THE CHRIST OF JOHN MILTON

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THE CHRIST OF JOHN MILTON

At a time when western Christendom was reexamining itself and its doctrine, the poet John Milton lived. It is legitimate to assume that this Christian poet would have been concerned with the central figure of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ. This concern is reflected in the works of Milton, not just during a single period but throughout his career. As the central figure of Milton's religion and his thought, the Christ as the Christ of Milton deserves study. As a good Christian, Milton should be credited with having been sincere in whatever he wrote about the Christ, regardless of its orthodoxy in relation to traditional doctrine. The Christ, therefore, should not be viewed as a fictional character in any of Milton's treatment of Him. The problem in a study of what this human-divine figure was to this Christian poet is a real one because of the conflicting concepts and changes within the realm of Milton's own writings, which may be accepted as evidence of his thought. What Milton actually believed cannot be finally stated by anyone, perhaps not even by the poet himself.

The question of Milton's personal doctrine of the Christ has been investigated by a number of scholars. There is general agreement that Milton's beliefs underwent a transformation from the doctrine of orthodox Trinitarianism to something else. The theories of what this something else is range to the extremes of Arianism, Anti-Trinitarianism, and Unitarianism as well as to less specific movements away from orthodoxy. The humanity of the Christ and the divinity of the Christ are problems implicit in a study of Milton's beliefs concerning the Christ.

It is the purpose of this study to consider the various theories of the process of Milton's faith, to observe the Christ in the works in which He is prominent, and to examine the Christ of <u>Paradise Regained</u> as scholars have seen Him in this probably final formal expression of the poet's thought on the central figure of his thinking. No concise or definitive conclusion is expected, but some insight into what the Christ meant to this man Milton is anticipated.

Many noted critics have considered the progression of Milton's concepts of the Christ. David Masson, generally conceded to be the most acclaimed biographer of Milton, concludes his sixth and final volume of Milton's Life with the appendage of some remarks to his discussion of De Doctrina Christiana, Milton's treatise on doctrine. Masson states the case of this inquiry: "Milton's theological views had been progressive and had undergone changes." Masson sees Milton in 1629 as certainly not an Arian or Anti-Trinitarian of any kind, and he holds the same opinion in relation to the Milton of 1641, the date of the first prose pamphlet, Of Reformation, in which Milton invokes "one Tri-personal Godhead." Masson speculates that Milton's drift into heterodoxy may have begun about 1644. At that time, Milton "exchanged his temporary Presbyterianism or semi-Presbyterianism in Churchgovernment for Independency or Congregationalism." 2 The definite formation of the views of the treatise most probably should be ascribed to the period 1649-1660. when Milton was Secretary to the Commonwealth and the Protectorate. Finally, Masson recognizes the possibility that the system of views may not have been finally consolidated and imbued with some of its peculiarities until after the Restoration.

Another scholar whose concern with the process of Milton's faith has resulted in a lengthy discussion of this development is Denis Saurat.

Saurat asserts that for Milton, God was still the orthodox Trinity in 1641. In Of Reformation of that year, as Masson also notes, "one Tripersonal Godhead" appears. In the same year, Milton rebukes Tertullian in Of Prelatical Episcopacy, asking, "Should he move us, that goes about to prove an imparity between God the Father and God the Son?" This question is not merely an incidental reference to be interpreted by critics like Saurat as evidence of Milton's orthodoxy, but an intentional comment from Milton defending the equality and unity of God the Father and God the Son. Saurat considers Milton still an orthodox believer who prays to the Trinity in his pamphlets against the bishops. 5

At some point after these writings, Saurat visualizes the ruin of the Trinity in Milton's mind as a result of Milton's conception of God as justice, the infinite, the incomprehensible. For Milton, God as the Absolute, Infinite, Unknowable is never manifested; therefore, as soon as Milton's writings reach the point of the manifestation of the divine in the world, Milton speaks of the Son, Who is the finite, created, knowable, manifested part of God. The fact that God cannot exert His power in contradictory matters is the principle which disproves the Trinity for Milton, as the <u>Treatise</u> implies, since Unity and Trinity are not compatible, Saurat continues.

creative power, noting that Milton calls the Son God in the Creation

Book of the epic. As for nomenclature, Saurat names for Milton the

Christ as the Creator of the world. Saurat proposes specific definitions

of the Christ of Paradise Lost; Christ therein is the Greater Man, but emphatically

a man. Again Saurat defines Milton's Christ as "Intelligence coming

down into man to dominate the passions, by incarnation into a group of

men who are the elect. 10 In the triumph over passion necessary for man's

regeneration, Saurat finds Milton's thought parallel to the theory of Augustine. 11

On the progression of Milton's idea of Christ, Saurat accepts the date of the De Doctrina Christiana proposed by J. H. Hanford, 1655-1660, and rejects the theory that Milton's ideas underwent their change during the writing of Paradise Lost. 12 He also disregards the possibility of any change in these ideas between the writing of Paradise Lost and the writing of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, which were written immediately thereafter. Saurat goes so far as to declare that with no mention of the Son in Samson, "the last remnants of the doctrine of the Trinity disappear." Like the Holy Ghost, the Christ-Son dissolves; as the Son, this second person of the Trinity, He receives identity with God the Creator, and as Christ, the Savior, He appears as mere Divine Reason in the elect; and "as Jesus, he fades more and more into mere man." This statement by Saurat is his evidence that though the Trinity disappears from Milton's view, the idea of God grows.

In a much more general statement than that of Saurat, E. M. W.

