Beyond Sacrifice: Milton and the Atonement

GREGORY CHAPLIN

THE RECOVERY OF JOHN MILTON'S *DE DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA* IN 1823 from the Old State Paper Office in Whitehall, where the manuscript lay forgotten for nearly 150 years, led to a scandalous revelation: the great Protestant poet and tireless champion of English republicanism maintained a host of heterodox views, including one of the most ancient and reviled Christian heresies, Arianism.[1] Arians reject the Athanasian conception of the Trinity and hold that the Son of God is a finite being, generated in time, whose exalted status depends on the will of the Father. Defined and anathematized in the fourth century, this anti-Trinitarian heresy gained new traction in the late seventeenth century among moral and natural philosophers—Locke and Newton are the best-known examples—committed to the historically rigorous interpretation of scripture and to the rational formulation of religious doctrine. Since the nineteenth century, critics committed to the orthodoxy of Milton and his epic have sought to protect the poet from his own deeply held religious views by minimizing the relation between *Paradise Lost* and his theological treatise (his "dearest and best possession" [*De doctrina* 121]). The recent attempt to exclude *De doctrina* from the Miltonic canon is a particularly vivid example of this strategy at work.[2] But the heretical Christology that Milton takes pains to articulate and defend in *De doctrina* is crucial to our understanding of *Paradise Lost*. By embracing Arianism and deemphasizing the spectacle of the Crucifixion in his theory of salvation, or soteriology, Milton breaks with two definitive theological tenets that have been central to Christianity ever since it became a state religion under Constantine.[3] These heresies constitute the theological underpinnings of his radical republicanism, which upholds an idea of human dignity and agency antithetical to the tyrannical politics of torture and blood sacrifice.

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This heterodox view of the Son and his sacrifice finds its cosmological counterpart in an infinite universe with a plurality of worlds. In book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan soars through the newly created universe

> Amongst innumerable Stars, that shone
> Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other Worlds,
> Or other Worlds they seem'd, or happy Isles,
> Like those Hesperian Gardens fam'd of old,
> Fortunate Fields, and Groves and flow'ry Vales,
> Thrice happy Isles, but who dwelt happy there
> He stay'd not to enquire. (lines 565–71)

Intent on reaching earth, the "happy Isle" of Adam and Eve, Satan leaves these other "happy Isles" unexplored (2.410). But the provocative simile that compares these "other Worlds" to "Hesperian Gardens" invites us to imagine other garden-bound inhabitants who may or may not be constrained by their own forbidden fruit. Later, of course, Raphael warns Adam, "Dream not of other Worlds, what Creatures there / Live, in what state, condition, or degree" (8.175–76). His point is not that such worlds do not exist—indeed, he has just introduced Adam to the possibility that they do—but that Adam should leave such matters to God and enjoy his own lot. Instead of closing off speculation, however, the alliterative emphasis of Raphael's warning ("joy *th*ou / In what he gives to *th*ee, *th*is Paradise / And *th*y fair Eve" [170–72]) encourages us to believe that the universe contains other paradises and, perhaps, other Eves.

Fueled by the publication of Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* (1543), early modern conjecture about a plurality of inhabited worlds carried with it disturbing theological implications. As early as 1549, the Lutheran humanist Philip Melanchthon formulated the principal objection:

> There is one Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when he had gone forth into this world, died only once and was resurrected. He did not show himself elsewhere; neither did he die nor was he resurrected elsewhere. Therefore, it should not be imagined that there are many worlds, and because of this, it should not be imagined that Christ died and was often resurrected. Nor must it be thought that in any other world, without knowledge of the Son of God, men are restored to eternal life.[4]

Note the emphasis on singularity here: there is only one Son of God, and he sacrificed himself only once for the inhabitants of the one and only created world. The cumulative effect of these assertions is to insist that there is only one route to salvation. It leads through the Passion and encompasses everyone. Belief in the existence of other worlds, Melanchthon fears, would undermine orthodox Christocentric doctrine. Speculation about other redeemers and other redemptive acts would diminish the centrality and universal scope of Christ's sacrifice and of the atonement. Moreover, it would raise questions about why an omnipotent deity who created and governs a multitude of inhabited worlds chose to be incarnated, crucified, and resurrected on this one. Thomas Paine, who accepted the existence of other worlds, demonstrates that Melanchthon was right to worry. "To believe that God created a plurality of worlds at least as numerous as what we call stars," he argues in *The Age of Reason, Part I* (1794), "renders the Christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous and scatters it in the mind like feathers in the air. The two beliefs cannot be held together in the same mind; and he who thinks that he believes in both has thought but little of either" (303).

Milton would have disagreed. Instead of seeing the possibility of other worlds as a threat to his faith, he found reassurance in it. In *Paradise Lost*, he repeatedly turns our attention to this possibility: invoking Galileo's telescope observations, the narrator implies that the moon may be another earth (1.287–91, 5.261–63); Raphael's flight "between

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worlds and worlds" reinforces the likelihood that the stars of our universe are other worlds (5.268); and although Satan's Lucretian claim that "Space may produce new Worlds" is misleading, it reminds us that God can raise more universes out of Chaos, if he chooses (1.650). Yet Milton scholars, more focused on whether he leans toward a Ptolemaic or Copernican cosmos, tend to deflect or dismiss the theological implications of his universe. For instance, Harinder Singh Marjara suggests that Milton was drawn to "a universe that flew in the face of Aristotelianism and Christian orthodoxy" merely because of "its poetic possibilities" (80). But Milton's cosmos accommodates his heterodox theology. The idea of a plurality of worlds exerts two contrary pressures on the Trinity: it exalts the omnipotence of the creator, while it limits the significance of the redeemer. In effect, it produces a tension best resolved by rejecting the dogma of the Trinity and adopting the Arian belief that God the Father and the Son of God are two distinct beings—the former uncreated, infinite, and immutable and the latter created, finite, and changeable. In *De doctrina Christiana*, Milton takes this heretical view, declaring it "more clearly deducible from the text of the scripture than the currently accepted doctrine" (203), and in *Paradise Lost* he situates the Father ("Omnipotent, / Immutable, Immortal, Infinite, / Eternal King" [3.372–74]) and the Son ("of all Creation first, / Begotten Son, Divine Similitude" [383–84]) in a cosmos that many of his contemporaries found incompatible with their orthodox Trinitarian God.

