charged with heresy if the question of his relationship to the Nicaean Creed is
superficially regarded or grossly oversimplified.

Accordingly, Milton's alleged heresies--his anti-Trinitarianism, materialism, and mortalism--are examined against the background not only of the content of the classical statements regarding these subjects but also of the fundamental conceptions that the statements of Athanasius, Augustine and others were intended radically to emphasize. Ultimately, the argument for Milton's orthodox imagination and intention depends upon a demonstration of the fact that Milton's theological deviations are not the result of the omission of any of creedal orthodoxy's vital elements but rather the result of emphasis of certain points. This proposition finds its crucial test in Milton's attitude toward the doctrine of the atonement.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton uses several transpositions of orthodox belief rather than heresies and employs them to forward his poetic purposes. The process of selection and manipulation is seen to be governed not only by a powerful and positive religious sensibility, but also by an unerring sense of what is artistically appropriate. How Milton, the Puritan, achieved expression in the form of the epic is, in simple terms, the account of how his emphasis on will provides the momentum of the great argument, and how the elements of traditional Christianity are emphasized, subordinated, or transposed to suit the poet's driving purpose.

Milton's announced purpose of justifying the ways of God to
men is fulfilled in a strange but revealing manner. A God who is ipso facto beyond comprehension is subjected to rational analysis within the confines of epic convention. Some low moments and absurdities result. Yet, in spite of some logical impasses, Milton succeeds magnificently. Not all Adam's questions are answered but he experiences a Paradise within him, happier far. The consummation of Milton's argument and the resolution of the reader's doubt come with the realization,

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Then that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! (XII, 469-73)

This ultimate triumph, so Miltonic and yet so entirely orthodox, so imaginatively satisfying and so in keeping with the whole structure of the poem, is the final proof that, doctrinally as well as poetically, we have here "nothing but well and fair".
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Milton's Theology</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>The Effect of Milton's Orthodoxy Upon the Content and Style of <em>Paradise Lost</em></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And so these men of Hindustan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong;
Though each was partly in the right
And all were in the wrong.  

John Milton's personal theology is in the position of the proverbial elephant which upon examination by six blind men of Hindustan was said to be like a wall, a snake, a spear, a tree, a rope and a fan. For almost three centuries there has been wide disagreement over the precise nature of the poet's doctrine and over its relation to his major poems. "The theology of Paradise Lost has been called Arian, Arminian, Puritan, Presbyterian, Baptist, orthodox, heterodox, heretical, Catholic, Protestant, Hebraic, millenarian, cabalistic, mortalist, Platonic, neo-Platonic, materialistic, mystical, Stoic, Epicurean, Socinian, atheistic, Quaker, Independent, quietist, humanitarian.... Most of these epithets are justified in part at least."² Some of these descriptive terms are mutually exclusive. It will be worth our while to re-examine two of Milton's major works, in which

---

² Harry F. Robins, If This Be Heresy: A Study of Milton and Origen (Urbana, 1963), p. 3.
his will and imagination are clearly displayed, to see what unity we

   can discover in his theological system.

   Any discussion of Milton's orthodoxy will centre upon \textit{Paradise
   Lost} and \textit{The Christian Doctrine}. Within recent years, a number of
   critics have undertaken to reiterate what previous generations of
   readers took for granted: that \textit{Paradise Lost} is broadly speaking an
   orthodox poem. C.S. Lewis remarks that generations of orthodox
   Christians have read \textit{Paradise Lost} without noticing that it includes
   heretical doctrines; in his opinion, "Heretical elements exist in it,
   but are only discoverable by search: any criticism which forces them
   into the foreground is mistaken, and ignores the fact that this poem
   was accepted by many generations of acute readers well grounded in
   theology."³ Sister Miriam Joseph defends the orthodoxy of the poem
   from the point of view of a strict Trinitarian:

   With respect to the three Persons of the Trinity and the
   work of creation... \textit{Paradise Lost} seems in harmony with the teachings
   of Catholic theologians. Especially in expressing the equality of the
   Son with the Father, the poem appears to accord with Catholic dogma;
   at least, it would hardly lead the ordinary reader to suspect its author
   of the heresies he had set forth in \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}. ⁴

   Sir Herbert Grierson says of \textit{Paradise Lost}, "One must recognize that
   all the main and prominent doctrines of the poem are those of
   Evangelical Protestantism."⁵

---

³ C.S. Lewis, \textit{A Preface to Paradise Lost} (London, 1942), p. 82.
⁴ Sister Miriam Joseph, \textit{Orthodoxy in Paradise Lost} (Laval, 1952),
p. 258.
Though *Paradise Lost* readily finds defenders of its orthodoxy, the case is different with *The Christian Doctrine*. Many critics, including the three cited above, hold that it contains much heretical material. The most casual reader will be stopped short by such a sentence as this:

> Since therefore the Son derives his essence from the Father, he is posterior to the Father not merely in rank, a distinction unauthorized by Scripture, and by which many are deceived, but also in essence; and the filial character itself, on the strength of which they are chiefly wont to build his claim to supreme divinity, affords the best refutation of their opinion. (C. E. XIV, 313)

If, then, we take the side of those critics, such as Robins, who contend that "Milton's theology is coherent, philosophically sound, and consistently adhered to in both the treatises and the epics" and if we intend to use *The Christian Doctrine* in interpreting the epics, we must seek a new perspective, from which the whole configuration of Milton's thought may be viewed.

We should be concerned, in searching for a fresh viewpoint, with indirect as well as direct embodiments of doctrine. To say that there is great sympathy on intellectual subjects between Satan and

---

6 Citations from John Milton in my text are from *The Works of John Milton* Vols. I-XVIII, Columbia Edition (New York, 1931). For the convenience of the reader references to major poems are by book and line, to the prose by volume and page.

7 Robins, p. 2.
Milton or to suggest that, there being no real counterpart to Satan, the real hero of the poem is Milton himself is in either case to infer something crucial about Milton's theology. Saurat asserts that Milton, not God or the Son as he presents them, overcomes Satan; Blake's dictum was to the effect that Milton "was of the devil's party" without knowing it: these are meaningful statements about Milton's beliefs. If, however, we are seeking to describe with some accuracy Milton's relation to orthodox Christian faith we must translate all our evidence into comparable theological terms. Present day Christians might well be astonished and saddened if, in a study of Milton's poetry and theology, it were disclosed that the great Christian poet of the English tradition is not in the central current of Christianity.

Before going to the historians, the fathers or the Bible itself, let us pay some attention to Milton's own statements relevant to our inquiry. His stated and demonstrable hatred of hypocrisy suggests that we may discard the possibility that he is wilfully inconsistent for his own poetic convenience. He loathes "Hypocrisie, the onley evil that walks Invisible, except to God alone." (P.L., III, 683-4). His especial aversion is the learned prevaricator:

---


9 Saurat, p. 184.
And in matters of Religion, there is not anything more intollerable then a learned fool, or a learned Hypocrite, the one is ever coopt up at his empty speculations, a sot, an ideot for any use that mankind can make of him, or else sowing the World with nice, and idle questions. (C.E. 111, I, 162)

We ought also to look at Milton's concern with the idea itself of heresy. In his treatise Of Civil Power, he condemns those who are so unjust and foolish as to "stamp with the invidious name 'heretic' or 'heresy' whatever appears to them to differ from the received opinions, without trying the doctrine by a comparison with Scripture testimonies." (XIV, 13) To what uses this "Greek appari­tion" of heresy can be put Milton is fully aware:

According to their notions, to have branded any one at random with this opprobious mark, is to have refuted him without any trouble, by a single word. By the simple imputation of the name heretic, they think they have dispatched their man at one blow. (XIV, 13)

"Heresie therefore is a Religion taken up and believ'd from the traditions of men and additions to the Word of God." (VI, 167)

And, specifically, "Popery is the only or the greatest Heresie: and he who is so forward to brand all others for Hereticks, the obstinate Papist, the only Heretick." (VI, 167)

In Milton's view, heresy is to be avoided, not only by direct recourse to the Scriptures, but also by debate among seekers after truth: "nothing more protestantly can be permitted then a free and lawful debate at all times by writing, conference or disputation of what opinion soever, disputable by scripture." (VI, 13) "He the only
heretic, who counts all heretics but himself." (VI, 14) Recourse to the Scriptures, however, generates its own problems, as Milton is well aware.

Seeing, therefore, that no man, no synod, no session of men, though called the church, can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another man's conscience, which is well known to be a general maxim of the Protestant religion, it follows plainly, that he who holds in religion that belief or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appear with most evidence or probabilitie in the scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censur'd for a heretic than his censurers; who do but the same thing themselves while they censure him for doing so. (VI, 12)

It is at first difficult for us to see how Milton can justify the stance of the lone objector, in a situation where a prolonged free debate on some interpretations of Scripture has brought all others down on the contrary side. But if we recall that Milton habitually groups his ideas about the single axis between the mind of God and the mind of the individual Christian, his position becomes at least intelligible.

So convinced is Milton of the inerrable rightness of those who rely on Scripture as interpreted by the direct ministration of the Holy Spirit, that he is indifferent to charges of technically heretical doctrine.

If this be heresy, I confess with St. Paul, Acts 24:14, 'that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets'; to which I add, whatever is written in the New Testament. Any other judges or paramount interpreters of the Christian belief, together with all implicit faith, as it is called, I, in common with the whole Protestant Church, refuse to recognize. (C.E. XIV, 15)
To this we must add the most truly Miltonic statement of all, a position logical enough in view of his premises and yet audacious in the extreme.

Heresie is in the Will and choice profestly against Scripture; error is against the Will, in misunderstanding the Scripture after all sincere endeavours to understand it rightly: Hence it was said well by one of the Ancients, 'Err I may, but Heretick I will not be.' It is a human frailty to err, and no man is infallible here on earth. But so long as all these profess to set the Word of God only before them as Rule of Faith and obedience; and use all diligence and sincerity of heart, by reading, by learning, by study, by prayer for Illumination of the Holy Spirit, to understand the Rule and obey it, they have done what man can do: God will assuredly pardon them. (VI, 168)

To Milton, the Puritan and man of the Renaissance, a true Christian is one who is unlikely to lose an argument with his opponents, who even if he appears to do so will be justified in due time by God, and who even if in the wrong will receive heavenly approval because of his method and intentions.

It must be admitted that Milton's statements on heresy contribute less than one might hope to the solution of our problem of finding a simple working definition with which to locate his position in the main stream of Christian thought. They do, however, help us to understand both the complexity of the issue and the consistency of Milton's fundamental attitude. Heresy is a shifting term, depending for its meaning on the user; Milton is glad to be called heretical if it puts him in the company of the Apostle Paul or denotes simply a deviation from the traditions of men; he is, in any case, convinced that in the face of all his reading, learning, study, prayer, and
sincere reaching after heaven's highest will, God will not permit him
to go seriously astray.

Complex as the situation appears, it would be most inaccurate
and unjust to Milton to suggest that there is not an easily identifiable
criterion for orthodoxy according to the poet's own terms of reference.
For him, as for all Protestants, the appeal to Scripture is the true
criterion, and as a result, his rejection of the Nicaean formula is
not really a departure from orthodoxy. The creedal statements which
we are to consider are, of course, of interest in that through them
Milton's position with regard to the fathers is illuminated; nevertheless;
Milton's appeal to Scripture, a very Protestant procedure, has the
effect of freeing him from bondage to the creeds while witnessing to
his orthodoxy. In fact, his position on Scripture is precisely that of
those who subscribe to the Westminster Confession.

The authority of the Holy Scripture...dependeth not on
the testimony of any man or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth
itself) the author thereof... Our full persuasion and assurance of the
infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work
of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our
hearts.... Nothing is at any time to be added --whether by new
revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men... The Church is
finally to appeal to them.... The infallible rule of interpretation of
Scripture is the Scripture itself....

---

10 Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church
From Milton we must turn to the objective statements of the early ecumenical Councils and to their subjective motives in saying what they do. The subject is of such complexity as to render the chronological listing of pronouncements inadequate by itself. The Apostles' Creed, thought to be based on the baptismal creed of the early Roman Church which in turn was supposed to derive from a rule of faith composed by the Apostles at Jerusalem, or alternatively thought to have been formulated by Marcellus, Bishop of Ancyra, and given by him to Julius, Bishop of Rome, about 340 A.D., runs (with very slight variations) as follows:

I believe in God almighty/ And in Christ Jesus, his only son, our Lord/ Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary/ Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried/ And the third day rose from the dead/ Who ascended into heaven/ And sitteth on the right hand of the Father/ Whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead./ And in the Holy Ghost/ The Holy Church/ The remission of sins/ The resurrection of the flesh/ The life everlasting.

We may say summarily that this differs from the general presentation of doctrine in the New Testament in that it is obviously an attempt to schematize what the authors thought to be essentials of the faith. The data of their statement appear in the New Testament, but the New Testament itself is not concerned with definitions as such. The Apostles' creed is worded in such a way as to be acceptable to an

---

11Bettenson, p. 33.

12Bettenson, p. 33.
explicitly Trinitarian thinker, but it must be noted that it is not offensive to the person who rejects Trinitarian terminology.

Something of the complexity of the problem of finding adequate definitions can be seen as we consider the Nicaean Creed in its historical context. The Council, in 325, took the creed used in the church of Eusebius of Caesarea and revised it to serve as an explicitly anti-Arian pronouncement. The italicized phrases are those added or emphasized by changes of wording, for this purpose.

We believe in one God the Father All-sovereign, maker of all things visible and invisible; / And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge living and dead. / And in the Holy Spirit.  

