

MILTON'S ANTI-TRINITARIANISM AND PARADISE REGAINED

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#### MILTON'S ANTI-TRINITARIANISM AND PARADISE REGAINED

John Milton's Trinitarian heterodoxy was revealed in 1825 when Charles R. Sumner printed the previously unpublished De Doctrina Christiana, with his own translation. The question of the degree of that heterodoxy has yet to be answered. Similarly, the question of whether or not Paradise Lost displays anti-Trinitarian tenets began at the same time and continues to be hotly debated. The first question is not likely to be answered to the satisfaction of all scholars in the near future because of the considerable problem that arises when critics attempt to conclusively define the terms of the discussion. One needs to be an astute scholar of the Greek language and a learned theologian to bring enough ability to this question to answer it with any degree of success.

Fortunately, however, it is not necessary for my purpose in this report to determine the degree of Milton's heterodoxy. What I do wish to examine is whether or not Paradise Regained, a poem not often referred to

by those discussing Milton's position on the Trinity, displays orthodox Trinitarian beliefs. It is my thesis that although Milton may have been involved in anti-Trinitarian speculation when he composed Paradise Regained, he left the poem open to orthodox interpretation. By orthodox Trinitarianism I mean the belief that there is absolute equality among the Father, Son and Spirit--a belief that will tolerate no subordination of one person of the Trinity to another. Because of the subject matter of the poem my paper will focus chiefly on the status of the Son of God. In limiting my discussion of Paradise Regained to the question of its position on the Trinity I have left out many important aspects of the poem which do not bear directly on my subject.

First of all, focusing on Book I, Chapter V of De Doctrina Christiana, "Of the Son," I would like to examine some elements of the contemporary controversy concerning Milton's alleged "Arianism." In 1941 Maurice Kelley published This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Kelley assumes that the question of whether Milton expressed Arian views in De Doctrina Christiana has already been answered satisfactorily in the affirmative. He goes on to present the idea that Paradise Lost is an "Arian document."<sup>2</sup> However, William B. Hunter, Jr. backs up a step to deny that De Doctrina Christiana exhibits Arian views.<sup>3</sup> He points out that Milton never mentioned Arius

<sup>1</sup>This Great Argument (reprinted 1962). See pages 4-7 for a review of early reaction to De Doctrina Christiana.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 122

<sup>3</sup>"Milton's Arianism Reconsidered," Harvard Theological Review, 52 (1959), pp. 9-35.

with any hint of kinship; that contemporary biographers never accuse Milton of Arian views; that Arians seldom used Scripture, Milton's avowed source for all his theological conclusions; and that Arians insisted that the Son was generated "out of nothing" while Milton says that the Son was begotten from God's own substance. He goes on to say that while Arius declared:

1. that the Father acted in time of his own free will;
2. that the Logos was not eternally generated; and 3. that the Logos was created "out of nothing," the Council of Nicaea condemned only the last statement. Mr. Hunter concludes that Milton avoids the only real charge of Arianism that might be brought against him by saying that the Logos was created out of divine substance. He summarizes with this statement: "It seems that we may assert positively that Milton was not an Arian. Sub-ordinationism as such has not been branded heretical, though it is not the view of the Trinity found most widely today--or in the seventeenth century for that matter."<sup>4</sup> While denying that Milton can be described as Arian, Mr. Hunter acknowledges that his theological speculation concerning the Son of God is unusual for his time and for ours. J.H. Adamson accepts Hunter's opinion and adds the point that Arians abhorred metaphor while St. Athanasius, a vigorous opponent of the Arians, used the device frequently.<sup>5</sup> Athanasius often described the Father as sun, fountain and archetype while describing the Son as radiance, stream and image--metaphors that Milton uses frequently in his poetry. This is not to

<sup>4</sup>"Milton's Arianism Reconsidered," Harvard Theological Review, 52 (1959), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>"Milton's Arianism," Harvard Theological Review, 53 (1960), pp. 269-276.



say that Milton was directly indebted to Athanasius as the metaphors were popular.

C.A. Patrides presents a useful summary of the reasons why Milton should not be regarded as an Arian.<sup>6</sup> Although Mr. Patrides acknowledges that Milton and most Protestants share the Arian concept that creation was an act of God's free will, he finds eight specific differences between the Arians and Milton: 1. Arians believed that God is completely isolated from creation while Milton repeatedly described God's involvement with the universe; 2. Arians maintained that the Son was created "out of nothing" whereas Milton believed that the Son was created out of the divine substance; 3. Arians scrupulously avoided all metaphors, and though Milton seldom uses metaphor in De Doctrina Christiana, his poetry is full of the very metaphors that St. Athanasius was fond of using; 4. Arians insisted that the Father was invisible and ineffable to the Son while Milton emphasized the communion of Father and Son; 5. Arians believed that the Son of God was begotten expressly to create the world but Milton did not express this view; 6. Arians believed that the Son was mutable and peccable while Milton insisted that the Son was not; 7. Arians believed that the Son assumed a body without a soul while Milton believed that the Son was man, body and soul; 8. Arians believed that the Holy Spirit did not take part in the substance of the Son or Father while Milton expressed the opinion that the Holy Spirit was begotten of the substance of the Father.