Whereas others took comfort in the idea of one world governed by a single Christian doctrine, Milton embraced God's infinite power to create and celebrated the multiplicity of that creation. Indeed, his poetic universe can be seen as a cosmic correlative of his views on intellectual freedom and religious tolerance. In *Areopagitica* (1644), he suggests that truth "may have more shapes then one," subverting claims predicated on the assumption that there is only one world because there is only one path to salvation (563). Likewise, the cosmos that Milton hints at in *Paradise Lost* reflects the views on tolerance and nonconformity that he sets out in *Of True Religion* (1673): his rejection of a single, monolithic church that subsumes both political and ecclesiastical power in favor of a plurality of religious sects corresponds to his preference for a plurality of worlds. He maintains that Protestant sects as divergent as Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Arians, Socinians, and Arminians have been taught by the divine Spirit "all things absolutely necessary to salvation" (424). Throughout his later writings, from *Areopagitica* onward, Milton tends to destabilize political, religious, and intellectual monopolies by dispersing power and authority to multiple sites. Instead of a single, divinely ordained monarch, for instance, Milton invests political authority in all men: "No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself."[5]

By stressing the possibility of other "Hesperian Gardens" in *Paradise Lost*, Milton does exactly what Melanchthon fears and dislodges Christ's sacrifice from its central position, both cosmically and theologically. By embracing Arianism, he goes even further and redefines the nature of that sacrifice. God—or, rather, the second person of the Christian Godhead—no longer dies on the cross; the Son of God, a created being distinct from the one true God, dies instead. In *Paradise Lost*, then, cosmology and theology converge to transform the significance of the Son's sacrifice for humankind and thus the relation between the Father, the Son, and the individual believer. As I will argue later, Milton enlists the classical friendship tradition to help him recast the sacrifice as an ethical decision, shifting our attention from Christ's suffering on the cross to the Son's heroic offer to die for Man. This tradition provides him with examples of friends whose sublime devotion and self-sacrifice

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provide a new model for the bond between redeemer and redeemed. I am not claiming that Milton's fascination with other worlds compelled him to become an Arian. Rather, the Arianism that he adopted through his own reading of scripture allowed him to move past his vexed relation to the Crucifixion and imagine the poetic universe that we recognize as distinctively his own. Reflecting on the heresies of *De doctrina Christiana*, William Kerrigan convincingly concludes, "Milton bent his religion into conformity with himself" (166). Nowhere is this more true, I would argue, than in his heretical view of the Son.

The Crucifixion

More than two decades before he began work on *De doctrina* in the mid to late 1650s, Milton displays a resistance to the Passion, and especially the Crucifixion, that separates him from mainstream Protestantism and points toward his future heterodoxy. Protestant reflection on the Passion of Christ tended to prompt emotional responses—frequently a profound sense of sinfulness and depravity linked to worthlessness, helplessness, and dejection—antithetical to Milton's sense of himself. Examining the role of Calvinist Passion narratives in early modern England, Debora Shuger avers "these texts attempt to produce a specific version of Christian selfhood—a divided selfhood gripped by intense, contradictory emotions," and she finds that "Christ's agony provided the primary symbol for early modern speculation on selfhood and society. The tortured and torturing males who supply the dramatis personae of the Crucifixion . . . haunt the interior landscape of the Puritan automachia" (9, 127). Michael Schoenfeldt draws similar conclusions about the role of Christ's sacrifice in devotional poetry. Poems by Donne, Herbert, and Milton, he contends, look at the Passion "through squinting eyes amid slumping postures, as if they were glimpsing a trauma too immense for human comprehension" (562). Instead of dwelling on the actual Crucifixion, they focus on their inability to respond to it. "The fitting object of sacrifice," he writes, "is the tacitly arrogant self that would claim to be able to respond appropriately to this event" (564). Schoenfeldt makes a compelling case for Donne and Herbert. But Milton provides him with a much more limited example: the incomplete eight-stanza poem "The Passion," which Milton attempted after his successful ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." Nonetheless, Schoenfeldt suggests that "The Passion" "offers a formal version of the stuttering inability to respond to Christ's sacrifice" and concludes that for Milton, as for Donne and Herbert, "Christ's sacrifice ultimately defeats poetry" (581).

But Milton would rarely concede defeat in anything. Indeed, throughout all his works, nothing is more rare than admissions of inability or failure. At times, his confidence in his own abilities seems almost limitless. In his poem *Mansus* (1638–39), the young, unknown Milton imagines himself, after "no silent career," being rewarded for the brilliant literary works he has yet to write:

> So I should rest in perfect peace. Then, if there be such a thing as faith and assured rewards of the righteous, I myself, far remote in the ethereal homes of the gods who dwell in heaven, whither labor and a pure mind and ardent virtue lead, shall look down upon these events—as much as the fates permit—from some part of that mysterious world, and with a serene spirit and a face suffused with smiles and rosy light, I shall congratulate myself on ethereal Olympus. (lines 86, 93–100)

In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), Milton depicts himself as leading us out of a "labyrinth of servitude," a feat that places his contribution to "civill and human life" above that of "the inventors of wine and oyl" (240). There are famous expressions of doubt and anxiety scattered throughout his poetry, such as his fear that "an age too late,

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or cold / Climate, or Years" might undermine his epic ambitions (*Paradise Lost* 9.44–45). But these expressions tend to foreground rather than diminish his aspirations and accomplishments. If Milton had wanted to make Christ's agony central to his poetics, he would have found a way to do so. "The truth," as J. H. Hanford observed long ago, "is that the Crucifixion was not a congenial theme to him at any time. Even thus early he seems to have felt instinctively that man's salvation depends upon himself and that he needs Christ as a guide and model rather than as a redeemer" (145). Instead of linking Milton to Donne and Herbert, his unfinished poem on the Passion already marks his distance from them.

