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Volume 8, numéro 2, 1952

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020788ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020788ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Joseph, M. (1952). Orthodoxy in *Paradise Lost*. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 8(2), 243–284. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020788ar>

Orthodoxy in *Paradise Lost*

Many critics rate *Paradise Lost* the greatest single poem in the English language. Chaucer, in his series of tales, presents with unmatched realism, humor, and warmth a delightful galaxy of human beings. Shakespeare, in the whole range of his plays, not only peoples his stage with an astonishing variety of persons but at the same time delves deeply into the problems and conflicts of the human heart. Yet in this single, unified epic poem of sustained high seriousness, Milton, like his Italian predecessor Dante, deals with the major question of every man — his relation to God and to the enemy of his soul. To his subject matter Milton himself attributed the excellence by which he would soar above Homer and Vergil,¹ and he humbly invoked the aid of the Holy Spirit to write fitly this “advent’rous song”:

What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support ;
That to the height of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. (I.22)

It is, however, through its superior artistic merit that *Paradise Lost* has achieved a place in world literature high above other works dealing with much the same subject matter, Vondel’s *Lucifer*, for example, or Du Bartas’ *La Semaine*.

The more highly *Paradise Lost* is regarded as a work of art, the more pressing becomes the question it poses for the intelligent general reader, especially one of Catholic background: Can he thoroughly enjoy this poem for its æsthetic excellence and at the same time cherish it for its truth, or will he feel impelled to turn in disappointment from one of the finest works of his literary inheritance because he rejects too much of its content? To determine the answer, two main questions will occupy this study of *Paradise Lost*: How acceptable from the dogmatic, moral, and philosophical points of view is its treatment of the material drawn from Scripture? What values does the author contribute by his poetic method?

I

Milton fuses classical, medieval, Renaissance, and Biblical material to create a poem that assimilates literary and religious tradition and at the same time electrifies it with powerful poetic conceptions and subtly varied and melodious blank verse. Familiar accounts of

1. See *PL* I.13-15 ; IX.13-19, 31, 40.

Scripture come to new life by his poetic method. Consider his elaboration of two Biblical texts.

The first is "For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils" (*Ps.* 95:6). While imitating Homer's sonorous catalogue of the Greek ships at Troy, Milton gives to the demons assembling at Satan's call the names of pagan gods.¹

And Devils to adore for Deities :
Then were they known to men by various Names,
And various Idols through the Heathen World. (I.373)

Among them are Moloch and Belial, unforgettably characterized in the Great Consult where the one urges violent resistance and the other timorous submission — sharply opposed policies that not only owe something to Milton's acquaintance with the crucial parliamentary debates of his time but also gain voice in many another political crisis.

The second text is from the Epistle of Saint James (1:15) : "For when passion has conceived, it brings forth sin ; but when sin has matured, it begets death." From this text Milton develops his superb allegory of Sin and Death,² which far surpasses in both moral significance and poetic power anything to be found in medieval or Spenserian allegory.

Having cleverly won in the Great Consult the coveted mission to go alone to Earth to seduce man (II.426-466), Satan finds his exit from Hell barred by two formidable shapes guarding the gates. The first is Sin.

The one seem'd Woman to the waist, and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fold
Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
With mortal sting : about her middle round
A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung
A hideous Peal : yet, when they list, would creep,
If aught disturb'd their noise, into her womb,
And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd
Within unseen. (II.650)

The other is Death, described in inchoate images that remind us, as we read in the *Imitation of Christ* (II.23), that Death comes in many shapes.

The other shape,
If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
For each seem'd either. (666)

1. Cf. BURTON, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, I.iii.1,2.

2. GOWER, *Mirrou de l'Omme* (205-237), had represented Sin as Satan's daughter who by him conceives the Seven Deadly Sins.

Just when Satan and this shapeless monster are poised for angry instant combat, the "Snaky Sorceress" rushes between :

O Father, what intends thy hand, she cri'd,
Against thy only Son? What fury O Son,
Possesses thee to bend that mortal Dart
Against thy Father's head? (727)

Amazed, Satan asks her why, on this their first meeting, she calls him father and calls this monster his son, for, he says,

I know thee not, nor ever saw till now
Sight more detestable than him and thee. (744)

She replies with words, all too true, that may be put to every sinner :

Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem
Now in thine eye so foul, once deemed so fair . . . ?
(747)

Then she tells of her origin in Heaven¹ (and here Milton with astonishing aptness adapts the Greek myth that Athena sprang full-panoplied from the brow of Zeus) :

. . . in sight
Of all the Seraphim with thee combin'd
In bold conspiracy against Heav'n's King,
All on a sudden miserable pain
Surpris'd thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum
In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast
Threw forth, till on the left side op'ning wide,
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
Out of thy head I sprung. (749)

She fell with Satan and, sitting stationed at Hell's gate, found herself pregnant by him and there brought forth Death, their son. The incestuous and proliferating² nature of sin and death she explained further in hideous but allegorically true detail :

I fled, but he pursu'd (though more, it seems,
Inflam'd with lust than rage) and swifter far,
Me overtook his mother all dismay'd,
And in embraces forcible and foul
Ingend'ring with me, of that rape begot
These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me, as thou saw'st, hourly conceiv'd
And hourly born, . . .
Before mine eyes in opposition sits

1. The precise moment is told in V.668. Cf. *MATT.* 5:28.

2. Cf. *Macbeth*, III.iv.136 ; also *The Faerie Queene*, I.i.15.

Nor can I miss the way, so strongly drawn
 By this new felt attraction and instinct.
 (X.235-263)

Filled with new energy, these two build a bridge joining Earth to Hell. They meet Satan returning triumphant after seducing Eve, and Sin exultantly stresses their intrinsic relationship.

O Parent, these are thy magnific deeds,
 Thy Trophies, which thou view'st as not thine own,
 Thou art their Author and prime Architect :
 For I no sooner in my Heart divin'd,
 My Heart, which by a secret harmony
 Still moves with thine, join'd in connexion sweet,
 That thou on Earth hadst prosper'd, which thy looks
 Now also evidence, but straight I felt
 Though distant from thee Worlds between, yet felt
 That I must after thee with this thy Son ;
 Such fatal consequence unites us three :
 Hell could no longer hold us in her bounds,
 Nor this unvoyageable Gulf obscure
 Detain from following thy illustrious track.
 Thou hast achiev'd our liberty, confin'd
 Within Hell Gates till now, thou us impow'r'd
 To fortify thus far, and overlay
 With this portentous Bridge the dark abyss.
 Thine now is all this World, thy virtue hath won
 What thy hands builded not, thy Wisdom gain'd
 With odds what War hath lost, and fully aveng'd
 Our foil in Heav'n ; here thou shalt Monarch reign.
 (354)

Satan highly commends their efforts that have made

Hell and this World, one Realm, one Continent
 Of easy thorough-fare. (392)

This easy future traffic, in striking contrast to Satan's hazardous and difficult journey through Chaos (II.890-1055), measures too truly his dire success (cf. I.1024). He bids them go on to Paradise.

There dwell and Reign in bliss, thence on the Earth
 Dominion exercise and in the Air,
 Chiefly on Man, sole Lord of all declar'd,
 Him first make sure your thrall, and lastly kill.
 My Substitutes I send ye, and Create
 Plenipotent on Earth, of matchless might
 Issuing from me : on your joint vigor now
 My hold of this new Kingdom all depends,
 Through Sin to Death expos'd by my exploit. (399)

Thus were Sin and Death let loose upon the world.

So saying he dismiss'd them, they with speed
 Their course through thickest Constellations held
 Spreading their bane ; the blasted Stars lookt wan,
 And Planets, Planet-strook, real Eclipse
 Then suffer'd. (409)

On his return to Hell Satan sardonically boasts to his followers of what he and his progeny have wrought against man :

Him by fraud I have seduc'd
 From his Creator, and the more to increase
 Your wonder, with an Apple ; he thereat
 Offended, worth your laughter, hath giv'n up
 Both his belov'd Man and all his World
 To Sin and Death a prey, and so to us,
 Without our hazard, labor, or alarm,
 To range in, and to dwell, and over Man
 To rule, as over all he should have rul'd. (485)

Who can read this potent allegory and not be moved by its hideous and menacing truth, by the contrast between what sin appears to be when it is chosen preferably to God and what it really is? A triumph of poetic synthesis, this allegory is a fitting and not exaggerated development of the text from Saint James. Its intense ugliness, proper to evil and made palpable by powerful imaginative conceptions, impresses upon every sinner its ominous relevance to himself. It stamps Milton a master of artistic method. Had he written nothing but this, he would deserve a high place among poets of religious truth.

II

Since the greater part of its subject matter is derived from Holy Scripture, *Paradise Lost* is predominantly theological. To what extent can a Catholic accept its theology?