Mr. Patrides' evidence provides proof that Milton cannot be called an Arian in any strict definition of the word. However, as Edward S. Le Comte

<sup>6</sup>"Milton and Arianism," Journal of the History of Ideas, 25 (1964), pp. 423-429.

points out in A Milton Dictionary<sup>7</sup> the term is often used loosely as a synonym for anti-Trinitarianism. Mr. Kelley, answering Mr. Hunter's article, asserts that the Nicene Creed indicated that the Son is the same essence as the Father and anathematized those who said there was a time when the Son did not exist. He also insists that ". . .the term Arian may be applied generally to theologians who do not accept orthodox dogmas concerning the Trinity. . ."<sup>8</sup> but acknowledges that anti-Trinitarianism may be a more precise term to use when describing Milton's heterodoxy. Mr. Patrides prefers the term subordinationism and points out that subordinationism was "upheld by early Christian writers to the Council of Nicaea and revived by the Cambridge Platonists of Milton's own day."<sup>9</sup> The argument continues to rage. It is complicated by the fact that we can read about Arian tenets only as they are refuted by writers such as St. Athanasius because early Church officials destroyed the writings of the Arians.<sup>10</sup> A further complexity results from Milton's theological vocabulary which contains Greek terms that have been defined in more than one fashion.<sup>11</sup> John A. Clair, espousing Kelley's view maintains the differences between Kelley and Hunter are more apparent than real.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A Milton Dictionary, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> "Milton's Arianism Again Considered," Harvard Theological Review, 54 (1961), p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Milton and the Christian Tradition, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Patrides, "Milton and Arianism," p. 423.

<sup>11</sup> See William B. Hunter, Jr., "Some Problems in John Milton's Theological Vocabulary," Harvard Theological Review, 57 (1964), pp. 353-365.

<sup>12</sup> "A Note on Milton's 'Arianism'," Essays and Studies in Language and Literature, ed. Herbert Petit, p. 44.

Stella Revard states that strict Trinitarianism, contrary to the position adopted by Milton in De Doctrina Christiana insists that both the Son and Father are inoriginate.<sup>13</sup> In the face of the evidence provided by Messrs. Hunter, Adamson and Patrises, I would be very reluctant to call Milton an Arian. Nevertheless, I do believe that the status of the Son as presented in Book I, Chapter V of De Doctrina Christiana would appear highly objectionable to orthodox Trinitarians in Milton's day and our own.

In the preface to Chapter V Milton says:

The Roman Church demands implicit obedience on all points of faith. If I professed myself a member of it, I should be so indoctrinated, or at any rate so besotted by habit, that I should yield to its authority and to its mere decree even if it were to assert that the doctrine of the Trinity, as accepted at present, could not be proved from any passage of scripture. As it happens, however, I am one of those who recognize God's word alone as the rule of faith; so I shall state quite openly what seems to me much more clearly deducible from the text of scripture than the currently accepted doctrine. I do not see how anyone who calls himself a Protestant or a member of the Reformed Church, and who acknowledges the same rule of faith as myself, could be offended with me for this, especially as I am not trying to browbeat anyone, but am merely pointing out what I consider the more credible doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

Milton is clearly aware that what he has to say about the Son of God is at odds with both Roman Catholic dogma and the "currently accepted doctrine" of Protestants. He is not disturbed that his ideas are unusual because he is writing to those who share his Protestant faith. He hopes that they will not accuse any individual of wrongdoing for using his God-given reason to interpret Holy Scripture. However, it is significant

<sup>13</sup>"The Dramatic Function of the Son in Paradise Lost: A Commentary on Milton's 'Trinitarianism'," Journal of English and Germanic Philology. 66 (1967), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup>John Milton, De Doctrina Christiana, I.v., The Works of John Milton, ed. Maurice Kelley (see List of Works Cited), p. 203. Hereafter cited by

that he is very careful to remind his readers that as a Protestant he has the right to engage in this kind of study.

Milton continues to acknowledge that he is contradicting accepted opinion. He says ". . . however the Son was begotten, it did not arise from natural necessity, as is usually maintained, but was just as much a result of the Father's decree and will as the Son's priesthood, kingship, and resurrection from the dead." (208) Milton even exhibits a degree of scorn for those who have established the commonly accepted creed:

In spite of the fact that we all know there is only one God, Christ in scripture is called not merely the only begotten Son of God but also, frequently, God. Many people, pretty intelligent people in their own estimation, felt sure that this was inconsistent. So they hit upon the bizarre and senseless idea that the Son, although personally and numerically distinct, was nevertheless essentially one with the Father, and so there was still only one God. (212)

This bizarre and senseless belief is, of course, common to Trinitarians.

He goes on to explain that angels and saints are often called god in Scripture when they are performing services for the deity. One cannot conclude, then, that simply because the Son is called God in Scripture he is co-essential with the Father. Mr. Kelley summarizes the argument of Chapter V in this way:

The orthodox Trinitarian concept of the Son cannot be upheld by either reason or the Scripture. In the Bible, the Son testifies that the Father is the one true God by whom are all things; the Son and the apostles teach that divine attributes belong only to the Father; when these are attributed to the Son they are understood to be attributable in their original and proper sense to the Father alone; the Son acknowledges that whatever share of divinity he possesses is assigned to him by gift of the Father; and the Son and the apostles both proclaim the Father is greater than the Son in all things.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This Great Argument, p. 84.

Milton presents a very effective interpretation of Holy Scripture which is completely in line with his rational assumptions about the nature of being, but unorthodox in that it seems to declare the Son subordinate to the Father.

## II

The dates of composition of both De Doctrina Christiana and Paradise Regained are a subject of critical controversy. One cannot argue convincingly about their relationship on the basis of chronology. However, even if Milton was involved in anti-Trinitarian thinking when he composed Paradise Regained, as seems likely, he has left the poem open to orthodox interpretation. A casual reading of the poem by those aware of the heterodox elements in De Doctrina Christiana can certainly reveal elements which seem on first glance to be anti-Trinitarian, that is, to imply that the Son is subordinate to the Father. Milton focuses very carefully and deliberately on the Son of God as man. There were, however, both dramatic and traditional reasons for this focus which orthodox Trinitarians could accept. Furthermore, there are elements in the poem which indicate the divine nature of its protagonist.