Tillyard deals with the question of Milton's beliefs and the extent to which they changed during his life. He asserts that he finds in the antiepiscopal pamphlets the expression of a general belief in the Trinity, with special emphasis on the co-eternity of the Son in the poet's addressing the Son as the "ever-begotten light and perfect image of the Father."

Since the <u>De Doctrina</u> is a plain denial of the Trinity, Tillyard interprets the change in Milton's view of the Trinity as conversion to Arianism in the interval between the anti-episcopal pamphlets and the <u>De Doctrina</u>.

Assuming that this treatise was completed in 1660, Tillyard wonders if this work states Milton's final position in the matter. 15

Another prominent scholar notes the change from a similar standpoint.

James Holly Hanford attributes the acceptance of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity to Milton at the time of the writing of the Nativity Ode. As early as the writing of "The Passion," Milton seems to have felt instinctively that man "needs Christ as a guide and model rather than as a redeemer,"

Hanford observes. 16 Without explaining the transition from the Trinitarianism of the Nativity Ode, Hanford describes Milton in relation to Paradise

Lost as "not an orthodox Trinitarian," Milton's view at that point identifying Christ as "a being divine but distinctly lower than God." 17

Labeling Milton as anti-Trinitarian, Hanford asserts that Milton concealed or modified these tendencies in Paradise Lost but they are recognizable in both Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained if read in the light of De

Doctrina Christiana.

Christian doctrine of Milton with much emphasis on the concept of the Trinity and the nature of the Christ. He is Professor Arthur Sewell, and he traces the progression of Milton's beliefs and concludes from the poet's earlier works that until 1659, the poet remained orthodox in mamy of the points of doctrine which later became his main areas of heterodoxy. Sewell cites the reference to "Trinal Unity" in the Nativity Ode of 1634 as one evidence of Milton's continuing orthodox view of the Trinity. In 1641, according to Sewell, Milton labels Arians as "no true friends of Christ" and expressly denounces, in Of Prelatical Episcopacy, Tertullian's teaching an imparity between Father and Son, a denunciation already pointed out herein by Saurat. Sewell finds that Tetrachordon (1645) presents God the Lawgiver as one with the Christ of the Gospels in teaching. Sewell infers from The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a

and the two Paradise seems later. Of the progression of Milton's beliefs

Free Commonwealth (1660) that as late as 1659 or 1660, Milton's view of God and His Son is not that set forth in De Doctrina Christiana; this work apostrophizes the Father and Son in terms inferred by Sewell to indicate equality. More ambiguous but nearer to the Trinitarian view than later opinions is a clause from A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes (1659): "if bought and by him redeemed who is God...." Sewell feels that if Milton had already been a proponent of the anti-Trinitarian opinion that he would have expressed the act of redemption by Him "who is the Son of God," not "who is God." Sewell asserts on these bases that Milton's view was at least akin to the Trinitarian as late as 1659. 18 Sewell concludes that before 1650, Milton's Trinitarianism is supported by clear evidence; after 1650, Milton still writes of the Father and the Son in terms not objectionable to Trinitarians and not simply reconciled with his later views. 19

According to Sewell, <u>De Doctrina Christiana</u> and <u>Paradise Lost</u> are the accounts of a mind in quest of reconciliation between God and his trust in man. The depth of this concern has not been present in the earlier works, and Sewell finds the question of God's omnipotence and man's liberty of central importance. God's special providence for the English and for Milton is another topic which helped determine the course of Milton's beliefs; Sewell portrays Milton's mind at the time of the Restoration as one perplexed in its attempts to understand God. The political developments of the time are involved in Milton's concepts of religion, especially those on predestination, and the developments of this frame of reference must have been accompanied by the formulation of Milton's feelings toward the Christ.

More will be said of Sewell's specific ideas on <u>De Doctrina Christiana</u> and the two <u>Paradise</u> poems later. Of the progression of Milton's beliefs

in general, Sewell's opinion is that the early books of <u>Paradise Lost</u>

were written before Milton formulated some of the arguments in <u>De Doctrina</u>.

Sewell advances the view that Milton "was Trinitarian when the early books were composed, but that his Trinitarianism is yielding to the pressure of other opinion in the later books."

An examination of the works which are landmarks in Milton's process of faith as seen by the foregoing critics and others is profitable. The first of these works to be considered is the early poem just cited frequently as illustrative of Milton's orthodox Trinitarianism. Generally conceded to be the earliest of Milton's poems to demonstrate his genius, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity indicates the orthodoxy of Milton's view of the Christ at this early stage of the poet's life and career; it was written at Christmas, 1629, when Milton was twenty-one years old. The nativity gives birth to the basic paradox of the life of Christ, the embodiment of the divine in the human. Rosemond Tuve asserts that despite the persistent comparisons of the Nativity Ode with other nativity poems, the subject of this poem is the Incarnation. The birth and the incarnation are one; the nativity is the presentation of the incarnation to the world.

The second stanza of the proem describes what the Son has given up to come to earth as one of us.

That glorious Form, that Light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty,
Wherewith he wont at Heav'n's high Council-Table
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside; (11.8-12).

Christ is portrayed as sitting as part of the Trinal Unity, which identifies Him as of the Trinity. The orthodoxy of Milton's thought at this early stage of his career is evident in these lines. Milton suggests the

Trinity within the next few lines as he questions the Muse: "Say Heav'nly
Muse, shall not thy sacred vein/ Afford a present to the Infant God? (11. 15-16)"
Evidence of the baby's identity is cited by the poet after the silencing
of the pagan gods. "Our Babe, to show his Godhead true, / Can in his
swaddling bands control the damned crew" (11.227-228).