The Nicaean statement did not find unanimous acceptance. In fact, the dispute about the person and work of Christ, His relationship to the Father, and related topics extended to the seventh century when at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (680-81) the church extended the earlier pronouncements by adding something concerning the relationship of the divine and human elements in the person of Christ. For the purposes of our discussion it is sufficient to draw attention to the complexity of the problem of finding adequate

---

13 Bettenson, p. 35.
statements; we can now go on to consider the aspect of the story of the formulation of the creeds which is relevant to this thesis. In the discussion about Milton and the creeds what is important is not only the content of the creedal statement, but, in such a significant instance as the creed just cited, what assumed heresy the wording is intended to combat. For the sake of clarity, let us consider briefly the origin of the Apostles' Creed.

In the second century the Church passed through an internal crisis even more trying than the persecutions of the following centuries and with results far more momentous. Gnosticism is the generic term applied to a variety of types of teaching and interpretations of Christian doctrine which were coloured by Oriental speculation and found both within and alongside the Church itself. It is sufficient at this point to mention two of the Gnostic heresies, their significance and the measures with which the church met their threat.

The Docetists affirmed the "seeming" but not the concrete existence of Christ and denied that his life was a real and full human experience. The Ebionites, ignoring the divinity of Christ, accorded him the status of a prophet and viewed his work as a continuation of the Old Testament prophetic tradition.  

---


attacks them both. The Old Roman Creed also rules them both out. It can be seen then, that heresies which threatened the life of Christianity were swiftly dealt with in the creeds, and yet the process of developing formulations went on for years as further refinements were added to the basic statements. It was not until the late seventh or early eighth century that the Apostles' Creed in its present form was stabilized.

The Creed of Nicaea engages in what the layman can only regard as an excess of pedantry; e.g., in such a phrase as "of one substance with the Father." To put it another way, it is hard to suppose that Christ's disciples, in the days of his flesh, were concerned with such distinctions or that the introduction of dogmatic definitions would have increased their faith or love. The point is worth grasping, as it bears on Milton's own attitude.

H.F. Robins, in his critique on Milton, If This Be Heresy, argues convincingly that, when Milton's beliefs are measured by the creeds which in the first few centuries served as a standard of orthodox faith, his deviation from the established norm will appear quite negligible. But, "With the Athanasian Creed the Creed, of Nicaea and its subsequent variants ... Milton unequivocally dis-

16 Fern, p. 185.
17 Fern, p. 105.
agrees. It was designed to state definitively the Trinitarian position and Milton is, of course, anti-Trinitarian. Milton appears by this last to have put himself outside orthodoxy's circle, but (as we shall hope in due course to show) only if the question is superficially regarded and grossly oversimplified.

In pursuit of the precise implications of Milton's real or supposed heresy, we should never lose sight of the historical continuum of argument out of which the creeds first rose. Difficulties in the formulation of a statement describing the relationship of the Second to the First Person of the Trinity go back at least as far as to Origen, who in De Principiis defended the "unity" of the Trinity and in doing so employed terms which were open to the interpretation that they subordinated the Son to the Father. From Origen's assertion of the eternal timeless generation of the Son, Arius went on to insist that God the Father alone was without beginning and that the Son was brought into being. Arius' position was ambiguous in that he held the Son to be below the level of the Father yet not fully man.

To Athanasius, who emerged as the foremost opponent of Arius' views, the question at issue was one of salvation; that he made

18 Robins, p. 56.

19 Fern, p. 117.

20 Fern, p. 127.
his auditors feel it to be so was a mark of his power. He argues that Christ is truly man and very God because the consequences of letting slip either of these essentials is the loss of salvation for men.

Therefore let those who deny that the Son is from the Father by nature and proper to His Essence, deny also that He took true human flesh of Mary Ever-Virgin; for in neither case had it been of profit to us men, whether the Word were not true and naturally Son of God, or the flesh not true which he assumed. But surely He took true flesh, though Valentius [a Gnostic leader] rave; yea the Word was by nature Very God, though Ariomaniacs rave; and in that flesh has come to pass the beginning of our new creation.  

Moving from the historical to the contemporary, we may conclude this chapter with two somewhat divergent, but perhaps complementary opinions. Concerning the Nicaean Creed:

Such is the creed that has ever since been regarded in the Greek, Latin and most Protestant Churches as the 'orthodox' solution of the Christological problem. It is easy to criticize. Its adoption was greatly involved in ecclesiastical politics. It solved few of the intellectual difficulties regarding Christology which have been raised in the East. It did not even heal the Christological quarrels. But when all is admitted, it must be said that its formulation was fortunate and its consequences useful. It established a norm of doctrine in a field in which there has been great confusion. More important than that, it was true to the fundamental conviction of the Church that in Christ a complete revelation of God is made in terms of genuine human life.

---


22 Athanasius, "Against the Arians," cited in Fern, Readings, p. 149.

23 Walker, p. 139.
Even so, and admitting the semantic convenience of this creed and its essential relevance to our discussion, it falls short of the usefulness traditionally attributed to it and Church historians are inclined to qualify their assessment of what is gained from having a creed.

With this gain there came a loss, because of a tendency to think that the most important thing in Christianity was to hold correct definitions of the Christian truth. The test of a man's Christianity was not so much his loyalty as his agreement with what the church declared to be right doctrine, that is, his orthodoxy. One who was not orthodox was cast out as a heretic however faithful to Christ his life.  

---

CHAPTER II
MILTON'S THEOLOGY

Milton's general theological position is quite clear. His views are apparently compatible with the early creeds prior to that of the Nicaean; his heresies, if any, appear to pass easily through the loosely worded screening of primitive Christian manifestos. His very strong sense of historical perspective makes it natural for him to speak freely of his place in the school of Biblical scholars, primitives and reformers. Of Prelatical Episcopacy provides an index to the use Milton makes of the primitive Christians and to the value he places upon authority.

He that thinks that it is the part of a well learned man, to have read diligently the ancient stories of the Church, and to be no stranger in the volumes of the Fathers shall have all judicious men consenting with him; not hereby to controule, and new fangle the Scripture, God forbid, but to mark how corruption, and Apostacy crept in by degrees, and to gather up, where ever wee find the remaining sparks of Originall truth, wherewith to stop the mouths of our adversaries, and to bridle them with their own curb, who willingly passe by that which is Orthodoxall in them, and studiously cull out that which is commentitious, and best for their turnes, not weighing the Fathers in the ballance of Scripture, but Scripture in the ballance of the Fathers. (C.E. III, I, 101)

There is no doubt that the apostolic era being the freest from corruption is the most congenial to his mind; his reverence for primary

---

1 Robins, p. 56.
sources immediately calls forth the admiration of scholars. He clearly considers himself a Reformation man, but he is unwilling to leave the matter there. The Reformation was only the beginning for the church of restoration to original purity; this he makes clear when he suggests that his own Christian Doctrine will not be a superfluous addition to the many treatises of theology that have already been published. Since the validity of his whole approach to the faith rests upon what Milton calls "a general maxim of the Protestant religion" it seems worthwhile at this point to repeat the passage already cited:

Seeing therefore that no man, no synod, no session of men, though call'd the church, can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another man's conscience, which is well known to be a general maxim of the Protestant religion, it follows planely, that he who hold in religion that beleef or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appeer with most evidence or probabilitie in scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censur'd for a heretic than his censurers; who do but the same thing themselves while they censure him for so doing. For ask them, or any Protestant, which hath most autoritie, the church or scripture? They will answer, doubtless, that the scripture: and what hath most autoritie, that no doubt but they will confess is to be followed. (VI, 12)

Even in its broadest outlines, Milton's theological position is unusual, especially in his time. He is generally compatible with the pre-Athanasians and the Reformers but he is far from willing to rely upon Luther or anyone else for his creed or hope of salvation. Whatever is written in the law and the prophets and the New Testament is for him the final arbiter: "Any other judges or paramount interpreters of the Christian belief, together with all implicit faith, as it is called, I, in common with the whole Protestant Church, refuse to
recognize." (XIV, 15)

With the "creed in general acceptation" (that is with the Trinitarian Nicaean Creed) Milton is in open disagreement. Nor does he see why anyone who belongs to the same Protestant or Reformed Church and professes to acknowledge the same rule of faith as himself should take offense at his freedom; particularly as he imposes his authority on no one but merely proposes what he thinks more worthy of belief than the creed which is commonly accepted by his contemporaries: "For without intending to oppose the authority of Scripture, which I consider inviolably sacred, I only take upon myself to refute human interpretations as often as the occasion requires, conformably to my right, or rather to my duty as a man." (XIV, 177) He realizes that if he had been brought up as a member of the Church of Rome, which requires implicit obedience to its creeds on all points of faith, he probably would have acquiesced from education or habit, but such was not the case and now as the result of his own free enquiry he stoutly holds that the creeds must be weighed in the balance of scripture.

Again and again Milton brings forward the idea that there is a certain framework within which he is free to move; that heresy (when it means disagreement with the consensus of the majority or received opinion) is an ingredient of the Christian faith. Diligent research and free discussion do not guarantee complete uniformity of
opinion, but do eliminate the disagreeable possibility that one may because of mere "implicit faith" be a heretic in the truth.

Milton's astonishing audacity toward early and contemporary authorities is exactly what should be expected in a man who expresses everywhere, in prose and in poetry, his overwhelming confidence in the idea of the ultimate triumph of reason.

Many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering Adam to transgresse, foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force; God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence....And were I a chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferr'd before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evill-doing. For God sure esteems the growth and compleating of one vertuous person, more than the restraint of ten vitious. (C.E. IV, 319-20)

The view that the poet puts forward of the function of reason in man in Paradise Lost is precisely the same as that which shapes his personal attitudes toward the apprehension of God's truth. Raphael says that man, the Master work of creation, unlike other creatures, was endued with sanctity of reason, made to stand upright and given the power of self-awareness and of self-knowledge. Later Michael reviews the circumstances under which the sanctity of reason is violated:

Reason in man obscur'd, or not obey'd,
Immediately inordinate desires
And upstart Passions catch the Government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man till then free. (XII, 86-90)
Milton clearly defines the function of reason. When reason triumphs man is free. True liberty always with right reason dwells, but liberty is impaired when man acts unreasonably. Adam, having been warned by Raphael, tells Eve of the dangers inherent in their situation:

Against his will he can receive no harme.  
But God left free the Will, for what obeyes Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,  
But bid her well beware, and still erect,  
Least by some faire appearing good surpris'd  
She dictate false, and misinforme the Will  
To do what God expressly hath forbid. (P.L., IX, 350-6)

In Milton's scheme of things reason is right, providentially, so that it is logically correct for Adam and Eve to say, "Our reason is our law."

The idea "that knowledge can not defile...if the will and conscience be not defiled" is important to an understanding of the freedom and ease with which Milton moves in theological discussions because his sense of freedom in the pursuit of truth is the direct result of the view that such liberty is the prerogative of the regenerate man who by virtue of his standing in Christ has an uncorrupted will and as one of the elect is under obligation to maintain a wary and active intelligence. However, the sublimity of Miltonic declarations notwithstanding, right reason and the will as related in his scheme are far from forming the perfect circle. When Eve fell into disobedience, she fell deceived, her will having been misdirected, but
why was she not like the Lady in *Comus* whose uncorrupted will would not permit passion to sway her judgment? The Lady's uncorrupted will saves her from the wrong reasoning of Comus, and what obeys right reason is free. The will and reason serve each other in preserving the individual's relationship to God. But something is wrong with reason's service if "by some faire appeering good surpris'd She dictate false and misinforme the Will To do what God expressly hath forbid."

The suggestion that Milton believed so strongly in the ultimate triumph of reason that he was guided by this principle in his own approach to truth may be automatically associated with another possibility. If Will and Reason in Eve's case failed to interact in such a way as to prevent the fall, Milton and his cherished elect may also be liable to err; whether in fact the poet falls short of the standards of mainstream Christianity is a question that should receive a satisfactory answer in the detailed examination of his alleged heresies which is now to occupy our attention.

To examine John Milton's theological system by way of the alleged heresies is the course most expedient for a presentation of this kind since one can get quickly to a residue of controversial material simply by the process of eliminating what is easily identifiable as unquestionably orthodox. However, much of the value of examining the alleged heresies will be lost if it is not constantly kept
in mind that Milton's conception and presentation of the principal themes of the Christian faith are tremendously impressive and to his everlasting glory as a poet.

For a demonstration of his presentation of orthodoxy's great themes there is no need to look further than to the opening thirteen lines of *Paradise Lost*:

> Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed, In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song. (I, 1-13)

Thus we are introduced to Christianity's and Milton's world scheme. Using no less than fifteen Biblical allusions he places the reader in contact with events belonging to particular places and persons in Scripture (Oreb, Sinai, Sion, That Shepherd, chosen Seed, greater Man, Eden) and suggests the central doctrines of Christianity (the Fall and consequent death, redemption by Christ, and an inspired revelation of God in the Bible). To deal with the alleged heresies in such a way as to develop understanding of that side of Milton at the expense of fully comprehending how firmly he held the "characteristicall truths" of Christianity would be a mistake. With these
qualifications in mind we now go on to examine the alleged heresies.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to begin de novo to assemble the necessary materials for the construction of the theological house that Milton built. Of the main studies on the subject, those of C.S. Lewis and H.F. Robins provide an excellent starting point for discussion because in both cases, first the individual items in the list of Milton's alleged heresies are dealt with, and then, after a good deal of non-essential material is cleared away, those matters which are of a sufficiently serious nature to call into question Milton's orthodoxy are clearly identified in a summary statement.