Throughout Paradise Regained Jesus is referred to as man. The poem begins with the words:

I WHO e're while the happy Garden sung,  
By one mans disobedience lost, now sing  
Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,  
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd .  
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd  
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,  
And Eden rais'd in the wast Wilderness.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Paradise Regained, I. 1-7, Columbia Milton, ed. Frank A. Patterson (see List of Works Cited). Hereafter cited by book and verse.

This will be the story of the second Adam who will undo the folly of his predecessor. This second Adam, like the first, is described as "one man." There is no allusion to the divine qualities of the protagonist in these first lines of the poem. The father also refers to his son as man, a man who will teach Satan a valuable lesson:

He now shall know I can produce a man  
 Of female Seed, far abler to resist  
 All his sollicitations, and at length  
 All his vast force, and drive him back to Hell,  
 Winning by Conquest what the first man lost  
 By fallacy surpriz'd. But first I mean  
 To exercise him in the Wilderness,  
 There he shall first lay down the rudiments  
 Of his great warfare, e're I send him forth  
 To conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes,  
 By Humiliation and strong Sufferance:  
 His weakness shall o'recome Satanic strength  
 And all the world, and mass of sinful flesh;  
 That all the Angels and Aethereal Powers,  
 They now, and men hereafter may discern,  
 From what consummate vertue I have chose  
 This perfect Man, by merit call'd my Son,  
 To earn Salvation for the Sons of men. (I, 150-167)

The father is outlining the reasons for Jesus's temptation. In this outline he puts a great deal of emphasis on the human nature of his Son.

Christ's own words add evidence to the assumption that we will see a human being in Paradise Regained. His autobiographical account in Book I describes a man awakening to his mission in life. Jesus ponders over the fact that childish play did not interest him and that as a child he was able to teach the wise men in the Temple. He describes his youthful desire "To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke," (I, 217), and to quell all evil through physical force. Then, he describes how this aim upon serious meditation gave way to a wish "By winning words to conquer willing hearts," (I, 222). He recalls how the words of his mother combined with his knowledge of the Law and the Prophets led him to believe that he was the Messiah

and how this belief was gloriously confirmed when he was baptized by John at the river Jordan. He indicates that he is entering the desert because the Spirit wills it, and seems to be unaware of what will follow. No evidence of divine knowledge or power is presented in this autobiographical account delivered by Jesus even though his account follows the scene at the river Jordan where John the Baptist recognized his divinity and the Father confirmed this recognition.

In the course of the poem Jesus continues to exhibit human attributes. A learning process is carried out. At one point he is quietly amazed by the fact that while he is fasting his body does not suffer:

Where will this end? four times ten days I have pass'd  
Wandering this woody maze, and humane food  
Nor tasted, nor had appetite; that Fast  
To Vertue I impute not, or count part  
Of what I suffer here; if Nature need not,  
Or God support Nature without repast  
Though needing, what praise is it to endure?  
But now I feel I hunger, which declares,  
Nature hath need of what she asks; yet God  
Can satisfie that need some other way,  
Though hunger still remain: . . . (II, 245-255)

Jesus has quiet faith that God will supply all his needs. This faith and submission characterize all his words in Paradise Regained.

The emphasis on Christ's humanity leads Elizabeth Pope to speculate: "Taken by and in itself, such preoccupation with the lower aspect of Christ's dual nature may well raise the question of whether by the time he wrote Paradise Regained, Milton still believed in the Lord's divinity at all. We know that when he composed The Christian Doctrine, he was an Arian: is it not at least possible that his faith in the Trinity deteriorated still further as the years went on?"<sup>17</sup> She acknowledges, however,

<sup>17</sup> Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem (Reprinted 1962), p. 23.



that this theory cannot be proven by internal evidence from Paradise Regained and therefore repudiates it.

As she points out: "In thus making the temptation an event carried out quasi homo for the redemption of mankind, Milton was in agreement with a long line of theologians of both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Catholic and Protestant alike."<sup>18</sup> An all-perfect, all-knowing Godhead cannot be tempted. It is theologically impossible. Yet, three evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, describe Christ's temptation (as well as his crucifixion and death). This presents a rather serious dilemma for the orthodox believer. To suggest that the Godhead can suffer in any way is Sabellian or Modalist heresy.<sup>19</sup> The orthodox answer is that Christ was tempted, suffered and died only in his human nature. Milton is not presenting anything that would shock an orthodox Protestant (or Catholic for that matter) in the seventeenth century.

There is another reason (apart from anti-Trinitarianism) that Milton might have chosen to present Christ chiefly as a human being. Arnold Stein puts it this way: "The hero our drama gives us is a perfect man, a legitimate subject for poetry but extremely difficult to present in dramatic action. A perfect divine hero would be more difficult, in fact impossible for dramatic action, and a semi-divine hero would be less difficult for he would not need to be perfect."<sup>20</sup> Mr. Stein's point is well-taken. In a poem such as Paradise Regained where there are only two major figures, one of whom is perfect, dramatic tension is exceedingly difficult

<sup>18</sup> Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem (reprinted 1962), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Adamson, "Milton's Arianism," p. 269.