Besides these references to the Trinity, there are also specific notations of Christ's sonhood.

"Son of Heav'n's eternal King" (1. 2) and "Heav'n's new-born Heir" (1. 116) are such references. With the former is an assertion of the Virgin birth whereby a paradoxically "wedded maid and Virgin Mother" was delivered of this Son.

Hanford admits that theologically Milton accepts the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in this ode, but he insists that the true theme is the moral significance of Christ. This theme is prominent, as the bringer of peace, light, and kindness to this world receives emphasis in the characterization.

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of light
His reign of peace upon the earth began. (11.61-63)

The Sun saw "a greater Sun appear" (1.83). Christ as the Good Shepherd
appears in the poem as "the mighty Pan...kindly come to live with them
below" (11.90-91).

The militance of Milton's Christ may be inferred from the passage cited above describing the Babe who can control the damned crew. This picture is often termed that of an "infant Hercules." The "dreaded infant's hand" (1. 222) also expresses this militance.

Most deeply paradoxical is the incarnation of the Word of God in the speechless babe. The music of the spheres at the nativity almost brings about the return of the golden age, but the poet interrupts this fancy:

But wisest Fate says no,
This must not yet be so,
The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss;"

(11. 151-153)

and implicit in this caution is the basis of another issue involved in the nature of the Christ. That the Babe lies yet in smiling infancy may mean to Milton that the Infant Christ is not yet capable of redeeming the world. Luke 2:52 states: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." The question involved is one of whether there is development in the Christ as in an ordinary human being in mental and physical growth. The Scripture seems to indicate this, and Milton seems to follow this. The effect of this on the divine identity of Christ is indefinite. On the other hand, the Word of God in a speechless babe is capable of silencing the oracles and routing the pagan gods and indicates divine power. Paradoxical and subject for much debate is this question.

The Ode concludes with Milton's Christ as the sleeping Lord, the Babe laid to rest by His mother.

Written at Easter, 1630, and generally considered a failure in comparison to the <u>Nativity Ode</u>, "The Passion" does fall short in its expression of the poet's sorrow. For Milton, the crucifixion is perhaps not as close to the center of the conception of the life of Christ as it is for most Christians. The attempt is ended somewhat abruptly and left unfinished, the author finding the subject above his years. In this somewhat futile attempt at a work of inspiration, however, there are a few expressive images of the poet's Christ. The sufferings which

"our dearest Lord" underwent freely make the Christ the "Most perfect
Hero, tried in heaviest plight/ Of labors huge and hard, too hard for
human wight" (11. 13-14). The survival of such labors indicates the
superhuman nature of the Christ. "Most perfect Hero" is a phrase referred
to by some critics in their discussion of Christ as Milton's hero. Some
attempts are made to prove that Milton identified with the Christ, but
Frank Kermode considers these "unnecessary and dangerous." 27

Another rich passage signifies the supremacy of the Christ as priest and as royalty.

He sovereign Priest, stooping his regal head
That dropt with odorous oil down his fair eyes,
Poor fleshly Tabernacle entered,"
(11. 15-17).

With His entrance to the flesh, the Christ assumes a mask, a disguise.

One of the few references to the actual crucifixion appears after this rich expression of the Lord's sacrificing His royalty for earthly habitation. "Yet more; the stroke of death he must abide" (1. 20).

The meekness of the Christ is seen as He lies down "by his Brethren's side" (1. 21).

The poet explains that in this poem "His Godlike acts and his temptations fierce/ And former sufferings" (11. 24-25) do not appear. Milton's use of the adjective "Godlike" presents a question as to his opinion of the Christ's power. "Godlike" may be read "as God" and inferred to mean equality, or it may, on the other hand, be read and interpreted as "merely similar to God."

The final image of the Christ is "Heav'n's richest store" used as possessor of the Casket which is "that sad Sepulchral rock." The use of the superlative form of the adjective rich is perhaps interpreted as equality or unity with God, thus implying the Trinity.

His servious condition and His arrival in the world, but the human condition

"Upon the Circumcision" treats the event of the title in the life of Christ as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion. In this poem of the period about 1632, the angels which heralded the birth of Christ are invited to mourn upon the occasion of the circumcision. The poet remarks Christ's having entered the world "with all Heav'n's heraldry" (1. 10). In contrast to this glorious entranceis the situation as He "now bleeds to give us ease" in the same line. to a berein and which support Milton's

The circumcision performed on Christ in His infancy is an early manifestation of the demands of human sin on the Redeemer.

Alas, how soon our sin ablastion of the same emperoral Sore doth begin His Infancy to sieze! (11. 12-14).

The question involving love and law appears. The Christ must satisfy the law of High Justice, but only love can fulfill the law. This explanation in Paradise Lost XII, 401-404, is found in this early poem, as Milton decides: "Just law indeed, but more exceeding love!" (1. 16). The rightful and remediless plight of mankind, the condition of frail dust, and man's continuing transgression of the Covenant are counteracted by the voluntary and merciful acts of the loving Christ, Who "dwelt above/ High-thron'd in secret bliss..." (11. 18-19). He sacrificed this high position, "Emptied his glory ev'n to nakedness" (1. 20), taking on the form of man to satisfy the Covenant and to bear the wrath of Justice.

