MILTON'S CHURCHES

by THOMAS N. CORNS

This essay considers both John Milton's relationship to the churches he attended and his developing attitude to the Church of England and to the wider Protestant faith community, nationally and internationally. The objective is better to place Milton within the divisive and shifting religious politics of seventeenth-century England. Only incidental reference is made to his poetry; this is primarily a study of life records and his prose publications.

It is relatively straightforward to track John Milton through the actual churches he attended, and, as for other Englishmen in his age and of his class, the surest, least ambiguous life records that chart his rites of passage relate to his membership of the Church of England.

He was baptized in All Hallows Church in Bread Street, London, his parish church, on 20 December 1608, a building somewhat past its prime since its steeple had been demolished after a lightning strike in 1559; nor was its rector, Thomas Edmonds, in better repair. Presumably because of the rector's physical indisposition, the baptism was performed by his curate and eventual successor, Richard Stock, a nimble churchman with a flair for attracting patronage. Stock's publishing career, which petered out shortly after Milton's birth, consisted of a cluster of fiercely anti-Catholic sermons and related items, and there is strong evidence of a pronounced streak of puritanism both in the company he kept and his role as one of the founding Feoffees for Impropriations, an organization established to secure lectureships for clergy of puritan inclination, which was to be abolished by William Laud in 1633. However, Stock's death in 1626 took him from the fray before the struggle started in earnest.

Stock was a keen catechizer, according to his funeral sermon, and in all probability catechized Milton. However, it should be stressed that John Milton senior, the poet's father, was living in the parish before Stock arrived; he did not move to live in a puritan's parish. Though Stock would almost certainly have lined up with many other London clergy against Laud's reforms and policies, his

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

own inclinations constitute no evidence that Milton's own father shared them.[1]

Indeed, when (in or around 1625) Milton senior came to select a Cambridge college and a tutor for his sixteen-year-old son, his choices were far from puritanical. They were made in the context of the increasingly open controversy within the Church of England, particularly over aspects of liturgical practice and soteriology, a controversy that would deepen on the appointment of William Laud successively to the sees of London and Canterbury. Eschewing the Calvinist and anti-ceremonialist strongholds of Emmanuel and Sidney Sussex Colleges, the poet's father opted for William Chappell, a fellow of Christ's, a high-profile Arminian and future recipient of Laud's patronage, to be Milton's tutor. Thus, Milton's second church was Christ's College chapel. His youthful gift for neo-Latin funeral elegy shortly produced poems in commemoration of two Arminian luminaries, Nicholas Felton, the bishop of Ely, and Lancelot Andrewes, the bishop of Winchester and founding father of English ceremonial Arminianism, whose sermons were posthumously edited by Laud himself. At this time the Church of England was already manifesting, albeit incipiently, a dangerous disagreement over the doctrine of salvation. Some churchmen, probably a majority, remained committed to Calvinist predestination; others, particularly ceremonialists, were drawn to the views of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius, who viewed grace as freely extended to all who would accept it. Although Milton left the tutorage of Chappell after some (currently unidentified) quarrel or misdemeanour and apparently a period of rustication, his new tutor, Nathaniel Tovey, marked no significant shift in religious predilection; twenty years later, he would be deprived of his Leicestershire living for his adherence to Laudian practices.[2]

Each stage of Milton's progression through Cambridge was marked by unqualified conformity with the practices of the Church of England. As he supplicated in 1629 for his B.A., he affirmed the three Articles of Religion required at that point. The second article accepted episcopalian church government and the

[1] Biographical information is drawn from Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008), 7–18; see also 386–92 for citation of the life-records and documents from which their narrative is drawn.