Throughout his life, Milton rejects the model of reformed selfhood that seeks to install the Crucifixion as its central scene. As a poet, he stands and waits; he does not squint or slouch. His unwillingness to assume the prostrate position of a fallen creature struggling to accept its own unworthiness helps explain the success of the Nativity Ode and the failure of "The Passion." In the ode, the poet harmonizes his inspired voice with "the Angel Choir" so seamlessly that he never needs to speak in the first-person singular (line 27). He observes that Christ will release "our deadly forfeit," bringing about "[o]ur great redemption," glorification, and bliss, but he is more preoccupied with Christ's heroics than with human depravity (6, 4). When the proleptic fantasy that the Incarnation will immediately destroy sin and restore "the age of gold" is cut short by the recognition that this infant "on the bitter cross / Must redeem our loss," the poem quickly recasts Christ as a Herculean figure conquering Satan and his minions from the cradle: "Our Babe, to show his Godhead true, / Can in his swaddling bands control the damned crew" (135, 152–53, 227–28). In the final stanza, a peaceful image of the sleeping child ("the Virgin blest, / Hath laid her Babe to rest") is qualified by a description of the angels prepared for battle: "And all about the Courtly Stable, / Bright-harness'd Angels sit in order serviceable" (237–38, 243–44). The poet who joined their choir does not break ranks to rejoin the nameless multitude of fallen humanity; he waits for his call to arms as well.

The unity of the Nativity Ode—the heroic infant and his militant followers biding time before the final battle—eludes Milton when he attempts to compose a companion piece on the Passion. He can no longer share the perspective of the angelic host, who have no part in the atonement. He now sings in a solitary human voice: "For now to sorrow must I tune my song, / And set my Harp to notes of saddest woe" (8–9). His Christ remains Herculean, so much so that it is hard to imagine this "Most perfect Hero, tried in heaviest plight / Of labors huge and hard, too hard for human wight" dying on the cross, especially since his human identity is described as merely "a Mask" and "disguise" for his omnipotence (13–14, 19). But the real problem is the restless, self-conscious speaker, who is unable to approach the subject with sufficient humility. The supplicant posture and inner torment of a creature implicated in the horrific death of its loving savior and unworthy of the redemption that it hopes to receive seem utterly alien to him. Although he claims that his "sorrows are too dark for day to know," they do not impair him in any way (33). Nor does Milton relinquish the heroic tropes that are his poetic signature: the prophetic status ("See, see the Chariot and those rushing wheels, / That whirl'd the Prophet up at *Chebar* flood" [36–37]), rapt visions ("There doth my soul in holy vision sit / In pensive trance" [41–42]), winged flight ("I thence hurried on viewless wings" [50]), and Orphic powers ("I . . . / Might think th'infection of my sorrows loud / Had got a race of mourners" [54–56]). The poem ends prematurely because Milton refuses to make the sacrifice that the genre requires: he will not adopt a poetic identity that rejects personal heroism and dwells despairingly on his own status as a fallen creature.

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This authorial stance is not simply youthful idealism or evidence of an immaturity that Milton later outgrows. As Stephen Fallon has demonstrated, Milton's tendency to view himself "as heroically virtuous, divinely chosen, and untouched by frailty" emerges in many, if not most, of his works, and it shapes the soteriology of *De doctrina* and *Paradise Lost* (118). When forced to "contemplat[e] despair and alienation" in his divorce tracts, for instance, Milton "immediately . . . reasserts his freedom from all varieties of imperfection, and thus implicitly dissociates himself from the fall" (120). What Milton avoids here are precisely the feelings that Protestant reflection on the Passion seeks to provoke: alienation and despair that lead to the denigration of oneself.

Dwelling on Christ's sacrifice, as Herbert does in *The Temple*, foregrounds the unbridgeable ontological gulf that divides the redeemer and the redeemed in Christian orthodoxy, and it reminds individual believers of their impaired state as fallen beings and the irreparable debt that they owe the redeemer. This emphasis yields poems like Herbert's "Love (III)," where the speaker must come to terms with his own utter unworthiness as he learns to passively accept love that he cannot deserve. Milton never courts this type of self-reflection. He expresses a profound sense of debt to God: he is fully aware of himself "as a creature, something made, circumscribed, finite," who has an obligation to refine and perfect himself as an instrument of God's glory (Rumrich, *Matter* 45). But it is a debt that he owes to the creator, not the redeemer, and an obligation that all created beings share. Thus, this debt foregrounds ontological continuity, placing human beings—and Milton in particular—in the same category as the angels and the first created being, the Son of God. All can be active, heroic servants of God the Father: Milton, who learns to "stand and wait" in sonnet 19; the serviceable angels of the Nativity Ode; and Jesus as he stands atop the "highest pinnacle" in *Paradise Regained* (4.549). So unlike Herbert, who places Christ's sacrifice at the center of his poetics, Milton traces his poetic power back to God's power as creator. In his preparation for his prophetic role in *Paradise Lost*, the blind bard implores the divine Spirit for a rebirth that echoes the first act of creation: "What in me is dark / Illumine, what is low raise and support" (1.22–23).