That Milton was anti-Catholic his prose tracts clearly testify. That he remained so is evident from *Paradise Lost*, XII.512-535, and from his last tract, "Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration, and What Best Means May Be Used against the Growth of Popery," published in 1673, the year before his death. In the latter he asserted, "popery is the only or the greatest heresy" and he excluded it from the toleration he urged toward other sects, because, he wrote, "popery, as being idolatrous, is not to be tolerated either in public or in private ; it must be now thought how to remove it, and hinder the growth thereof, I mean in our natives, and not foreigners, privileged by the law of nations."

The unpublished manuscript of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*, discovered in 1823, was translated and edited by Bishop Charles Sumner and published in 1825. In it Milton affirms that the Holy Scriptures, privately interpreted, constitute the sole rule of faith; that the Father alone is the one supreme self-existent infinite God; that before the world was made, but not from eternity, the Father created or produced or generated the Son, not of necessity, but by a decree of His free will, imparting to the Son as much as He pleased of the divine nature and substance, as in the fullness of time He miraculously begot Him in His human nature of the Virgin Mary; that the Son is emphatically not coessential, coequal, or coeternal with the Father; that He does not possess absolute omnipresence, omniscience, or omnipotence; that His nature is divine, but distinct from and clearly inferior to the nature of the Father; that He sits at the Father's right hand, next in dignity; that the Holy Spirit was freely created or produced of the substance of God, probably before the foundation of the world, but later than the Son and that He is far inferior to Him; that the Father, through His Word and Spirit, created all things not out of nothing but from matter which proceeded from God, incorruptible, and at first confused and formless, as an efflux of the Deity.

Is the theology of *Paradise Lost* in accord with these heresies of *De Doctrina*? If not, why not?

Some scholars have offered cogent arguments for dating the composition of *De Doctrina Christiana* 1642-1649, whereas others date it 1655-1660. *Paradise Lost* was first published in 1667. During the years between, Milton may have changed his views. Or he may have put into the poem theological views that he did not personally accept, just as he incorporated in it the Ptolemaic astronomy, perhaps for literary reasons or on account of its more general familiarity to his readers, although he himself undoubtedly accepted the system of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo.

Whatever be the reasons, this study will endeavor to show that *Paradise Lost* is capable of being read as a poem embodying theological doctrines in conformity with those of the Catholic Church.

Numerous passages in *Paradise Lost* cannot easily be reconciled with *De Doctrina*.

The Arian or anti-Trinitarian view of the inferiority of Christ and the Holy Spirit to the Father, while clearly set forth in the treatise, is less distinct and obvious in the poem (which did not disturb generations of orthodox readers), but no doctrinal passage in the poem is inconsistent with the Arianism of Milton's formal theology.¹

1. DOUGLAS BUSH, *English Literature in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1945, reprinted 1948). The remark in parenthesis corroborates the view that the theology of the poem itself is ordinarily understood by Christian readers as orthodox.

Milton has, however, deliberately avoided in his poem, especially in the more dangerous issues, the clear and uncompromising precision of his statements in prose.¹

In the opinion of this writer, these critics express the disagreement too mildly.

The intelligent general reader commonly reads poetry for what it means to him rather than for precisely what the author meant by it. The literary specialist, on the other hand, seeks to determine as carefully as possible what the author intended, often with dubious results, challenged by other literary specialists. For the latter it is legitimate and desirable to consider fully whatever light may be shed on *Paradise Lost* by *De Doctrina* or any other relevant work, but that is not the purpose of this study, which is concerned rather with what the intelligent general reader with a Catholic mind will normally understand.

Milton himself suggests the point of view adopted here. Discussing *Ecclesiastes* 12:7, he writes: "Euripides in the *Suppliants* [line 519] has, without being aware of it, given a far better interpretation of this passage than the commentators in question."² Here Milton is not attributing to Euripides any awareness of the Scripture (quite the contrary) nor to the Biblical writer any awareness of Euripides. Milton is simply saying that he himself as a reader finds a passage in Holy Scripture illuminated by a passage in Euripides, that the one is in conformity with the other. In the same spirit, a Catholic may read *Paradise Lost* and, without wrenching the text, find it in conformity with his faith, find it illuminated by Holy Scripture or interpreted by Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas. In this spirit a Catholic can enjoy to the full this great work of his literary heritage and at the same time experience the power poetry has to make truth delight and move the soul.

A mere partial list of orthodox views in *Paradise Lost* is not unimpressive. The poem shows us the one and only living God, eternal infinite Spirit, incomprehensible, uncreated; Creator of all that is; immense, immutable, yet free; omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent; gracious and merciful, true, and magnificently just. God's immutable decrees are Fate; chance is but His permissive Will. He is the source, the fountain, and exemplar of all goodness. To Him, angels, demons, men, and all nature owe being. Man, whom He made in His own image, is of unique value and dignity; to him God gave free will,

1. JAMES HOLLY HANFORD, *A Milton Handbook*, 4th ed. (New York, 1946), p.122.

2. *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.xiii. In his remarks on tragedy prefacing *Samson Agonistes*, MILTON writes: "The Apostle Paul himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the text of Holy Scripture, *I Cor.* 15.33." In this study, we shall from time to time emulate Milton's practice of glancing at comparable passages related only in the reader's mind to the passage under consideration.

His own wonderful and precious attribute. Milton is not only orthodox but eloquent in teaching the primal goodness of man and nature, of reason and passion ; the need of self-discipline and temperance as opposed to excess ; the internality of goodness ; the origin, nature, and heinousness of sin ; the necessity and sufficiency of grace ; the compatibility of obedience with free will ; original sin inherited from Adam ; regeneration through repentance, self-condemnation, and the mediation of Christ, who made satisfaction for all men of all times, both before and after His coming ; the necessity of faith *and* works ; the brotherhood of men ; the ideals of wedded love ; the proper subordination of woman to man in the family ; the resurrection of the dead, the punishment of the wicked, and the reward of the just.

We know that Milton was familiar with Aristotle's concept of God as *Actus Purus*, for he comments adversely on it.

There seems, therefore, an impropriety in the term of *actus purus*, which Aristotle applies to God, for thus the Deity would have no choice of act, but what he did he would do of necessity and could do in no other way, which would be inconsistent with his omnipotence and free agency. It must be remembered, however, that the power of God is not exerted in things which imply a contradiction.¹

Whether or not Milton was acquainted with the application of this concept of *Actus Purus* to the theology of the Trinity, we do not know with certainty. We are certain that he was familiar with Saint Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, for he listed it in his *Commonplace Book*. In this work Saint Augustine touches on *Actus Purus* and deals with it more fully in *De Trinitate*, which Milton may have known, although it is not listed in the *Commonplace Book*, for it can hardly be assumed that the *Commonplace Book* presents an exhaustive list of Milton's studies. Saint Thomas, who is not listed, develops *Actus Purus* most fully. The doctrine may be briefly summarized.

Pure Act expresses the absolute perfection of God, for, if there were in God any passive potentiality, its actuability would render Him mutable. The activity of His internal nature must be in act by the very necessity of His Being. This necessary internal activity is the eternal intercourse of the Trinity Himself, for God is Being, Knowledge, and Love, and these Three are One. The one perfect Being (the Father) perfectly comprehends Himself because His power "in knowing is as great as His actuality in existing."² This Knowledge of Himself (His Word, His Son) must therefore be coequal and coeternal with Himself, because God would not be All Perfect if His

1. *Ibid.*, l.ii.

2. SAINT THOMAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.14, a.3, literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. All quotations from SAINT THOMAS in this study are from this work (New York, 1947).

Knowledge of Himself were less than Himself or if He had ever not thus fully known Himself.

The procession of the Word in God is generation . . . by way of similitude, inasmuch as the concept of the intellect is a likeness of the object conceived : — and exists in the same nature, because in God the act of understanding and His existence are the same¹ . . . The act of God's intellect is His substance.²

The Father eternally generates the Son. Hence He says, "This day have I begotten Thee."³ This day means every day, every instant, continuously. The Father, beholding Himself thus mirrored in His Word, loves Himself (the Son) and the Word loves the Father from whom He eternally proceeds — whence originates the second procession — the Holy Spirit, who is the Love between the Father and the Son, proceeding from both equally, and equal to each, coeternal with each, since, God being Pure Act, there was never a time when the Father and the Word did not love each other, and love each all the other. This second procession is not called generation, because it is the term of God's will, whereas it is the unique characteristic of intellect that it generates its likeness.

Whether or not Milton changed his mind about the nature of God by the time he wrote his great poem, if one were to assume that he did ardently subscribe to this doctrine, it would be difficult to conceive how he could have expressed it better than he actually does again and again in *Paradise Lost*.

First the equality of the Son with the Father is emphatically stated.⁴ (The italics are mine.)