The obedience of Christ to the law is first sealed with the "wounding smart" of circumcision. The poet laments this pain as it reminds him of the sufferings yet to come. The language was to Midashall, the

...Oh! ere long the preceding tragelies were multiplent to have Huge pangs and strong Will pierce more near his heart. (11. 26-28)

In this work, the divinity of Christ is portrayed in the account of His previous condition and His arrival in the world, but the human condition of the Christ necessary for man's redemption is implicit in the act of circumcision. The loving, voluntarily sacrificing, redeeming Christ is the figure of this one of Milton's early poems.

These three poems illustrate some of Milton's early attitudes toward the Christ, and the first is an assurance of his orthodoxy on the Christ of the Trinity. The anti-prelatical tracts contain incidental references to the Christ, some of which are mentioned herein and which support Milton's concept of Christ as of the Trinity. Lycidas and other poems not concerned with Christ reveal incidental references to Him also.

During the period after the publication of the anti-episcopal pamphlets, Milton's publications were many and varied, including his Detrine and Discipline of Divorce, Of Education, Areopagitica, Tetrachordon, and Colasterion, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Eikonoklastes, and Defensio pro Populo Anglicano. This was a period of many personal and family trials for Milton. In June, 1642, Milton married Mary Powell, who returned home the second month thereafter for a prolonged visit. Not until three years later did she return to her husband. Following this reconciliation, two daughters and a son were born in 1648, 1649, and 1651. By 1652, however, the poet had arrived at the pitiful condition of almost total blindness. Later that year, a third daughter's birth was followed by the death of Mary Powell Milton, which was followed the next month by the death of the poet's only son. Four years later, the widower married again, but this wife, Katherine Woodcock Milton, died fifteen months later. A third and final marriage was to Elizabeth Minshull, who outlived her husband, but the preceding tragedies were sufficient to have embittered the poet. Whether these sad events had any effect on the development of Milton's religious feelings or on his doctrine is merely a matter of conjecture.

<u>De Doctrina Christiana</u> is the treatise which sets forth Milton's religious beliefs. There is much disagreement and conjecture as to the date of composition of this treatise and as to whether the views set forth therein are Milton's final beliefs. For Milton, the main virtue of the treatise was that its principles were based solely on the Scripture. 28

The manuscript of the treatise was published posthumously, 1825
being the first publication date. Hanford has studied the problem of
dating the document and has found evidence in the manuscript that it was
a complete work by 1661. Milton's prefatory remarks contain a description
of the Scriptural sources read in preparation for the treatise as work
begun in his youth. 29 "The Date of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana"
by Hanford cites the inference of the period as perhaps as early as
Milton's return from Italy. 30 Then there is the statement of several
biographers that the work of framing a body of divinity from Scriptures
began in 1655. The prevailing opinion, whatever its basis, is that the
treatise does belong to Milton's later years. 31

Masson's opinion has already been stated to the effect that the doctrine, not the formulation, of the treatise should be ascribed to the years of 1649-1660. Stern interprets the maturity of the works as indicative of Milton's old age. 32

Wood finds it incredible that the treatise could have been completed before <u>Paradise Lost</u> and even suggests that the doctrine of the treatise may have reached fruition as a result of the writing of <u>Paradise Lost</u>. 33 Hanford not only disagrees with Wood but also directly opposes this theory, feeling, on the other hand, that Milton would not have attempted his religious epic without having a clear formulation of his religious views before him as he worked. 34 Assuming that <u>De Doctrina</u> was complete in or before

to interpret the Bible. Tillyard describes this claim on "a disrifted

the early 1660's, Hanford defends its use as a guide in the interpretation of Paradise Lost.35

Doctrina and interprets them as an account of the stages he went through during the compilation of his treatise. To Sewell, these clarify that Milton's religious beliefs were continually in the process of revision over a period of years. The composition of De Doctrina, according to Sewell, was concurrent with that of Paradise Lost. The finds the disagreements in doctrine between De Doctrina and Paradise Lost significant enough to discard the possibility that the treatise was completed in time to serve as a guide for writing Paradise Lost.

The critics staunchly defend their diverse opinions on the composition of <u>De Doctrina Christiana</u> and its authenticity as Milton's actual beliefs.

It is impossible to declare which theory is fact, if either of them is.

To state the predominant ideas of <u>De Doctrina</u> is possible, and to consider their relation to Milton's other statements is also possible.

of Milton's expressions to be his actual professed beliefs because of their guarded, unemotional mature. This criterion is debatable; what a man writes in an emotional context may be more indicative of his actual beliefs than what he writes from a cautious, scientific approach, since belief involves emotion as well as intellect. Tillyard is concise in his discussion of Milton's doctrine of the Trinity. He sees the lengthy discussion inserted between the chapter on God and chapters on the other persons of the Trinity as an emphatic suggestion that Milton does not adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity. Milton claims in the preface to the chapter on the Son that he has as much right as anybody to interpret the Bible. Tillyard describes this claim as "a dignified

apology for his major heresy."40 He summarizes Milton's conclusions on the Son to the effect that the Son is of a different essence from the Father, that the Son was not in existence from the beginning, that the Son is the agent of the unknowable God, that the Son is of definite inferiority to God, and that the Son is of definite superiority to the Holy Ghost, about Whom Milton expresses little.41 Sir Herbert Grierson describes these points of doctrine as "Milton's Arianism,... fully developed..."42

Discussing the treatment of regeneration in <u>De Doctrina</u>, Tillyard observes Milton's almost complete silence on the events of Christ's life and the Crucifixion. The effect of this silence on Tillyard is to make Milton's Christ seem "divine indeed, though less than God, but a divine abstraction," rather than to make Christ a mere man, as some critics have felt this effect to be. This tendency toward Christ as a divine abstraction appears to Tillyard to grow into the dimness of <u>Paradise Regained</u>. 43

The critics cited as proponents of the theory that Milton changed his views during the writing of this treatise have noted numerous contradictions within the treatise. The outstanding points in <u>De Filio</u>, however are those outlined above. They are, again, that the Son is not of the same essence as the Father, has not been in eternal existence, is the agent of the unknowable God, but is inferior to God the Father.