Milton refuses to internalize the Crucifixion—and thus rejects the normative model of Protestant subjectivity that Shuger describes—because of his own sense of dignity. As Richard Strier observes, Milton "never sustainedly adopted the Reformation understanding of humility" and "does not consistently participate in the Reformation attack on the dignity of man as a rational and (potentially) self-governing creature" (268, 280).[6] What passes for Christian humility, Milton asserts in *Of Reformation* (1641), is often servility: "men . . . knew not how to hide their Slavish approach to *Gods* behests by them not understood, nor worthily receav'd, but by cloaking their Servile crouching to all *Religious* Presentments, somtimes lawfull, sometimes Idolatrous, under the name of *humility*" (522). Before the "dreadfull Idol" of the Catholic mass, deceived men prefer "a foolish Sacrifice" instead of "a savory obedience to Christs example" (523). Dignity is Milton's rallying cry in the cause of human freedom. Although man is "created after Gods owne Image," "nothing now adayes is more degenerately forgott'n," he laments in *Tetrachordon* (1645), "then the true dignity of man" (587). This ingrained sense of dignity leads Milton away from the Crucifixion and toward the Arian Christology of *De doctrina* and *Paradise Lost*.

An Arian Son

Milton often seems more like the intellectual heir of Italian humanists like Pico della Mirandola than of reformers like Luther or Calvin—more enthralled by human possibility than human limitation. He would certainly

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have recognized the limitations of Pico's euphoric fantasy that man could be "maker and molder" of himself: divorced from God, belief in one's own agency is fundamentally satanic (225). But he never surrendered his belief that a "clear spirit" who "live[d] laborious days" could accomplish something if he recognized God as the source of his identity and power and acted not for himself but for God's glory (*Lycidas*, lines 70, 72). The Arian position on the Son of God enables Milton to retain the ontological mobility that fascinated Renaissance humanists and incorporate it into his theology. Rejecting the orthodox formulation that the Son shares the Father's immutable, unbegotten, and infinite essence, Milton conceives of the Son as a created being ("the first of created things") subject to time, change, and choice: "God begot the Son as a result of his own decree . . . within the bounds of time" (*De doctrina* 206, 209). Since they "are not one in essence," their relation depends on the harmony or concord between their wills: "they are one in that they speak and act as one. . . . [The Son] and the Father are one in the same way as we are one with him: that is, not in essence but in love, in communion, in agreement, in charity, in spirit, and finally in glory" (220). The Father rewards the Son for his voluntary obedience to God's will by increasing his power and prestige and by bestowing his divine attributes on him: "the Son admits that he possesses whatever measure of Deity is attributed to him, by virtue of the peculiar gift and kindness of the Father" (223). Like all created beings, the Son has the freedom to make moral choices, and by choosing to obey the will of God in *Paradise Lost*, he ascends upward until, anointing him "universal King," the Father bestows on him the ultimate reward: "all Power, / I give thee, reign for ever, and assume / Thy Merits" (3.317–20).

The Son's identity as a created being changes his redemptive role: it is his exemplary obedience to God, not his unique essence, that reconciles God and Man. By making the redeemer a creature, Arianism elevates the status and exalts the potential of all created beings. "The central point in the Arian system," Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh conclude in their study of early Arian soteriology, "is that Christ gains and holds his sonship in the same way as other creatures—thus it is asserted that what is predicated of the redeemer can and must be predicated of the redeemed" (67). Throughout *De doctrina*, Milton concurs, stressing that other creatures bear the same relation to God that the Son does. Against those who claim that the Son is the supreme god because he is "at times called God and even Jehovah," Milton responds "that the name 'God' is, by the will and permission of God the Father, not infrequently bestowed even upon angels and men. . . . This is done to show us that angels or messengers, even though they may seem to take upon themselves, when they speak, the name and character of God, do not speak their own words but those specified by God, who sent them" (233, 237). As "*the first born among many brothers*," the Son may be closer to God than other creatures are, but he is not different in kind (Colossians 1.15; qtd. in 211).

From this perspective, the Passion does not represent God as sacrificing himself for Man; it demonstrates the obedience of a perfect creature to the will of God. For Milton, to make Christ the principal object of devotion, either through ritual or psychological reenactment, would be to worship a creature, not the creator. "The ultimate object of faith is not Christ, the Mediator," he insists, "but God the Father. . . . So it does not seem surprising that there are a lot of Jews, and Gentiles too, who are saved although they believed or believe in God alone, either because they lived before Christ or because, even though they have lived after him, he has not been revealed to them" (475). Humbling yourself before the Crucifixion, deliberately sacrificing your dignity and agency, as Donne and Herbert do, would be placing a servile idol-

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atry before a "savory obedience to Christs example," which is obedience to God. As Michael tells Adam, the Messiah will destroy Satan's works "by fulfilling that which [Adam] didst want, / Obedience to the Law of God" (*Paradise Lost* 12.396–97). Instead of receiving special attention, the Crucifixion—deftly converted into an act of triumphant heroism ("nail'd to the Cross / By his own Nation, slain for bringing Life; / But to the Cross he nails thy Enemies" [413–15])—is folded into the history of the Son's return to "[h]is seat at God's right hand," the Second Coming, and the final transformation of Earth into "Paradise, far happier place / Than this of *Eden*" (457, 464–65). Although he learns that the redeemer will suffer and die for his transgression, Adam does not make the martyrdom the focus of his devotion. He praises God the Father as the ultimate source of goodness, and Michael does not correct him.

Heroic Choice

Milton can relegate Christ's sacrifice to a few lines toward the end of *Paradise Lost* because he has already depicted the Son's definitive act of obedience and love. "Virtually, and insofar as the efficacy of his action is concerned," he writes in *De doctrina*, Christ "offered himself from the very beginning of the world" (434). By focusing on the Son's offer to die for Man rather than on Christ's fulfillment of that pledge, Milton substitutes a voluntary decision for the spectacular suffering of the Passion. Instead of passive acceptance and corporeal martyrdom, this revision allows him to present active collaboration with God's will—the ability to discern it and the deliberate choice to obey it—as the central heroic act of the epic. Milton locates this offer in the larger context of a trial: peering down from "his prospect high, / Wherein past, present, future he beholds," the Father vindicates himself and condemns the fallen angels and Man for their transgressions (*Paradise Lost* 3.77–78). He clears himself of responsibility by citing the freedom with which he has endowed his creatures ("Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" [99–101]) and pronounces two different sentences: "Man falls deceiv'd / By th' other first: Man therefore shall find grace / The other none" (130–32). Thus, "in Mercy and Justice both" his glory will "excel, / But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine" (132–34).