Professor Lewis in dealing systematically with Saurat's list of Milton's so-called heresies identifies some of the items as commonplaces of Christian theology, some as not in Milton at all, and some as occurring either in Milton's Christian Doctrine or in Paradise Lost. By a process of elimination Lewis arrives at the conclusion that Milton is an Arian, and that he holds unusual ideas about creation, such as that matter is part of God. Quite properly Lewis takes the opportunity to discuss Milton's presentation of redemption, a subject which has to be dealt with either implicitly or explicitly in any discussion of Christian theology. When Robins says

---

2 Lewis, p. 85.

3 Lewis, p. 87.
in summary, "...Milton is in three major respects at odds with the established dogmatics of the Catholic and Protestant churches: He is anti-Trinitarian, he is a materialist; and he is a mortalist," his conclusions as to the crucial points of the controversy over Milton's theology are essentially at one with Lewis's.

With the knowledge that Lewis and Robins concur as to the problem areas in Milton's theology, it is possible to move quickly to an evaluation of the significance of his deviations, especially with regard to the ideas the orthodox creedal statements were intended to lay stress upon. Accordingly, attention will now be given to certain classical theological discussions. If Milton is in the mainstream of orthodoxy his theology must be compatible not only with the pre-Athanasians and the Reformers but also with the fundamental conceptions that the statements of Athanasius, Augustine and others were intended definitely to emphasize.

A reading of Harnack's comments on Augustine's views of creation should have a salutary effect on the thinking of those who hope to evaluate objectively the importance of Milton's refusal to go

\footnote{Robins, p. 59.}

\footnote{Adolph Harnack in the \textit{History of Dogma}, 4 vols. (New York, 1961) traces the development of the authoritative Christian doctrinal system from its beginning down to the Reformation and gives a brief survey of later developments through 1870.}
along with the *ex nihilo* doctrine of creation. If one is under the impression that the *ex nihilo* doctrine is so utterly logical, so straightforwardly simple, that anyone who wants to be a good orthodox Christian should accept it with scarcely a second thought, a little reading on the subject will quickly dissolve the illusion.

Augustine's statements are best understood against the background of a knowledge of what the early apologists tried to do. Their statements which deal with the knowledge of God and of the world are dominated by the fundamental idea that the world is created, conditioned, and transient and is in contrast with something self-existing, unchangeable, and eternal, which is the first cause of the world. The self-existing Being has none of the attributes which belong to the world; hence he is exalted above every name and has in himself no distinctions. This implies, first, the unity and uniqueness of this eternal Being; secondly, his spiritual nature, for everything bodily is subject to change; and finally, his perfection, for the self-existent and eternal requires nothing. 6

These dogmas are set forth by one early apologist in a more detailed way, and by another in a more concise form, but three points are emphasized by all. First, God is primarily to be conceived as the First Cause. Secondly, the principle of moral good is also

---

6 Harnack, II, pp. 204-5.
the principle of the world. Thirdly, the principle of the world, that is, the Deity, as being the immortal and eternal, forms the contrast to the world which is transient. In the cosmology of the Apologists the two fundamental ideas are that God is the Father and Creator of the world, but that as uncreated and eternal, he is also the complete contrast to it.  

By the fourth century the Trinitarian conflicts led to a precise distinction being drawn between creating, making, begetting, and emanating, and thus the notion of creation out of nothing now first received its strict impress.... The following propositions may be regarded as containing the quintessence of the orthodox Fathers from the fifth century, and at the same time as the presuppositions that gave scope to all their future speculations. It can be stated thus: God from eternity bore in his own mind the idea of the world. In free self-determination he, in order to prove his goodness, created by the Logos, who embraces all ideas, this world, which has had a beginning and will have an end, in six days out of nothing, in accordance with the pattern of the upper world created by him.

The more one samples the Fathers' thinking on the ex nihilo doctrine the greater becomes one's awareness that the difference between the comments of Milton and the comments of, say, Augustine on the same doctrine is great, and that there must be an important, perhaps unique cause for this difference. What this cause is, and of what possible significance it may be to the decision about Milton's orthodoxy, we shortly shall have occasion to discover.

7 Harnack, II, p. 206.

8 Harnack, II, p. 249.
For the moment it is sufficient to note that much of Augustine's speculation is "Neoplatonic."

By Neoplatonic speculations of the ascent of the soul Augustine reached the supreme unchangeable, permanent Being, the incorporeal truth, the light incommutable....Starting with this, everything which was not God, including his own soul, was examined by Augustine from two points of view. On the other hand, it appeared as the absolutely transient, therefore as non-existent; for no true being exists, where there is also not-being; therefore God exists alone (God the only substance). On the other hand, as far as is possessed a relative existence, it seemed good, as an evolution of divine being (the many as the embodiment, emanating, and every returning, of the one).  

With apologies to those who are impatiently awaiting the final statement of Augustine's views on the ex nihilo doctrine in the hope that it will provide the much needed elucidation, we take the present opportunity to note that whereas Milton is accused of "materialism" and "pantheism" (terms which Conklin says are misleading), Augustine is also open to criticism. Harnack says of him,

How deeply in earnest Augustine was with this acosmic Pantheism which threatened to degenerate into cosmic Monism, how he never wholly abandoned it, is shown even by the expression 'pulchritudo' (beauty) for God, by his doctrine of predestination, which has one of its roots here, and, finally, by the aesthetic optimism of his view of the world which comes out here and there even in his latest writings, and by his uncertainty as to the notion of creation.

9Harnack, V, p. 114.


11Harnack, V, p. 115.
Harnack's comments on Augustine's use of the *ex nihilo* concept may usefully be juxtaposed with Milton's statements. Concerning creation Milton says, "As to the actions of God before the foundation of the world, it would be the height of folly to inquire into them, and almost equally so to attempt a solution of the question."

When he defines creation as, "that act whereby God the Father produced everything that exists by his Word and Spirit, that is, by His will, for the manifestation of the glory of his power and goodness," (C.E. XV, 5) his view is in harmony with Augustine's. There is, however, a sharp difference of opinion with regard to the original matter of the universe. Milton says,

Thus far it has appeared that God the Father is the primary and efficient cause of all things. With regard to the original matter of the universe, however, there has been much difference of opinion. Most of the moderns contend we have drawn attention to the *ex nihilo* formulation which was solidified from the fourth century that it was formed from nothing, a basis as unsubstantial as that of their own theory. (XV, 17)

At this point then Milton and Augustine are in open disagreement, not about *Who* created, or the verity of the doctrine of *creation per se*, but about how it was done. Similarly, our present concern is not with the validity of the entire scheme which depends on the existence of God and related matters but rather with the questions which may place John Milton outside the Christian *modus operandi* altogether. At this moment on this question it is important that we recognize that Augustine used the term *nihil* because it was
philosophically expedient for him to do so. On the other hand, Milton's doctrine *creatio ex deo*, as will be demonstrated, comes as the logical consequence of a different need, which arises out of a different set of pre-suppositions.

Clearly, Augustine and Milton have similar intentions devotionally, wrestle with many of the same problems intellectually, and are tempted toward the same errors. For example on one occasion Harnack says of Augustine, "But, at this point, Augustine had nevertheless to make a distinction in God, in order to discriminate the divine world-plan from him, and not to fall completely into Pantheism."

At the same time commenting on Augustine's realization of the inadequacies of the idea of cause and effect, Harnack says:

> Augustine...felt that more causality was useless. He adopted the expedient of calling in *nihil* (nothing) to his aid, the negation: *God works in nothing*. This 'nothing' was the cause of the world not being a transformation or evolution of God, but of its appearing as an inferior iridescent product, which because it is a *divina operatio*, exists (yet not independently of God), which, so far as independent, does not exist, since its independence resides in the *nihil*. The sentence 'mundus de nihil a deo factus' -- the root principle of Augustine cosmology--is ultimately taken dualistically; but the dualism is concealed by the second element consisting in negation, and therefore only revealing itself in the privative form (of mutability, transitoriness).

But in the end the purely negative character of the second element cannot be absolutely retained (Augustine never, certainly, identified it with matter); it purported to be absolute impotence, but combined with divine activity it became the resisting factor, and we know how it does resist sin. Accordingly, the question most fatal to Augustine would have been: *Who created this nothing?* As a matter

---

12 Harnack, V, p. 121.
of fact this question breaks down the whole construction. Absurd as
it sounds, it is justified. Augustine cannot explain negation with it
determinative power existing side by side with the divina operatio;
for it is no explanation to say that it did not exist at all, since it
merely had negative effects. 13

For Augustine then "nothing" is not simply "nothing"; and it is
admitted by the experts on orthodoxy that the fatal question for him is,
"Who created this nothing?" We need not ask that question; we need
only to point out that Augustine began with certain philosophic pre­
suppositions, argued to protect what he thought was essential, and
then finally, in the outer-limits of his material found himself faced
with an insoluble problem. For Milton the situation is not too
different: he begins with certain pre-suppositions concerning God
and his way of revealing Himself to mankind, argues as consistently
as he can from the revealed facts, and then finds himself making
statements which are contrary to received opinion, and which develop
for him some embarrassing questions. It does not seem likely,
however, that the holding of unique views on the difficult doctrine of
God and creation could have consequences of such a serious nature as
to upset Milton's relationship to the Christian faith.

Unlike Augustine, Milton argues solely from Scripture; in fact
if Conklin's thesis is correct, and there is a strong possibility that it
may be (even though it cannot be proven so), Milton's disavowal of
creation ex nihilo derives entirely from his interpretation of Genesis 1:1:

13 Loc. cit.
His position was determined (Scripture Duce), not by philosophical deduction, but by the simple linguistic fact that the key verb of the text, despite the general theological interpretation to the contrary, did not per se mean 'to create out of nothing'. From this starting point he necessarily...evolved his unique system of the material cosmos, the corollary of his exegesis.14

The inevitable starting point for Milton15 is the meaning of the original text of Scripture. As against those who uphold the ex nihilo position, Milton's exegesis of the opening phrase of Genesis defines the all-important verb, create, as signifying "creation out of matter."

Most of the moderns contend that it was formed from nothing, a basis as unsubstantial as that of their own theory. In the first place, it is certain that neither the Hebrew verb בָּרָא nor the Greek ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου, nor the Latin creare, can signify to create out of nothing. On the contrary, these words uniformly signify to create out of matter. (C.E. XV, 17)

Conklin says that

Most of the lexicons, merely by noting the various occurrences of in other parts of Scripture where it is obvious that the verb does not mean to create out of nothing, show without stating the fact that strictly the ex nihilo qualification is theological rather than grammatical.

He adds that the philological position of Milton was widely acknowledged by his contemporaries.16

14 Conklin, p. 74.

15 See Conklin's "Milton on Bara: the Creation", pp. 67-74, for more detail on the specifically unique in Milton's method and position.

16 Conklin, p. 69.
A highly significant aspect of Milton's discussion of creation is seen when he proceeds to consider the doctrinal consequences of his exegesis. If "to create" does not mean to make out of nothing it must mean to make out of something; thus it follows that matter must either have always existed independently of God, or have originated from God at some particular point of time. In its final step, Milton's logic is in harmony with the intentions of the Fathers: he will not assent to any kind of dualism (the idea that God is not the sole origin of things, but has always been faced with something other than Himself). Finally, Milton extricates himself from the difficulty into which his exegesis has led him with the phrase, "We have the authority of Scripture namely, that all things are of God." (XV, 21)

He does not fall into the heresy against which the doctrine of "created out of nothing" was intended to guard. As C.S. Lewis says,

If he has erred he has erred by flying too far from it, and believing that God made the world 'out of Himself'. And this view must in a certain sense be accepted by all Theists: in the sense that the world was modelled on an idea existing in God's mind, that God invented matter, that (salva reverentia) He 'thought of' matter as Dickens 'thought of' Mr. Pickwick.17

Also among those who deny that Milton fell into dualism with his ex deo doctrine is the scholarly C.A. Patrides in his recently published Milton and the Christian Tradition: "Not that Milton maintained the eternal co-existence of God and the rude pristine matter, for he had

17 Lewis, p. 89.
no wish to become the prey of dualism."  

Moreover, Patrides' able argument to the effect that Milton is not at variance with orthodoxy on the doctrine of creation is of such force as to merit inclusion in this account. To a large extent his argument rests, as does mine, on the premise that the doctrine of creation has difficulties inherent in its precise formulation and that since the statement of it has varied from time to time, the chief concern in evaluating an individual's position regarding it should be a consideration of his attitude toward those heresies which the mainstream of Christianity most emphatically resists.

After admitting that Milton's theory of creation may not seem particularly orthodox, Patrides flatly states,

Yet it is not heretical either: indeed, the use of such labels only diverts our attention from the essential fact that Milton's view of creation ex Deo, far from being unique, forms part of 'an ancient and honourable Christian tradition' that probably began with Plotinus and was then conveyed by the proponents of the via negativa to the Renaissance.  

Backed by "authoritative pronouncements" Patrides boldly argues that "for the early Christians the belief that the world had been formed out

---


19Patrides, MCT., p. 33.
of formless matter...was at first accepted without qualification."

Furthermore, he claims that the Fathers themselves realized that the Genesis narrative implied belief in an already existing matter:

When the dualism inherent in this attitude [the belief that Genesis implies an already existing matter] was seen to be obviously inconsistent with monotheism, the Christian theologians of Alexandria proposed that God had created the formless matter in advance of the six days' work, a theory which was time and again to save appearances... To 'save phenomena' the apologists of the faith postulated two creations: a first creation that resulted in the ex nihilo production of chaos ('from Absolute Notbeing to Being), and a secondary creation during which order was imposed on the 'first matter'.

Patrides' argument may be summarized as follows: Since Milton holds to an ex deo instead of an ex nihilo view he appears to fall into "dualism," but on closer examination it is clear he does not. In any case scholarly research on the idea of creation ex materia praeexistente reveals that the idea in itself is not categorically heretical. The heresy comes with the dualism from which the Fathers and Milton save themselves, each with different expedients. In the case of the postulation of two stages of creation, primary and secondary, Milton is able to sustain the idea of the secondary creation unreservedly, and as Paradise Lost reveals, extol most eloquently the creative power of the Father Almighty. With Patrides I hold that

20Patrides, MCT., p. 30.