So spake the Father, and unfolding bright
Toward the right hand his Glory, *on the Son*
Blaz'd forth unclouded Deity ; he full
Resplendent *all* his Father manifest
Express'd. (X.63)

He said, and on his Son with Rays direct
Shone *full*, he *all* his Father *full* exprest
Ineffably into his face receiv'd,
And thus the *filial Godhead* answering spake.
(VI.719)

Beyond compare the son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him *all* his Father shone
Substantially express'd. (III.138)

1. *Ibid.*, I, q.27, a.2.

2. *Ibid.*, I, q.14, a.4.

3. *Ps.* 2:7. Cf. *PL.* V.603.

4. In emphasis on fullness, cf. *Col.* 1:19.

... the Son of God
 In whom the *fullness* dwells of love divine, . . .
 (III.224)

Begotten Son, *Divine Similitude*,
 In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
 Made visible, th' Almighty Father *shines*, . . .
 (III.384)

Girt with *Omnipotence*, with Radiance crown'd
 Of Majesty Divine, Sapience and Love
 Immense, and *all* his Father in him *shone*.
 (VII.194)

The *Filial Power* arriv'd, and sat him down
 With his great *Father*, for he *also* went
 Invisible, yet stay'd (such privilege
 Hath *Omnipresence*). (VII.587)

The Father expresses the nature of their relation when He addresses His Son :

Son who art *alone*
My Word, my wisdom and effectual might,
All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are, all
 As my Eternal purpose hath decreed : (III.170)

Nor shalt thou by descending to assume
 Man's Nature, less'n or degrade thine own.
 Because thou hast, though Thron'd in highest bliss
Equal to God, and *equally* enjoying
 God-like fruition, quitted all to save
 A World from utter loss, . . .
 Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign
 Both *God* and Man, . . . *all* Power
 I give thee, . . . (III.303-318)

Son, thou in whom my glory I behold
 In *full* resplendence, Heir of *all* my might,
 Nearly it now concerns us to be sure
 Of *our Omnipotence*. (V.719)

The Father testifies to this equality when He declares :

All power on him transferr'd : . . .
 Effulgence of my Glory, Son belov'd,
 Son in whose face invisible is beheld
 Visibly, *what by Deity I am*
 And in whose hand *what* by Decree I do, . . .
 (VI.678-683)

To the angels the Father gave command,

Adore the Son, and *honour him as me*. (III.343)

Clearly understanding that the Son is presented as equal to the Father, Lucifer disdains

Knee tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,
Too much to one, but *double* how endur'd,
To one and to *his image* now proclaim'd?
(V.782)

Addressing the Father, the Son calls Himself "*Image of thee in all things*." (VI.736) and claims "*all Regal Pow'r Giv'n me*" (V.739). When He returns,

Sole Victor from th' expulsion of his Foes . . .
To meet him all his Saints, who silent stood
Eye-witnesses of his *Almighty Acts*
With Jubilee advanc'd. (VI.880-884)

After the sin of Adam and Eve, the Son goes to judge the transgressors.

Thus saying from his radiant Seat he rose
Of high *collateral* glory : . . .
To sentence Man : the *voice of God* they heard
Now walking in the Garden, . . . till *God*
Approaching, thus to Adam call'd aloud.
(X.86-102)

The hymn to the Trinity (described III.372-411) is focused on the Son, and at its close Milton himself exultantly addresses Him :

Hail Son of God, Savior 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 disjoin.
(III.412)

Is Milton saying in the following that the Son was created?

Thee next they sang of all creation first,
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude. (III.383)

The grammar permits a reading that is consonant with Milton's frequent and characteristic poetic inversion of common word order as well as with the numerous passages cited above : Next they (the angels), of all creation first, sang thee, begotten Son. "Second to thee" (III.409) and "Second Omnipotence" (VI.684) may as readily mean second in order as second in time or degree, for knowledge must logically, though not necessarily chronologically, follow being. And

omnipotence loses its meaning if it is susceptible of difference in degree.

The basic theology of the Incarnation is succinctly stated by the Father :

Their Nature also to thy Nature join ;
 And be thyself Man among men on Earth,
 Made flesh, when time shall be, of Virgin seed,
 By wondrous birth : Be thou in Adam's room
 The Head of all mankind, though Adam's Son.
 (III.282)

The Holy Spirit is invoked by Milton at the beginning of his poem.

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me, for Thou know'st ; Thou from the first
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
 Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant : (I.17)

At the end, Michael assures Adam that when the Son has redeemed man and resumed his seat at the Father's right hand,

from Heav'n

He to his own a Comforter will send,
 The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
 His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
 Working through love upon their hearts shall write,
 To guide them in all truth, . . . for the Spirit
 Pour'd first on his Apostles, whom he sends
 To evangelize the Nations, then on all
 Baptiz'd, shall them with wondrous gifts endue
 To speak all Tongues, and do all Miracles,
 As did their Lord before them. (XII.485-502)

The Trinity is hymned by the angelic choirs :

Thee Father first they sung Omnipotent, . . .
 Thee next they sang of all Creation first
 Begotten Son, Divine Similitude, . . .
on thee
 Impresst the effulgence of his Glory abides,
 Transfus'd on thee his ample Spirit rests.
 (III.372-389)

The internal fellowship of the Three Persons is implied when Adam, pleading for a companion for himself, says to God :

Thou in thy secrecy although alone
Best with thyself accompanied, seek'st not
 Social communication, . . . (VIII.427)

In the Trinity "the several Persons are the several subsisting relations really distinct from each other" ¹ in origin (in order, not time) but one and the same in substance ; analogously, in man, who is made in the image of God, being, knowing, and willing are distinct. In God these acts are so intense, so complete, that each is a Person. The Three Persons have one and the same essence, and every external operation of God is due to the whole Trinity and cannot be attributed to one Person alone except by appropriation. Saint Thomas explains with respect to creation :

To create belongs to God according to His being, that is, His essence, which is common to the three Persons. Hence to create . . . is common to the whole Trinity. Nevertheless, the divine Persons, according to the nature of their procession, have a causality respecting the creation of things. Hence . . . the Father made the creature through His Word, which is His Son ; and through His Love, which is the Holy Ghost . . . The power of creation, whilst common to the three Persons, belongs to them in a kind of order. For the Son receives it from the Father, and the Holy Ghost from both. ²

In *Paradise Lost* the Father, having freely chosen to create the world, addresses the Son :

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.
 (VII.163)

The poem shows creation as the work of the Three Persons :

Heav'n op'n'd wide
 Her ever-during Gates, Harmonious sound
 On golden Hinges moving, to let forth
 The *King of Glory* in his powerful *Word*
 And *Spirit* coming to create new Worlds.
 (VII.205)

Besides the Trinity, we may consider here one other theological question : How nearly can the account of creation in *Paradise Lost* be interpreted in accord with Catholic orthodoxy ?

Thus God the Heav'n created, thus the Earth
 Matter unform'd and void . . .
 And vital virtue infus'd, and vital warmth
 Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg'd
 The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs
 Adverse to life. (VII.232-239)

1. SAINT THOMAS, I, q.30, a.2.

2. *Ibid.*, I, q.45, a.6. Cf. *Gen.* 1:2, JOHN 1:3.

Light had not yet been created. It is worth noting that *black* and *cold* are negative terms, as modern science explains. Milton asserts that God created matter unformed. It is interesting to notice how closely these lines of Milton parallel Saint Augustine.

Since therefore God began creating with the heavens and the earth, and the earth itself, as Scripture adds, was at first invisible and formless, light not being as yet made and darkness covering the face of the deep (that is to say, covering an undefined chaos of earth and sea) for where light is not darkness must be. ¹

Saint Augustine teaches that God created this matter out of nothing — nothing being the absence, not the presence, of a material cause. The things created are the external realization of the immaterial exemplars in the mind of God, in a finite way, as Milton expresses it, "answering his great Idea" (*PL*, VII.557). The Son, who created them by his "Omnific Word" (217), summoned them out of nothing, for "immediate are the Acts of God" (176).

Under the supposition that God created matter out of nothing by His Will, according to His exemplars or ideas, we may thus understand Milton: Chaos is the realm of unformed matter. Night is pure negation outside the formless but circumscribed matter.

Boundless the deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space. (VII.168)

The space is not vacuous because God fills the infinitude of the Night or the Deep beyond created matter by virtue of His immensity. As Saint Thomas remarks:

To be everywhere absolutely . . . belongs to God alone. For whatever number of places be supposed, even if an infinite number be supposed besides what already exist, it would be necessary that God should be in all of them . . . as to His very self. ²

God expresses His complete freedom to create or not:

Though I uncircumscrib'd myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessity or Chance
Approach not me, and what I will is Fate.
(VII.170)

God, free to act or not, at various times (days) chooses to put forth His goodness, and wins from Chaos by the act of creation new worlds raised to order — the cosmos.

1. *De Civitate Dei* XI.9. Cf. *Gen.* 1:2; also SAINT THOMAS, I, q.66, a.1.