But what is true for Man and the angels is true for the Son as well: to please his father, he must be free to obey or disobey and offer his life for Man or not. As the Father affirms,

> What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
> When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
> Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
> Made passive both, had serv'd necessity,
> Not mee. (107–11)

This judicial encounter between God and Man presents a test for the Son: like Adam in book 8, he must demonstrate that he knows both himself and God and can fathom what it means to be the Father's most perfect image and "chief delight" (168). But more than this, he must reveal who he is through choice and thus merit his status as the "[o]nly begotten Son" (80). He must discern the will of God and then volunteer to renounce his place next to the Father ("I for [Man's] sake will leave / Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee / Freely put off" [238–40]), demonstrating the lesson that he makes explicit in *Paradise Regained*: "who best / Can suffer, best can do; best reign, who first / Well hath obey'd" (3.194–96).

The Son also recognizes that mercy is as necessary to God as it is to Man, and he acts on the recognition. Without it, he observes, God's "goodness and . . . greatness" would "[b]e question'd and blasphem'd without defense" (165–66). But for reasons I will return to later, the Father alone cannot resolve the conflict between mercy and justice: he can "renew / [Man's] lapsed powers" so that "once more he shall stand / On even ground against

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his mortal foe," but he cannot simply remit the death sentence that Man has incurred: "Die hee or Justice must" (175–76, 178–79, 210). Thus, he asks if there is in "all Heaven charity so dear" to "pay / The rigid satisfaction, death for death," for Man's crime (216, 211–12). After a dramatic silence ("all the Heav'nly Choir stood mute . . . / And now without redemption all mankind / Must have been lost" [217, 222–23]), the Son declares that "man shall find grace" and offers himself: "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life / I offer, on mee let thine anger fall" (227, 236–37). Behind these lines stands another sacrificial offer, Nisus's attempt to save the life of his friend Euryalus in book 9 of the *Aeneid*: "On me—on me—here am I who did the deed—on me turn your steel, Rutulians!" ("me, me, adsum qui feci, in me converitite ferrum, / O Rutuli!").[7] Whereas Nisus tries to exchange his life for Euryalus's after their two-man raid on the Rutulian camp gives way to a failed escape and retribution, the Son pledges his life to save Man, the collective identity of humanity. Nisus could have slipped off into the dark woods and saved himself, but the "one love" ("amor unus"; 9.182) that unites the two Trojans compels him to risk, offer, and finally sacrifice his life for Euryalus. The Son, "[i]n whom the fullness dwells of love divine," could have remained silent, but he offers himself "for Man, [to] be judg'd and die, / And dying rise, and rising with him raise / His Brethren" (225, 295–97).

Noting this parallel, Barbara Lewalski claims that it deliberately evokes the "deeds of bravery and self-sacrifice inspired by erotic love and noble friendship" to illustrate "how the Son's heroic love transcends and transvalues the heroic virtues and actions central to epic and romance" (116–17). But Milton, I would argue, is focused specifically on friendship here: by fashioning the Son's voluntary offer after Nisus's willingness to die for his friend, he suggests that "Heroic Martyrdom" incorporates and transcends the ideal of self-sacrifice central to the classical friendship tradition: *caritas* subsumes *amicitia* (*Paradise Lost* 9.32). The highest expression of love, this tradition repeatedly asserts, is the willingness to die so that someone else might live.

The two pairs of classical friends who fueled this tradition—Orestes and Pylades and the young Pythagoreans Damon and Pythias—faced situations in which one friend was condemned to death but survived because of his companion's loyalty and self-sacrifice. In *De amicitia*, Cicero locates such gestures in a cosmic context. Invoking the theory "that in nature and the entire universe whatever things are at rest and whatever are in motion are united by friendship and scattered by discord," Cicero has his spokesman Laelius continue:

> And indeed this is a statement that all men not only understand but also approve. Whenever, therefore, there comes to light some signal service in undergoing or sharing the dangers of a friend, who does not proclaim it with the loudest praise? What shouts recently rang through the entire theater during the performance of the new play, written by my guest and friend, Marcus Pacuvius, at the scene where, the king being ignorant of which of the two was Orestes, Pylades, who wished to be put to death instead of his friend, declared, "I am Orestes," while Orestes continued steadfastly to assert, as was the fact, "I am Orestes!" The people in the audience rose to their feet and cheered this incident in fiction. (135; pt. 7, sec. 24)

Through their offer of self-sacrifice, both friends unwittingly demonstrate their harmony with the natural forces that give coherence and order to the universe. The audience members celebrate the pair's heroism because, Cicero maintains, they instinctively recognize that it embodies and exemplifies the concord that holds both human society and the natural world together.

Likewise, the Son's offer to die for Man expresses his voluntary decision to conform to

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the will of God and the law of nature. Milton always believed, as he tells Claudius Salmasius, "that the law of God does most closely agree with the law of nature" (*Defensio* 422), and in *Paradise Lost* the law of nature comprises the same forces that govern Cicero's universe. When the Son rides out into Chaos "to create new Worlds," he creates by imposing concord and amity on Chaos: "Silence, ye troubl'd waves, and thou Deep, peace, / Said then th' Omnific Word, your discord end" (7.216–17). At the same time, "on the wat'ry calm / His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread," an image that invokes the emblematic peace of the brooding halcyon as well as the dove,

> 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; then founded, then conglob'd
> Like things to like, the rest to several place
> Disparted, and between spun out the Air,
> And Earth self-balanc't on her Centre hung.
> (234–42)

The law of nature includes the bond of amity ("Like things to like") that extends from the elements through the natural world to human society—a bond that degenerates as a consequence of the Fall. Thus, after the flood restores the world to its original state, "not content / With fair equality, fraternal state," Nimrod will "quite dispossess / Concord and the law of Nature from the Earth" (12.25–26, 28–29).