<sup>20</sup> Heroic Knowledge, p. 4.



to maintain. It is therefore in the interest of dramatic success that Milton describe some kind of active process and that active process in Paradise Regained can legitimately include the awakening of self-knowledge in Christ. Milton does not have to step outside the bounds of orthodoxy to present this action, as tradition firmly supports the idea that Christ in his human nature shared completely in humanity in all things but sin.

Paradise Regained not only recounts the process whereby Jesus learns about his mission, it also takes into account the divine nature of Christ. Don Cameron Allen describes this characteristic: "In his divine nature Christ knows his identity and foresees his course, but in his human nature the 'exalted man' is often uncertain of both. As we read the epic, we watch him as he crosses and recrosses the boundary between the two persons, for it is out of this wandering to and fro, out of the humanly uncertain and the divinely sure that Milton gives validity to the test and extracts from it a highly dramatic conclusion."<sup>21</sup> The Son of God is a man in Paradise Regained. Yet, if this emphasis on Christ's human nature begins to indicate anti-Trinitarianism there are other elements in the poem to counterbalance it. There is a symbolic representation of the Trinity that occurs several times in the poem. Furthermore Christ's divinity is made clear through the poem's relationship with Paradise Lost, through its references to Christ's knowledge and power, and through the theological speculation engaged in by the apostles, Mary and, most importantly, Satan. Satan's speculation gives increased dramatic tension to the poem for he is trying desperately to learn the true nature of the "man" he is tempting. Throughout the poem Satan is given hints concerning Jesus's identity, but

<sup>21</sup>The Harmonious Vision (enlarged edition, 1970), p. 118.

blinded (perhaps by the same pride that led to his defeat in Paradise Lost) refuses to accept these clues. He remains bewildered until the dramatic conclusion.

The symbolic representation of the Trinity that I refer to is the scene at the river Jordan. This scene is described no less than six times in Paradise Regained. As Jesus is being baptized by John a dove appears above his head and a voice from the heavens proclaims: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This scene is still described when Christians are studying and venerating the Trinity.

The first reference to it appears very early in the poem:

From Nazareth the Son of Joseph deem'd  
To the flood Jordan, came as then obscure,  
Unmarkt, unknown; but him the Baptist soon  
Descri'd, divinely warn'd, and witness bore  
As to his worthier, and would have resign'd  
To him his Heavenly Office, nor was long  
His witness unconfirm'd: on him baptiz'd  
Heaven open'd, and in likeness of a Dove  
The Spirit descended, while the Fathers voice  
From Heav'n pronounc'd him his beloved Son. (I, 23-32)

Satan is described as having witnessed this scene. We discover later that the Prince of Evil has been watching Jesus since his birth; yet this particular event moves him to real fear. He recounts the scene for his cohorts in this way:

I saw

The Prophet do him reverence, on him rising  
Out of the water, Heav'n above the Clouds  
Unfold her Crystal Dores, thence on his head  
A perfect Dove descend, what e're it meant,  
And out of Heav'n the Sov'raign voice I heard,  
This is my Son belov'd, in him am pleas'd.  
His Mother then is mortal, but his Sire;  
He who obtains the Monarchy of Heav'n,  
And what will he not do to advance his Son?  
His first-begot we know, and sore have felt,  
When his fierce thunder drove us to the deep;  
Who this is we must learn, for man he seems  
In all his lineaments, though in his face  
The glimpses of his Fathers glory shine. (I, 79-93)

While Jesus is reflecting upon his mission in Book I the scene is described

again:

But as I rose out of the laving stream,  
Heaven open'd her eternal doors, from whence  
The Spirit descended on me like a Dove,  
And last the sum of all, my Father's voice,  
Audibly heard from Heav'n, pronounc'd me his,  
Me his beloved Son, in whom alone  
He was well pleas'd; . . . (I, 280-286)

Then, just before the first temptation Satan refers to the scene again (I, 327-330). Mary also mentions it early in Book II (II, 85). The final reference to the baptismal scene occurs just prior to the final temptation (IV, 510-514). Satan makes the reference because he is haunted by this picture. It, above all else he has learned about Christ, leads him to believe that he is Son of God in a very special sense.

I do not insist that Milton's frequent allusion to the baptismal scene proves that he is presenting orthodox Trinitarian views. The scene is symbolic and does not confirm any dogmatic unity of essence or equality among the three persons of the Trinity. However, it is a symbolic representation of the Trinity accepted by orthodox Trinitarians and Milton adds nothing to it that would disturb orthodox believers in his time or our own.

Two of the major figures of Paradise Lost appear as the central figures of Paradise Regained. This relationship between the poems may also lead to an orthodox Trinitarian interpretation of Paradise Regained. Don Cameron Allen believes that the protagonist and antagonist of Paradise Regained are entirely different from the Son of God and Satan of Paradise Lost.<sup>22</sup> I would be the last to suggest that the Satan in Paradise Regained has the diabolical strength, energy and acumen of the ruler of hell in Paradise Regained. However, there is no theological or literary dogma,

<sup>22</sup>The Harmonious Vision (enlarged edition, 1970), p. 110.

to my knowledge, that proclaims Satan immutable. The tarnished angel of the earlier epic has become more and more tarnished as the centuries passed. Neither would I insist that Jesus could step immediately into the role of the Son of Paradise Lost because the Son in that epic had no human nature. He was not Jesus Christ because there was no Jesus Christ until the Incarnation. This is not to say that one must read Paradise Lost before being able to appreciate Paradise Regained. As E. M. W. Tillyard describes it, the later poem is a "colony linked by first tradition to its mother-city, [Paradise Lost] but autonomous and with a character entirely its own."<sup>23</sup> However, having read the earlier poem one recognizes its major characters in the later work.