Milton's great epic Paradise Lost deals abstractly with the Christ.

The relation of <u>Paradise Lost to De Doctrina Christiana</u> is one which somewhat determines the effect of the Christ of <u>Paradise Lost</u>. B. Rajan believes that if one collates <u>Paradise Lost</u> with the <u>De Doctrina</u>, the poem is Arian; if the poem is read by itself, however, its heresy fades and its "scriptural references reverberate orthodoxy." Rajan prefers the

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of The Father, while the Christ is the Saviour of ash."

latter and insists that <u>Paradise Lost</u> is sufficient unto itself. That <u>Paradise Lost</u> "reverberates orthodoxy" is a matter of opinion, but Rajan's advice on the reading of <u>Paradise Lost</u> unto itself deserves consideration.

Hanford's opinions on the subject are similar to those above. This scholar attributes anti-Trinitarian heresies to Milton but says, as has been stated previously, that Milton conceals or modifies these in <u>Paradise Lost</u> as an independent work. 45 C. S. Lewis asserts that one would not infer Milton's Arianism from the text of <u>Paradise Lost</u> without external evidence. 46 Herein, <u>Paradise Lost</u> will be considered independently as exclusively as possible.

That Christ is the real hero of <u>Paradise Lost</u> is the conviction of Northrop Frye, who bases this point on the fact that the Son of God performs all the divine acts and is thus the only character in the whole poem who performs a positive act. 47

Another aspect of the Christ of <u>Paradise Lost</u> is as representing reason as opposed to Satan as passion. Tillyard interprets this reason versus passion as the conscious intention of Milton. Satan as unreasoning energy is destroyer, while Christ as energy as well as reason is creator, in the words of Tillyard. This critic sees in Christ more than allegorical reason; he sees in Milton's Christ the divine redeemer of mankind. On this aspect of Christ in Paradise Lost, Tillyard finds Milton orthodox.

He also finds Milton optimistic in his hope for the regeneration of man by Christ to a more excellent state, thus presenting the fortunate fall.

Saurat's vision of Milton's Christ in <u>Paradise Lost</u> was set forth earlier. Saurat insists that Christ is a man in <u>Paradise Lost</u>, but he also considers Him the Greater Man, in that the believers or the elect are the parts of this Greater Man. From the creation book (VII) of <u>Paradise Lost</u>, Saurat infers that for Milton, the Son is the creative power of God the Father, while the Christ is the Saviour of men. 50

In Book III, Paradise Lost, the poet describes the Son as "Equal to God..." A legitimate assumption on the basis of this and other lines is that Milton was an orthodox Trinitarian when he wrote this. Sewell, previously noted, proposes this assumption as theory, saying that Milton was Trinitarian when he composed the early books of Paradise Lost, but that he yielded to the pressure of different opinion in the later books. Sewell fails to find evidence in Paradise Lost that Milton's thought had changed to the extent that he believed the Son not to be co-essential with the Father.

Several references to the Christ as "filial Godhead" in Book VII certainly suggest the Trinity. Sewell uses these in another context, however, that of the identity of the Creator. At this stage of the poem, Sewell varies from Saurat, who supports the Son as Creator and emphasizes Milton's emphasis on God as Creator and Son as somewhat inferior as the mere worker of the Father's plans for creation. Moving to a passage in Book VIII, Sewell admits that it sounds like Arianism or like De Doctrina. This passage (11. 399-411) contains the Father's expression of His solitude and lack of any conversation with any except His creatures, whom He calls "inferiour." Sewell rejects this reading, saying that the Son must not have been included with the other creatures and that, therefore, the Son must be somehow united with the Almighty. 53

Rather than considering the Christ in His creative function, Sewell sees the Christ most significantly in His role as Mediator, and thus Prophet, King, Priest, Redeemer. The distinguishing attribute of the Christ as Mediator is Love. The Father as Divine Justice needs appearement in the form of Divine Love, and this manifestation of this Love to man is the Son. These concepts encourage Sewell in his hypothesis that Milton's view of

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the Trinity in the earlier books of <u>Paradise Lost</u> is different from that in <u>De Doctrina</u>. 55

The Christ as Mediator in <u>Paradise Lost</u> is the concept which Sewell believes led Milton to Anti-Trinitarianism, through questioning how the Christ could mediate and receive man as part of Himself and even become man and still be co-equal and co-essential with the Father. 56

The Christ as Mediator, Redeemer, Divine Love, and manifestation of God in Paradise Lost becomes much more the picture of reason, temperance, and obedience in <u>Paradise Regained</u>. In this next work, the last to be considered, the Christ fades into mere man, according to some scholars.

Perhaps there is, on the other hand, a similarity of the Christ of <u>Paradise Regained</u> to the Father as Divine Justice in <u>Paradise Lost</u>; this possibility deserves noticing.