[2] Ibid. 26–47, 392–6nn.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Book of Common Prayer; the third endorsed the Thirty-Nine Articles. He duly repeated these affirmations as he proceeded to the degree of M.A. in 1632.[3]

Milton's third church was the chapel of ease in the village of Hammersmith, consecrated by Laud in 1631. Milton's mother and father had moved there as the chapel was nearing completion. The poet joined them on going down from Cambridge a year later. However, his parents developed a certain wanderlust in their old age, shifting the family home in 1636 to Horton, now adjacent to Heathrow Airport. His fourth church, St Michael, had as its rector Edward Goodall, who sided against the rise of Laudianism and who would serve actively in the Westminster Assembly of Divines, convened by the Long Parliament to reform further the Church of England. The Milton family evidently cut something of a dash in this community. Their pew was lofty enough to attract censure during a decanal visitation. Milton's mother died during their period at Horton, and was interred within the church in a prime spot near the altar; the orientation of her memorial stone attracted also adverse decanal comment, on the grounds that it faced in the wrong direction. Milton's incipient radicalization can probably be attributed to the Horton years, though it is difficult to determine which of several factors, both personal and on the national scale, weighed most heavily with him. However, both the decanal response to the family's over-exuberant profile and the influence of Goodall could have been components in that process.[4]

In all later major life events for which there is a clear record, we find Milton acting out the ceremonies and obligations of his national Church. Information is lacking for both his first marriage and the burial of his first wife, Mary Powell. As a loyal government employee he married his second wife, Katherine Woodcock, according to the terms of the 1653 Marriage Act in a civil ceremony, probably in the Guildhall. But her burial, less than five years later, was commemorated by an elaborate heraldic funeral with high ceremony in St Margaret's, Westminster, a church in reasonable proximity to their home in Petty France. Their child

3 Ibid. 63, 400n.

4 Ibid. 67–8, 400nn, 88–102, 404–6nn; Edward Jones, '"Church-outed by the Prelates": Milton and the 1637 Inspection of Horton Parish Church', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 102 (2003), 42–58.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was buried in the same church in the following month. Milton's sonnet 19, 'Methought I saw my late espoused saint', which almost certainly commemorates his grief for Katherine, perhaps discloses a nostalgia for at least one aspect of the old liturgy of the Church of England, by then displaced by the Directory devised by the Westminster Assembly of Divines. It alludes to the rite of churching women after childbirth, which was no longer conducted. His third and final marriage, to Elizabeth Minshull, was a church ceremony held in St Mary Aldermary in 1663. The venue, which was some distance from the place of abode of both bride and groom, was a splendid one, an impressive church in a rich parish and favoured by the City's mercantile elite. Its rector, Dr Robert Gell, was an old acquaintance and perhaps an old friend of Milton's. He had been a fellow of Christ's College in Milton's student days, and may perhaps have collaborated with him. As an angelologist and defender of astrologers, he was, moreover, an example of a principle which, I shall argue, Milton later expounded, that speculative notions can be entertained within the national Church. Indeed, Gell, though not evidently of puritan orientation, managed to keep his lucrative living while many were losing theirs through the expulsions of the 1640s and of the Restoration.

Milton's own funeral in 1674 was at St Giles Cripplegate, not far from his then home. His father was already interred near its altar, and the poet's coffin was placed alongside his father's, where it remained until unfortunate interference with the remains required that the body be relocated within the church. Accounts in the early lives stress the ceremonial nature of the burial. It was 'according to his Quality', and the funeral cortège included 'several Gentlemen then in Town, his principal wellwishers and admirers';[5] '[a]ll his learned and great Friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the Vulgar, accompany'd his Body to the Church'.[6]

Cyriack Skinner, a former pupil, friend and early biographer, concluded, in a resonant phrase, that Milton 'had this Elogy in common with the Patriarchs and Kings of Israel that he was gath-

[5] Edward Philips, in *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London, 1932), 76; Philips was Milton's elder nephew.

[6] John Toland, in ibid. 193; Toland did not know Milton personally, though had some access to those who did.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ered to his people'.[7] Indeed, he seemed finally and permanently, literally and metaphorically, lodged within the national Church in which he had lived, though possibly his conformity in later years may have shared the highly occasional character – births, marriages, and deaths – of some modern Anglicans. Skinner's sentiments are striking, but they seem to contradict two more frequently cited comments, by John Toland, a radical whig, and by Milton himself, though both remarks require some care in interpretation. Toland, speaking of Milton in the poet's Restoration seclusion, noted:

> In his early days he was a Favorer of those Protestants then opprobriously cal'd by the name of *Puritans:* In his middle years he was best pleas'd with the *Independents* and *Anabaptists*, as allowing of more Liberty than others, and coming nearest in his opinion to the primitive practice: but in the latter part of his Life, he was not a profest member of any Sect among Christians, he frequented none of their Assemblies, nor made use of their particular Rites in his Family.[8]

Toland was writing his biography to accompany an edition of Milton's prose writings,[9] and his account was shaped by his familiarity with that *oeuvre*, particularly over the 1640s. In those terms, it makes a kind of sense: Milton moves from alignment with the likes of Smectymnuus, to whom I shall shortly turn, to more radical thinkers: advocates of toleration, certainly independents, and perhaps, at least at the level of a broad agreement on certain issues, with people like Thomas Lambe, soap-boiler and preacher. However, the social gulf between Milton and such tub-preachers was a wide one.[10] As he reviews Milton's final years, Toland seems to exclude any suggestion that he attended the dangerous and shadowy world of Dissenter conventicles. Quite what Toland meant by 'Sect' remains somewhat uncertain, though the affirmation, by someone who did not know him personally, does not

[7] Cyriack Skinner, in ibid. 34. Darbishire had attributed this anonymous manuscript account to Milton's younger nephew, John Philips, though the attribution to Skinner now seems proven beyond reasonable doubt.

[8] Ibid. 195.

[9] John Toland, ed., *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political and Miscellaneous Work of John Milton … to which is prefix'd the life of the author* ('Amsterdam' [London], 1698).

[10] Campbell and Corns, *John Milton*, 193–4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

seem to me to preclude a professed membership of the national Church. Indeed, the usual range and signification of the word applies primarily to groups like those Baptist and Quaker gatherings that risked – as Milton almost certainly did not – the rigour of Restoration legislation directed against Dissenters.

We must also consider a second passage, Milton's own observation in the biographical digression of his *Reason of Church-Government* (1642):

> ... it were sad for me if I should draw back, for me especially, now when all men offer their aid to help ease and lighten the difficult labours of the Church, to whose service by the intentions of my parents and freinds [*sic*] I was destin'd of a child and in mine own resolutions, till comming to some maturing of yeers and perceaving what tyranny had invaded the Church, that he who would take Order must subscribe slave, and take an oath withall, which unlesse he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either strait perjure, or split his faith, I thought it better to preferre a blamelesse silence before the sacred office of speaking bought, and begun with servitude and forswearing. Howsoever thus Church-outed by the Prelats, hence may appear the right I have to meddle in these matters, as before, the necessity and constraint appear'd.[11]

The word 'Church-outed', striking though the Miltonic neologism is, is somewhat unhelpful interpretatively. It cannot simply mean, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* asserts, 'put out of the church',[12] since Milton plainly was not. More likely, it holds a resonance of a possible meaning of 'Out', the verb 'oust from ... a[n] office' (sig. 1). Indeed, the passage is a ringing affirmation of Milton's intention, manifest throughout his anti-prelatical pamphlets of 1641–2, to engage energetically in the internal process of the continued reformation of the national Church. The passage offers a further puzzle for biographers, since Milton had twice in the 1630s taken in effect the same oath, of compliance with the Thirty-Nine Articles, which would have been required at his ordination. The Yale editor, Ralph Haug, somewhat ingeniously suggests that Milton alludes to the very similar oath

[11] John Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols (New Haven, CT, 1953–82), 1: 822–3 [hereafter: *CPW*].

[12] *OED*, *s.v.* 'church', n., C3, special combinations.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

promulgated as part of the Canons of 1640, in which it was extended somewhat to require a positive defence of episcopal government,[13] although there is strong biographical evidence of Milton's waning interest in an ecclesiastical career before that date.[14] In the immediate context of the campaign against Laudianism, however, it marks a radical stance in favour of the role and rights of the laity in engaging in the regulation of the Church, in sharp conflict with Laud's insistence on the pre-eminence of the clergy. Milton is asserting that the Church of England, its doctrine and discipline, are of legitimate concern to its lay members.