21Loc. cit.

22Patrides, MCT., p. 31.
Milton's qualification of the *ex nihilo* doctrine is only a slight deviation as compared with his immense appreciation of the content of the Christian faith.

Two transcendent forces, his high regard for liberty and his equally high regard for reason, exert a tremendous influence upon Milton's doctrine of creation which in turn inclines him toward mortalism which will be our next subject of discussion. For him creation is liberation; and the result of creation, matter, is left unrestrained to become good or evil according to the power which gives it form. Satan's freedom allows his downfall; Christ's enables him to become King. Man is free to fall and free to rise again. The inexorable application of reason to the data of revelation is dictated by a stern logic which in the case of his materialism leads to other deviations, one of which is mortalism. The significant point to note, however, is that Milton's logic also operates to keep him straight with the main theme of the Christian story of the creation, fall and redemption of man.

*****

If they are all to be taken at their word, the Fathers and Milton shared a lifetime of service and devotion in which the chief aim was to glorify God; there was, however, an enormous difference in perspective as has been demonstrated in the lengthy discussion of creation. The real differences of opinion between Milton and the
Fathers are nevertheless almost negligible when compared with the differences that exist between Christian believers and non-believers. Thus Milton's mortalism is really neither here nor there in the decision as to whether he is orthodox; the fact that he discusses it with all seriousness, and, as in the case of the development of the doctrine of \textit{creatio ex deo}, begins with the exegesis of scripture is nothing against his Christianity. Milton, himself is confident that no heresy is involved in discussing the problem, regardless of sides taken: "And this is a subject which may be discussed without endangering our faith or devotion, whichever side of the controversy we espouse...." (C.E. XV, 219)

The question of what happens to the soul immediately after death did not receive very satisfactory treatment from any of the authorities: Milton's orthodox contemporaries either chose the Calvinist position, effected a straddle, avoided the issue, or shared Milton's view that the soul as well as the body sleeps till the day of the resurrection. (XV, 214-51) Says Patrides, "His view was shared by his contemporaries Sir Thomas Browne, Sir Kenelm Digby, Richard Overton, and Hobbes, as well as Luther and an impressive number of theologians on the left wing of the Reformation."\textsuperscript{23}

The questions regarding mortalism (the doctrine that the soul as well as the body sleeps till the day of the resurrection) are as

\textsuperscript{23}Patrides, \textit{MCT.}, p. 265.
follows: When the body dies what happens to the soul? Does it perish with the body? Is the soul mortal? In Christian theology a final day of judgment raises the problem of an intermediate state between death and the final resurrection. Does the soul sleep during the interval, does it wander about waiting, or does the soul go to its final resting place to await the body on the Final Day? One of the fundamental claims of the Christian faith is that death, the terror brought into the world by man's first disobedience, has been transformed since the advent of Christ into infinite joy, "a shaking hands with God." Upon that statement of faith Patrides aptly comments, "If this belief is unanimously professed by all Christians, beyond it agreement ceases abruptly."25

The questions are implicit in the main ecumenical creeds, but do not receive a completely satisfactory answer. The creeds do not account for, but rather avoid the problem of what happens between the death of the individual and his judgment; equally they avoid the suggestion that the soul sleeps or takes its flight without the body.

The Roman Church held that the soul remained guiltily in purgatory until some expiation had been made. However, as late as Augustine in the fifth century the doctrine of the intermediate state was generally vague. More or less in defense of purgatory it can

24 Conklin, pp. 75-85.

25 Patrides, MCT., p. 264.
be said that it did logically account for the "hidden retreat" of the soul between death and resurrection.

The Protestant abolition of purgatory necessitated another explanation. The one taken by the orthodox traditionalist, the Calvinist, or the Arminian seems generally to have been that the soul goes immediately to heaven, leaving behind the dead body, which will be reunited with the soul on the day of judgment. Chapter XXXII, "Of the State of Men after Death", in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1643, makes the following statement:

The bodies of men after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.  

It is not like John Milton to choose anyone else's position, effect a straddle, or avoid the issue. His approach to the question of what happens to the soul is direct; the point he makes is fairly simple: namely that the "soul" in the Old Testament refers to the whole man and that therefore the whole man is soul and the soul man. Milton has two main theses here: First, exegetically, the word "soul" means the organic whole of man and, indeed, is used in

\(^{26}\) Church of Scotland, The Confession of Faith (Edinburgh, 1952) p. 46.

\(^{27}\) Genesis 2:7, God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: thus man became a living soul.
Scripture for animal and every kind of living being; second, hermeneutically, there is nothing said in Scripture to indicate the separation of soul and body. (C.E. XV, 227-9) Commenting on I Corinthians 15:42-50, Milton points out that Paul's reasoning proceeds on the supposition that there are only two states, the mortal and immortal, death and resurrection, and nothing is said of any intermediate condition. (C.E. XV, 225)

Thus Milton's idea of what happens to the soul after death is: that when the body dies, the soul dies too.

Inasmuch then as the whole man is uniformly said to consist of body, spirit, and soul (whatever may be the distinct provinces severally assigned to these divisions), I shall first show that the whole man dies, and, secondly, that each component part suffers privation of life. (XV, 219)

As for the intermediate period between death and the resurrection, it is Milton's opinion that the soul sleeps; he says of Lazarus whom the New Testament says was raised from the dead by Christ: "In such a sleep I should suppose Lazarus to have been lying, if it were asked whither his soul betook itself during those four days of death." (XV, 235) The sleep will end, or the resurrection will take place through the resuscitation of the dead: "Neither is it more incredible that a bodily power should issue from a spiritual substance, than that what is spiritual should arise from body; which nevertheless we believe will be the case with our own bodies at the resurrection." (XV, 25)
In addition to Milton's exegesis of the verses in which the word "soul" is used, and his interpretations of the Biblical statements concerning the soul and body, it would seem that his pre-suppositions regarding creation, and the almightiness of the Father had much to do with the manner in which he settled the question of the intermediate state of the dead, that is, by espousing mortalism. He argues for creatio ex deo because to argue ex nihilo is, in his opinion, to attribute imperfection to God.

Those who are dissatisfied because, according to this view, substance was imperfect, must also be dissatisfied with God for having originally produced it out of nothing in an imperfect state and without form. For what difference does it make, whether God produced it in this imperfect state out of nothing, or out of Himself? By this reasoning, they only transfer that imperfection to the divine efficiency, which they are unwilling to admit can properly be attributed to substance considered as an efflux of the Deity. (C.E. XV, 23)

In the same passage he says, "It is not true that matter was in its own nature originally imperfect." A few pages later he adds that the whole human race is one of the components of the material universe. (XV, 37) Eventually, the poet's view of matter, the nature of the soul, and the attributes of his god blend harmoniously into one: Matter which is not inherently evil has its source in God as does also the man (total man, soul and body) who is the direct result of God's moulding, breathing into, and embellishing him with proper faculties. (XV, 39) According to Milton the body and soul were made simultaneously, "which precludes us from attributing pre-existence to the soul" or
thinking that the soul could be a separate entity able to function without the body. (XV, 38) Concerning Milton's view, it may well be asked, "What then does it mean to say 'God takes back' the spirit or breath of life? Why if God takes it back, are we to conclude that it ceases to exist?" Milton's answer would likely be that God having taken back the spirit or breath of life into Himself as Source and Origin, the individual organism as such ceases to exist.

Milton's obvious attempts to resist explanations that tend to detract from the glory and power of the Father may not be directly responsible for his statement of mortalism, but certainly mortalism serves his intentions which are constantly directed toward ascribing all power and control in the entire universe to the Father. Mortalism provides the soul no sovereignty of its own but leaves all things every moment in the direct control of the Father: "Every living thing receives animation from one and the same source of life and breath; inasmuch as when God takes back to himself that spirit or breath of life, they cease to exist." (XV, 39)

*****

Ultimately, the argument of this thesis for Milton's orthodox intention and imagination depends on the demonstration of the fact that Milton's theological deviations are not the result of the omission of any of creedal orthodoxy's vital elements but rather the result of a characteristic emphasis of certain points. This proposition finds its
crucial test in Milton's attitude toward the doctrine of the atonement. Weigh Milton for a qualitative mode of belief rather than for a quantitative denial of dogma and the truth about his Christianity emerges. He denied the doctrine of the Trinity because, as he says in his prefatory remarks on the subject, "the doctrine of the Trinity as now received," cannot be proved from any passage of scripture. (C.E. XIV, 177) Nevertheless, contrary to what might be expected, his anti-trinitarianism does not weaken his appreciation of the Son's redemptive work at Calvary. The point here, of course, is that Athanasius, Anselm and others saw the doctrine of the Trinity as central to the doctrine of the atonement; hence if Milton's understanding of the godhead were deficient, the lack could be expected to effect his grasp of the doctrine of the atonement.

There is no lack of testimony from Milton scholars to the effect that Milton is by no means an odd, un-Christian-Christian. Roy Daniells argues that Milton shows no originality, in the sense of introducing fresh theological concepts, but that he re-orders and re-emphasizes common beliefs to produce new effects and new responses.

It is no exaggeration to say that Milton re-cast Christian doctrine in his own terms. This may not be entirely apparent so long as De Doctrine Christiana is read as a series of clauses, most of them looking like simple statements of orthodoxy. It is when we get into the sweep of his contention concerning the omnipotence of God as the central fact of all being and when we move into the argument that guards the person of God from all attempts to impose a trinitarian concept, that the controlling passions--they are far more than concepts--of Milton's thought are revealed. Let anyone read over the historical creeds, the old Roman creed, the creeds of Antioch, of
Eusebius, of the Nicene Council, of Athanasius, and go on to the Augsburg Confession, the articles of Zurich, the Scots Confession of 1560, and the Book of Common Prayer, and let him then turn to Milton's Christian Doctrine where the old familiar files suddenly form up to produce an entirely new intellectual tactic.\footnote{Roy Daniells, \textit{Milton, Mannerism and Baroque} (Toronto, 1963), p. 66.}

Milton's lack of originality as demonstrated in his failure to come up with new theological concepts argues strongly for his pious intentions. Nothing could be clearer than that the poet had no desire to distort the data of the Christian gospel. He urges that the reader neither adopt his sentiments, nor reject them, unless every doubt has been removed from his belief by the clear testimony of revelation.

\footnote{(C. E. XIV, 11) The statements that he re-cast Christian doctrine (and not some other) and that in the main he reads like the old creeds are presented here with some satisfaction because they give valuable support to the argument of the thesis.}

Notwithstanding the evidence on the positive side for Milton's orthodoxy, it must be admitted that there are tendencies in his theology that could have upset his relationship to Christian tradition. That these tendencies did not disrupt his relationship will be clearly demonstrated, it is hoped, in the ensuing discussion of the classical views of the atonement, Arianism, and Milton's attitudes toward the Trinity and the doctrine of the atonement. The discussion in this chapter will be limited to Milton's anti-trinitarianism or Arianism so-called; the doctrine of the atonement will be given further attention.
in the final chapter.

To realize the seriousness of deviation from the trinitarian dogma we must turn to *Cur Deus Homo* \(^{29}\) (1097-9) in which St. Anselm expounds the "Satisfaction Theory" of the atonement. Anselm's treatise concerns mainly the relation of man to God and is meant to provide a convincing rational demonstration of the necessity of Christ as the God-man; specifically, Anselm speaks of "the impossibility that any man should be saved without Him." \(^{30}\) Sin is defined as that which violates God's honour by not rendering to Him his due. \(^{31}\) The man who does not render to God this honor, which is His due, takes away from God what is His own, and dishonours God, and this is to sin. \(^{32}\) Satisfaction, which every sinner ought to render back to God, is to render back to God the honour taken away. \(^{33}\) And it is righteousness or rectitude of will that is due to God, but the need is not only for the restoration of what has been taken away but in consideration of the insult offered, more than what was taken away must be rendered. The satisfaction ought to be in proportion to the sin

\(^{29}\) *Anselm, St. Anselm Basic Writings; Proslogium, Monologium, Cur Deus Homo and The Fool by Guanilon* (La Salle, 1962), p. 177.

\(^{30}\) *Anselm, p. 177.*

\(^{31}\) *Anselm, p. 202.*

\(^{32}\) *Anselm, p. 202.*

\(^{33}\) *Anselm, p. 203.*
which is in this case infinite, since it is directed against infinite Being.

The elements that provide the dilemma to which Anselm's satisfaction theory is the resolution are as follows: an infinite satisfaction must be made; since man has sinned, only he can make it; and since man is sinful and finite, he cannot offer an infinite satisfaction. Anselm's answer to the dilemma begins in the premise that an infinite and yet human sacrifice can be offered only by one who is both God and man. That premise having been established a priori, he goes on to demonstrate that Christ possesses this stature and his death alone can make atoning satisfaction for the sins of mankind.

Anselm's argument is but the other side of the doctrine of the atonement as it relates to the doctrine of the Trinity as described by Athanasius in the fourth century, and that is why of all those who contributed richly to the debate on the atonement, Anselm and Athanasius are here selected for examination. Anselm concentrates his argument on the God-man, but even as he gives his own exposition is aware that Athanasius' De Incarnatione Verbi Dei is centered on the Man-god, on the solidarity of mankind, the oneness of the human race, and its incorporation in Christ by virtue of the incarnation.