In his human nature Jesus is the second Adam, but in his divine nature he is the being who conquered Satan and his cohorts in a battle which took place before time began. This is clearly indicated as the angels salute Jesus at the end of Book IV:

True Image of the Father whether thron'd  
In the bosom of bliss, and light of light  
Conceiving, or remote from Heaven, enshrin'd  
In fleshly Tabernacle, and human form,  
Wandering the Wilderness, whatever place,  
Habit, or state, or motion, still expressing  
The Son of God, with Godlike force indu'd  
Against th' Attempter of thy Fathers Throne,  
And Thief of Paradise; him long of old  
Thou didst debel, and down from Heav'n cast  
With all his Army, . . . (IV, 596-606)

In retrospect, these lines add ironic drama to Jesus's words to Satan after the first temptation. He says: "Why dost thou then suggest to me distrust,/ Knowing who I am as I know who thou art?" (I, 355-356). These words present a question. If Christ has only a human nature, how does he recognize Satan? The answer is that Christ has a divine as well as human

<sup>23</sup>Milton (second ed., 1967), p. 255.

nature.

Jesus refers to his past knowledge of the tempter one more time in the poem. After the temptation of the kingdoms Christ says to Satan:

I never lik'd thy talk, thy offers less,  
Now both abhor, since thou has dar'd to utter  
The adominable terms, impious condition;  
But I endure the time, till which expir'd,  
Thou hast permission on me. It is written  
The first of all Commandments, Thou shalt worship  
The Lord thy God, and only him shalt serve; (IV, 171-177)

"Never" is a strong word for a short acquaintance. Christ may be referring to another occurrence. The Son of God did not confront Satan face to face in Paradise Lost but he was surely aware of the tempter's impious braggadocio during the heavenly battle.

Milton would not have presented these passages if he had not wished to suggest that the Satan and the Son of God of Paradise Lost appear again in Paradise Regained. Admittedly Satan has lost luster and the Son of God has taken on a human nature, but they should know each other and Satan's blindness indicates how much he has changed from the cunning fiend of Paradise Lost.

Besides having past knowledge of the tempter Jesus displays other elements of superhuman knowledge. On the subject of Christ's knowledge John Steadman has this to say: "Though he undoubtedly knows some of the answers already, there is no indication that he knows all of them in advance."<sup>24</sup> Mr. Steadman's point is perceptive and logical. The Father proclaimed that he would "exercise" his Son in the wilderness. Yet Christ answers Satan with speed and clarity. He never displays the least hesitation when responding to Satan's ploys. From the first temptation to the

<sup>24</sup>"Paradise Regained: Moral Dialectic and the Pattern of Rejection," University of Toronto Quarterly, 31 (1962), p. 425.

last the Savior is ready with answers that confound his antagonist. If this does not indicate divine knowledge it begins to imply it.

When Satan suggests that Christ turn stone into bread to satisfy his hunger, Jesus replies:

Think'st thou such force in Bread? is it not written  
 (For I discern thee other than thou seem'st)  
 Man lives not by Bread only, but each Word  
 Proceeding from the mouth of God; who fed  
 Our Fathers here with Manna; in the Mount  
Moses was forty days, nor eat nor drank,  
 And forty days Elijah without food  
 Wandred this barren waste, the same I now:  
 Why dost thou then suggest to me distrust,  
 Knowing who I am, as I know who thou art? (I, 347-356)

There is no reason to think that the man, Jesus, has ever come into contact with the Prince of Darkness; yet, he knows immediately who the old man in "rural weeds" really is. I have already suggested that this implies they have met before; does not Christ's ability to unmask the demon represent his divine knowledge? Shortly after this first temptation Jesus expresses scorn for demon oracles and says:

God hath now sent his living Oracle  
 Into the World, to teach his final will,  
 And sends his Spirit of Truth henceforth to dwell  
 In pious Hearts, an inward Oracle  
 To all truth requisite for men to know. (I, 460-464)

Christ is aware of his mission early in the poem. He is also aware that he will be Satan's conquerer, "Know'st thou not that my rising is thy fall,/ And my promotion will by thy destruction?" (III, 201-202).

Furthermore Christ's knowledge extends beyond self-knowledge. He also appears to be privy to the wisdom of past ages. When Satan shows him the grandeurs of ancient Greece and suggests that he would rule more effectively if he had the wisdom of the Peripatetics, Epicureans and Stoics, Christ answers:

Think not but that I know these things, or think  
 I know them not; not therefore am I short  
 Of knowing what I aught: he who receives  
 Light from above, from the fountain of light,  
 No other doctrine needs, though granted true; (IV, 286-290)

The major thrust of this section is to indicate that Christ holds divine inspiration and Sacred Scripture in much higher respect than secular knowledge. The words also suggest, however, that Christ knows something about the philosophy of the Greeks. It is highly unlikely that a carpenter's son would have had the opportunity to study Greek philosophy but God, as author of all things, would not need to study in order to know. This passage, then, may be suggesting the extent of Christ's superhuman knowledge.