2. SAINT THOMAS, I, q.8, a.4.

Milton seems to favor a limited evolution :

The Earth was form'd but in the Womb as yet
Of Waters, Embryon immature involv'd,
Appear'd not. (VII.276)

Similarly Saint Augustine observes :

As in the seed there are invisibly and at one time all the things which in course of time will grow into a tree, so the universe must be conceived . . . having had at the same time all things which were made in it and with it . . . but also those things which earth and water produced potentially and causally, before in the course of time they came into being in the shape in which they are now known to us. ¹

With respect to the Three Persons of the Trinity and the work of creation, as the quoted passages witness, *Paradise Lost* seems in harmony with the teaching 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 *De Doctrina Christiana*.

Since *Paradise Lost* is not, however, a theological treatise but a narrative poem, the question arises, what is the religious and artistic impact of its story and its characters on the reader ?

III

Its very magnitude confers on *Paradise Lost* a fundamental grandeur. In one magnificently constructed epic poem Milton depicts the vast sweep of events from the creation of the angels to the Last Judgment, events that had inspired the cycles of the medieval miracle plays. He dramatically presents the titanic struggle of the forces of Good and Evil and in particular their struggle for the soul of man. Both the lines of conflict and the opposing characters, sharply drawn, are powerful in their moral and artistic implications.

In trial of their fidelity God commanded the angels to adore His Son (V.600-615). Lucifer refused and led a revolt (V.597). The Son drove the rebels over the abyss to fall nine days into Hell (VI.801). There we meet them at the opening of the poem, for, in accordance with epic tradition, Milton plunges *in medias res*. The action of the poem therefore begins when Satan, awakening in the fiery gulf that flamed with " no light but rather darkness visible " (I.63), conceives a plan of revenge on God by ruining man (I.650), who is destined to replace the fallen angels (VII.150). By imbruting himself (IX.166) Satan seduces Eve and, through her, Adam and returns to Hell expecting

1. *De Genesi ad litteram* V. xxiii.45.

triumph, but instead he is greeted by hisses and he experiences the degradation of himself and his fellow rebels (X.541). This ironical denouement shows that the antagonist¹ " Arch Angel ruin'd " (I.593) contends in vain against the protagonist Son of God. By incarnating Himself the Son through love and mercy (X.58, 209-223) initiates a counter-action, redeems the souls of men corrupted through Satan's hate and desire for revenge, outwits Satan, Death, and Sin (XI.55-66, 359), wins hope and joy out of despair (139, 167), and returns to heaven as victor with the multitude He has saved (III.250-261) ; VI.880-892 ; X.613-639 ; XII.390, 410, 431, 469-478).

Adam, like Othello, is acted upon. On his fall the whole poem is focused. As the central theme it is mentioned in the first line and it constitutes the turning point of the plot (IX.906). Like the peripety of *Ædipus the King*, it has the quality of irony. To Satan, Adam's fall appears as consummate victory and revenge, whereas it is really a " happy fault " that makes manifest the great love of the Redeemer (XII.471), for God knows how to draw good out of evil, as the revelations to Adam in the last two books show. Adam's flaw is his excessive and ill-ordered love of Eve. " Was she thy God ? " (X.145) All sin implies a similar disorder.

Satan, like Iago, initiates the action and, though evil, he is a superb artistic creation. Milton first introduces him as a villain (as the words I have italicized below clearly show).

. . . say first what cause
 Mov'd our Grand Parents in that happy State,
 Favour'd of Heav'n so lightly, to fall off
 From their Creator and transgress his Will
 For one restraint, Lords of the World besides ?
 Who first *seduc'd* them to that *foul revolt* ?
 Th' *infernal Serpent* ; he it was whose *guile*
 Stirr'd up with *Envy* and *Revenge*, *deceiv'd*
 The Mother of Mankind, what time his *Pride* . . .
 Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
 Raised *impious War* . . . (I.28-43)

Likewise Milton ejects Satan ignominiously just when he exultingly awaits acclaim :

. . . Ye have th' account
 Of my performance : What remains, ye Gods,
 But up and enter now into full bliss.
 So having said, a while he stood, expecting
 Their universal shout and high applause
 To fill his ear, when contrary he hears
 On all sides, from innumerable tongues

1. Satan calls himself " antagonist " X.387 ; cf. also II.509.

A dismal universal hiss, the sound
 Of public scorn ; he wonder'd, but not long
 Had leisure, wond'ring at himself now more ;
 His Visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare,
 His Arms clung to his Ribs, his Legs entwining
 Each other, till supplanted down he fell
 A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone,
 Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power
 Now rul'd him, punisht in the shape he sinn'd,
 According to his doom ; he would have spoke,
 But hiss for hiss return'd with forked tongue
 To forked tongue, for now were all transform'd
 Alike, to Serpents all as accessories
 To his bold Riot : . . .

Thus was th' applause they meant,
 Turn'd to exploding hiss, triumph to shame
 Cast on themselves from their own mouths.

(X.501-547)

In view of this evidence, can anyone judiciously hold that Milton really admires Satan, as some critics contend ? It must be remembered that Satan is a powerful dramatic figure whose acts and words the artist who created him need not approve. He is drawn on a grander scale than Goethe's Mephistopheles, and he is much more complex and subtle than Manfred or any other example of the boldly cynical Byronic man (whom apparently Byron does approve). It is true that in his very first speech to Beelzebub as they lie vanquished after their fall, Satan manifests an indomitable spirit, a quality which usually evokes admiration.

What though the field be lost ?
 All is not lost ; the unconquerable Will,
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield :
 And what is else not to be overcome ?
 That Glory never shall his wrath or might
 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
 With suppliant knee, and deify his power
 Who from the terror of this Arm so late
 Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath
 This downfall ; . . .
 Since through experience of this great event . . .
 We may with more successful hope resolve
 To wage by force or guile eternal War
 Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe, . . . (I.105-122)

But Milton immediately hastens to point out the divergence between his words and his true interior state.

Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
 Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
 Of contraries ;¹ all good to me becomes
 Bane, and in Heav'n much worse would be my state.
 . . . I seek, but others to make such
 As I, though thereby worse to me redound :
 For only in destroying I find ease
 To my relentless thoughts. (IX.114-130)

To compass his revenge, Satan determines to imbrute himself in the serpent, even though his whole being shrinks from so base a degradation.

O foul descent ! that I who erst contended
 With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrain'd
 Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime,
 This essence to incarnate and imbrute,
 That to the height of Deity aspir'd ;
 But what will not Ambition and Revenge
 Descend to ? who aspires must down as low
 As high he soar'd, obnoxious first or last
 To basest things. Revenge, at first though sweet,
 Bitter ere long back on itself recoils ;
 Let it ; I reck not, so it light well aim'd,
 Since higher I fall short, on him who next
 Provokes my envy, this new Favorite
 Of Heav'n, this Man of Clay, Son of despite,
 Whom us the more to spite his Maker rais'd
 From dust : spite then with spite is best repaid.
 (163)

Satan achieved his malicious purpose ; Adam and Eve fell. Immediately their fall was known in Heaven and the Father sent the Son to judge the transgressors and promise them mercy (X.58-62), because they fell, not self-tempted, like the angels, but deceived (III.130). In view of this human defect, the Son, foreknowing their fall, had freely offered, long before the event, to redeem men, and now, after it, He reiterates the offer (X.71-79).

To accentuate the direct opposition between Satan and the Son of God in contending for the soul of man, Milton presents the Son's offer to undertake man's redemption in close rhetorical parallel to Satan's offer to undertake his destruction. In both passages, the question who shall go on this important mission (II.402-416 ; III,209-216) evokes mute consternation among the assembled spirits (II.417-426 ; III.217-224) until at last (II.426-429 ; III.224-226) one accepts

1. For a discussion of the emotional impact of contraries, especially in Renaissance literature, see Sister MIRIAM JOSEPH, C.S.C., *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York, 1947), pp.131-133.

(II.430-444 ; III.236-265). Summarizing the situation which will involve an encounter with Sin and Death, the Son of God speaks to His Father in behalf of man :

Behold me then, me for him, life for life
 I offer, on me let thine anger fall ;
 Account me man ; I for his sake will leave
 Thy bosom, . . . and for him lastly die
 Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage ; . . .
 But I shall rise Victorious and subdue
 My vanquisher, spoil'd of his vaunted spoil ;
 Death his death's wound shall then receive, and stoop
 Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarm'd. (III.236-263)

Raphael, sent to prepare Adam for his trial, warns him that if he eats of the forbidden tree,

Death is the penalty impos'd, beware,
 And govern well thy appetite, lest sin
 Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death.
 (VII.545)

In contrast to Satan's barren remorse is the contrite repentance of Adam and Eve (X.1086-92). Hardly had they ended their prayer when, through their Advocate in Heaven, they found new hope, strength, joy, and peace (XI.136-158). Sent by God, Michael informs Adam that Death is delayed in order to allow them time to atone for their sin with good deeds (252-258).