---

34 Anselm, p. 225.

It will be remembered that Anselm is concerned to prove "the impossibility that any man should be saved without Him [Christ]" and that Athanasius likewise is interested primarily in salvation for men; that he made others to see the question as affecting their personal salvation was one of his sources of power. Here we have a key to the psychology of the doctrine of the atonement, and this key provides the solution to the difficult question of Milton's position in Christian theology. The emphasis is on "salvation"; thus any doctrinal statements which seem to undermine the structure upon which the promises of the gospel depend, or posit a premise which is contrary to the logic of the God-man, Man-god requirements, are strenuously resisted. Arius is counted an enemy of God because he teaches "that Christ was neither God nor man, but a created being intermediate between divinity and humanity," a doctrine which when compared with the views of Athanasius and Anselm is seen to be in major disagreement.

With Arius Milton has little in common. C. A. Patrides, who investigates with great care the extent to which Milton may be correctly termed an Arian, emphatically states that "considered out of context, at least one of the ideas presented by Arius and welcomed

\[36\] Anselm, p. 178.

by Milton is orthodox enough: the conception of creation as an act of God's free will, but beyond this, however, Milton diverges from every one of the Arian tenets."

With attention to context, Patrides outlines and documents specific points upon which Arius and Milton are in disagreement. These may be seen in the following paraphrased summary which is presented with the aim of definitely clarifying Milton's relationship to the heretical Arius.

1 Arius held that God is utterly incommunicable and absolutely isolated from His entire creation, whether physical or spiritual, animate or inanimate. Milton, on the other hand, asserted God's direct involvement in both the origin and the history of the created order.

2 Before the advent of time, Arius further maintained, God "begat" (created) the Son, of whom it must properly be said "there was once when He was not." The Son was produced not of the Father's divine nature, but out of nothing. The two persons, in fact, are utterly dissimilar in substance or essence and totally unequal in every respect, even glory. The Son may indeed on occasion be termed "God", but this is merely a nominal concession because in


reality, He is not "true" God. In contrast Milton rejected this scheme, even though he agreed in principle that "there was once when the Son was not."

3 Arius scrupulously avoided the use of metaphorical statements which had the effect of emphasizing the close relationship existing between the Father and the Son, but Milton did not.

4 Whereas Arius maintained that the Father is both invisible and ineffable to the Son, Milton took great pains to assert the extremely close communion between the two Persons.

5 According to Arius, the Son of God was expressly produced in order to create the universe and time "out of nothing". Milton disagreed in three respects. First, he rejected the idea of the world's creation ex nihilo; secondly, he asserted times' existence in eternity prior to the creation of the world; and finally, he did not hold that the Son was "begotten" specifically with a view to the creation of the world.

6 Whereas Arius maintained that the Son is, like all rational creatures, mutable and indeed peccable, Milton vehemently denied that He may be regarded as in any way liable to change.

7 Whereas the Arians shattered the unity of the incarnate Son with their affirmation that He assumed a body without a soul, Milton maintained that Christ Jesus was "very man" in both body and soul.
8 Whereas Arius was of the opinion that the Holy Spirit does not partake of the Son's substance, and still less of the Father's, Milton asserted that the Third Person, though inferior to both the Father and the Son, was none the less also "begotten" of the substance of God.

The effect of Patrides' research on Arius and Milton is to put us "in a better position to appreciate Milton's orthodoxy no less than his heterodoxies." Indeed, that Milton is at odds with the Arian heresy is of fundamental importance because the difference between Milton's subordination of the Son to the Father and Arius' relegation of the Son to the position of a created being is the difference between Christianity and mythology:

For the Arians, in denying that the Son is similar to the Father in any way denied also the historical basis of the Christian faith; while Milton, in asserting that the Son was created ex substantia Dei and is Himself God, asserted also the fundamental Christian claim that the Incarnation is the central event of history, marking the entrance into the world not of any fantastic "body without a soul" totally alien from God, but of God Himself. Milton has plainly recognized, as did the early Christians before him, that Arius had in effect reduced Christianity from a historical religion to a pseudo-philosophical mythology.

In any case, Milton's subordination of the Son to the Father presents no practical difficulty in his exercise of worship. It is true he excelled in praises to the Father, but it is equally true that he did not deny or denigrate the Son.

---


Thee Father first they sung Omnipotent,
Immutable, Immortal, Infinite,
Eternal King; thee Author of all being,
Fountain of Light, thyself invisible. (P.L., III, 372-5)

When the Son's praises are sung, the poet puts himself in the choir,
and specifically promises never to forget to praise Him:

O unexampled love,
Love no where to be found less then Divine!
Hail Son of God, Saviour of Men, thy Name
Shall be the copious matter of my Song
Henceforth, and never shall my Harp thy praise
Forget, nor from thy Father's praise disjoins. (italics mine
(P.L., III, 410-5)

"Nor from thy Father's praise disjoine" is undoubtedly the phrase
that expresses Milton's unique theological bias; the emphasis throughout the hymn of the angels is consistently on glory to the Father.

Nevertheless, the Son receives due and loving praise, and there is not the slightest evidence that when Milton speaks of the "Saviour of Men" that the Saviour-hood is in any respect short of orthodoxy's God-man, Man-god requirements.

The impact then of the investigation of Milton's materialism, mortalism and anti-trinitarianism is toward denial that his unique views in any way disrupt his relationship with the Christian faith.

It remains for us to examine his affirmations which are impressive both for their number and quality.
CHAPTER III

THE EFFECT OF MILTON'S ORTHODOXY UPON

THE CONTENT AND STYLE OF PARADISE LOST

It might be expected that Milton's highly individualistic approach to scripture and his extraordinary audacity toward the Fathers would have led him into serious conflict with creedal orthodoxy; on careful examination, however, his alleged heresies come out quite clearly as certain transpositions of orthodox belief rather than as a departure from it. This process of selection and manipulation is seen to be governed, in Paradise Lost, not only by a powerful and positive religious sensibility but also by an almost unerring sense of what is artistically appropriate. Part of our task in this chapter will be to look at the poem to see how these two faculties combine.

There is, furthermore, a need to consider the disparity in Paradise Lost between Milton's declared aim (to justify the ways of God to men) and the resultant portrayal of God. Clearly, in attempting to justify the ways of God to man he meets with extraordinary difficulties, some of which arise out of the conflict between the artistic demands of the epic convention and the theological demands of the Christian revelation. Some critics blame the embarrassing passages in Paradise Lost on the inferior quality of Milton's
Christianity, and some like Empson\(^1\) tend to ascribe the flaws to the fact that Christianity is of such poor stuff, and therefore, to commend Milton for doing so well when he has so little with which to work. But neither of these tacks gets one near enough to the truth to be helpful. If we accept the evidence of the foregoing chapters of this thesis (corroborated by a discussion in this chapter of the blending of traditional orthodox elements into a harmonious whole which serves the poet's dominant urges) Milton as the author of *Paradise Lost* emerges as an outstanding Christian apologist. Not because he solved all or any of the intellectual problems connected with the logical justification of the system, but rather because he soared in his singing robes to present the story of Christian redemption with unsurpassed beauty and eloquence.

Milton's intense interest in individual responsibility is a proper subject with which to begin the discussion of certain transpositions of orthodox belief. The emphasis on individual responsibility is, of course, something he shares with other Puritans; for example, John Bunyan. The elements which characteristically dominate Milton's thought are also selected for emphasis in the opening lines

\(^1\) In *Milton's God*, Empson attempts to demonstrate, "That Milton's God is morally very much better than the traditional God of Christianity, not worse as has often been said in recent times." (p. 272) Instead of using Milton's alleged heterodoxies to depreciate him, he uses what he understands to be Milton's attitude toward the atonement and the Trinity to compliment the poet at Christianity's expense.
of Pilgrim's Progress. The reader's attention is arrested by the intensely personal note ("I walked, I slept, I dreamed, I saw, I looked."); the concentration on the Book by the man in rags; and the emphasis on individual responsibility and action as represented in the cry, "What shall I do?" The atmosphere is charged with a sense of exigency; the movement is toward concentration of the human will on the divine command. Although this resolution and singleness of purpose may be regarded as typically Puritan it is by no means exclusively Puritan. In contrast to this introspective, highly subjective emphasis on individual responsibility there is another strand in the Puritan sensibility which reaches out and upward to God. In Milton's case, it seems that the deep and hidden predilection which accounts for his aversion to Trinitarian concepts and other of his theological eccentricities is the same force that impels him toward the worship of absolute unity, goodness, and power. The effect of the interaction of these two elements, that is the emphasis on individual responsibility and the emphasis on the will of God, is the subordination or elimination in Paradise Lost of all elements that do not permit the direct identification of the personal drive with the external will of the transcendent God. It is Milton's feeling for unity that impels him toward his so-called Arianism. "His concept of individual responsi-

bility leads to an almost total neglect of the redemption, by the
sacrifice of Christ, of sinful man." Specifically the "neglect" is
the failure to portray the sacrificial scene at Calvary, not, however,
a failure to treat the redemption theme as it is woven into the story
of God's dealings with mankind.

Nowhere is Milton's Puritan emphasis on individual responsi-

bility more easily identifiable as a selecting factor than in his treat-
ment of sacrifice and martyrdom. In spite of the fact that near the
beginning of Book IX he stated his intention to praise "heroic martyr-
dom", the last two books of Paradise Lost show that he evaded the
fact of martyrdom as much as possible. Most of the earlier tableaux
of Book XI which Michael set before Adam depicted individuals
whose devotion to God protected them from the onslaughts of their
enemies. Abel was murdered, but Enoch, Noah, and others were
preserved by means of the direct intervention of God. Michael's
portrayal of the Church period of history also demonstrated Milton's
tendency to evade the fact of martyrdom. While some would be done
to death for their faith in Christ, believers would be "oft supported
so as shall amaze Thir proudest persecutors" and would go on to
win great numbers for Christ until


3 Daniell's, p. 81.
Significantly, the "slaughtered saints" are enshrined in the sonnet, "Avenge O Lord", not because martyrdom advances them above the ordinary believer, but because they shine in a most exemplary way as those who kept God's truth; even in the face of death they maintained inner rectitude of will.

The ultimate in heroism then, is not martyrdom necessarily; rather it is the ability to maintain a continuous, driving, personal devotion to heaven's highest will. In Raphael's account of the war in heaven, Abdiel, the seraph, is singled out to illustrate for Adam the meaning of true heroism. This "fervent angel" who remained true to God in the midst of "innumerable false" was able because of the rectitude of his will to withstand the armed hosts of Satan without raising a sword. For this he is commended directly by God after he returns from the enemy camp.

Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single has maintaing
Against revolted multitudes the Cause
Of Truth, in word mightier then they in Armes;
And for the testimonie of Truth hast born
Universal reproach, far worse to beare
Then violence.  (P.L., VI, 29-35)

Similarly the emphasis on rectitude of will in Paradise Regained makes the old story read as something new while preserving
all the original elements. When the poet sings of "deeds above heroic" his song is of

Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,
And Eden rais'd in the wast Wilderness. (P.R., I, 3-7)

Though the concern of Paradise Regained is with "many a hard assay" there is never any doubt that the temptations to transgress the will of the Father are but the prelude to the death on the cross.

This chiefly, that my way must lie
Through many a hard assay even to the death,
E're I the promis'd Kingdom can attain,
Or work Redemption for mankind, whose sins
Full weight must be transferr'd upon my head. (P.R., I, 263-7)

The emphasis on will threatens nothing that is essential to the work of Christ while it has the advantage of bringing forcefully to mind a thought that has long been appreciated by Christian believers: that the Son's power to redeem mankind rested solely in His obedience to the Father.

Notwithstanding the uniqueness of Milton's approach to sacrifice and martyrdom and related subjects, a general survey of his affirmations will show quite plainly that Milton's world scheme is the Christian one; at the same time it makes little difference which of the elements from among the richness of available truth Milton chose to work with because all the parts undergo a transposition to take on the colour of the familiar Miltonic fundamentals: that the
Father is omnipotent, that His will is absolute and therefore beyond question and, finally, that all that can be said of God may quite properly be subsumed under the attribute, Unity. (C.E. XIV, 49)

In *Paradise Lost* the poet's sensibility not only transforms but also selects with the result that the poem is a unique blending of the traditional and individual. How truly commonplace were the themes and counter-themes Milton presented can be seen in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*. As the reader is introduced to the poet's world scheme and to such widely separated persons as Adam and Christ, Israel (the "Chosen Seed", descendant of Abraham, and ancestor of Christ who was himself called the 'seed of the woman') and Moses, Milton appeals to his readers to make the kind of connection which they were accustomed to make when they read the Bible or heard it expounded from the pulpit: a vertical or figural connection between events not horizontally or casually connected except as they were seen as stages in the history of man's salvation. As Sims says,

> The disobedience of Adam in Eden, the receiving of the law by Moses on Sinai, and the placing of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple on 'Sion Hill' are not casually connected as a horizontal chain of events, but the divine scheme of salvation as seen by centuries of Christians seeking to align the Old Testament with the New had vertically connected these events as successive stages in God's plan for man's redemption.  

That *Paradise Lost* is Milton's presentation of the story of

---

man's fall and redemption is agreed upon; nevertheless some critics go on to point out that Milton does not enjoy the doctrine of the atonement, but gives only a cold, intellectual assent, an opinion to which attention should be given. However, opinions as to the measure of Milton's enjoyment notwithstanding, the fact remains that Milton does affirm the doctrine and, furthermore, that there is a world of difference between him and those who categorically deny it. Before giving attention to Tillyard's comment, and to what happens to the doctrine of the atonement in the hands of a Christian poet to whom the power and the will of God mean everything, may we establish by example, albeit a negative one, that there is a profound difference in attitude between Milton and those who deny the validity of the Christian idea of redemption through Christ.