As both a creature and the instrument of subsequent creation, the Son has an exceptionally close relation to these laws: he is the medium through which discord is resolved into concord. Man's disobedience not only introduces discord into human history, but it also alienates the Father and threatens to set him at odds with himself. He would like to show mercy to his "youngest son" but must enact justice (3.151): "Die hee or Justice must." When the Son discerns this "strife / Of Mercy and Justice" in the Father's "face," he ends it by offering "himself to die / For man's offence" (406–07, 409–10). After his sacrifice and final defeat of Death, he envisions returning "with the multitude of [his] redeem'd" to see the Father's "face, wherein no cloud / Of anger shall remain, but peace assur'd, / And reconcilement" (260, 262–64). The Father confirms this prediction, praising the Son: "O thou in Heav'n and Earth the only peace / Found out for mankind under wrath, O thou / My sole complacence!" (274–76). In offering himself, the Son has cleared away the conflict from the Father's countenance, preemptively atoned for mankind's disobedience, and initiated the historical process that will produce "New Heav'n and Earth" and the ultimate expression of union and concord, the time when "God shall be All in All" (335, 341). Like Pylades's willingness to sacrifice himself for Orestes, the Son's pledge represents the apotheosis of the amity that animates the universe and prevents it from slipping back into Chaos. This demonstration of "immortal love" fills the angelic audience with "Admiration," and after the Father praises the Son's offer and unveils the course of human history, they celebrate with "sacred Song . . . / No voice exempt, no voice but well could join / Melodious part, such concord is in Heav'n" (267, 271, 345–46, 370–71).

Thus, the judicial scene in book 3 invokes an episode familiar from the classical friendship tradition: at the moment when a monarch condemns a man to death, his friend intervenes to take the entire punishment on himself, and this heroic display of selfless love compels the monarch to relent, saving them both. Milton foregrounds this dimension of the Son's relation to Man in book 10, where God sends him to the garden as "Man's Friend, his Mediator, his design'd / Both Ransom and Redeemer voluntary" (58–60). The Son's act of "unexampled love" saves Man and establishes the pattern of self-sacrifice that classical friends and Christian martyrs will emulate (3.410)—the former by adhering to the laws of nature, the latter by adhering

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to Christ's words "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Bible*, John 15.13). Although Man and this "one greater Man" must pass through death to eternal life, the Son's offer guarantees that both will live (1.4). It is also the act that declares him "by Merit more than Birthright Son of God, / Found worthiest to be so by being Good, / Far more than Great or High" (3.308–10). His friendship to Man justifies his anointment and the powers that he has already obtained, as well as those he will receive.

Rigid Satisfaction

But heroic displays of friendship do more than save and ennoble the individual friends: they have a transformative power that can convert tyrants into benevolent monarchs. The mutual love of Orestes and Pylades, as Thomas Elyot observes in *The Boke Named the Governour*, has just this effect: "Thus a long tyme they to gither contendinge, the one to die for the other, at last so relented the fierse and cruell hart of the tyrant: that wondring at their marvailous frendship, he suffered them frely to depart, without doing them any damage" (152). The loyalty of Damon and Pythias has the same result:

> Wherfore he desired the minister of justice to lose his fellow, and to prepare the execution on hym, that had given the occasion: wherat the tyraunt being all abashed commaunded bothe to be brought in his presence: and whan he had ynough wondered at their noble hartes and their constance in very frendship, he offring to them great rewards, desired them to receive hym into their company: and so doinge them moche honour, dyd set them at liberte. (153)

On a purely literary level, the Son's offer produces a similar outcome. It enables God to transform himself from a vengeful to a forgiving monarch, allowing his mercy to transcend his justice. Indeed, the Father courts this transformation—or, more accurately, the revelation of his true character—to make Satan's charge of "tyrant" ring false.

In his conduct, however, Milton's God is closer to a constitutional monarch than to the tyrants who condemn classical friends. He has judged correctly and is constrained by his own integrity. To free himself and demonstrate that he is great and good, he needs the Son to be both "Man's friend" and "a sacrifice / Glad to be offer'd" (3.270). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton rejects the traditional Anselmian understanding of the atonement as a debt that Man owes to God, a debt that Christ must pay for him because he cannot pay it, and adopts a position similar to the one that Hugo Grotius presents in *De satisfactione Christi* (1617): God rules creation as a political state and has an obligation to punish crimes against that state. As a creditor and injured party, he could remit the debt. As a sovereign, he cannot allow crimes to go unpunished:

> But yet all is not done; Man disobeying,
> Disloyal breaks his fealty, and sins
> Against the high Supremacy of Heav'n,
> Affecting God-head, and so losing all,
> To expiate his Treason hath naught left,
> But to destruction sacred and devote,
> He with his whole posterity must die,
> Die hee or Justice must; unless for him
> Some other able, and as willing, pay
> The rigid satisfaction, death for death.
> (203–12)

Like Satan's open rebellion against God, Adam and Eve's disobedience is an act of treason. In return for abstaining from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, "[t]he Pledge of th[eir] Obedience and th[eir] Faith," they are granted their "happy State": their internal state of perfection, their state of bliss in the garden, and the political state ("thy Realm is large," God tells Adam) that they have been given (8.325, 331, 375). By transgressing and "[a]ffecting God-head," they are asserting their own absolute sovereignty over the states

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with which they have been entrusted; they are claiming the offices that have been delegated to them as their own, seceding from union with God, and seeking to divide the indivisible kingdom of creation. They sin against not just God but also the order of things, "the high Supremacy of Heav'n." God must punish them or violate his own decrees, and violating the decrees would be to rule by personal whim, not law—the Aristotelian definition of a tyrant. But according to Roman public law, which is the theoretical framework that Grotius uses in *De satisfactione*, God could alter the penalty and demand some other satisfaction. As Shuger summarizes Grotius's position, "[I]n the Atonement, God exercises his *imperium* by relaxing the universal sentence of death the law imposed on humankind for the sin of Adam and substituting the Crucifixion as a minatory exemplum" (59).