Through a series of visions and narration Michael reveals to Adam the history of his descendants in which God's grace contends with the sinfulness of men (359). First he impresses upon him the hereditary character of his sin (423-428) ; cf. IX.415), and he shows him the violent deed of Cain that wrought on Abel the first death of man on earth. Then follow visions of death coming in many shapes, through disease, war, and the deluge. At the sight of the misery his sin has caused, Adam is overcome with the burden of his wrong (XI.763-786) until he finds in Noah a descendant in whom he can rejoice. He also learns that obedience to laws and rites revealed through Moses so delights God that He makes His tabernacle with men (XII.245). Milton beautifully celebrates the part the Virgin Mary played in the Redemption. Hearing of his Redeemer's birth, Adam bursts out in joy :

Virgin Mother, Hail,
 High in the love of Heav'n, yet from my Loins
 Thou shalt proceed, and from thy Womb the Son
 Of God most High ; so God with men unites.
 Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise
 Expect with mortal pain : (XII.379)

For Adam had heard the curse upon the Serpent

. . . then verifi'd
When Jesus son of Mary second Eve,
Saw Satan fall like Lightning down from Heav'n,
(X.182)

Satan, too, derisively reported it to his followers :

His Seed, when is not set, shall bruise my head ;
A World who would not purchase with a bruise ? ¹
(499)

But now Michael reveals to Adam how his Seed, the Son of God, in time, shall vanquish Satan, Sin, and Death :

. . . thy punishment
He shall endure by coming in the Flesh . . .
Seiz'd on by force, judg'd and to death condemn'd
A shameful and accurst, nail'd to the Cross
By his own Nation, slain for bringing Life ;
But to the Cross he nails thy Enemies,
The Law that is against thee, and the sins
Of all mankind, with him there crucifi'd,
. . . so he dies,
But soon revives, Death over him no power
Shall long usurp ; ere the third dawning light,
Return, the Stars of Morn shall see him rise
Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light,
Thy ransom paid, which Man from death redeems,
. . . the benefit embrace
By Faith not void of works : this God-like act
Annuls thy doom, the death thou shouldst have di'd
In sin for ever lost from life ; this act
Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength
Defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms, . . .
Then to the Heav'n of Heav'ns he shall ascend
With victory . . .
Then enter into glory, and resume
His Seat at God's right hand, . . . (XII.404-457)

Recognizing God's surpassing Providence, Adam exclaims (in the spirit of the liturgy of Holy Saturday, *O felix culpa*) :

O goodness infinite, goodness immense !
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good ; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness ! full of doubt I stand,

1. Cf. *Othello*, IV.iii.64.

Whether I should repent me now of sin
 By me done and occasion'd, or rejoice
 Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
 To God more glory, more good will to Men
 From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. (469)

And so the mighty conflict between the antagonist Satan and the protagonist Son ends with grace abounding for man. Satan freely chose evil as his good, the particularly malevolent evil of revenge on God by the ruination of man. The Son drew good out of this evil by redeeming man and reopening Heaven to him. Yet the conflict goes on, for every man must freely choose for himself either to accept the grace of redemption or to reject it.

IV

In this brief review of the story of *Paradise Lost*, some important ideas are implicit, but we shall now discuss explicitly a few moral and philosophical ideas in the poem. And first free will.

Milton is an ardent champion of free will. He emphatically asserts that God gave sufficient grace to the angels, to Adam, and to his progeny and that His foreknowledge and predestination of the elect in no way interferes with the exercise of their free will. In order to relate the fall of Adam, which was foreseen before Satan journeying from Hell had yet arrived on Earth, to the central theme of *Paradise Lost* expressed at its opening, Milton employs rhetorical parallelism : " whose fault ? " (III.96) echoes " what cause " (I.28), and in the two passages the pattern that follows the question is similar. The Father, foreseeing Adam's fall, speaks of it to His Son :

... whose fault?
 Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of me
 All he could have; I made him just and right,
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
 Such I created all th' Ethereal powers
 And Spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd;
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
 ... nor can justly accuse
 Their maker, or their making, or their Fate;
 As if predestination over-rul'd
 Their will, ... they themselves decreed
 Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, ...
 So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
 Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
 They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
 Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
 I form'd them free, and free they must remain

Till they enthrall themselves : else I must change
 Their Nature, and revoke the high Decree
 Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
 Their freedom, they themselves ordain'd their fall.
 (III.96-128)

Milton insists on the necessity of prevenient grace which, while showing man's complete dependence on God, enhances his freedom. The Father continues :

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
 Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
 Freely voutsaf't ; once more I will renew
 His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall'd
 By sin to foul exorbitant desires ;
 Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand . . .
 By me upheld, that he may know how frail
 His fall'n condition is, and to me owe
 All his deliv'rance, and to none but me.
 (173-182)

When, in time, Adam and Eve have fallen, Milton re-emphasizes their dependence on grace.

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
 Praying, for from the Mercy seat above
 Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
 The stony from their hearts, . . . (XI.1)

The Son, their great Intercessor, presenting their prayers to His Father, comments further on grace :

See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung
 From thy implanted Grace in Man, these Sighs
 And Prayers, which in this Golden Censer, mixt
 With Incense, I thy Priest before thee bring, . . . (23)

Most impressive, however, are Milton's ardent and reiterated assertions that free will is not only consonant with obedience but dependent on it. This thesis, one of the most important in *Paradise Lost*, is structurally imbedded in this poem whose action, vast in space and time, moves under the Eye of Eternity, for the Godhead, majestic and serene in its Omniscient Now, sees rebellion rising in the first "abstrusest thoughts" of Lucifer and his cohorts (V.711-715) and likewise, observing Satan "Coasting the wall of Heav'n" (III.71) and preparing to alight on Earth, decrees Mercy and Redemption *before* man falls despite his freedom. Beholding Adam at prayer and work in Eden (V.209-220), God mercifully sends Raphael to warn him

that his will is free yet mutable (235). Raphael instructs Adam in particular on the relation of obedience and love to freedom :

Myself and all th' Angelic Host that stand
 In sight of God enthron'd, our happy state
 Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds ;
 On other surety none ; freely we serve,
 Because we freely love, as in our will
 To love or not ; in this we stand or fall :
 And some are fall'n, to disobedience fall'n,
 And so from Heav'n to deepest Hell ; O fall
 From what high state of bliss into what woe !
 (V.535)

Then, to fortify instruction by example, Raphael narrates the revolt with consequent loss of liberty of the disobedient angels (V.792-VI.664) and the victory through strength of innocence of the obedient hosts (VI.398-405). Before parting from him, Raphael earnestly summarizes his mission to prepare Adam for his trial by reminding him that the happiness not only of himself but also of his descendants depends upon the proper use of his free will and that woe will follow its misuse, if disordered love or passion blind his judgment (VIII.633-643).

In the human story Milton treats freedom in relation to both the obedience which man owes to God and that which a wife owes to her husband. Thoroughly instructed by Raphael, Adam explains to Eve the nature of free will, subject to surprise and deceit. He warns her not rashly to lay herself open to temptation by separating herself from him in their work, but rather to avoid it, for trial will come unsought (IX.342-363). Conscious of her free will (284), Eve nevertheless persists in her plan to work by herself. Deceived by the Serpent, she eats of the forbidden tree and afterwards offers it to Adam. He, freely choosing to cast his lot with hers and die with her rather than live without her (906, 952), also eats (997). After this disobedience has begun to work its deteriorating effects in both of them, Eve blames her husband for weakly yielding to her, but Adam reasserts that he left her free (1171-74).

At every opportunity, Milton continues to stress free will. The allseeing, omniscient God does not hinder Satan from tempting man, who is "with strength entire and free Will arm'd" (X.9). The Eternal Father bids the returning angelic guard not to be dismayed at their unsuccessful watch over man, for their sincerest care could not prevent his fall. It resulted from his own misuse of free will, an act foreseen and foretold, but, far from being necessitated by divine decree, it was untouched by lightest impulse (X.34-47).

In the last book of the poem, when Michael narrates to Adam the events of human history "Betwixt the world destroy'd and world

restor'd" (XII.3), the story of Nimroc and Babel expresses a scorn for tyranny, which usurps authority and violates the freedom and just order of man's relation to man in civil society (24-101). Through the comments of Michael rings Milton's own conviction derived from his political experience that personal servitude to passion (the heritage of Adam's original lapse) reduces to political servitude.

Man till then free. Therefore since he permits
 Within himself unworthy Powers to reign
 Over free Reason, God in Judgment just
 Subjects him from without to violent Lords ; . . .
 Deprives them of their outward liberty,
 Their inward lost : (XII.89-101)

Not only does Milton thus forcefully reiterate the freedom of the will at every strategic point in the structure of his poem, but he expresses it most eloquently in the debates between Abdiel¹ and Lucifer. This is especially significant because in Abdiel Milton has created the character he apparently admires most, and the reader quickly senses that what Abdiel says Milton himself fervently holds.