Paradise Regained deals directly with the Christ. As a sequel to Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained is perhaps more qualified as a final look at the Christ of Milton. Sewell finds in Paradise Regained calmness and even submission in contrast to the doubting and searching out of which grew De Doctrina Christiana and Paradise Lost. Published in 1671, four years later than Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained may very well be such a reconciliation of Milton's tumultous beliefs. Numerous articles on the Christ of Paradise Regained deal with the Christ as Milton's hero, and an examination of some of these reveals one category into which Milton placed his Christ.

Tillyard examines Milton's Christ in <u>Paradise Regained</u> from the standpoint of the conflict between the active and the contemplative. Other
critics have used this same approach. Hughes dates Milton's concern
over this conflict from the writing of <u>The Reason of Church Government</u> (1642)
through the writing of Paradise Regained. Hughes also attributes to Milton's

thought at this period the inclusion of the possibility of a solution to this conflict by some "heroic" spirit. 58 Tillyard recognizes this conflict and solution as Milton's concern even earlier than 1642. His contention is supported by the indication of the spheres of activity and of resignation and their perfect union in a heroic Christ in the poems on the nativity, the circumcision, and the passion. In the Nativity Ode, according to Tillyard, the infant Christ is an active principle capable of silencing the oracles and routing the pagan gods. In "The Passion" Christ meditates and voluntarily decides to undergo the tribulations, and He emerges forthwith as the perfect hero. Tillyard sees this conflict as a master theme in Milton's works and concludes that Milton's final conclusion is that contemplation is the legitimizing condition for activity. 59

For Hughes, The Reason of Church Government deals with a heroic, otherworldly Christ. Tillyard disagrees, however, believing that the active dominates this work and finding in the God Whom Milton invokes at the end of the work, not the Christus patiens, but the God Who allowed the defeat of the Spanish Armada by the English. 61

Tillyard categorizes Milton's concern with the two realms as having the active emphasized in the prose work <u>Reformation in England</u>, and the passive virtues emphasized in <u>Paradise Regained</u>. 62

All of Tillyard's discussion of this active-contemplative is involved with his theory that in his presentation of the hero of <u>Paradise Regained</u>, Milton followed the Renaissance heroic tradition, which action resulted in a Christianized form of the magnanimous man of Aristotle's works. The act of renouncing glory in Paradise Regained renders the tradition implicit in Christ. Tillyard thus identifies Milton's Christ as an example of the central Renaissance hero. 63

The Christ as heroic or not is the query of more of these articles. The personality of Christ is the focus of Don M. Wolfe's article, "The Role of Milton's Christ." According to Wolfe, Milton expected an earthly paradise to be gained, the instrument by which this was to be done being the personality of Jesus. Wolfe finds Milton's conception to have three faces to Christ's personality. One face is that of the temperate, self-controlled Christ, master of hunger and passion, and resister of glory and riches. Temperance as the supreme virtue in Christ and in man is advanced by the first temptation of Paradise Regained. With temperance as the resolution of man's inner conflicts, everybody can participate in the regaining of paradise. 64

Christ in the role of judge and punisher has a second face. This personality appears in <u>Paradise Regained</u> as Christ the military leader hovering in the background. The punisher aspect of the personality is reluctant but willing to punish the intemperate and the stubborn. 65

A third face of Christ appears in Paradise Regained and was a persistently recurring thought in Milton's younger days. This is the mild, persuasive, infinitely patient Christ Who believes in gradual and peaceful redemption. Areopagitica and the toleration tracts present this self-sacrificing Christ of "exceeding love." Wolfe does not find this personality at all dominant in Paradise Regained, however, and he explains its absence by Milton's own preference for the personality of reason, temperance, and judgment; Wolfe considers Milton's faith in this aspect of Christ deepest. He attributes to Milton's Furitan background a tendency to be repelled by a soft, forgiving personality. For these reasons, Milton's hopes for redemption rest not wholly on love and knowledge but further on judgment and punishment. 67

This theory on <u>Paradise Regained</u> presents a marked contrast to Milton's emphasis on love rather on law as the more important element in fulfilling justice and redeeming, an emphasis found in the earlier <u>Paradise Lost</u> and in one of the fruits of Milton's younger days, "Upon the Circumcision," with, "Just law indeed, but more exceeding love!"

Wolfe completes his article with the application of his theory to Milton's own personality, concluding that Milton's portrait of Christ reflects himself, with temperance and self-mastery as the accents.

Kermode, who has previously been cited as challenging attempts to link Milton's self-concept with his concept of the Christ, portrays Jesus as Milton's exemplary hero. Kermode credits Milton with dealing with substance rather than shadow in his work on Christ as in all of his endeavors. The critic refers to the Christianized Aristotelian prescription and "extinction of appetite by reason," using Hughes' phrase, as heroic agony.

reasons for its hero's being as He is and that Milton was consistent in his treatment. To make his Christ an unchallengeable example, Milton molded Paradise Regained to handle "a hero who transcends the heroic data." 69 As a hero, Christ is not merely an example of patience and martyrdom but receives exemplary rewards which exceed the rewards of a pagan hero. Kermode sees in Christ the virtues of heroes whose poverty or self-sacrifice have allowed them to accomplish; suffering and rejecting are Christ's actions. 70 By refusing to throw himself down, Christ declares his supernatural powers by remaining inactive, and immediately receives supernatural rewards. 71 Kermode concludes that all the known modes of heroism are transcended by Christ. 72