Christ's power is also referred to in the poem. Shortly after the first temptation, Christ has this to say to Satan:

Thy coming hither, though I know thy scope,  
 I bid not or forbid; do as thou find'st  
 Permission from above; thou canst not more. (I, 494-496)

As a man Jesus submits himself to the will of the Father, but the first part of his statement indicates that he has the power to bid or reproof. He is voluntarily refusing to exercise that power. Later in the poem the testimony to Christ's power is made clearer. Satan taunts Christ with a banquet:

All these are Spirits of Air, and Woods, and Springs,  
 Thy gentle Ministers, who come to pay  
 Thee homage, and acknowledge thee thir Lord:  
 What doubt'st thou Son of God? sit down and eat. (II, 374-377)

Jesus replies:

Said'st thou not that to all things I had right?  
 And who withholds my pow'r that right to use?  
 Shall I receive by gift what of my own,  
 When and where likes me best, I can command?  
 I can at will, doubt not, as soon as thou,  
 Command a Table in this Wilderness,  
 And call swift flights of Angels ministrant  
 Array'd in Glory on my cup to attend:  
 Why shouldst thou then obtrude this diligence,  
 In vain, where no acceptance it can find,



And with my hunger what hast thou to do?  
 Thy Pompous Delicacies I contemn,  
 And count thy specious gifts no gifts but guiles. (II, 379-391)

If Christ's reply contained only questions, it would be difficult to determine the meaning of the passage. One could conjecture that the Son of God is only taunting Satan and revealing nothing about himself. However, the declarative sentence is a definite expression of power. Satan's gifts are particularly meager when the Son of God can as easily attain them through his own power.

The obvious allusions to Christ's knowledge and power are kept to a minimum because Milton is focusing chiefly on the Son of God's human nature. However, by the end of the poem there is no room to doubt that Christ has more power than his antagonist (who has more power than human beings). This power can be considered as a gift from the Father, but Christ refers to it occasionally as if it were his own. William B. Hunter, Jr. describes the situation in this way: ". . .the incarnate Son, emptied of his divine power, is tempted as is man, and by his own free choice reveals his merit by refusing to do evil."<sup>25</sup> The Son of God does not display his power until the end of the poem, but he alludes to it more than once.

### III

The allusions to the baptismal scene and the references to Christ's knowledge and power show in themselves that there are elements of orthodox Trinitarianism in Paradise Regained. More important than these is the theological speculation that goes on concerning the person of Jesus. This speculation adds narrative suspense which could have been wanting since readers are quite familiar with the Biblical story.

<sup>25</sup>"Milton on the Incarnation: Some More Heresies," Journal of the History of Ideas, 21 (1960), p. 367.



E. M. W. Tillyard suggests that there is no theological speculation in Paradise Regained,<sup>26</sup> and it is true there is no erudite discussion of any theological point. However, the apostles and Mary speculate concerning Christ's mission and, more importantly, Satan speculates concerning Christ's true identity.

The second book of Paradise Regained begins with a description of those who have been baptized by John. They had been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but his disappearance into the desert has disturbed and bewildered them:

Alas, from what high hope to what relapse  
Unlook'd for are we fall'n, our eyes beheld  
Messiah certainly now come, so long  
Expected of our Fathers; we have heard  
His words, his wisdom full of grace and truth,  
Now, now, for sure, deliverance is at hand,  
The Kingdom shall to Israel be restor'd:  
Thus we rejoyc'd, but soon our joy is turn'd  
Into perplexity and new amaze:  
For whither is he gone, what accident  
Hath rapt him from us? will he now retire  
After appearance, and again prolong  
Our expectation? . . . (II, 30-42)

The apostles are concerned about the question of Jesus' mission. Their concern shows their inability to discern exactly who Jesus is. The Virgin Mother is also upset by her Son's disappearance. She, too, has witnessed the baptismal scene and is waiting for a prophecy of sorrow to be fulfilled (II, 85-101).

It is Satan's questionings, however, that are the most pertinent to my thesis. Ms. Pope indicates that the belief that Satan was trying to discover whether Christ was Son of God by gift or nature was traditional.<sup>27</sup> Mr. Allen, however, believes that in Paradise Regained "the real doubt that

<sup>26</sup> Milton, p. 256.

<sup>27</sup> Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem, p. 32.

lurks in the mind of the 'old Serpent' is about his own failing power as a corrupter and not about the identity of his opposite."<sup>28</sup> There is no doubt that Satan is becoming concerned about his deteriorating power as tempter. His two trips to hell indicate this very clearly. However, there is another doubt in his mind. There might be reasons for this devil to pretend that he does not know Jesus' true identity when he is speaking to the Savior. He may wish to taunt him, insult him, hurt his pride. However, Satan also indicates to his cohorts in hell that he has serious questions about the real nature of the being he has been tempting. Furthermore, Milton has presented the temptations in such a way that the last can hardly be considered a temptation at all. The third temptation is simply Satan's last desperate attempt to discover who Jesus really is.

Just after observing the baptismal scene, Satan returns to hell. He is clearly puzzling over the identity of Jesus. He reminds his cohorts: "His [God's] first-begot we know, and sore have felt,/ when his fierce thunder drove us to the deep;" (I, 89-90). and with great urgency proclaims that it is in their best interests to determine who this man is and to attempt to defeat him. Satan has two missions: first, to find out the true nature of the remarkable man; second, to conquer him. If he can accomplish the second mission the first will also be accomplished because if the man sins he is not the Son of God who conquered the rebels. There is no reason to believe that Satan is capable or even believes he is capable of conquering his former foe, but if the being in the desert is only a man, perhaps he will fall to the temptation to display the power that God has given him.

Satan's first ploy is in the line of tempter: "But if thou be the Son

<sup>28</sup>The Harmonious Vision, p. 114

of God, Command/That out of these hard stones be made thee bread" (I, 343-344). Satan is probably aware that the Son of God will obey no commands from him and that a just man may be able to resist this temptation. This tactic is no problem for Christ either as God or man. Jesus has yet to experience any hunger so he will not succumb because of a physical need. If it is a temptation to pride it is rather meager. The episode itself would be simple if it weren't for Jesus's magnificent reply in which he dramatically acknowledges that he is quite aware of who the man in "rural weeds" is. Christ also points out that Moses and Eliah were able to go for a great deal of time without food, implying that he is at least their equal. Shortly after this temptation Jesus indicates another clue to his identity. He calls himself God's "living Oracle" (I, 201). Satan is unable to determine what this means and returns to hell to examine the matter more carefully.