What is at stake for both Milton and Grotius is the morality of the atonement—the morality of killing an innocent person for someone else's crime. *De satisfactione*, Shuger demonstrates, attempts to ward off the Socinian critique of the atonement—a rationalist rejection of mystical substitution—by demonstrating that it conforms to the "rational principles of justice and fairness" epitomized by Roman public law (65). But this legal code allowed for penal substitution only for particular crimes, including treason and civil revolt, and under certain conditions: the victim must consent to be substituted for the other party, and the two parties must have a connection to each other and thus have some kind of corporate identity. As Milton's God stresses, the substitute must be "able, and as willing, [to] pay / The rigid satisfaction." Shuger observes that Grotius, to support his argument, "searches outside the law for Classical precedent, reinterpreting the story of Damon and Pythias, for instance, not as an exemplum of true friendship—the standard Renaissance reading—but as evidence for the ancient practice of executing sureties if they failed to produce the accused in court" (73).[8] Pythias's willingness to serve as the ransom and hostage that will guarantee Damon's return, along with the shared identity produced by their friendship, satisfies the demands of Roman law, and their story provides a parallel for the substitution of Christ for mankind. Milton turns to the friendship tradition—echoing Nisus's words, staging the heroic offer, and declaring the Son "Man's friend"—for the same reasons that Grotius does: to justify the atonement and the God who requires it.

Unexampled Love

In *Paradise Lost*, the Son's offer, "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life," stands at the center of a series of heroic echoes. Satan's willingness to risk Chaos and "unessential Night" on his voyage to the newly created world as the "last hope" of the fallen angels provides a disturbing parallel (2.439, 416). The dramatic situation follows the same pattern—a call for a redeemer, silence, an offer, bent knees, praise, and a "firm concord" of the devils—and in the end Satan will be crucified by the Son's redemptive sacrifice ("But to the Cross he nails thy Enemies"; 2.497). But Adam and Eve's echoes of the Son are more significant. As Milton writes in *De doctrina*, "[T]he effect and end of the whole mediatorial administration is the satisfaction of divine justice on behalf of all men, and the shaping of the faithful in the image of Christ" (443). This refashioning of the faithful begins with Adam and Eve's repentance, which is itself enabled by prevenient grace. Adam's accusations against God give way to the recognition of his own guilt and of the fact that his crime has doomed his future offspring. This admission leads Adam to the idea of self-sacrifice, something that he wistfully entertains but dismisses as impossible:

> first and last
> On mee, mee only as the source and spring

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> Of all corruption, all blame lights due;
> So might the wrath. Fond wish! (10.831–34)

Undeterred by Adam's wrath toward her, Eve "besought / His peace," seeking to take the entire death sentence upon herself:

> [I] . . . to the place of judgment will return,
> There with my cries importune Heaven, that all
> The sentence from thy head remov'd may light
> On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
> Mee mee only just object of his ire. (931–36)

Of course, it is too late. Since they are both guilty, both have lost their immortality, and neither can offer to die for the other or their descendants. They have nothing with which to bargain: they are both dead. But just as the Son dispels the wrath and discord of the Father with his voluntary offer of self-sacrifice, Eve's offer brings "peace" and leads to her reconciliation with Adam (who responds "with peaceful words"), which results in their repentance and prayer (938, 946). She demonstrates the virtues of the Son more fully than Adam does, and her embrace of "the better fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" restores their relationship, which is a precondition for the Incarnation (9.31–32).

Earlier Eve describes Adam's willingness to eat the fruit and join her, whatever the punishment, as a "glorious trial of exceeding Love" (9.961). But the Son's act of "unexampled love" provides a preemptive critique of Adam's choice and establishes an alternative that is much closer to *amicitia* than *eros*. Adam fails his trial of love because he decides to die *with* Eve. He never imagines that he could die *for* her. Instead, he indulges in the narcissism of romantic love: like Romeo and Juliet, he would rather kill himself than live without his partner. Likewise, falling into another romantic fallacy, Eve loves Adam so much that she would rather kill him than have him live without her. Neither can imagine the kind of self-sacrificing love that Nisus exemplifies: "no, no, kill me instead." Neither can imagine dying so that the other might live—without him or her. Once Eve has eaten the fruit, Adam is in the same position as Nisus, Pythias, and Pylades. His partner is condemned to death, and yet he still has his own life to offer instead. But he fails, "submitting to what seem'd remediless" (919). As the word does in the reference to "other Worlds" in book 3, "seem'd" suggests that there are possibilities and alternatives that the poem cannot pursue. In book 9 it suggests that there is a remedy that Adam overlooks, and presumably—as C. S. Lewis and several subsequent critics have suggested—it is to offer his life for Eve's.[9] How this would work is unclear. Perhaps Adam's offer would be enough to "pay / The rigid satisfaction" for Eve's fall. Or perhaps, like the brothers Castor and Pollux, they would share one immortal life between them.

But the idea that Adam could have acted as Eve's redeemer poses a theological problem. In orthodox Christianity, only God can play this role. Christ pays a debt no other being could because of the divinity he brings as God, and thus he performs a sacrifice that is unique and beyond comprehension and imitation. This is the Christ of Herbert's "The Sacrifice." But this is not Milton's theology. His distinction between the Father and the Son makes merit, not essence, the crucial factor:

> [T]he Bible nowhere states that only God can approach God, or take away sin, or fulfil the law, or endure and overcome the anger of God, the power of Satan and temporal and eternal death, or recover the blessings lost by us. What it does state is that he whom God has empowered to do all this can do it: in other words, God's beloved Son with whom God has declared himself pleased. (*De doctrina* 425)

The power to redeem is not an intrinsic characteristic of the Son. It is something that the Father endows him with—just as he provides him with "the Chariot of Paternal Deity" for routing the rebel angels and with "golden Compasses" for circumscribing the universe