One need read only a few pages of Milton's God (to which reference has already been made) to notice that Empson has a theological bias so unlike that of Milton as to make it extremely difficult for him to make a judgment about Milton's attitude toward the atonement and the Trinity and thereby place the poet with regard to orthodox Christianity. Nevertheless, Empson has made a valuable contribution to the discussion of Milton's God if for no other reason than that his work of devoted hostility is anti-Christian in a fairly

---

logical way, and in spite of the fact that Empson's wrath against religion blinds him to much of Milton's text and to the religious ideas of Milton's contemporaries, and frequently impels him to express himself in unscholarly phrases. One critic says of Milton's God, "Sometimes one wonders whether the book is a gigantic hoax, written to see how much misrepresentation we will accept without calling for shock troops." All other considerations to the side, Empson's anti-Christian sentiment is noteworthy in that he hates most what is most important to the Christian doctrine—the atonement.

Empson thinks Christianity's God very wicked and does not fail to express as often as possible his opposition to Him, as the ultimate in malignity: "The Christian God the Father, the God of Tertullian, Augustine and Aquinas, is the wickedest thing yet invented by the black heart of man." The idea of the Trinity is a "means of deceiving good men into accepting evil; it is the double-talk by which Christians hide from themselves the insane wickedness of their God." Nor is Empson willing to oppose the concept of God the Father all by himself, but actually attempts to bring Milton in on his side. That Milton's God is morally very much better than the

---


7 Empson, p. 251.

8 Empson, p. 245.
traditional God of Christianity he attributes to what he alleges to be Milton's doctrine of the atonement, the hallmark of which is his firm rejection of an interest in torture.

That the main argument of Empson's book is invalid will be seen as we move along to examine Milton's attitude toward the atonement. However, Empson's statements are of interest at least in passing because, vocal and militant as he is, he serves admirably as the perfectly oriented anti-Christian. In the face of Empson's onslaught against orthodoxy even the most exclusive of the creedal Christians must admit that there is a great gulf fixed between them and Empson; and that they and Milton stand together.

Whether he "enjoyed" the doctrine of the atonement or not, there is every evidence that Milton consciously subscribed to the ideas of sin and grace, that is redemption through Christ's sacrifice. In his prose section "Of the Ministry of Redemption", under the subtitle "By Payment of the Required Price", he provides a list of texts and then in one sentence claims that they refute any Socinian view, that is, any theory that Christ died not to pay for man's salvation but merely to set an example for man to follow. (C. E. XV, 317-9) There is no reluctance on Milton's part to speak of the

---

9 Empson, p. 272.

10 Empson, p. 273.
atonement, and we cannot doubt that had he found the doctrine repulsive he would have expressed his rejection in a forceful way. On the contrary, he expresses himself most energetically, with a zeal for the doctrine of grace comparable to that of Luther himself:

The Gospel is the new dispensation of the covenant of grace, far more excellent and perfect than the law, announced first obscurely by Moses and the prophets, afterwards in the clearest terms by Christ Himself, and his apostles and evangelists, written since by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, and ordained to continue even to the end of the world, containing a promise of eternal life to all in every nation who shall believe in Christ when revealed to them, and a threat of eternal death to such as shall not believe. (C.E. XVI, 113)

Moreover, his understanding of the doctrine of grace is such that his exposition of it reads like that of Luther or of the Apostle Paul himself. That this is no mean accomplishment can be seen as one compares Empson's comments on the subject with Milton's. Empson not only does not accept the doctrine of grace (which is his privilege) but he simply cannot understand it (which makes writing about it very difficult). For example, he insists on making nonsense of Milton's conception of the state of grace as one that makes man entirely free as a Son. According to Milton grace makes possible a reconciliation between man and God whereby man's understanding is illuminated and his will enfranchised. Empson says,

He [Milton] thus believed when he wrote the poem that Eve would have been justified if she had eaten the apple with sufficient faith that God wanted her to do it, in spite of God's repeated instructions to the contrary.  

Empson admits that he does not understand the doctrine of grace:
"I could never see that any belief except 'legalism' is possible to a Christian at any date who attends to the doctrine laid down for him..."\(^\text{12}\)

He thinks that "Milton had long believed that the Modern Elect do not literally have to obey the Word of God, including the Ten Commandments", \(^\text{13}\) and in that statement again betrays the weakness of his understanding of the orthodox conception and of Milton's outstanding appreciation of it. "The Elect do not literally have to obey", is an irrelevant statement as far as the elect are concerned because according to Paul, Luther and Milton, their state is one of liberty in which the emphasis is on serving Christ not under compulsion but in love. Milton himself is in no doubt as to where Christians stand in relationship to the law. Answering the statement that "to redeem them that were under the law" (Galatians IV. 4-5) means finally that Christians owe no more obedience to the law, Milton says,

So far from a less degree of perfection being exacted from Christians, it is expected of them that they should be more perfect than those who were under the law; as the whole tenor of Christ's precepts evinces. The only difference is, that Moses imposed the letter, or external law, even on those who were not willing to receive it; whereas Christ writes the inward law of God by his Spirit on the hearts of believers, and leads them as willing followers. (C.E. XVI, 151)

Further, regarding Milton's appreciation of the doctrine of

\(^{12}\)Empson, p. 269.

\(^{13}\)Empson, p. 177.
grace, and his understanding of its place in the doctrine of the atone-
ment, it should be noted that a principle which is an essential part
of the fabric of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained is that sin and
grace are inextricably linked; sin provides the occasion for the
manifesting of grace. The bard who sang of man's first disobedience
and the restoration by one greater man, later returns to sing,

Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,  
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd. (P.R., I, 3-4)

To those who complain that the atonement is neglected in Paradise
Lost we put G.S. Lewis's question, "What could Milton have done,
which he has not done, to forestall Saurat's criticism that the cruci-
ifixion plays 'no noticeable part' in the poet's theology and that
'vicarious atonement' is no Miltonic conception?"¹⁴ Nor does Milton
distort the redemption story in Paradise Regained. The idea of
distortion occurs only if the poem is read without due attention to the
major framework. The Father makes it plain that the temptation in
the wilderness is merely the beginning:

But first I mean
To exercise him in the Wilderness,
There he shall first lay down the rudiments
Of his great warfare, e're I send him forth
To conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes,
By Humiliation and strong Sufferance:
His weakness shall o'recome Satanic strength...
To earn Salvation for the Sons of men.     (I, 155-67)

¹⁴ For Lewis's opinion on Milton's view of redemption see Preface,
pp. 90-1.
The Son later says that on investigating the law and the prophets he found

Of whom they spake
I am; this chiefly, that my way must lie
Through many a hard assay even to the death,
E're I the promis'd Kingdom can attain.
Or work Redemption for mankind, whose sins
Full weight must be transferr'd upon my head. (I, 262-7)

It is incorrect to say that the crucifixion plays no part in Paradise Regained; the world vision into which the poem fits is the Christian one of which the center is the cross. This is conclusively demonstrated in the last few lines of the poem where the poet makes it clear that the temptation has been preparatory to the work of redemption, Eden--not Heaven--has been raised in the wilderness, and Christ now enters upon his work.

Hail Son of the most High, heir of both worlds,
Queller of Satan, on thy glorious work
Now enter, and begin to save mankind. (IV, 633-5)

It is not necessary to go on marshalling evidence to prove that Milton is orthodox in general outlook, and that the proof hinges upon his attitude toward redemption. Certainly the following statement which seems to embrace equally his obsessions and his devotions would be acceptable by and large by the most correct creedal Christian:

The whole passage must be understood of God the Father in conjunction with the Son. For it is not Christ who is 'the great mystery of godliness', but God the Father in Christ, as appears from Col. 2:2 'the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ.'
2 Cor. 5.18, 19. 'all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ...to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.' Why therefore should God the Father not be in Christ through the medium of all those offices of reconciliation which the apostle enumerates in this passage of Timothy? 'God was manifest in the flesh'—namely in the Son, his own image; in any other way he is invisible: nor did Christ come to manifest himself, but his Father, John XIV. 8, 9. (C.E. XIV, 265)

However, to do justice to Milton the orthodox poet and Milton the individualistic Puritan, one must avoid the error of assuming that his imagination is in some way shackled by traditionalism. His powerful inner compulsions, which direct the presentation of his art, liberate his imagination so that he is able to impose his own emphases on the traditional materials of his faith and on traditional art forms.

Milton, we have shown, works within a Puritan range of sensibility in which the emphasis on individual responsibility and the will of God results in the subordination or elimination of all elements that can not be manoeuvered along the fixed axis between the human and the divine. How Milton the Puritan achieved expression in the form of the epic is, in simple terms, the account of how the emphasis on will provides the momentum of the great argument. To put it in another way, all of the elements of traditional Christianity are emphasized, subordinated, or transposed to suit the poet's driving purpose.

The constant axis upon which all action in Paradise Lost moves is delineated in the opening verses:
Say first what cause
Mov'd our Grand Parents in that happy State,
Favour'd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off
From thir Creator, and transgress his Will
For one restraint, Lords of the World besides? (I, 28-32)

Those opposites between which a tension exists throughout the epic appear in the first introduction to a universe which is perfectly unified by God and in which there is seemingly no distinction between his unity and his omnipotence. The singleness of his power is maintained by emissions of divine energy which combat rebellion and by the exercise of free will on the part of the loyal. The reader is provided immediately with the opportunity to look up and down the vertical axis which extends from the Father Almighty in Heaven to Satan the Infernal Serpent and the deep tract of Hell. The dynamic emission of energy which characterizes the description of Satan's fall owes its force in great part to the enormous concentration of power in the vertical axis and Milton's sense of the primacy, in a God-sustained universe, of doing the will of God.

He trusted to have equal'd the most High,
If he oppos'd; and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
Rais'd impious War in Heav'n and Battel proud
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie
With hideous ruine and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,
Who durst defie th' Omnipotent to Arms. (I, 40-9)

That Paradise Lost and the other major works are constructed
about the axial line of the Divine Will, which is demonstrably right, is related intimately to the fact that the unique thing about Milton, unique above all his extraordinary attitudes, is his simple reliance upon God's will. This is expressed beautifully in "How Soon Hath Time", and demonstrated faithfully in his application of his powers to the service of his country, as described by himself in The Second Defense of the English People. There is in the poetic declaration of his three and twentieth year the typically Puritan apprehension of the need for action and the sense of intense responsibility to do something worthy:

Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure eev'n,
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great task Master's eye. (Sonnet VII, 9-14)

That he was true to the intention expressed in his early sonnet is clear from his own account of his reaction to the pronouncements of his physicians that he was soon to lose the sight of his remaining eye, and that to engage in the work of the Defense would bring irreparable loss. He says,

Methought, that, by a certain fatality in my birth, two destinies were set before me, on the one hand, blindness, on the other, duty--that I must necessarily incur the loss of my eyes, or desert a sovereign duty....These are the reasons of my choice; these the causes of my loss. (C.E. VIII, 69-70)

This intensely pervasive Puritan individualism, living between celestial and infernal poles and believing that God's will is a directing
Absolute which is in some sense accessible to reason, leaves its
stamp upon Milton's major works.

The movement along the axial line in *Paradise Lost* is toward
a unity which can be maintained by obedience and disrupted by
rebellion. During the conflict in Heaven the rebellious host is plunged
into disorder and fear:

\begin{verbatim}
 to such evil brought
 By sin of disobedience, till that hour
 Not liable to fear or flight or paine. (VII, 395-7)
\end{verbatim}

Meanwhile the state of the Saints is far otherwise:

\begin{verbatim}
Far otherwise th' inviolable Saints
In Cubic Phalanx firm advanc't entire,
Invulnerable, impenetrably arm'd:
Such high advantages thir innocence
Gave them above thir foes, not to have sinnd,
Not to have disobei'd. (VI, 398-403)
\end{verbatim}

Union with God, which is the antithesis of rebellion, preserves in
them perfect harmony and makes them impregnable to harm. Abdiel
"than whom [no one] with more zeal ador'd the Diety and divine
commands obeyed," stands out among the ranks of the faithful as the
truly Miltonic hero.

\begin{verbatim}
Abdiel faithful found,
 Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshak'n, unseduc'd, unterrif'd
His Loyaltie he kept, his Love, his Zeale;
Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single. (V, 896-903)
\end{verbatim}

Above, the Almighty Father sits shrined in his Sanctuary of Heaven
secure, "consulting on the sum of things" (VI, 673), completely controlling the progress of events, having already forecast the day when the violent alternating movements in the universe toward disintegration and unity become a phenomenon of the past, and power and will dissolve back into perfect unity.

Hell, her numbers full
Thenceforth shall be for ever shut. Mean while
The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
New Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell,
And after all thir tribulations long
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,
With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth.
Then thou thy regal Scepter shalt lay by,
For regal Scepter then no more shall need,
God shall be All in All. (III, 332-41)

Milton is unable to see this universe and man as anything but whole as God is whole. This unifying impulse, which is the shaping influence in the creation of the totality of Paradise Lost, determines the manner in which Milton's supposed Arianism and materialism appear in the poem. The so-called Arianism results from a transposition of the honour due to the Trinity toward the Father's side of the spectrum. To the Son all glory and honour are ascribed but it is the Father's countenance without cloud which is made visible in him and the Father's Spirit "transfused" which makes him a proper recipient of unbounded praise.
Thee next they sang of all Creation first,  
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,  
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud  
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines,  
Whom else no Creature can behold; on thee  
Impresst the effulgence of his Glorie abides,  
Transfus'd on thee his ample Spirit rests. (III, 383-9)

Even judgment, as He exercises it, is by his Father's thunder and his Father's might:

Thou... that day  
Thy Fathers dreadful Thunder didst not spare,  
Nor stop thy flaming Chariot wheels, that shook  Heav'n's everlasting Frame, while o're the necks Thou drov'st of warring Angels disarray'd.  
Back from pursuit thy Powers with loud acclaims  
Thee only extoll'd, Son of thy Fathers might,  
To execute fierce vengeance on his foes. (III, 392-9)

The Father must accompany the Son to the scene of creation and participate omnipotently. On the mission of creation, as in all the events of Paradise Lost, there is careful insistence on the Father's controlling authority; the Son who goes forth as the Father's agent has no individual power:

And thou my Word, begotten Son, by thee  
This I perform, speak thou, and be it done:  
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee  
I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep  
Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth,  Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill Infinitude, nor vacuous the space. (VII, 163-9)

The plain statement of the ex deo view of creation which Milton gives in The Christian Doctrine is transcended in the imaginative illumination of poetry when the Almighty says to the Son as he rides out on
his creative mission into chaos:

Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessitie and Chance
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate. (VII, 168-73)

The description of creation as voluntary withdrawal by the Creator from the infinitude which he previously filled amounts to but another expression of the poet's inability to conceive of God as less than the totality of all things.