His first confrontation with Jesus has left the fallen archangel quite shaken. The "man" in the desert is certainly different from Adam. Satan says:

I, as I undertook, and with the vote  
 Consenting in full frequence was impowr'd,  
 Have found him, view'd him, tasted him, but find  
 Far other labour to be undergon  
 Then when I dealt with Adam first of Men,  
 Though Adam by his Wives allurements fell,  
 However to this Man inferior far,  
 If he be Man by Mothers side at least, (II, 129-136)

Satan is beginning to fear the worst. This leads to dishonest bravado:

I summon all  
 Rather to be in readiness, with hand  
 Or counsel to assist; lest I who erst  
 Thought none my equal, now be over-match'd. (II, 143-146)

Satan has already admitted to the denizens of hell that he had been over-matched by the Son of God. It is true, however, that up to this time no

mortal has been equal to his power. He is uncertain what to make of this "man."

When Belial suggests that Satan tempt Christ with beautiful women, the ruler of hell rejects the suggestion with scorn:

among the Sons of Men,  
How many have with a smile made small account  
Of beauty and her lures, easily scorn'd  
All her assaults, on worthier things intent? (II, 192-195)

If among the sons of men many rejected this temptation, how much easier would it be for a (?) the (?) Son of God? Satan does not suggest this overtly but there is the possibility that the problem is on his mind when he speaks these words.

When the Prince of Evil returns to the desert to speak with the Lord just before the banquet scene, he has these words:

Hast thou not right to all Created things,  
Owe not all Creatures by just right to thee  
Duty and Service, nor to stay till bid,  
But tender all their power? . . . (II, 324-327)

Christ is not even given time to reply to this question when the elegant banquet is spread before his eyes. However, he does answer the question later and, as I have pointed out when discussing Christ's power, indicates that he could call up a feast much more elaborate should he wish to do so. By this time Satan should be beginning to understand the nature of the individual before him, but he still refuses to believe what he has feared from the time he witnessed the baptismal scene. Through the remainder of Book II and the beginning of Book III Satan addresses Jesus as though he were a mere man.

Satan brings up the problem once more with: "Think not so slight of glory; therein least/Resembling thy great Father: . . ." (III, 109-110). Having misunderstood the Godhead from the beginning, Satan clings to the

hope that since Jesus rejects glory he must not be divine. Satan still justifies himself as having rebelled against a tyrant. Christ's answer in defense of his Father leaves Satan speechless (III, 145-146). He is soon to offer Jesus the kingdom of Parthia. Before this move, however, he gets in this remark:

. . . . . thy Kingdom though foretold  
By Prophet or by Angel, unless thou  
Endeavour, as thy Father David did,  
Thou never shalt obtain; . . . (III, 351-353)

To this imputation that he is a mere Son of David, the Savior does not reply.

By the beginning of Book IV Satan finds himself on the horns of a serious dilemma. He has been unable to succeed in either of his missions. In spite of Christ's remarks, Satan is justified in believing that the Son of God has not unequivocally revealed his true identity. Furthermore, as man this Son of God is stronger than any of Satan's former victims. "Eve was Eve" but this individual has presented new problems. It seems that there is no possible success for Satan. Either this man is God and per se unconquerable or he is an apparently unconquerable human being. Either alternative is distasteful to Satan.

Not completely dashed, however, Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world. He is harshly repulsed:

. . . Wert thou so void of fear or shame,  
As offer them to me the Son of God,  
To me my own, on such abhorred pact,  
That I fall down and worship thee as God?  
Get thee behind me; plain thou now appear'st  
That Evil one, Satan for ever damn'd. (IV, 189-194)

One can almost hear a humiliated wheedling in Satan's voice as he replies:

Be not so sore offended, Son of God;  
Though Sons of God both Angels are and Men,  
If I to try whether in higher sort  
Than these thou bear'st that title, (IV, 196-199)

If he is going to be unable to defeat this being on any terms, he wishes at least to be able to discern exactly who his foe is.

Satan's final thrust in the line of true temptation lies in his picture of the Kingdom of Greece. This "man" has not fallen to the dangers of the flesh or to wordly ambition, perhaps he will succumb to the dangers of the contemplative life of philosophy which can lead man to rely too heavily on his own reason and too little upon the word of God. The Evil One fails in this tactic also. At this time Satan also realizes that temptation is quite useless, "all his darts were spent," (IV, 366). Whether man or God, this individual is victor.

As Merritt Y. Hughes explains: "From early times the Christian imagination played around the scene [of temptation]. Some of the fathers of the Church, like Origen, thought of Christ's entire forty days in the wilderness as a continual conflict between him and Satan."<sup>29</sup> Ms. Pope also points out that tradition supported the idea that the devil tempted Christ with a storm.<sup>30</sup> However, since Milton indicates that Satan's "darts were spent" prior to the storm scene, I think that the ugly dreams and storms that occur in Book IV can hardly be described as temptations at all. They are merely the frustrated maneuvers of a devil, who, realizing he can do no spiritual harm to this incredible creature he has encountered, wishes to cause him as much physical discomfort as possible. The storm scene also provides a useful contrast to the radiant day which follows, the day on which the poem will reach its climax.