Milton's first polemical engagement eschewed secular political issues, a decision that can be attributed in part to his personal contacts with the Smectymnuan group through his continuing friendship with Thomas Young, former tutor and future figure of some prominence in Presbyterian circles, combined with his lack of contacts among political activists. 'Smectymnuus' was the acronym for a doughty consortium of anti-Laudian and anti-ceremonialist churchmen, Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen and William Spurstow, the initial of whose given name supplies the 'uu'. Of course such an association is itself indicative of a standing commitment; these were the men with whom Milton chose to align himself, all of them deeply loyal to the Church of England, which none of them chose to leave till the expulsions that followed the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Nor can the depth of Milton's engagement in the anti-prelatical cause be doubted in those first five fiery tracts, which constitute his anti-prelatical writings; reforming his mother Church, plainly, was for him the immediate priority of the early 1640s.

Yet Milton's view of the national Church, probably from the outset, stands outside the mainstream of moderate puritan opinion in both its populist and its scholarly manifestations. The broadside, *See heer, Malignants Foolerie* (Fig. 1),[15] nicely exemplifies some familiar emphases. The prelatical figure stands between a Protestant clergyman, who offers only Holy Writ, and 'A Ball'd-pate

[13] *CPW*, 1: 823 n. 161; the oath is sometimes known as the 'Et Cetera' oath.

[14] Campbell and Corns, *John Milton*, 101.

[15] I conjecture a date of publication between late 1641, when for the first time the term 'roundhead' entered currency (*OED*, *s.v.* 'roundhead') and approximately 1643, when popular interest in the anti-prelatical campaign was on the wane.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Fig. 1. Anon., *See, heer, Malignants Foolerie*

Fryer, a Round-head indeed', from whom he takes a crucifix as a token of Romish innovation. The ecclesiastical architecture merits a moment's consideration: on one side, a solid English Gothic church, its tower sporting ancient crocketed pinnacles and the whole manifesting a conspicuous lack of more recent adornment; on the other, an Italianate structure replete with cross, sacring bell and Marian icon. The enemy, however, is not simply Catholicism; rather the broadside targets Laudian innovation, additions to English Protestant practice, under the influence of Catholicism. Though the Smectymnuans were too committed to the academic analysis of the records of the Early Church to stoop to such spirited if crude populism, they too were drawn to the argument that the problems of the Church of England were substantially due to relatively recent and somewhat Romish innovation, reflected in the terminology of Laudian ceremonialism: 'The Church of God hath alwayes been as diligent to resist novelties, of words, as her adversaries are busie to invent them, for which cause shee will not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have us communicate with them, nor follow their fashions and phrase newly invented'.[16]

Innovation came as a package, and it came recently and ultimately from Rome: 'it comes to passe, that in England there is such increase of Popery, superstition, Arminianisme, and profanenesse more then in other reformed Churches'.[17] They spoke of a pressing, recent and accelerating process of damaging innovation under the malign influence of Rome, and for the Smectymnuans that innovation centred on a shift in the doctrine of salvation, away from the rigours of Calvinism to the new and dangerous Arminianism that had entered the Church in the days of Lancelot Andrewes and found its triumph in the ascendancy of Laud. The Smectymnuans and indeed the author of the broadside confirm quite precisely Nicholas Tyacke's influential thesis that the crisis within the Caroline Church originated in the breach of the previous unanimity primarily on matters of doctrine.[18]

Milton placed the emphases differently. For him, the failure of the Church of England was not recent (and not particularly connected with Arminianism, to the soteriology of which the poet had an early commitment). For him, the corruption extended back to the immediately post-apostolic Church, and he railed against the worldliness, the carnality, of 'the false Doctors of the Primitive Church'.[19] It reached its mature state under Constantine, whose Church, he observed, for good reason constituted an ideal for prelatical apologists:

> I do not see how it can be disputed what good this Emperour *Constantine* wrought to the Church, but rather whether ever any, though perhaps not wittingly, set open a dore to more mischiefe in Christendome. There is just cause therefore that when the *Prelates* cry out Let the Church be reform'd according to *Constantine*, it should sound to a judicious eare no otherwise, then if they should say Make us rich, make us

[16] 'Smectymnuus', *An Answer to a Booke Entituled, An Humble Remonstrance* (London, 1641), 92.