Lucifer assures his followers, one of whom at this point is Abdiel, that they are all equally free, for their differences in order and degree do not jar with liberty, but he declares that to obey the Father's command to adore the Son would be intolerable servitude (V.772-802). Abdiel, "than whom none with more zeal" obeys divine commands, vehemently denies his assertion that it is "Flatly unjust, to bind with Laws the free" (819). He asks Lucifer if he will dispute the points of liberty with God who made him, who, provident of their good and dignity, is bent rather to exalt their happy state by this command, since by acknowledging the Son's reign, their own glory is not obscured but "more illustrious made" (842). Defiantly Lucifer bids Abdiel watch them try by proof who is their equal when they gird "th' Almighty Throne Beseeking or besieging" (868).

Clearly understanding that in law there is freedom, Abdiel warns Lucifer that in revolt he will find not liberty but slavery, for

That Golden Scepter which thou didst reject
 Is now an Iron Rod to bruise and break
 Thy disobedience. (886)

When Lucifer accuses the angels that come against him of servility, Abdiel flings the charge back at him in ringing tones by sharply distinguishing his false concept of servitude from the true.

Unjustly thou deprav'st it with the name
 Of Servitude to serve whom God ordains,

1. Abdiel is the name of a human being, a descendant of Gad mentioned in *I Paralipomenon* 5:15.

Or Nature ; God and Nature bid the same,
 When he who rules is worthiest, and excels
 Them whom he governs. This is servitude,
 To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebell'd
 Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,
 Thyself not free, but to thy self enthrall'd.
 (VI.174)

Lucifer's followers experience the first effects of the enthrallment resulting from their disobedience when they first feel fear and pain and ignominiously flee before the conquering host (394). One bitterly complains :

. . . too unequal work we find
 Against unequal arms to fight in pain,
 Against unpain'd, impassive ; from which evil
 Ruin must needs ensue ; for what avails
 Valor or strength, though matchless, quell'd with pain
 Which all subdues, . . .
 But pain is perfect misery, the worst
 Of evils, and excessive, overturns
 All patience. (VI.453-464)

V

The abuse of free will raises questions about the nature of evil and certain of its interrelated aspects.

Evil is negative. It is a defect, a lack of good. The only essential evil is sin. Sin is in the will. The will chooses sin as a good, a gratification of pride, sensuality, or avarice ; but at the same time the intellect, though darkened, knows the act is evil in that it is a deflection from the true good. A characteristic of sin in the conscious choice of an apparent rather than a real good. A determination to overcome this confusion between reality and appearance is expressed in the motto *Esse quam videri*, a theme strongly emphasized not only in *Paradise Lost* but in the work of Spenser, Shakespeare, and many other Renaissance writers.¹ Hypocrisy is the deliberate concealment of reality with a false appearance.

Sin is seeking self instead of God. The intellect, knowing self to be finite and created, recognizes that preferring self, the creature, to God, the Creator, is evil, is a defect. It is a monstrous disproportion, a perversion of order. It denies in practice the dependence of the creature on the Creator. It falsely regards the creature as self-sufficient. The creature sets himself up as his own providence, indulges a false independence and security. Saint Thomas analyzes this as the essential perversion of the sin both of Lucifer and of Adam :

1. This theme is treated in detail by THEODORE SPENCER in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York, 1943). See also Sister MIRIAM JOSEPH, *op. cit.*, pp.110f.

But he [the devil] desired resemblance with God in this respect, — by desiring, as his last end of beatitude, something which he could attain by the virtue of his own nature, turning his appetite away from supernatural beatitude, which is attained by God's grace. Or, if he desired as his last end that likeness of God which is bestowed by grace, he sought to have it by the power of his own nature ; and not from Divine assistance according to God's ordering. . . . He sought to have final beatitude of his own power, whereas this is proper to God alone. ¹

Accordingly, while both (namely the devil and the first man) coveted God's likeness inordinately, neither of them sinned by coveting a likeness of nature. But the first man sinned chiefly by coveting God's likeness, as regards *knowledge of good and evil*, according to the serpent's instigation, namely that by his own natural power he might decide what was good, and what was evil for him to do ; or again that he should of himself fore-know what good and what evil should befall him. Secondly he sinned by coveting God's likeness as regards his own power of operation, namely that by his own natural power he might act so as to obtain happiness . . . Nevertheless both coveted somewhat to be equal to God, in so far as each wished to rely on himself in contempt of the order of the Divine rule. ²

The ancient Greeks, whose writings strongly influenced Milton, called this overconfidence of men in their own power *hybris*. For denying his dependence on them, the gods would punish a man and abandon him to suffer ruin. Agamemnon, for example, arrogates to himself an honor reserved to the gods in walking on the purple tapestry. Therefore the gods abandon him, and Clytemnestra succeeds in killing him. That is just what she wanted. That is why she induced him to walk on the tapestry. Milton's Samson commits *hybris* (SA, 496-501, 529-540) and God abandons him until he humbly repents. The Greek writers regarded *hybris* as the worst form of excess. Æschylus especially condemns excess and praises moderation. The theme of temperance as opposed to excess is outstanding in Spenser, whom Milton admired and imitated. In angels, excess takes the form of pride ; in men, pride or sensuality. These then are closely interrelated aspects of evil : the confusion of appearance and reality, hypocrisy, *hybris*, excess. They are strikingly illustrated in *Paradise Lost*.

But first the question may arise, if evil is negative, can it exist and can it enter into the mind of God ? Milton writes :

Evil into the mind of God or man
May come and go, so un approv'd, and leave
No spot or blame behind. (V.117)

Saint Thomas comments :

Whoever knows a thing perfectly must know all that can be accidental to it. Now there are some good things to which corruption by evil may be

1. I, q.63, a.4.

2. II, II, q.163, a.4. Cf. LUKE 12:16-21.

accidental. Hence God would not know good things perfectly unless He also knew evil things. Now a thing is knowable in the degree in which it is ; hence, since this is the essence of evil that it is the privation of good, by the very fact that God knows good things He knows evil things also ; as by light is known darkness . . . The knowledge of God is not the cause of evil ; but is the cause of the good whereby evil is known . . . To know a thing by something else only, belongs to imperfect knowledge, if that thing is of itself knowable ; but evil is not of itself knowable, forasmuch as the very nature of evil means the privation of good ; therefore evil can neither be defined nor known except by good. ¹

In *Paradise Lost*, Michael, addressing Lucifer, reveals how evil originated and how it spread :

Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt,
Unnam'd in Heav'n, now plenteous, . . .
Heav'n casts thee out . . .
Hence then, and evil go with thee along
Thy offspring, to the place of evil, Hell, . . .
(VI.262-276)

Sin, or evil, was born when Lucifer *resolved* to revolt (V.668). How attractive Sin then seemed to him, Sin herself tells him when he sees her as she really is, detestable and foul (II.740-767). Later, deceived by his own false anticipations, Satan again gravely miscalculates the truth. Exultant over his expected triumph on returning to Hell, he addresses Sin as " Fair Daughter " (X.384), but instead of the awaited triumph he is greeted with " A dismal universal hiss " and falls prone " punish't in the shape he sinn'd " (508, 516). His pride, or hybris, led Lucifer to declare himself and his followers " self-begot, self-rai's'd . . . Our puissance is our own " (V.860, 864). To Michael he declared, " The strife which thou call'st evil . . . we style The strife of Glory " (VI.289). Milton repeatedly points out in Satan the contrast between reality and appearance (*italics mine*).

At last as from a Cloud his fulgent head
And shape Star-bright *appear'd*, or brighter, clad
With what *permissive glory* since his fall
Was left him, or *false glitter*. (X.449)

The arch hypocrite even beguiles the faithful angel Uriel,

For neither Man nor Angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone, . . . (III.682)

Like Iago, Satan, " Artificer of Fraud . . . the first That practis'd falsehood under saintly show " (IV.121), rehearses his plan to destroy

1. I, q.14, a.10.

Adam and Eve. He will excite their minds with excessive desire to know, since it is of the Tree of Knowledge they are forbidden to eat (514-527). Although Raphael had specifically warned them against excess in knowledge (VIII.167-178), for knowledge must be desired only "within bounds" (VII.120), Satan, who, like Belial, "could make the worse appear the better reason" (II.110), manages by "fair appearing" to "misinform the Will" of Eve to do what God expressly forbade (IX.354-356). Then Adam and Eve experience the reality as contrasted with false promises, for they

Soon found their Eyes how op'n'd, and their minds
How dark'n'd ; innocence, that as a veil
Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gone.
(IX.1053)

Too late they realize that "that false Worm" (1068) that could "counterfeit Man's voice" (1069) has (like the witches in *Macbeth*) adhered to the letter but deceived them in the sense, for now ironically they do indeed know "Both Good and Evil, Good lost and Evil got" (1072).