Satan's frustration has become fury. When Jesus explains "Mee worse than wet thou find'st not. . . ." (IV, 486), Satan explodes with:

<sup>29</sup> Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., Paradise Regained p. 419.

<sup>30</sup> Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem, p. 121.

Then hear, O Son of David, Virgin-born;  
 For Son of God to me is yet in doubt,  
 Of the Messiah I have heard foretold  
 By all the Prophets; of thy birth at length  
 Announc't by Gabriel with the first I knew,  
 And of the Angelic Song in Bethlehem field,  
 On thy birth-night, that sung the Saviour born.  
 From that time seldom have I ceas'd to eye  
 Thy infancy, thy childhood, and thy youth,  
 Thy manhood last, though yet in private bred;  
 Till at the Ford of Jordan whither all  
 Flock'd to the Baptist, I among the rest,  
 Though not to be Baptiz'd, by voice from Heav'n  
 Heard thee pronounc'd the Son of God belov'd.  
 Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view  
 And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn  
 In what degree or meaning thou art call'd  
 The Son of God, which bears no single sense;  
 The Son of God I also am, or was,  
 And if I was, I am; relation stands;  
 All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought  
 In some respect far higher so declar'd. (IV, 500-521)  
 . . . . .  
 Therefore to know what more thou art than man,  
 Worth naming Son of God by voice from Heav'n,  
 Another method I must now begin. (IV, 538-540)

As A. S. P. Woodhouse points out: "Ostensibly a temptation to presumption, it [the temptation of the tower] is really Satan's last desperate effort to resolve, one way or other, the question that still plagues him, 'For Son of God to me is yet in doubt.'"<sup>31</sup> Satan can do no further spiritual or physical harm to Jesus, but he is mad to discover who his conqueror is and uses his final tactic which is the climax of the poem:

There on the highest Pinnacle he set  
 The Son of God; and added thus in scorn:  
 There stand, if thou wilt stand; to stand upright  
 Will ask thee skill; I to thy Fathers house  
 Have brought thee, and highest plac't, highest is best,  
 Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand,  
 Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God;  
 For it is written, He will give command  
 Concerning thee to his Angels, in thir hands  
 They shall uplift thee, lest at any time  
 Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone.  
 To whom thus Jesus: also it is written,  
 Tempt not the Lord thy God, he said and stood.  
 But Satan smitten with amazement fell [.] (IV 549-562)

<sup>31</sup>"Theme and Pattern in Paradise Regained," University of Toronto Quarterly, 25 (1956), p. 180.

In the face of what has occurred prior to this climax it is difficult to believe that the fact that Jesus is able to stand would force Satan into the mental paralysis that the word "amazement" suggests. It must be the Savior's words that have this awesome effect upon the devil. There is a great deal of critical controversy over Christ's final lines. Arnold Stein believes that Christ is saying that to cast himself down would be to tempt God.<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Pope believes that they mean "Tempt not Me, the Lord thy God."<sup>33</sup> Northrop Frye seems correct in holding that the lines are open to either interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

Satan takes Christ's words to be a revelation of his true identity. It is significant to note that when he observed Jesus' baptism he was "nigh thunderstruck." Christ's words leave him truly thunderstruck. Ironically, however, since the words may be taken in two ways, Christ has really told the Prince of Evil nothing. Satan fails in both of his missions.

Milton chose Luke's order of temptations over that of Matthew, who had recorded the temptation of the kingdoms as coming last. It seems to me that this was for the purpose of climax. If the temptation of Christ were the only dramatic concern of the poem the climax would come after the temptation of the kingdoms. But a further element in the plot is concerned with the drama surrounding the question of Christ's identity. Therefore Christ's final words provide the climax of the poem.

Christ's answer to Satan is ambiguous, and in itself does not ad-

<sup>32</sup>Heroic Knowledge, p. 128.

<sup>33</sup>Paradise Regained: The Tradition and the Poem, p. 183.

<sup>34</sup>"The Typology of Paradise Regained," Modern Philology, 53 (1956), p. 237.



equately establish the fact that the poem is orthodox. However, in view of the frequent references to the baptismal scene and to Christ's knowledge and power, the poem appears to offer satisfying grounds for a Trinitarian reading. It presents Jesus Christ as Lord God just as his Father is Lord God. Milton was too careful a poet for this to be the result of mere chance. He deliberately left Paradise Regained open to Trinitarian interpretation.

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MILTON'S ANTI-TRINITARIANISM AND PARADISE REGAINED

by

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There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the question of whether or not John Milton professed anti-Trinitarianism. He cannot be called Arian if the word is strictly defined. However, Book I, Chapter V of De Doctrina Christiana contains elements which Milton acknowledges are outside the common creed. In spite of this, though Milton may have written Paradise Regained after he composed the prose tract, the poem does not necessarily exhibit anti-Trinitarian beliefs. It is theologically orthodox. The protagonist of Paradise Regained is the same person as the Son of God of Paradise Lost. The chief antagonist of both poems is also the same. The emphasis Milton places on Christ's human nature is traditionally justifiable and used for dramatic effect. If it has any anti-Trinitarian effect on the poem, this effect is reversed or at least countervailed by other elements in the poem. Milton presents a scene which is symbolic of the common view of the Trinity. He also makes many references to Christ's knowledge and power which indicate the protagonist's divinity. Most importantly Satan engages in theological speculation about the nature of his foe which results in the climax of the poem where Christ's words, "Tempt not the Lord thy God," may be interpreted as "Tempt not me." Paradise Regained is not unequivocally a Trinitarian poem, but Milton has left it open to orthodox interpretation.