[17] Ibid. 90.

[18] See esp. Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c.1590–1640* (Oxford, 1997).

[19] John Milton, *An Apology against a Pamphlet Call'd A Modest Confutation* (*CPW*, 1: 942).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> lofty, make us lawlesse, for if any under him were not so, thanks to those ancient remains of integrity, which were not yet quite worne out, and not to his Government.[20]

He was scornful of the 'Primitive English Churches', which shared the petty fractiousness of other post-apostolic Churches. His contempt for the founding fathers of the Christian faith in England continued long past his first anti-prelatical exercises in Early Church history. His *History of Britain* (1670) playfully depicted as ludicrous the pivotal encounter between Ethelbert and Augustine, whose party approached the superstitious monarch like a modern papist procession 'singing thir solemn Litanies' and carrying cross and icon. The king's anxiety about the missionaries' casting a spell over him in Milton's account would have been reinforced by what he saw.[21]

Milton, like other anti-prelatical and anti-ceremonialist activists, exempted John Wyclif, the Oxford theologian who inspired the Lollard heresy, from any censure. Milton identified him and his followers as a source of 'that glimmering light' that anticipated the work currently in progress.[22] However, he differed from the Smectymnuans in his profound disappointment with the English Reformation, what he termed 'this forescore yeares vexation' of the Church,[23] and in his sustained and disparaging comparison of English ecclesiastical history with the experience of continental Reformed Churches. Milton had recently seen them at first hand, or at least two of them. He had travelled across France at a time when the Edict of Nantes still allowed Huguenots to worship pretty much as they pleased, and he returned from Italy via Geneva, where he stayed a little while, meeting daily with the Italian émigré Giovanni Diodati, the staunchly Calvinist uncle of his late friend Charles Diodati and a luminary within that staunchly Calvinist society.[24] In France and Italy he had seen, too, the characteristics of Catholic discipline and church government, what he termed 'the great darknesse of the Roman Church'.[25] To him it appeared evident that, in

[20] John Milton, *Of Reformation* (*CPW*, 1: 560).
[21] John Milton, *The History of Britain* (*CPW*, 5: 187–8).
[22] Milton, *Apology* (*CPW*, 1: 704).
[23] Ibid. 703.
[24] Campbell and Corns, *John Milton*, 125–7.
[25] Milton, *Church-Government* (*CPW*, 1: 850).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

its liturgy, its ceremonialism, its vestments and its church government, the English Reformation was very incomplete. Throughout his anti-prelatical tracts, with a distinctive earnestness, he invoked the spirit of Protestant internationalism and the examples of continental Churches. He praised their extinction of 'idolatrous and Gentilish rites and ceremonies' still practised in the Church of England.[26] English Protestants should strive for 'our *Uniforme Consent* to the rest of the *Churches* abroad'.[27]

Turning the old prelatical charge that puritanism was schismatical against his adversaries, he developed, with a flamboyance typical of the style of these early tracts, a protracted image:

> we must first of all begin roundly to cashier, and cut away from the publick body the noysom, and diseased tumor of Prelacie, and come from Schisme to *unity* with our neighbour Reformed sister Churches, which with the blessing of *peace* and *pure doctrine* have now long time flourish'd; and doubtles with all hearty *joy,* and *gratulation,* will meet, and welcome our Christian *union* with them, as they have bin all this while griev'd at our strangeness and little better then separation from them.[28]

As in his use of the term 'schism', smartly shifted from its usual range of reference to allude to the gaps between the Church of England and continental Protestantism, Milton was again playing a linguistic game. 'Separation' had since the late sixteenth century been used as a generic term for those more radical puritans, such as the Brownists, who no longer maintained even a show of communion with the Church of England.[29] Once more, Milton suggested, the real dangers to unity across the Protestant nations, as within English Protestantism, lay in ceremonialism and the practices maintained in the Church of England.