Northrop Frye contends, on the other hand, that in the final period of his life, Milton was sick of the heroism recognized by the world and was no longer a believer in any such thing as a "Christian hero." Milton, in fact, makes Jesus contemptuously reject such a role in <u>Paradise Regained</u>. The heroism of Christ in <u>Paradise Regained</u> is actually his persistence in obedience. 73

Considering the Christ of <u>Paradise Regained</u> in some of the preceding ways perhaps emphasizes his humanity and classical heroism. Northrop

Frye has presented a rich typology of <u>Paradise Regained</u> which presents

Christ in several roles, including those of the Son of God and thus divine and purely as man, thus human. Frye's first typification in his detailed presentation of Christ in various roles as the hero of <u>Paradise Regained</u> is that of Christ as the dragon-killer by virtue of His wars with Satan. This role is fulfilled in <u>Paradise Regained</u> by the defeat of Satan the tempter, and it is paralleled in <u>Paradise Lost</u> by the victory in the original war in Heaven and in the Book of Revelation by the final victory over Satan in the second coming of Christ.

Christ in Job's role is a second category of Frye's typology. Frye bases this role on Milton's statement in The Reason of Church Covernment 75 that he was planning to use the Book of Job as a model for a poem.

The role of Job's accusers is fulfilled by Satan, for their accusations created temptations for Job.

The natural home of Christ is Heaven, a paradise of which the Garden of Eden before the Fall is a counterpart, and the natural home of Adam. Christ as a second Adam is victorious over the temptation which for the first Adam resulted in the Fall; by Christ's victory, the garden is won back.

frye goes farther and proposes Christ as a second Israel. Numerous parallels are presented to justify Christ's identification as a second Israel. Christ regains a spiritual form of the Promised Land. The account of the Exodus prefigures the life of Christ in the Gospels.

The children of Israel had as their leader into the Promised Land a Joseph; the Infant Jesus was taken to Egypt by a Joseph. The organization of Israel by Moses into twelve tribes is comparable to the later selection by Christ of the twelve followers. Forty days' wandering in the wilderness is characteristic of both Christ and Israel. Mount Sinai is the scene of the receiving of the Ten Commandments; Christ's Sermon on the Mount is a commentary on this law. The redemption of the Israelites by a brazen serpent on a pole is a prototype of the Crucifixion. John 3: 14 observes this similarity: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

The conquest of the Promised Land is accomplished under the leadership of Joshua, whose name is the same work in the language of the

Gentiles as the name of Jesus. The typological explanation of Gabriel's
visitation of Mary for the purpose of telling her to name the child Jesus,
meaning Joshua, is that the reign os law is now over and that the assault
on the Promised Land has begun. That the law is not sufficient to redeem
mankind has been proved by the death of Moses outside the Promised Land.
When the temptation occurs in the wilderness, Christ is still under the
law, and the temptation is a part of the mental process of separating
in His own mind the law to be destroyed from the law to be fulfilled.
The period in the wilderness is employed by Christ in clarifying in
His own mind what the nature of His messianic mission is. Frye asserts
this, quoting Milton as saying that Christ "into himself descended."

77

The as tempted. Trye interprets Milton's idea of what ear can do

Drawing another analogy, Frye considers the victory of Jesus as a second Adam and a second Israel "identical with the central act of his ministry, the casting of devils out of the human mind." 78

The remaining points proposed in Frye's typology seem to deal more intimately with the Christ as He appears in Paradise Regained. Frye interprets the battle of the temptation in the wilderness as "a clash of oracular powers." 79 This is reminiscent of the conflict of the Nativity Ode, in which the Babe lying "yet in smiling infancy" is the successful silencer of the oracles. Frye calls Satan's weapon of dialectic "the evasive or quibbling oracle," and that of Christ "the simplicity and plainness that Milton prizes so in Scripture, especially the Gospels." Also reminiscent of the Nativity Ode, wherein the unspeaking Babe is paradoxically the Word of God, is Frye's interpretation of the climax of the temptation.as more than victory over the temptation. "Christ has not only overcome temptation, but, as the Word of God, he has solved the verbal riddle of human life, putting all the words which are properly attributes of God into their rightful context! 80 Christ as the Word of God is important in Frye's study and is an interesting fulfillment in this sense of the Christ of the Nativity Ode.

The temptation of the pinnacle is admitted by Satan, truthful for once, to be a test of Christ purely in His capacity as the Son of God.

No human nature could stand the mental testing for pride of mind,
especially at a time of testing physically for exhaustion. Since Christ
as the Son of God and not an ordinary human being endures and passes these
tests the Christ is eligible and capable of His plight as the Son of
God, the ultimate death as the conqueror of death.

Purely as man, "quasi homo," 82 is a significant aspect of the way Christ was tempted. Frye interprets Milton's idea of what man can do

for himself as the negative accomplishment of rejecting the world in order to indicate his willingness to be saved. Christ rejects the world offered to Him by Satan. This act accounts for the haughty, aloof manner of the Christ of Paradise Regained. The "unmoved" Christ of paradise Regained is necessary for the repudiation of the world; He displays no interest, personal feeling, anger, or irritation. His world is "the reaction of goodness contemplating badness." The act of rejection is a miracle by virtue of Christ's humanity, for it indicates that His human will is submissive to the divine will. In this way the words on the cross are prefigured: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Considering the remark, "Tempt not the Lord thy God." Frye turns to A. S. P. Woodhouse and labels this "the only remark Christ makes in the poem which employs ambiguity." (Woodhouse's statement is in his article "Paradise Regained," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXV (1956), 181.)85 This answer means, "Do not put the Father to unnecessary tests," and it may also mean, "Do not continue the temptation of the Son of God." according to Frye. Hanford regards this simply as a "human victory over all temptation," 36 but it may be read as a simple declaration of divinity, as Rughes reads it. 87 Herein the Son bears the name and the nature of the Father. It is believed that this is the moment of recognition for Satan, realizing that his opponent has confronted him before in Heaven. Satan's early description of Christ as an opaque screen against the Father's wrath is inaccurate to Frye. Christ's countenance is, on the contrary, that through which the Father shines. Focusing the fire of the Father, the Son is united with the Father, unifying their two natures of the Godhead "as closely as Milton's Christology will permit." 88