Three forms of deceit contributed to the fall of Adam and Eve : the guile of the Serpent ; Adam's confusion of false and true love for Eve ; and his consequent choice of Eve rather than God.

Adam's excessive praise of Eve provokes in Raphael the first frown in Paradise. Thereupon Raphael explains to Adam the difference between passion and true love by which he should ascend to heavenly love (VIII.579-594). Failing to heed Raphael's warning that Eve should acknowledge him "her Head, And to realities yield all her shows" (574), Adam weakly consents to let her separate herself from him. When she offers him the fruit of which she has already eaten, he clearly realizes that she has been ruined by fraud and he with her (IX.906), for, "fondly overcome with Female charm" (999), he chooses death with her rather than life and God's friendship without her (954). This monstrous choice of false values for true echoes Satan's terrible "Evil be thou my good" (IV.110). Nature twice bears witness to the terrible perversion, for "God and nature bid the same" (VI.176). When Eve ate the forbidden fruit,

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seal
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe, (VI.782)

and when Adam ate, "Earth trembl'd from her entrails . . . at completing of the mortal Sin Original" (1000-04). This witness is, however, unnoticed by the deluded human pair.

As with new Wine intoxicated both
They swim in mirth, and fancy that they feel
Divinity within them breeding wings
Wherewith to scorn the Earth : (1008)

Even after he has regained the friendship of God by repentance, Adam shows himself unable to distinguish between appearance and reality. When he sees the vision of Cain's race, he erroneously judges it good : " Here Nature *seems* fulfill'd in all her ends." Thereupon Michael cautions him, " Judge not what is best By pleasure, though to Nature *seeming* meet " (XI.602-604), for the wicked women that *seem* goddesses are " empty of all good " (616). When men began " to serve ungovern'd appetite," they defaced God's image, which they " did not reverence in themselves " (515-525). What seems passing fair " is really " luxury and riot " (715-717). Michael further warns Adam that certain false names deceive men, such as the false concept of glory in war, for men " styl'd great Conquerors " are really " Destroyers rightlier call'd and Plagues of men," and the false concept of fame keeps " what most merits fame in silence hid " (695-699).

VI

His own idea of what merits fame and honor Milton expresses eloquently in his characterization of Abdiel and other courageous lovers of truth and right. These characters clearly reflect his own dedication to the cause of truth as he saw it.

When Lucifer proposed revolt, only one among his followers, Abdiel, " The flaming Seraph fearless, though alone Encompass'd round with foes " (V. 875), vehemently protested against it, " but his zeal None seconded, as out of season judg'd, Or singular and rash " (849). With unstinted admiration Milton comments :

Among the faithless, faithful only he,
 Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
 Unshak'n, uneduc'd, unterrifi'd
 His Loyalty he kept, his Love, his Zeal ;
 Nor number, nor example with him wrought
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
 Though single. From amidst them forth he pass'd,
 Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustain'd
 Superior, nor of violence fear'd aught ;
 And with retorted scorn, his back he turn'd
 On those proud Tow'rs to swift destruction doom'd.
 (V.897)

Seeing " the dreadless Angel " come toward them, the good spirits rejoiced " That of so many Myriads fall'n, yet one Return'd not lost, " and thereupon the voice of God Himself

From midst a Golden Cloud thus mild was heard.
 Servant of God, well done, well hast thou fought
 The better fight, who single hast maintain'd
 Against revolted multitudes the Cause

Of Truth, in word mightier than they in Arms ;
 And for the testimony of Truth hast borne
 Universal reproach, far worse to bear
 Than violence : for this was all thy care
 To stand approv'd in sight of God ; though Worlds
 Judg'd thee perverse : (VI.28)

Like Saint Thomas More, accused at his trial of similar perverseness,¹ Abdiel shows how shortsighted even with respect to numbers is his accuser who identifies truth with the opinion held by a multitude. He retorts to Lucifer :

All are not of thy Train ; there be who Faith
 Prefer, and Piety to God, though then
 To thee not visible, when I alone
 Seem'd in thy World erroneous to dissent
 From all : my Sect thou seest, now learn too late
 How few sometimes may know, when thousands err. (143)

Other lone lovers of truth whom Milton ardently admires are Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. He describes Enoch as

The only righteous in a World perverse,
 And therefore hated, therefore so beset
 With Foes for daring single to be just,
 And utter odious Truth, . . . (XI.701)

that God exempted him from death. Noah, " the only Son of light In a dark Age . . . fearless of reproach and scorn, Or violence, " in vain admonishing men, shall be " Of them derided, but of God observ'd The one just Man alive " (808-818). Abraham is the " one faithful man " (XII.113) from whom God's Chosen People shall spring.

A modern reader may catch in current controversy echoes of some false views held by certain characters in *Paradise Lost*. Like Marx in his appeal to those who have nothing to lose but their chains, Moloch, in his summons to violent attack (II.85-105), " grounds his courage on despair " (126), as even Belial points out. Those who to-day propose humanism as a fourth faith, superior to the faith of Jews, Protestants, or Catholics, urge men to free themselves from superstitious fear and servitude to a mythical supernatural Power and to rely on themselves alone to overcome difficulties and gradually improve their lot in this world. This counsel to seek their own good from themselves (much in the disdainful spirit of the Byronic man) echoes that of Belial :

. . . Let us not then pursue . . . our state
 Of splendid vassalage, but rather seek

1. SAINT THOMAS MORE pointed out to his shortsighted accusers that the absent and the blessed who were on his side were far more numerous than all the submissive bishops and laity of England. See HARPSFIELD'S *Life of More* (London, 1932), p.195.

Our own good from ourselves, and from our own
 Live to ourselves, though in this vast recess,
 Free, and to none accountable, preferring
 Hard liberty before the easy yoke
 Of servile pomp. Our greatness will appear
 Then most conspicuous, when great things of small,
 Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse
 We can create, and in what place soe'er
 Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain
 Through labor and endurance. (II.249)

Much as Milton disliked war, he points out that it is possible for
 "Peace to corrupt no less than War to waste" (XI.784) when men
 "Shall change their course to pleasure, ease, and sloth, Surfeit, and
 lust" (794). He warns also against too great reliance on security by
 those who,

... cool'd in zeal
 Thenceforth shall practice how to live secure,
 Worldly or dissolute, on what their Lords
 Shall leave them to enjoy ; . . .
 So all shall turn degenerate, all deprav'd. (801-806)

After she realizes her sin, Eve, in her distraught confusion, proposes
 willful barrenness, "yet ere Conception to prevent The Race unblest"
 (X.987), and even suicide (1001-06). But Adam rejects "such acts
 Of contumacy" and reminds her of the remedy in God's promise :

... thy Seed shall bruise
 The Serpent's head ; . . . which will be lost
 By death brought on ourselves, or childless days
 Resolv'd, as thou proposest : (X.1031-38)

Milton delights in celebrating chaste and holy marriage as
 opposed to "Court Amours" or "the bought smile Of Harlots"
 (IV.765). Adam describes his first sight of Eve, the ideal woman,
 when after her creation he awoke.

Such as I saw her in my dream, adorn'd
 With what all Earth or Heaven could bestow
 To make her amiable : On she came,
 Led by her Heav'nly Maker, though unseen,
 And guided by his voice, nor uninform'd
 Of nuptial Sanctity and marriage Rites :
 Grace was in all her steps, Heav'n in her Eye
 In every gesture dignity and love. (VIII.482)

Adam thanks God for this fairest of his gifts, for whom man

... shall forgo
 Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere ;
 And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul.
 (497)

When he leads Eve to the Nuptial Bower, Nature celebrates the first holy marriage :

. . . all Heav'n
 And happy Constellations on that hour
 Shed their selectest influence ; the Earth
 Gave sign of gratulation, and each Hill ;
 Joyous the Birds ; fresh Gales and gentle Airs
 Whisper'd it to the Woods, and from their wings
 Flung Rose, flung Odours from the spicy Shrub
 Disporting, till the amorous Bird of Night
 Sung Spousal, and bid haste the Ev'ning Star
 On his Hill top, to light the bridal Lamp. (511)

Milton sings a hymn to chaste wedlock :

Hail wedded Love, . . . by thee
 Founded in Reason, Loyal, Just, and Pure
 Relations dear, and all the Charities
 Of Father, Son, and Brother, first were known . . .
 Perpetual Fountain of Domestic sweets, . . .
 Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights
 His constant Lamp, and waves his purple wings.
 (IV.750-764)

When Eve laments, as any woman would, that she must leave the familiar home she has tended and adorned, Michael consoles her :

Thy going is not lonely, with thee goes
 Thy Husband, him to follow thou art bound ;
 Where he abides think there thy native soil.
 (XI.290)

This duty of the wife to go wherever her husband goes (too often flouted today) is re-emphasized when at the moment of their departure from Eden, Eve, with true insight, bids Adam

. . . lead on,
 In me is no delay ; with thee to go.
 Is to stay here ; without thee here to stay,
 Is to go hence unwilling ; thou to me
 Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou.
 (XII.614)

Constituents of the good life as Milton presents them are work, leisure, solitude, wisdom, prayer, and worship.