Milton's own radicalization certainly accelerated apace after 1643 and the sustained attack by what Ann Hughes has called 'the Presbyterian mobilisation'[30] on the first edition of his *Doctrine*

[26] Ibid. 761.
[27] Milton, *Of Reformation* (*CPW*, 1: 527).
[28] Ibid.
[29] *OED*, *s.v.* 'Separation', 4.
[30] Ann Hughes, Gangraena *and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004); the term is used *passim* to denote the organized attempts by less radical puri-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and Discipline of Divorce. Very shortly, he understood at first hand that the kinds of heterodox theological speculation to which he had become drawn were incompatible with the version of church reform favoured by his former Smectymnuan allies, which would have resulted in a Calvinist orthodoxy on matters of salvation and probably a Presbyterian church government, both protected and confirmed by the power of civil magistrates.

Milton's currently most famous prose work, *Areopagitica* (1644), is still often regarded as an iconic text in the western liberal tradition, in its apparent assertion of the rights of a free press. It properly belongs in the debate that developed between, on the one hand, Presbyterians and, on the other hand, independent and more radical advocates of the toleration of a wide spectrum of Protestant belief. Viewed historically, it is a tolerationist, not a liberal, tract. Its particular concern with pre-publication licensing and press control reflected the importance of print dissemination to an activist like Milton, who had no access to parliamentary and pulpit platforms. Yet Milton's interest in tolerationism preceded his direct personal interest in resisting attempts to silence his advocacy of radical reform in the field of divorce legislation. Indeed, in his last two anti-prelatical tracts, *The Reason of Church-Government* and *An Apology*, he seemed at times more concerned with a limited defence of sects outside the Church of England than with the restructuring of its episcopalian model of church government. Moreover, with the power of hindsight, we may recognize in his *Reason of Church-Government* the origins of a radical perspective that would remain central to his thinking till his final tract of 1673. It found expression in an aggressive response to a familiar prelatical claim that, without the authority of bishops, sects would be rampant and disruptive of the national Church:

> What sects? What are their opinions? ... it will appeare both by your former prosecutions and your present instances, that they are only such to speak of as are offended with your lawless government, your ceremonies, your Liturgy, an extract of the Masse book translated. ... Noise it till ye be hoarse; that a rabble of Sects will come in, it will be answer'd ye, no rabble

tans to resist toleration, to oppose Independency and more radical sects, and to bring the Church of England to a settlement on the Scottish Presbyterian model, enforced by the civil magistrate.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> sir Priest, but a unanimous multitude of good Protestants will then joyne to the Church, which now because of you stand separated.[31]

It could not be clearer. Milton's vision of the English national Church was so wide and inclusive that those who stood separated could re-enter – while prelates and ceremonialists were to make some sort of unspecified exit.

As a programme for reformation and indeed for the maintenance of a national Church this view is not without its problems. In step with Milton, John Goodwin was forming a broadly similar concept. Goodwin, though Milton's senior by some fourteen years, has been widely recognized as among the closest to him in terms of ideological development. Indeed, the tracking of their similarities is among the most useful aspects of Christopher Hill's biography of the poet,[32] though the point had been made by Don Wolfe[33] and has been eloquently confirmed in John Coffey's biography of Goodwin.[34] Indeed, if Milton had followed his once intended ecclesiastical career, it would perhaps broadly have resembled that of Goodwin, a man whose education, tolerationist values, scholarship and intellectual pugnacity broadly resembled his own. (G. E. Aylmer, in a telling phrase, brackets them as 'intellectual mandarins to their fingertips'.)[35] Goodwin's own problems in the mid 1640s illuminate some of the conflicting impulses present also in Milton's alternative vision for the Church of England. He had been ordained in 1620 and since 1633 had been vicar of St Stephen's, Coleman Street, London. As congregational Independency emerged as the leading alternative model to Presbyterianism and as Goodwin developed both as its advocate and as a leading defender of toleration, he faced an interesting problem. While retaining his parochial office and duties, he also became leader of a gathered church, a congregation closely aligned to those radical views that set him at odds with more conservatively inclined parishioners. The position proved untenable, as Tai Liu relates:

[31] Milton, *Church-Government* (*CPW*, 1: 787–8); quotation at 788.
[32] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London, 1977).
[33] Don M. Wolfe, *Milton in the Puritan Revolution* (New York, 1941).
[34] John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Woodbridge, 2006).
[35] G. E. Aylmer, *The State's Servants: The Civil Service of the English Republic 1649–1660* (London, 1973), 279.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Some parishioners, therefore, brought charges against Goodwin to the committee for plundered ministers. Efforts were made to reconcile the differences but all failed. On 22 May 1645 Goodwin was sequestered. After his sequestration, he and his gathered church first met in some buildings in Coleman Street and afterwards at the parish church of St Mary Abchurch.[36]

Goodwin returned to his living and the gathered congregation migrated back to St Stephen's late in 1649, by which time he had emerged as among the foremost defenders of the regicidal regime, at least among its clerical supporters.

As a lay activist, Milton was never required to negotiate the potential conflicts for Independent ministers who wished to remain within the national Church. Independency had had a much simpler experience in New England, where the broad alignment between most Churches allowed the congregational model to develop. Goodwin, however, thereafter retained his parish and his living till he was deprived of both, and of holding any other office, at the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.

But through the late 1640s and the 1650s Milton was adding a broader anti-clericalism to his rejection first of ceremonial episcopacy and thereafter of Presbyterianism. The equation of Presbyterianism and prelacy had been made with sardonic wordplay, probably no later than 1646, in the assertion that 'New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest* writ large',[37] with its quibble that the word 'priest' is etymologically a contracted form of Latin 'presbyter'. 'On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament', the poem that concludes thus, remained unpublished till 1673. Through the decade of his state employment initiated in 1649 Milton's publications remained scrupulously on message, declining involvement in theological debate and assiduously focusing on the political issues that fell to his responsibility. But in two other poems, both dating from 1652, which were to remain for some while in manuscript, we may discern his belief that Independent divines were as grasping as episcopalian and Presbyterian ones and that a beneficed clergy, supported by tithes and protected by magistrates, was unacceptable.

[36] *ODNB*, *s.n.* 'Goodwin, John (c.1594–1665)'.

[37] John Milton, 'On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament', line 20, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey, 2nd edn (London, 1997), 298 [hereafter: *CSP*].

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Plainly it was to Independent clergy he alluded when he urged Oliver Cromwell, 'Help us to save free conscience from the paw | Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw'.[38] Again, Sir Henry Vane the Younger's achievements included the ability to distinguish 'spiritual power and civil, what each means, | What severs each'.[39] However, it was not until the end of Oliver's Protectorate in 1658 that Milton published two pamphlets in this vein.

In *Of Civil Power* and *Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the church* he gave vent to views long suppressed in the interest of the state he had served. A beneficed and educated clergy, supported by tithes, was to be rejected in favour of lay preachers moved by the Spirit, a concept plainly supported by some notion of the apostolic Church: 'They [who first taught the gospel] were otherwise unlearned men'.[40] Milton rehearsed, too, his sense that the core beliefs of Protestantism were easily understood and communicated: 'seeing then that Christian religion may be so easily attaind, and by meanest capacities, it cannot be much difficult to finde waies, both how the poore, yea all men may be soone taught what is to be known of Christianitie'.[41] An austere and militant vision of the Church emerged, in which the faith may be imparted by modestly recompensed and itinerant preachers and may be imparted anywhere: 'not withstanding the gaudy superstition of som devoted still ignorantly to temples, we may be well assur'd that he who disdaind not to be laid in manger, disdains not to be preachd in a barn'.[42]

So, the steeple-house and temple are redundant; universities are unnecessary to the training of preachers; the gospel may be disseminated most effectively by itinerants, and that role stands open to poor and uneducated men to take it on. Those views are wholly characteristic of the Quakerism of the late 1650s. Milton was no Quaker, disagreeing profoundly with several of their central tenets. But unsurprisingly in the decade following the Restoration, if not sooner, he found friendship and support among the Quaker community. Evidently, he liked their style.

[38] John Milton, 'To the Lord Generall Cromwell', lines 13–14 (*CSP*, 329).

[39] John Milton, 'To Sir Henry Vane the Younger', lines 10–11 (*CSP*, 331).