Frye describes the climax of Paradise Regained as "the great wheel of the questof Christ comes full circle, as far as Milton's treatment of it is concerned."

There has been much suggestion that Milton developed so far from Trinitarianism as to deny the divinity of the Christ in Paradise Regained. Hughes forcefully and systematically disputes this idea in his introductory notes to Paradise Regained in his edition of the works. Hughes notes the loose nomenclature which some critics employ in calling Milton an Arian or a Unitarian in the doctrine, "Jesus was a man." Miss E. M. Pope (Tradition, p. 24) is cited by Hughes for her review and failure to see the suggestion of Saurat's belief that the Christ of Paradise Regained fades into mere man and W. G. Rice's support of this belief. Miss Pope finds no evidence for any doubt of Christ's dual nature, human and divine. Milton uses the temptation and the crucifixion to illustrate humanity, and in the resurrection, these are united with divinity. Hughes asserts that Milton's Arianism "implied a limitation of Christ's divinity but by no means amounted to its denial."90 Though the "Arianism" of Milton is an explicit denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is also an assertion of Christ's divinity as well as humanity. M. M. Ross, an Anglo-Catholic, condemns the Christ of Paradise Regained as an ugly, "scornful, snobbish, Miltonic demi-god," but Hughes notices that even Ross does not deny the divine nature.

Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson writes that it is in the temptation that Christ reveals himself as perfect man, in contrast to Adam. To Grierson, Milton's Christ is not precisely the Christ of the Gospel according to St. John but is portrayed as Milton had portrayed Cromwell

orthogor belief in the Trinity moved me to seek unconsciously some

subdue the emotions of the soul; as Cromwell had, but had done this from His mother's womb. Grierson's interpretation of Milton's Christ presents again the issue discussed earlier with the Nativity on whether the Christ was born fully developed or whether waxing in wisdom and stature indicates growth from an imperfect or incomplete state. Grierson's view of Milton's Christ as perfect man implies divinity. 92

Critics both sympathetic and unsympathetic to Milton and to his Christ in Paradise Regained admit the dual nature of this God-man Christ. Thus the paradox in the Christ of this work as in Him of the other works considered herein. The man who can demonstrate the complete lack of response to the excessive temptation in the wilderness is the "perfect Man, by merit call'd my Son" (1. 166) Whom God introduces early in Paradise Regained, and the perfection of humanity signifies divinity.

Granted that Milton was far from orthodox Trinitarianism by the time that he wrote <u>Paradise Regained</u>, there appears to be a direct reference to the Trinity, perhaps a remnant of his original orthodoxy.

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. (11. 460-464).

There remains the question of what Milton actually believed. This paper has considered the progression of Milton's faith from some point of orthodox Trinitarianism to an opposing point of view. The extent of this change cannot be precisely measured. Milton's feelings for God and his opinions on other aspects of doctrine affect his view of the Christ. Christ for Milton is certainly a reality. As I began this study, my orthodox belief in the Trinity moved me to seek unconsciously some evidence that this Christian poet has not removed the Christ from the

pedestal of the Trinity. The reading of Sewell has created especially an awareness of the relationship between Milton and his God and that between him and his Christ. The quality of strangeness in the former relationship is impressive.

It seems necessary at this point to challenge Saurat's belief that the absence of Christ in <u>Samson Agonistes</u> as well as the final treatment of the Christ render Him increasingly a mere man. Certainly there is evidence of a new awe for God the Father, but increasing awe and respect for the Father are not necessarily synonymous or simultaneous with decreasing similar emotions toward the Son. Saurat seems to disregard the concept of Christ as the hero of Milton.

Sewell comments on Milton's condition after <u>Samson Agonistes</u>: "The poem bears all the marks of having been written by a man who is giving up a search, who is content at last to remain quiet before his intuition of ineffable mystery." Sewell thus phrases as the end of Milton's long inquiry the lesson of obedience. Having tried to reconcile God and man in <u>De Doctrina Christiana</u>, Milton still found God strange to him. In <u>Paradise Regained</u> and in <u>Samson Agonistes</u>, according to Sewell, that strangeness is accepted and Milton has learned obedience.

With this view of God, Milton must have seen in his Christ as being more akin to Himself. God the Father was for Milton the Unknowable, the Absolute, the Unmanifested. Perhaps separating Christ, God the Son, from God the Father increased the meaning of the Christ for he Milton. Being the man that was and having the mind that he had, Milton may have preferred the Knowable, so that placing the Christ on a different level may represent not so much a downward vertical shift

for the Christ, as a horizontal shift in status for the Christ, rendering Him more meaningful and closer to the poet whose works are so vitally concerned with this divine man, the Christ, the "most Perfect Heroe."

This position leaves Milton with a divine hero, his Christ remaining on a very real pedestal.

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