Milton's shifts of emphasis and selective elaborations of chosen doctrine conform, either rationally or intuitively, to the demands of the classical form of the epic in a most remarkable way. How beautifully and almost inevitably a controlling emphasis on the power and will of the Father suits the epic form and how difficult it would have been to accommodate a sacrificial Christ to the formal framework!

In both the Paradise epics the mysterious birth of Christ, the mystery of the incarnation and the Son's humiliation and sufferings are passed over in the poet's concern to get to the question of individual dedication. Even the love of Christ to fallen man is made a function of his obedience to the Father:

His words here ended, but his meek aspect
Silent yet spake, and breath'd immortal love
To mortal men, above which only shon
Filial obedience: as a sacrifice
Glad to be offer'd, he attends the will
Of his great Father. (III, 266-71)
However, in the speech by the Father given earlier, it is made abundantly clear that the atonement is part of the eternal purposes of God. "So is my will" (III, 184), "As my Eternal purpose hath decreed" (172) and other such phrases as "My day of grace" (198) precede the succinct statement of the lapsed condition of man and the plan for restoration:

He with his whole posteritie must dye,  
Dye hee or Justice must; unless for him  
Som other able, and as willing, pay  
The rigid satisfaction, death for death. (III, 209-12)

The Father then asks:

Say Heav'ny powers, where shall we find such love,  
Which of ye will be mortal to redeem  
Mans mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save,  
Dwels in all Heaven charitie so deare? (213-6)

No doubt the Puritan aversion to intermediaries accounts for the anti-sacerdotal and anti-sacramental in Milton as it does in Bunyan. Happily the emphasis on will which the Puritan outlook demands is admirably suited to the production of a great epic. Will dominates emotion; there is no time for mystical contemplation, no opportunity to move outward from the simple axis of man's rebellious will thrusting upward against God's will. The poet relies wholly upon the supernatural will, in which tensions may be contained, to provide a unifying sweep and embrace the rolling splendour of the panorama of epic scenes. In Paradise Regained, the poem in which an extended treatment of the passion might be expected, the power and scope of the
epic are preserved by the avoidance of minimizing gradations. The unity and drive of the poem are made to depend on the outcome of a single moral decision: what was lost by one man's disobedience is recovered by another man's obedience fully tried. The essence of the victory of the Son lies, however, in the fact that the Father's plan is carried out. The Father, in describing the course of events to Gabriel, says of the Son,

To shew him worthy of his birth divine
A high prediction, henceforth I expose
To Satan; let him tempt and now assay
His utmost subtilty.... (I, 141-4)

The direct participation of the Father in every aspect of the regaining of paradise is powerfully expressed by the repeated use of the first person:

He [Satan] now shall know I can produce a man
Of female Seed, far abler to resist
All his sollicitations, and at length
All his vast force, and drive him back to Hell,
Winning by Conquest what the first man lost
By fallacy surpriz'd. But first I mean
To exercise him in the Wilderness.... (I, 150-6)

The powerful driving I dominates the Father's unfolding of the plan for victory and triumph by the Son of God who is entering upon his great duel, not by arms, but by wisdom to vanquish hellish wiles (173-5), so that the obvious ego strength of the divine declaration: "I send him forth to conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes" (158-9) is of such magnitude as to shield the reader from the full meaning
of the next line, "By Humiliation and strong Sufferance". Once again the opportunity to dwell on the passion scene is passed by quickly in favour of an emphasis on will and obedient action.

I have chose
This perfect Man, by merit call'd my Son,
To earn Salvation for the Sons of men. (165-7)

Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained seen as the expression of the concept of will could not be more typically Puritan.

In addition to the Puritan manifestations in his art, another aspect of the interaction of the poet's sensibility and materials which ought not to be neglected is his enormous success in satisfying various kinds of religious expectation. To explore this thoroughly would involve a discussion not only of those subjects to be dealt with here: baptism, penance, the eucharist, holy orders, matrimony, and the Christian view of history, but also of a number of other topics.

It is true that Milton, along with most Puritans, repudiated mystical interpretations of the communion service as well as elaborate church ceremonies, but it is also true that, as in the case of baptism, he makes some surprisingly ingenious presentations that seem definitely to answer to traditional Christian expectations. Consider, for example, the ritual performed on Adam's behalf by Michael:

But to nobler sights
Michael from Adams eyes the Filme remov'd
Which that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight
Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue
The visual Nerve, for he had much to see;
And from the Well of Life three drops instill'd. (P.L., XI,411-6)

The application of the three drops of water (no doubt in the Name of
the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is to restore the clarity of vision
which was lost in the Fall. Eve also undergoes the ritual: "For I
have drencht her eyes," (367) says Michael. Prior to the ceremonial
washing Adam and Eve experienced regeneration:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the Mercie-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
The stonie from thir hearts, and made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead, that sighs now breath'd
Unutterable, which the Spirit of prayer
Inspir'd, and wing'd for Heav'n with speedier flight
Then loudest Oratorie. (XI, 1-8)

As for penance, the two repent at great length with tears watering the
ground. All the prerequisites for Christian experience have been met
by the time book ten closes:

So spake our Father penitent, nor Eve
Felt less remorse; they forthwith to the place
Repairing where he judg'd them prostrate fell
Before him reverent, and both confess'd
Humbly thir faults, and pardon beg'd, with tears.... (1097-1101)

There is, of course, no direct correspondence to the eucharist but
this is not surprising as the event takes place prior to the crucifixion.

Regarding "holy orders", as Michael predicted, the true
order of things would in time be upset as the greater part of mankind
would replace truth and faith with "outward rites and specious forms." According to Milton each man has an inalienable right to serve as his own priest, and this priesthood of every believer is sufficient to fulfill all that has been claimed for elaborate systems of "holy orders". That any man should think otherwise Milton lays to the charge of the Roman Catholic hierarchy: "The title of clergy St. Peter gave to all God's people, till Pope Higinus and the succeeding prelates took it from them." (C. E. III, I, 257) Of priests there are only two kinds: one, on the earth, is seen as Adam and Eve before retiring to their flower strewn bower approach God directly needing no human intermediary: "Under open skie they ador'd The God that made Skie, Air, Earth and Heav'n... other Rites observing none." (P. L., IV, 721-7; 736-7) The other, the priest in heaven, is the Messiah, the only mediator between God and man:

To Heav'n thir prayers
Flew up, nor missed the way, by envious windes
Blow'n vagabond or frustrate: in they passed
Dimentionless through Heav'nly dores; then clad
With incense, where the Golden Altar fum'd
By thir great Intercessor, came in sight
Before the Fathers Throne. Them the glad Son
Presenting, thus to intercede began. (XI, 14-21)

As regards marriage: in spite of his apparently harsh words about woman and the obvious masculine ascendency in Paradise Lost, Milton's immense respect for, "Wedded love! founded in reason, just and pure" makes possible a presentation of marriage which is superbly the Christian ideal. On one level his message about women
is clear enough: they must keep their place in obedience to the husband or trouble will ensue:

Thus it shall befall
Him to worth in Women overtrusting
Lets her will rule; restraint she will not brook,
And left to herself, if evil thence ensue,
She first his weak indulgence will accuse. (P.L., IX, 1182-6)

Of those upon whom evil fell because of "overtrust" in woman's worth, Samson is notable. He takes the occasion of Dalila's return to denounce all "false women" who break faith. Dalila, typical of her kind, breaks all vows, deceives, betrays, and then in a show of feigned remorse, confesses her faults and promises to change her ways.

Not truly penitent, but chiefly to try
Her husband, how far urg'd his patience bears,
His virtue or weaknesses which way to assail. (S.A., 754-6)

For whatever there is of harshness and of the poet's own anti-feminist sentiments there is no defense, but Milton's eloquent stress on the beauty and sanctity of marriage and the immense respect he shows for Eve more than compensate for the pro-masculine bias which, incidentally, was shared by his contemporaries. Eve, "our general Mother", a Queen, is a pure delight to her royal husband.

He in delight
Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
Smil'd with superior Love, as Jupiter
On Juno smiles, when he impregn the Clouds
That shed May Flowers; and press'd her Matron lip
With kisses pure. (P.L., IV, 497-502)

From her lips the masculine ascendency theme carries no offense:
My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst
Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains,
God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise. (IV, 635-38)

Her love for Adam has a logic all its own which allows the woman complete happiness while in submission to her husband; and she, the ideal wife, gives eloquent testimonial to the joy arising from sharing physically, intellectually and spiritually with her husband when in one of the poem's most beautiful passages she tells Adam of her love for him:

With thee conversing I forget all time,
All seasons and thir change, all please alike.
Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest Birds; pleasant the Sun
When first on this delightful Land he spreads
His orient Beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flour,
Glistring with dew....
But neither breath of Morn when she ascends
With charm of earliest Birds, nor rising Sun
On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, floure,
Glistring with dew nor fragrance after showers,
Nor grateful Eevening mild, nor silent Night
With this her solemn Bird, nor walk by Moon,
Or glittering Starr-light without thee is sweet. (IV, 639-56)

We may wish to quarrel with Milton's principle of masculine ascendancy, but there is nothing disappointing about his treatment of Eve or his portrayal of the ideal marriage relationship. Undoubtedly, it is Milton's artistry that enables him to charm the reader to acquiescence, and the fact that he has an intuitive rightness in his presentation of major Christian themes.

From the sacraments and marriage we must go on to discuss
Milton's handling of history. Since every account of history presupposes a point of view, it is not difficult to ascertain whether or not Milton's views as presented in *Paradise Lost* fulfill traditional expectations as formulated by Augustine in the late fifth century in *The City of God*, a work that is considered a classic on the Christian view of history. R.G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History* describes the Christian view of history as providential, universalistic, and epochal. In agreement with him although using different terminology, C.A. Patrides in a chapter on "The Christian View of History" also emphasizes the providential aspect: "God manifest his purposes in and through everyday events, until at last all rivers of temporal history tumble into the vast ocean of eternity." Patrides also draws attention to the teleological aspect of history, "notably the resurrection of the dead, for they [the early apologists] appreciated that the unity of mankind can be maintained only through an affirmation not merely of common origin but also of a common telos or end." This last quotation embraces also the universalistic which Patrides sees fit to discuss at length in Biblical terms: "that under the one Lord of the universe there exists but a single family of

---

17 Patrides, *MCT.* , p. 224.
18 Patrides, p. 229.
nations, divided at various points in history, yet retaining still their unity under God."

That Milton abundantly fulfilled traditional expectations in his handling of history is immediately obvious. His declared aim in *Paradise Lost* is "to assert Eternal Provindence, And justifie the wayes of God to men." (I, 25-6) The universalism of the traditional Christian view was also part of Milton's thought, especially as it expressed the all-encompassing plans of God for mankind. As Michael pointed out, God's providential care extended far beyond the Hebrew race:

Not onely to the Sons of Abrahams Loines Salvation shall be Preacht, but to the Sons Of Abrahams Faith wherever through the world; So in his seed all Nations shall be blessed. (XII, 447-50)

As for Milton's view of time, it was, like Augustine's, epochal, but in an entirely different way. "Milton did not adopt Augustine's neat, symmetrical patterns in his portrayal of the destiny of mankind in Books XI and XII of *Paradise Lost*. Stressing the fall of man and the redemptive work of Christ, Milton regarded history as a dynamic, yet syncopated, process by which God's will was worked out through individuals and nations." Augustine has divided the history of

---

19 Patrides, p. 224.

mankind into seven epochs, but for Milton history was a dynamic process marked by cataclysmic events such as the fall of man and the incarnation of Christ.

Not only is it true that "In Paradise Lost we have the most successful attempt in poetry to fuse the essential aspects of the Christian view of history into a magnificent whole," but it must also be added that Milton displayed his full awareness of the Christian view of history in his "Nativity Ode" which he wrote when he was only twenty-one years of age. His full awareness of the Christian view of history is revealed in his concentration on the all-embracing significance of the rude manger as it affected the relationship between God and all mankind, the totality of all human beings. "Milton's far-ranging references to the idols and deities of Assyria and Egypt, Greece and Rome, were imperative, and collectively they argue that the Atonement was all-embracing in its effect, that the infant Jesus achieved not merely peace, but in Milton's words, 'a universal Peace'."

The discussion of Milton's handling of history brings us to conclusions congenial to the perspective of this thesis. The Puritan poet abundantly fulfills traditional expectations in his handling of the

\footnote{Patrides, MCT., p. 259.}

\footnote{Patrides, MCT., p. 258.}
Christian view of history in its providential, universalistic, epochal and teleological aspects. At the same time, we discover typically Miltonic transformations of traditional material as it responds to his conception of God's will dynamically operating in the affairs of men. Finally, and of the utmost importance to our present purpose, is the eminence given the God-man. We must agree with Patrides "that the God-man in *Paradise Lost*, far from being relatively unimportant to Milton, renders coherence to the whole epic." This idea takes nothing away from the view that Milton's concern in *Paradise Lost* is with Man. It does, however, add a great deal to the argument for placing Milton in orthodoxy's mainstream to say he is "Christocentric".