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(6.750, 7.225). Presumably God could empower Adam, or another created being, to act as the redeemer. Indeed, if the Son were the only figure capable of redeeming Man, the scene where God asks for a volunteer to pay Man's debt would be undercut:

> Say Heav'nly Powers, where shall we find
> such love,
> Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
> Mans mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save,
> Dwells in all Heaven charity so dear? (3.213–16)

In his omniscience, God tells us that this sacrifice will be made, that someone will offer to do it. If the Son is the only figure capable of performing this task, he is being appointed to do it at this moment; he is being coerced into offering himself, and the drama of the scene is a disingenuous political spectacle like the one Satan and Beelzebub orchestrate in Hell. If someone else can offer—one of the angels, perhaps, as the passage suggests—then the Son's offer is voluntary. After he has volunteered, God praises his singular heroism and announces the Incarnation: "Thou therefore whom thou only canst redeem, / Thir Nature also to thy Nature join" (281–82).

In *Milton's God*, William Empson argues that God is wicked, Milton knew it, and Milton's heresies work to mitigate that wickedness.[10] Whatever we conclude about Empson's initial claim, Milton's Arianism and, in Christopher Hill's words, his "abandonment of traditional ideas of Christ's atonement" radically transform the individual's relation to God (286). Milton turns away from the Passion for reasons quite different from those of Donne and Herbert. He rejects it as a spectacle that disempowers the individual believer. By turning our gaze away from the suffering on Golgotha and directing our attention to the offer to "take me instead of him," Milton privileges a mode of heroism that individuals can both contemplate and imitate—because Milton's Arian theology brings Man closer to Christ at the same time as it distances the Son from God the Father. Instead of a scene that evokes human corruption, limitation, and irreparable debt, Milton offers an ethical decision—the self-sacrifice of Nisus writ large as heroic martyrdom—that encourages human agency. Is Christ's sacrifice unique? For Milton it seems so because the Son offered to die for Man and became the redeemer, whereas Adam failed to offer himself for Eve. It seems so because these choices were made and our history has run its course. But on those stars that seem to be "other Worlds," perhaps other Eves will resist temptation and other Adams will not fall victim to what "seem'd remediless." For Milton the word "seem'd" takes on vast import: it suggests the unrealized alternatives that free his characters, his epic, and his God from the tyranny of necessity.

Notes

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1. Building on the work of Maurice Kelley, Bauman's *Milton's Arianism* persuasively argues that "Arian" is the most accurate term for Milton's antitrinitarianism. "Simply put, if what was condemned at the council of Nicea was Arianism," Bauman writes, "then John Milton was an Arian" (2). Also see Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism." Lieb argues against the validity of the term (261–78), but the objections that he raises are not new and have been either addressed or refuted by Bauman. For the initial reaction to the recovery of *De doctrina*, see Kelley, *This Great Argument* 3–7, and his introduction to *De doctrina*. Bauman, "Heresy," demonstrates that a number of early readers of *Paradise Lost* suspected Milton of Arianism.

2. William B. Hunter first challenged Milton's authorship of *De doctrina* in 1991 ("Provenance" and *Visitation*). The committee assembled to address the resulting controversy recently confirmed Milton's authorship of the treatise (Campbell et al.).

3. The subject of *Paradise Regained*—the temptation of Christ rather than his Passion—has long been taken as evidence of Milton's discomfort with the Crucifixion and a sign that his theory of the atonement must be heterodox. See Rogers, "Milton's Circumcision," on Milton,

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the Crucifixion, and the atonement; see Huttar for the problem of the Passion and *Paradise Regained*.

4. My trans. The original reads, "Unus est filius Dei, Dominus noster Iesus Christus, qui cum in hunc mundum prodisset, tantum semel mortuus est, et resuscitatus. Nec alibi se ostendit, nec alibi mortuus aut resuscitatus est. Non igitur imaginandum est, plures esse mundos, quia nec imaginandum est, saepius Christum mortuum et resuscitatum esse, nec cogitandum est, in ullo alio mundo sine agnitione fili Dei, hominibus restitui vitam aeternam" (folio 43). Also see McColley 412–13 and Dick 88–89. In *Donne and the New Philosophy*, especially "Donne the Space Man" (78–128), Empson argues that Donne was inspired by the theological freedom of other worlds. C. S. Lewis explores extraterrestrial life in a Christian cosmos in his science fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelander* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945), works influenced by his reading of Milton.

5. *Tenure* 198. See Rumrich, "Milton's God," for the relation between the imposition of order and tyranny; see Rogers, *Matter* 112–22, for the radical decentralization implicit in Milton's animist materialism (or vitalism) and for its relation to political liberalism.

6. Strier convincingly argues that Milton has "a coherent ethical position" that is "distinctly classical rather than Christian" (258), but Strier does not connect Milton's investment in dignity to his Arianism.

7. Virgil 9.427–28. Fowler and Leonard note this allusion in their editions of *Paradise Lost*, as do earlier editors. Modeled after book 10 of the *Iliad* (the "Doloneia"), the Nisus and Euryalus episode influences later epics, including Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. See Hardie 23–34.

8. Grotius writes, "So, too, in capital punishments the sureties were commonly put to death, if the defendants did not appear (whence they are called *antipsuchoi* by the Greeks), as is sufficiently clear from, among other sources, that noble story of Damon and Pythias" ("Sic et in capitalibus iudiciis vades capite plecti solitos, si rei se non sisterent, unde Graecis αντιψυχοι appellantur, tum aliunde, tum ex nobili illa Damonis et Pythiae historia satis apparet"; 168–69; bk. 4, sec. 16]).

9. Lewis 121–24; Fish 261–72; Danielson, "Through the Telescope"; Leonard, *Naming* 213–32.

10. Although some of what Empson wrote has been qualified or superseded, one of his key insights remains valid: Milton's heresies tend to "cut out of Christianity . . . the torture-horror" of the Crucifixion (269). For a rebuttal, see Danielson, *Milton's Good God*.

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