Among creatures, work is the high prerogative of men, for, says Adam,

God hath set
 Labor and rest, as day and night to men . . .
 Man hath his daily work of body or mind

Appointed, which declares his Dignity,
 And the regard of Heav'n on all his ways.
 (IV.612-620)

Adam describes their work of lopping off the excess overgrowth of branches as "pleasant labor" (625). But he points out to Eve the needful and salutary uses of leisure.

Yet not so strictly hath our Lord impos'd
 Labor, as to debar us when we need
 Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,
 Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse
 Of looks and smiles, for smiles from Reason flow,
 To brute deni'd, and are of Love the food,
 Love not the lowest end of human life.
 For not to irksome toil, but to delight
 He made us, and delight to Reason join'd.
 (IX.235)

Adam acknowledges, however, that "solitude sometimes is best society" (249). Warning against excess in knowledge, Raphael declares, "to know That which before us lies in daily life, Is the prime Wisdom" (VIII.192). Michael gives to Adam a picture of the good life of man on earth that reminds one of Socrates' similar picture of the ideal life in the simple, healthy state.¹

. . . Men . . . fearing the Deity,
 With some regard to what is just and right
 Shall lead their lives, and multiply apace,
 Laboring the soil, and reaping plenteous crop,
 Corn, wine, and oil ; and from the herd or flock,
 Oft sacrificing Bullock, Lamb, or Kid,
 With large Wine-offerings pour'd, and sacred Feast,
 Shall spend their days in joy unblam'd and dwell
 Long time in peace by Families and Tribes
 Under paternal rule : (XII.15)

Instructed by the panorama of history which Michael has shown him, Adam sums up the good life as he now sees it :

Henceforth I learn that to obey is best,
 And love with fear the only God, to walk
 As in his presence, ever to observe
 His providence, and on him sole depend,
 Merciful over all his works, with good
 Still overcoming evil, and by small
 Accomplishing great things, by things deem'd weak
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise

1. PLATO, *Republic*, Bk.II.

By simply meek ; that suffering for Truth's sake
 Is fortitude to highest victory,
 And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life ;
 Taught this by his example whom I now
 Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest. (561)

Michael calls this the sum of wisdom, but admonishes him further :

... only add
 Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
 And Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
 By name to come call'd Charity, the soul
 Of all the rest : then wilt thou not be loath
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
 A Paradise within thee, happier far. (581)

Moral perfection falls far short, however, of man's supernatural destiny.¹ Precisely because man is " endu'd With Sanctity of Reason," he can and should be

... grateful to acknowledge whence his good
 Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes
 Directed in Devotion, to Adore
 And worship God Supreme, ... (VII.512)

In his poem Milton first introduces Adam speaking to Eve their mutual praise of God, while Satan eavesdrops to discover what their first words may reveal of their state :

... needs must the Power
 That made us, and for us this ample World
 Be infinitely good, and of his good
 As liberal and free as infinite,
 That rais'd us from the dust and plac't us here
 In all this happiness, who at his hand
 Have nothing merited, nor can perform
 Aught whereof he hath need, ... (IV.412)

In melodious verse, paraphrasing *Psalm* 148, Milton records the morning prayer of our first Parents in their happy, holy innocence.

Lowly they bow'd adoring, and began
 Their Orisons, each Morning duly paid . . .
 Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
 Their Maker, in fit strains pronounc't or sung . . .
 More tuneable than needed Lute or Harp . . .
 These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
 Almighty, thine this universal Frame,

1. *Paradise Lost*, in contrast to *The Faerie Queene*, never loses sight of God by concentrating merely on the moral virtues governing the relations of man to man.

Thus wondrous fair ; thyself how wondrous then ! . . .
 Speak ye who best can tell, ye Sons of light,
 Angels, for ye behold him, and with songs
 And choral symphonies, Day without Night,
 Circle his Throne rejoicing, ye in Heav'n,
 On Earth, join all ye Creatures to extol
 Him first, him last, him midst, and without end.
 (V.144-165)

Glorifying God is the one activity of creatures that requires no moderation, for it alone

. . . leads to no excess
 That reaches blame, but rather merits praise
 The more it seems excess, . . . (III.696)

The efficacy of prayer is attested when God bids Michael go to Adam and Eve "Bewailing their excess" (XI.111) and "send them forth, though sorrowing, yet in peace" (117), at the very moment they

Had ended now their Orisons, and found,
 Strength added from above, new hope to spring
 Out of despair, joy, but with fear yet linkt :
 (XI.137)

So impressed is Adam with the peace of heart won through prayer that he eloquently comments to his fellow-sinner :

Eve, easily may Faith admit, that all
 The good which we enjoy, from Heav'n descends
 But that from us aught should ascend to Heav'n
 So prevalent as to concern the mind
 Of God high-blest, or to incline his will,
 Hard to belief may seem ; yet this will Prayer,
 Or one short sigh of human breath, upborne
 Ev'n to the Seat of God. (141)

The reason for the efficacy of their prayer is shown in Heaven, where the Son intercedes for man before the Father's throne :

. . . hear his sighs though mute ;
 Unskilful with what words to pray, let me
 Interpret for him, me his Advocate
 And propitiation, . . . let him live
 Before thee reconcil'd . . . till Death . . .
 To better life shall yield him, where with me
 All my redeem'd may dwell in joy and bliss,
 Made one with me as I with thee am one. (31-44)

The supernatural destiny of man is emphasized throughout *Paradise Lost*, for the children of Adam are to take the place of the

fallen Angels and for all eternity join their voices to the faithful spirits who sing in happy, ceaseless praise of the Deity :

Fountain of Light, thyself invisible
 Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit'st
 Thron'd inaccessible, but when thou shad'st
 The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
 Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,
 Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,
 Yet dazzle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim
 Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.
 (III.375)

Milton pictures the highest perfection of God's intellectual creatures achieved in their sabbath worship of the Trinity through the

. . . acclamation and the sound
 Symphonious of ten thousand Harps that tun'd
 Angelic harmonies : . . .
 The Heav'ns and all the Constellations rung,
 The Planets in their stations list'ning stood,
 . . . the solemn Pipe,
 And Dulcimer, all Organs of sweet stop,
 All sounds on Fret by String or Golden Wire
 Temper'd soft Tunings, intermixt with Voice
 Choral or unison : . . .
 Great are thy works, Jehovah, infinite
 Thy power : what thought can measure thee or tongue
 Relate thee ; . . . ? Who seeks
 To lessen thee against his purpose serves
 To manifest the more thy might : his evil
 Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good . . .
 So sung they, and the Empyrean rung
 With *Halleluiahs* : Thus was Sabbath kept.
 (VII.558-634)

VII

From the evidence offered in this study it seems fair to conclude that an intelligent Catholic reader can enjoy in *Paradise Lost* the expression of dogmatic, moral, and philosophical truths impregnated with a power peculiar to poetry, the power not merely to teach but to delight and to move.

In this poem Milton insists, most strongly through Abdiel, that true freedom lies in obedience, for the Creator knows how the creature whom he has endowed with reason and free will and whom He assists with necessary preventing grace can achieve perfection. This discipline is not bondage. It is a false view, based on a false evaluation of self, that sees freedom in rebellion. Through rebellion Satan

experiences a " Hell within him " (IV.20), whereas through obedience Adam is assured a " Paradise within " him (XII.586). From free will flow the responsibility for choice and the consequent justice of punishment for disobedience (I.26). Milton shows sin as an essential violation of order multiple in its evil effects. Adam and Eve, " manifold in sin " (X.16), give way to anger, hate, mistrust, suspicion, discord, and sensual appetite (IX.1123-29). The proliferating nature of sin is most strikingly represented in the allegory of Sin and Death (II.790-797). The mistaking of appearance for reality, of false values for true, is most forcibly illustrated in Satan who thought Sin beautiful when she sprang from his brow in Heaven (V.668) and extremely revolting when he saw her blocking his passage at the gate of Hell (II.681). Impressive is the contrast between the two outcomes of the struggle of Satan against God for the soul of man. The first is Satan's false expectation of triumph in Hell ironically ending in a universal hiss (X.545). The second is the panorama of God's ways to men of good will, shown in Books XI and XII, in which through the Redeemer mercy triumphs over revenge, love over hate, good over evil. With the vast scene of its action moving always under the omniscient eye of the serene, majestic Triune God, beholding in one glance Earth, Hell, and the heavenly spheres, *Paradise Lost* conveys a sense of the reality and the unity of the invisible spiritual world — God, angels, demons, and the souls of men — and the supernatural destiny of all intelligent spirits to glorify their Creator in time and in eternity.

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