We could explore much further the question of the interaction of the poet's sensibility and his materials, but some attention must now be given to the extraordinary difficulties which Milton faced in his role as a poet-apologist. In the face of the many inherent difficulties in rendering a Christian theme in a pagan and classical form, and the traditional elements of orthodoxy into a poem to the satisfaction of the Puritan individualist and the common reader, Milton is astonishingly successful. No doubt, his success may be attributed to his poetic genius which is able to manipulate successfully

---

the diversified elements within himself which clamoured for expression.

A primary difficulty, of interest to numerous thoughtful readers, is the disparity in *Paradise Lost* between the ostensible philosophical purpose of the poem (to justify the ways of God to men) and the actual result. That Milton is an orthodox Christian has already been shown; it remains now to insist that his failure to justify the ways of God to men is in no way a reflection upon the quality of his Christian experience or understanding. An examination of the extraordinary difficulties (some due to the demands of theology and some to the demands of the poetic form) inherent in the task of writing *Paradise Lost* will dissuade the reader from taking seriously those critics who interpret the poem on the grounds of what they know of Milton's heretical tendencies, forgetting "that the poem was accepted as orthodox by many generations of acute readers well grounded in theology." 24 No one should be surprised that Milton fails to justify the ways of God to men; indeed, it would be most surprising to find in *Paradise Lost* a kind of justification of God which is not in the Bible itself.

The reasons why no one should be surprised are apparent when the extraordinary difficulties the poet-apologist faced are examined. In the first place the ostensible philosophical purpose of

24 Lewis, Preface, p. 82.
the poem is seen to be not only difficult to fulfill but actually impos-
sible for a number of reasons that are equally cogent for all
Christian apologists. One of the difficulties centers upon the fact
that the Bible reveals no tendency upon God's part to explain Himself.
Thus when Milton is required by epic convention to cast the Almighty
as an actor in a drama in which He must sometimes speak in self-
justification innumerable problems arise. Far from speaking in
self-justification the Biblical God simply says of Himself, "I am,"
(Ex. 3:14) and arbitrarily requires of the one who will come to Him,
"That he believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that
diligently seek Him." (Heb. 11:6)

The perplexing aspects of the task of representing God in the
poem are, of course, not beyond the poet's range of comprehension.
The God of theological definition would be the God of philosophical
proof, but such a god is, according to Milton's own view, incom-
prehensible: "For the Word... as he is the image, as it were, by
which we see God, so he is the word by which we hear him. But
if such be his nature, he cannot be essentially one with God, whom
no one can see or hear." (C.E. XIV, 401) In Paradise Lost,
however, God embarks upon lengthy rhetorical self-justification, a
deviation from Miltonic doctrine which is obviously the result of
dramatic necessity. It might be argued that, given the facts that
God the Father is incomprehensible and that any extra-Biblical
representation of him is bound in some way to be a distortion, the poet should not have attempted *Paradise Lost*. From the point of view of theological expediency there may be some truth in this charge; however, we are intent not upon un-writing the magnificent epic but rather upon analyzing it to see where Milton stands as a Christian apologist. The poet himself attempts to reconcile certain conflicting elements in his statement of the doctrine of accommodation. It is his conviction that "to know God as he really is, far transcends the power of man's thoughts, much more of his perception....God therefore has made as full a revelation of himself as our minds can conceive, or the weakness of our nature can bear." (C.E. XIV, 31)

Nevertheless, when we see God acting like an over-zealous immigration clerk:

The Stairs were then let down, whether to dare
The Fiend by easie ascent, or aggravate
His sad exclusion from the dores of Bliss, (P.L., III, 523-5)

we are forced to admit that the poet is unable to stay within the limits of the accommodation provided in Scripture where there is "nothing unsuitable to the character and dignity of God" and God says nothing of Himself which derogates His own majesty. (XIV, 33)

Perhaps an even better example of lines in which there is something unsuitable to the character and dignity of God are those where God "smiles" at the moment evil is born in heaven and fusses about His "omnipotence" which is about to be put to the test. (IV, 718-22) It
must be granted then that in spite of Milton's lofty intentions, God has His low moments, but our intention here is not to pick petty flaws in Milton's presentation, but rather to expose the fact that the problems regarding the actor-God are not uniquely Milton's; they are the natural inheritance of any Christian apologist who undertakes so ambitious a task. There is a deep-seated conflict between the theological material and the demands of the epic, and there are immense difficulties in representing in human terms a God who transcends human categories of thought.

It does not require any degree of skill to identify the few places in *Paradise Lost* where Milton is weak and imperfect. However, having drawn attention to the embarrassing business about the stairway and the other "weak" passage, it is appropriate to go on and point out that when Milton is weak and imperfect he generally makes immediate and generous compensation for what is lacking. The unattractive lines beginning "The Stairs were then let down" are immediately compensated for in the description of Satan's view "of all this World so faire." (III, 554)

```
Round he surveys, and well might, where he stood
So high above the circling Canopie
Of Nights extended shade; from Eastern Point
Of Libra to the fleecie Starr that bears
Andromeda farr off Atlantic Seas
Beyond th' Horizon; then from Pole to Pole
He views in breth, and without longer pause
Down right into the Worlds first Region throws
His flight precipitant, and windes with ease
```
Through the pure marble Air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable Starrs, that shon
Stars, distant, but nigh hand seemed other Worlds. (III, 555-66)

The passage in which God is briefly implausible, as He speaks to
His Son of Satan who is "coasting the wall of Heav'n on this side of
Night" in search of a landing place on earth, is another example:

So will fall,
Hee and his faithless Progenie: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrante, he had of mee
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. (III, 95-9)

But the poet proceeds almost immediately with an unerring sense of
what is artistically appropriate to compensate for the unattractive
picture of the Father which he had just presented.

Thus while God spake, ambrosial fragrance fill'd
All Heav'n, and in the blessed Spirits elect
Sense of new joy ineffable diffus'd:
Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all His Father shon
Substantially express'ld, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeard,
Love without end, and without measure Grace. (III, 135-42)

Another difficulty which ought to be recognized as inherent,
rather than as an essentially individual problem which arises out of
some weakness in Milton's theology, appears in connection with the
matter of making metaphysical affirmations. Having affirmed
something, an individual is under obligation to provide proof.
Empson does very little affirming but what little he does is open to
precisely the same objections as are levelled against Milton. Six-
ten pages from the end of Milton's God Empson admits (having
roundly denounced the Christian one) that he needs to try to say what a rational ethic may be, and then goes on to state what his personal belief is:

I am still inclined to the theory of Bentham which was in favour when I was a student at Cambridge; that the satisfaction of any impulse is in itself an elementary good, and that the practical ethical question is merely how to satisfy the greatest number. But he has no more than said it than he is forced to admit that there is an objection to Benthamism, and in voicing that admission lands squarely in the midst of the terrible problem of evil.

All the same, there is a basic objection to the theory; unless some special gadget can be fitted in, the satisfaction of an impulse to inflict pain on another person must have its equal democratic right.... I am much inclined to agree ... that this satisfaction is an elementary evil; and this makes it a remarkable object, carrying the only inherent or metaphysical evil in the world....

It is no coincidence that Empson in putting forth his rational ethic finds himself face to face with what Christian orthodoxy considers the knottiest intellectual problem of them all, the problem of evil. The problem of evil as social behaviour is not, of course, the same thing as the problem of evil as an unexplained primal element, but the comparison is of value in so far as it points to the difficulty of formulating an all-embracing rationale to cover even as limited a topic as man's relation to his fellows.

25 Empson, p. 259.
26 Empson, p. 260.
Anyone who dares to make metaphysical affirmations is confronted with the demand for proof. But contemporary Christian thinkers do not hold that the final solution to the problem of evil and the presentation of a rational ethic (which is inextricably woven into questions of the origin of the universe, the existence of God and the nature of God) are to be found through the marshalling of empirical evidence or the presentation of logical arguments. Something of the difficulty concerning logical proofs can be seen in Brunner's discussion of "proofs for the existence of God".

There are certain definite metaphysical processes of thought which with a certain logical clarity lead to the idea of God; for any people who are trained to think--some of whom are outstanding thinkers--these arguments possess considerable, and indeed convincing cogency. There is, however, no court of appeal which--from the outside, as it were--can establish the rightness or wrongness of the proofs for the existence of God. The examination of the proofs is possible only for one who himself takes part in the process of thought, and who therefore makes his own judgments. From the time of Kant this is what may have been done with good will and with the best intellectual equipment; the result, however, is always ambiguous, namely, that many, but by no means the majority, or even all who have been competent to deal with the problem, regard the proofs for the existence of God as verifiable.

Thus if the rational proofs are not regarded as verifiable by all who are competent to deal with the problem they are not "proof" as science defines it at all. As Brunner points out in the same passage "the proofs for the existence of God require the co-operation of

---

other motives, which lie outside the scope of reason, if the "proof" is to be felt truly convincing." Revelation and reason are not opposites between which a choice must be made, but a couplet joined by faith (other motives). According to Brunner, the question can never be "whether", but "to what extent" and "in what sense" reason and revelation, faith and rational thinking can be combined with one another. 28

It would, of course, be an anachronism to credit Milton with formally holding the views of revelation, faith and reason which represent progress achieved under three centuries of pressure from the developing sciences, but it is, nevertheless, quite clearly the case that in Paradise Lost Milton demonstrates many of contemporary orthodoxy's best insights. The attempt to justify logically the ways of God to men is by the very nature of the case bound to fall short of its goal. Nevertheless, insofar as "eternal providence" is presented and the logic of Love permitted to take over, the central purposes of the Christian gospel are served. Milton's accomplishment in this regard is of the highest order and in the very best tradition because his poetic genius and Christian insights carry him as did Dante's to the pinnacle of faith where all conflicts between dogma and art, faith and reason, are resolved in the vision of God.

28 Brunner, p. 311.
In Dante's *Paradise* the complicated puzzle of life is resolved when under the guidance of Beatrice he progresses in joy and understanding. The climax comes in the very last lines when Dante, possessed of a new and exalted vision, sees the Trinity as a Unity and in its separate aspects. He says then

Like to a geometrist who fain would strive that he
Might measure it, and yet not in his science find
The basis needed howso deep his thought may be,
So was I there before that vision of such novel kind.
I wished to see how was adapted, fused, annealed
The image in the circle; how it was confined:
And to my lack of power I had been forced to yield
If shaken had not been my whole mentality
By sudden flash in which my wish was clear revealed.  29

Then having admitted that his own wings are not enough to enable him
to reconcile the conflicts of faith and reason, he soars in the last lines of "The Beatific Vision"--illumined by a flash of Grace--to a resolution of the insoluble problems of his existence. His desire and will, because of the power of the vision, blend harmoniously with the divine Love.

Yet though power failed before this lofty fantasy,
My wish and will whirled on like force that nothing bars,
In time with all the other spheres, moved equally
By love: that love which moves the sun and other stars.  30

Like his forerunner, Milton is unable to encompass in poetic


30 Dante, p. 670.
lines a formula that would be of such vast comprehension as to justify the ways of God to men, but he is enormously successful in providing in a unique way a justification of the divine purpose which derives from contemplation of the magnificence of God and of His creation. The poet's inability to verbalise fully because he cannot solve intellectually the problems that plague man's existence is illustrated in the scene in which Adam utters bitter recriminations against the Almighty and his "inexplicable" justice (X, 755). Adam asks concerning the reason for his own existence:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To mould me Man, did I sollicit thee
From darkness to promote me, or here place
In this delicious Garden?  (X, 743-6)

Horrified by the idea that he is to leave his sons nothing but grief and death because of his disobedience he cries,

Ah, why should all mankind
For one mans fault thus guiltless be condemn'd,
If guiltless?  (X, 822-4)

Significantly, Adam, like the geometer who seeks to square the circle, does not receive satisfactory answers to the questions he posits; nevertheless, he and Eve resolve to ask for mercy.

What better can we do, then to the place
Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
Before him reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the Air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.  (X, 1086-92)
The admission of guilt is the prelude to the upward movement which lifts Adam, Eve and the reader out of the exhausting conflict to the vision of God and causes Adam to exclaim,

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Then that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness!  (XII, 469-73)

Adam, who has been hitherto nerving himself to endure his fate, is lifted in a beatific vision to the realization of paradise within and the expectation of the day when God will be all in all.

The impression conveyed by Milton in *The Christian Doctrine*, *Paradise Lost* and his other writings is so profound and complex that it defies summation. Having now behind us the question of his imagination and intention and of some related issues, we will do well to leave him in the company of Dante. Certainly we have Milton's own word that ultimately his personal consolation is the vision of God.

Neither am I concerned at being classed, though you think this a miserable thing, with the blind, with the afflicted, with the sorrowful, with the weak; since there is hope, that, on this account, I have a nearer claim to the mercy and protection of the sovereign Father.... May I be one of the weakest provided only in my weakness that immortal and better vigour be put forth with greater effect; provided only in my darkness the light of the divine countenance does but more brightly shine: for then I shall at once be the weakest and the most mighty; shall be at once blind, and of the most piercing sight. Thus, through this infirmity should I be consumated, perfected; thus, through this darkness should I be enrobed in light. And, in truth, we who are blind, are not the last regarded by the
providence of God; who, as we are the less able to discern anything but himself, beholds us with the greater clemency and benignity. (C.E. VIII, 73)

As far as Christian orthodoxy is concerned, it may be said of Milton in all seriousness, with no fear of falsification, that

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair. (S.A., 1721-3)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I  Primary Sources


________.  *Holy Bible*, King James Version.


II  Secondary Sources