[40] John Milton, *Of Civil Power* and *Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the church* (*CPW*, rev. edn, 7: 302).

[41] Ibid. 303.

[42] Ibid. 304.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

After 1660 Milton for long fell silent on issues of church reform. Although *Paradise Lost* is replete with lightly encoded critiques of kingship, it has little of an anti-clerical or anti-ceremonial nature to offer, beyond its endorsement of Adam and Eve's extempore style of worship. But in 1672, in *Paradise Regained*, he returned to some of the concerns and enthusiasms of his tracts of 1659 as he commemorated the humble home circumstances of the Son of God, 'low of birth, | A carpenter thy father known, thyself | Bred up in poverty and straits at home', while the apostolic Church in waiting were 'plain fishermen, no greater men them call, | Close in a cottage low together got'.[43] Taking the opportunity afforded by the confusions surrounding the Declaration of Indulgence (1672), he made one last sally into prose polemic, in his *Of True Religion, Haeresie, Schism, Toleration, And what best means may be us'd against the growth of Popery* (1673). Though it may seem somewhat of a paradox to modern readers, this was an implacably anti-Catholic tolerationist tract – though that formula could be applied as appropriately to *Areopagitica*. It exploited a growing climate of toleration towards Protestant Dissenters and an associated rise in hostility towards 'popery'. The work reprises many of the themes we have identified in his earlier writing. Once more, he took an internationalist perspective, reviewing possible errors that provoked divisions not only among English Protestants but between the Protestant faith communities of Europe. The core beliefs 'absolutely necessary to salvation' are few and simple. The differences between Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Arians and Socinians, 'calmly and charitably enquir'd into', should not divide the Protestant community.[44] Such disagreements need not 'tend to the breaking of Communion; if they can agree in the right administration of that wherein they Communicate, keeping their other Opinions to themselves, not being destructive to Faith'.[45] Milton's ultimate vision for the Church of England was of a wide Protestant faith community in which people may worship together after their own inclination while subscribing – without contention – to a wide range of doctrinal positions, united by their commitment

[43] John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, bk 2, lines 413–15; ibid., lines 27–8 (*CSP*, 460, 445).

[44] John Milton, *Of True Religion, Haeresie, Schism, Toleration, And what best means may be us'd against the growth of Popery* (*CPW*, 8: 424–5).

[45] Ibid. 423.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the foundation of religious belief on the revealed word of God. People can differ about soteriology, about the fate of the soul at death, about the nature of the marriage bond, about the doctrine of the Trinity, without breaking communion.

★ ★ ★

The study of Milton's churches offers an important perspective on puritanism and Dissent. Viewed from a post-1662 standpoint, once oppositional ministers had left the Church, radical Protestantism might appear to have been simply, eternally and inevitably at odds with and separate from the national Church. But Milton well exemplifies how many English Protestants who were fiercely critical of its ceremonialism and church government nevertheless regarded themselves for much of the 1640s and 1650s as members of the Church of England with a legitimate interest in its further reformation. At least for Milton, such possibilities remained even into the early 1670s.

What would Milton make of the twenty-first-century Church of England? No doubt on vestments and liturgy he would still have something to say. But tithes have gone, and civil magistrates rarely involve themselves in matters of religion. Its doctrinal inclusiveness and toleration of widely diverse opinion on doctrine and indeed on lifestyle meet late Miltonic criteria. It is home to creationists and Christian humanists alike. William Laud was paid like a prince; Rowan Williams is paid like a middle-ranking professor. Indeed, some Church of England clergy would probably argue that they are scarcely beneficed at all. Viewed from our own perspective, Milton's radicalism can sometimes be obscured by the success his ideas subsequently achieved. We take it for granted that our political masters may be held to account for their actions and that the law is above them, as he argued. There is a general assumption that, except in times of national emergency, the press should be free from pre-publication censorship, as he argued. Changes in divorce legislation have for decades permitted divorce on the grounds of incompatibility and straightforwardly allowed remarriage of both parties, as he argued. Perhaps the reformation of the national Church on Miltonic lines belongs, with some qualification, in that same set of Miltonic accomplishments.

Bangor University

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400001315 Published online by Cambridge University Press